Tracing a Roman siege from Late Roman Republic wars

Puigciutat (NE Iberian Peninsula)

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Summary

- The site
- Some questions
- Planning the research project
  - Small scale
  - Meso scale
  - Large scale
- Discussion
- Concluding remarks
The site

Puigciutat (literally, city on the hill) was surveyed during in 1975 & 1982

Fieldwork surveys show that there is an unusual concentration of Italian pottery from I BC

The site was abandoned after that

Illegal metal detectorists found a coin treasure in the site
Some questions

- Is the site a battlefield between Roman armies?
- Can we relate it to a particular conflict?
- Was it destroyed during an assault? Can we trace the action?
Planning the research project

- **Small scale (intrasite)**
  - Develop a geophysical survey plan to understand the site
  - Excavate the most promising zones

- **Medium scale (site and surroundings)**
  - Detect potential assault approaches using spatial analysis
  - Metal detecting surveys of these zones
  - Detection and survey of besieger's camp sites

- **Large scale (geostrategy)**
  - Geographical modelling of the environment
Small scale
Geophysical surveys

Different studies were undertaken to detect structures:
- Magnetometer
- Ground Penetrating Radar
Excavations

- Based on geophysical surveys the team worked in two zones, one of them near the wall.
The zone revealed several findings related to Roman military equipment.
Equipment
Mesoscale
Puigciutat's location is well suited for defense:
- Controls the zone around it
- It is difficult to approach without notice
Tracing the assault

- Several surveys were made around the perimeter.
- Our hypothesis is that the site was assaulted and destroyed.
- Accessibility and slope analysis showed the most promising zones.
Tracing the assault
Tracing the assault

- Additional military equipment was uncovered on one of the two potential approaches:
  - Studs
  - Lead bullets
Detecting camp sites

- If the site was destroyed by assault, it is possible that:
  - The attackers built a camp the night before...
  - A siege was established, deploying troops on different camps.
Detecting camp sites

- We used the same approach to detect and survey potential camps
Detecting camp sites

Some interesting findings appeared, but we need additional fieldwork
Large scale
Why Puigciutat?

- There is no evidence of this combat in classical textual sources:
  - Caesar
  - Sallustius
  - Plutarch

- This fact introduces an interesting methodological issue:
  - What can we get from these sources?
  - How can we understand the battle without them?
Geostrategy

Nevertheless, we have some hints:

- Gallia was an important supplier for this zone
- These were huge armies (>40,000 soldiers), that couldn't live just from local resources:
  - They needed logistic centres (cities and outposts)
  - In any case, they also required support from *oppida* an cities in the theatre of operations.
- Local *oppida* played a vital role during Ilerda's campaign.
Geostrategy

- Path analysis show that Puigciutat does not seem to be in a particular key route.
- We need to explain the importance of the site on its own.
Discussion

Puigciutat was destroyed during a Roman Civil War, probably during the Ilerda campaign (49 BC).

Although no classical textual sources talked about this battle, it seems that the attacking army was not small, and deployed a camp before the assault.

A question remains...how to improve the integration between intrasite excavations and outer side metal detector surveys?

What are the limits of battlefield archaeology when no textual sources explain the engagement?
Thank you!