

# The beginnings of Rome's conquest of *Hispania*: archaeological evidence for the assault on and destruction of the Iberian town Castellet de Banyoles

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Archaeological research conducted in the NE part of the Iberian peninsula points to a period of generalized crisis around 200 B.C., when many settlements appear to have been destroyed and hurriedly abandoned. Traditionally, this phenomenon has been linked to two phases of military activity in the peninsula described in the classical sources: the Second Punic War (218-206 B.C.), and, slightly later, the repression of indigenous revolts, the best-known example of which was led by the consul Cato in 195 B.C. The difficulty lies in the chronological proximity of these two phases, separated by barely a decade. As a result, from the archaeological evidence it is extremely difficult to attribute recorded destruction to one or the other phase.

Castellet de Banyoles was an Iberian settlement of the Ilercavones tribe, situated on a large triangular platform looking out over a depression created by the river Ebro. Through its excellent strategic position it controlled the watercourse, the ford across the river, and the communication route linking the interior of the peninsula with the coast and thus with Tarraco, capital of the new province of *Hispania Citerior* from 197 B.C. (fig. 1). Occupying an area of 4.2 ha, it was the largest inhabited site on the lower Ebro during the Iberian period. Its complex defensive system was formed by a narrow isthmus protected by two pentagonal towers (unparalleled in the peninsula) and a casemate wall. Iberian drachmae, imitating types from the Greek city of Emporion, were probably minted here. Luxury goods of gold and silver have also been found, pieces of lead bearing the Iberian script, and significant traces of metallurgical activity. The settlement had a complex, developed urban structure, with streets up to 10 m wide, covered drains, houses, and buildings of various sizes for public or display purposes. Thus it had the hallmarks of a town: unusual size, concentrated population, defenses, administration, coinage, housing, urban structures, and luxury items pointing to a high degree of social differentiation.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1998, the settlement has been excavated by the Research Group for Classical, Protohistoric and Egyptian Archaeology (GRACPE) at the University of Barcelona.<sup>2</sup> Between 2007 and 2009, the same team conducted a systematic exploration of 11 ha lying next to the path leading to the entrance to the town (fig. 2). The results of these two projects, together with study of the (mostly unpublished) written and archaeological materials from the campaigns of the first half of the 20th c., have allowed us to document the destruction of Castellet de Banyoles, clarify its chronology, and tentatively identify its assailants as the Roman legions.

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1 D. Asensio, M. T. Miró and J. Sanmartí, "Darreres intervencions arqueològiques al Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Ribera d'Ebre): una ciutat ibèrica en el segle III aC," in *Món Ibèric al paísos Catalans. XIII Col·loqui Int. d'Arqueologia de Puigcerdà* (Puigcerdà 2005) vol. I, 615-27.

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