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Universidade de Évora  
CIDEHUS - Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades

## *Changing Landscapes*

### *The impact of Roman towns in the Western Mediterranean*

*Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Castelo de Vide - Marvão 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2008*

edited by  
Cristina Corsi and Frank Vermeulen

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## SUMMARY

Foreword <i>João José dos Santos Sentieiro</i>	7
Prefácio <i>Mafalda Soares da Cunha, Filipe Themudo Barata</i>	9
Introduction <i>Cristina Corsi, Frank Vermeulen</i>	11
Town and country in the early Roman West – a perspective <i>Martin Millett</i>	17
Iberia and Italia: Issues and challenges in the comparative study of Roman urbanism <i>Simon Keay</i>	27
La “romanisation” des campagnes sardes: un bilan des recherches récentes <i>Cinzia Vismara</i>	47
The role of Roman towns in the Romanization process in Corsica. The case-study of <i>Mariana</i> <i>Cristina Corsi, Caterina Paola Venditti</i>	69
Romanisation et dynamiques territoriales en Gaule centrale. Le cas de la cité des Arvernes (II <sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.–II <sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.) <i>Frédéric Trément</i>	85
Implantation romaine et développement du territoire dans la colonie de Béziers <i>Monique Clavel-Lévêque</i>	105
Histoire d’une conquête. Dynamiques sociales et intentions programmatisées dans l’architecture et l’urbanisme de la Cisalpine occidentale et de la Gaule Narbonnaise en époque républicaine avancée <i>Elisa Panero</i>	117
L’occupation romaine de la Cerdagne: transformations d’un paysage pyrénéen pendant l’antiquité <i>Oriol Olesti i Vila, Oriol Mercadal i Fernandez</i>	129
Asentamientos rurales y estructuración de la Layetania interior (Barcelona): romanización e impacto de los programas de organización territorial <i>Marta Flórez Santasusanna, Josep M. Palet Martínez</i>	141
Modelación y conceptualización del paisaje romano en el <i>ager Tarraconensis</i> . <i>Tarraco</i> y la centuriación del territorio <i>Josep M. Palet Martínez, José I. Fiz Fernández, Héctor A. Orengo Romeu</i>	167
The impact of the organization of territory in a provincial capital: The colony of <i>Tarraco</i> and the <i>ager Tarraconensis</i> <i>Ramon Járrega Domínguez</i>	185

The <i>ager Tarraconensis</i> project (right side of river Francolí) (PAT): The application of geophysical survey to identify rural Roman settlement typologies <i>Marta Prevosti, Kristian Strutt, Cèsar Carreras</i>	205
Mudanças da paisagem cultural na baía de Algeciras (Cádiz, Espanha). Paisagem e território de <i>Carteia</i> <i>Lourdes Roldán, Juan Blánquez, Dario Bernal, José Juan Díaz</i>	217
An approach to landscape changes in the Bay of Gibraltar through the cartography <i>Helena Jiménez Vialás</i>	237
Urban forms and social space of <i>Italica</i> in Roman Imperial times <i>Margherita Carucci</i>	253
The Romanization process of an agrarian landscape: La Serena region <i>Victorino Mayoral Herrera, Rebeca Cazorla Martín, Sebastián Celestino Pérez</i>	263
<i>Bracara Augusta</i> and the changing rural landscape <i>Manuela Reis Martins, Helena Paula Abreu de Carvalho</i>	281
Variação e constância na ocupação de <i>Conimbriga</i> e do seu território <i>Virgílio Hipólito Correia, Adriaan De Man</i>	299
From cityscape to landscape in Roman <i>Lusitania</i> : the <i>municipium</i> of <i>Ammaia</i> <i>Frank Vermeulen, Devi Taelman</i>	311
Mesas do Castelinho (Almodôvar): A case of a failed Roman town in southern <i>Lusitania</i> <i>Carlos Fabião, Amílcar Guerra</i>	325
Changement et continuité: la romanisation à Chãos Salgados, Santiago do Cacém – <i>Mirobriga?</i> – (Portugal) <i>José Carlos Quaresma</i>	347
<i>Ab Oppido ad Urbem</i> : Algarve's urban landscape variations throughout the Roman age <i>João Pedro Bernardes</i>	357
El sustrato libiopúnico y el proceso de transformación del paisaje extraurbano en el África Romana <i>Fernando Prados Martínez</i>	369
Romanization and definition of commercial areas in <i>Africa Proconsularis</i> : The examples of <i>Leptis Magna</i> and <i>Thugga</i> <i>Lilia Palmieri</i>	385
List of Authors	393

## MESAS DO CASTELINHO (ALMODÔVAR): A CASE OF A FAILED ROMAN TOWN IN SOUTHERN *LUSITANIA*

*Carlos Fabião, Amílcar Guerra*

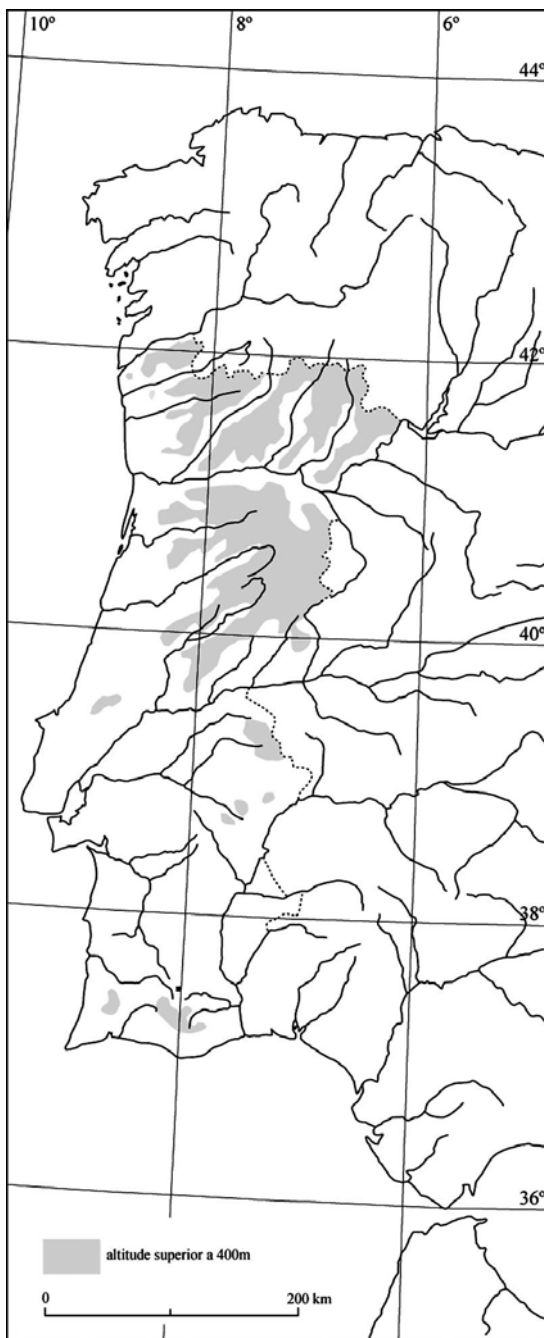
**ABSTRACT:** The archaeological site of Mesas do Castelinho (Almodôvar, southern Portugal) is an Iron Age hill-fort settled in the late fifth century BC. As there is no evidence of any major natural resource in the nearby area, we presume its location is designed to control a natural pass across the uplands at the border between the coastal area of the Algarve and the Alentejo plain. We have strong evidence for early contact with the Romans and no signs of major conflict in that process. The site had a carefully arranged urban setting, dating from Roman Republican times (late second-early first century BC), but the house plans do not seem to reproduce any known typical Italic model. From the reign of Augustus on, many signs of decadence become quite obvious and a final abandonment occurred in the late first or early second century AD. The creation of *Lusitania* as a Roman province, with its new political and administrative organization, the increasing exploitation of the region's mineral resources and the laying out of the new road network, condemned Mesas do Castelinho to a peripheral condition. The site no longer had a relevant role in the new provincial landscape. Human settlements in the area became dispersed, just small rural sites with no relevant town nearby. Only under Muslim rule, when new small and weak regional powers emerged, was the site occupied once again. Hence the archaeological site of Mesas do Castelinho can be seen as a good case study for an aborted urban setting from before the creation of the Roman province of *Lusitania*.

**KEYWORDS:** Southern *Lusitania*, Iron Age, Roman Republican.

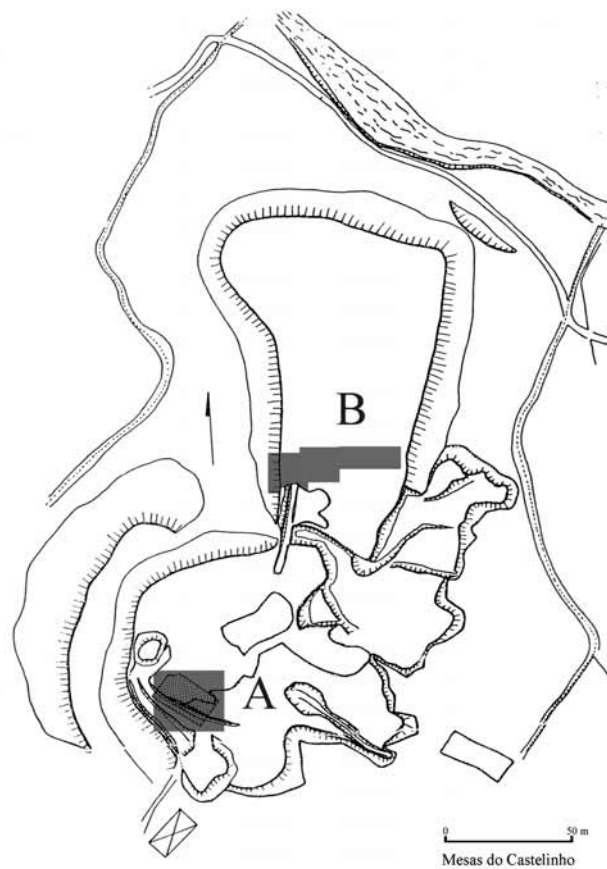
### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF MESAS DO CASTELINHO, ALMODÔVAR (SOUTHERN *LUSITANIA*)

In southern Portugal, in the area nowadays known as Lower Alentejo, Almodôvar county, at the frontier between the great Alentejo plain and the uplands of the Serra do Caldeirão, far from the sea or navigable rivers, the settlement of Mesas do Castelinho was founded in the late fifth century BC (Fig. 1). It was a fortified settlement, larger than 4 ha, spread over two platforms. At the highest point is a large area, Platform A, with a broad circular shape, and at a lower level, but clearly connected with the former, is another area, Platform B, which is larger and has a generally trapezoidal shape (Fig. 2). The archaeological site has been known since the end of the nineteenth century. Leite de Vasconcellos, the great pioneer of Portuguese archaeology, made some mention of the place, although he never went there as he missed the opportunity to visit when he was on an archaeological trip in the South Alentejo area (Vasconcellos, 1930-1931, p. 243). The archaeological importance of Mesas do Castelinho was only clearly understood in the 1950s, when Abel Viana and others published a paper on the site, presenting a black glazed Greek vase (Viana, Ferreira & Serralheiro, 1956). In that paper the site was described as an Iron Age hill fort, with signs of Roman occupation and evidence of Islamic artefacts. The paper had some impact due to the long period of occupation of the site, and also because few Portuguese sites then had Greek ceramics recorded. Henceforth the site was regularly present on southern Portugal's archaeological cartography. Later, the German archaeologist H. Schubart suggested the place could have had also a late Bronze Age occupation, based on some ceramic fragments from surface collection (Schubart, 1975). Despite this fragile argument, not confirmed by later research, Mesas do Castelinho still occurs frequently in maps of Bronze Age settlement in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula.

Although it was a well known archaeological site, Mesas do Castelinho suffered extensive destruction in 1986. This episode led to the classification of the site as cultural heritage, managed by the Portuguese national agency for cultural heritage, and from that date a conservation and research programme began. The first step was a true rescue excavation in some of the more affected areas of the site (Fabião & Guerra, 1991; Ferreira, 1992; Fabião & Guerra, 1994; Fabião, 1998). Although the project has now proceeded for more than twenty years, our knowledge of the site is not as ample as could be expected. On the one



1. Location of Mesas do Castelinho



2. General plan of Mesas do Castelinho, showing the different excavated areas

hand, this is because, as a cultural heritage site, it began as a rescue intervention and, with the major aim being to prepare the area for public display, there was less attention to the scientific research questions. On the other hand, the site has some large stratigraphic sequences, some of them going from the Islamic back to the Iron Age period, more than 5 metres deep in the soil. A long tradition of earth building techniques, dating back to the Iron Age, but also used in the other periods, explains the sedimentary process that caused such stratigraphy. The combination of these constraints helps to explain why we do not yet have more solid conclusions on many issues of the site.

Traditionally Mesas do Castelinho is regarded as a good example of a southern Portuguese Iron Age fortified site, despite the conspicuous presence of imports from the Italian peninsula. As the site was never truly a town of the Roman province of *Lusitania*, the Roman occupation has always been underestimated. As the presence of Roman Republican imports in the major Iron Age fortified sites in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula is quite frequent, their presence at Mesas do Castelinho was regarded as normal. Carlos Jorge Ferreira, the first archaeologist to work on the site after the large-scale destruction of 1986, emphasized these Roman Republican imports and underestimated those from Imperial times, arguing for a connection between the site and the Sertorian rebellion of the early first century BC in his preliminary report on Mesas do Castelinho (Ferreira, 1992, pp. 24-25). Actually we can assume now that the site's occupation went on until the late first or early second century AD and it is not at all clear that there is any kind of relationship with the Hispanic episodes of the Roman Civil Wars.



## SETTLEMENT AT MESAS DO CASTELINHO

Mesas do Castelinho's setting fits one of the well known settlement models of the late Iron Age in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, the so-called "creek settlement" (Berrocal-Rangel, 1992). Being a typical settlement of the late Iron Age means that it is quite different from the previous settlement patterns of the region. In the period usually called the First Iron Age, or the "Orientalizing period", the region had only some small open settlements, such as those excavated at the Mira river valley or those from the Neves-Corvo area (Castro Verde and Almodôvar counties). The dramatic change in settlement pattern that we can identify in the area deserves some attention. According to the site catchment analysis, it is hard to tell what could have been the reason for choosing such a place for settlement. There are no particular natural resources in the area. There are no good soils for agriculture, the area seems more suitable for pastoral use, with only some small alluvial areas at the nearby Mora's creek. There are no relevant water resources, despite the proximity of the creek, which cannot have been so different from today; and no particular mining resources, although mineral deposits exist in the region.

The location of the Iron Age settlement is rather peculiar as it does not have ample views. We may say that is almost hidden within the landscape, with no clear intention of seeing or being seen. The only reason we can imagine for the choice of this particular location was the proximity of a traditional path crossing the uplands of the Serra do Caldeirão. That means people living at Mesas do Castelinho could control this significant path connecting the Alentejo inland plain with the coastal areas of the modern Algarve, the southernmost part of Portugal. The Alentejo region is a large plain spreading south of the Tejo valley, but in its southern part there is a chain of uplands (the serras de Monchique and Caldeirão) crossing the country, from the Guadiana valley in the east to the Atlantic Ocean. These uplands are a relevant constraint to north-south communications, conferring special strategic importance to the paths crossing them. The control of these paths means actually controlling the circulation of people and merchandise. The capacity to control one of these paths is the only reason we can find to explain the choice of the place where Mesas do Castelinho was settled. In late mediaeval times, that same control was performed by Almodôvar, about 9 kilometres east of Mesas do Castelinho, from then on the chief place of the area.

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD AND ITS INTERPRETATION

The foundation of the Mesas do Castelinho hill-fort represents a major change in local settlement patterns. The same situation can be seen in many other regions of the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula. The question to be posed then is: Who were the founders and where did they come from? Actually, we do not have a definitive answer to that question. Two hypotheses can be suggested. The founders of Mesas do Castelinho were just the people who lived in the small open settlements, both in the river Mira valley and in the so-called Neves-Corvo area, apparently all of them abandoned by that time. If this was the case, the process can be described as a concentration of the local population, due to some cause that is not easy to determine – maybe just demographic pressure, any sort of instability, or both of them in close connection. Alternatively, we may presume that the founders were people from outside the area. Such invasion or migration phenomena are the classic archaeological explanation for cultural or settlement change, but this is not so fashionable nowadays. If it were the case, the new settlement patterns can be related to some echoes known from literary sources, such as Pliny the Elder, who wrote: «Celticos a Celtiberis ex Lusitania aduenisse» (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 3, 13).

These two hypotheses have been used by many archaeologists and ancient historians to explain some large changes in the local archaeological record, chiefly those related to settlement patterns, as it is quite clear that this region had a first Iron Age period, with small open settlements, and another with large fortified settlements. Beyond settlement patterns, where the change is clear, the artefacts cannot give a precise answer or, in other words, they do not allow a consistent defence of either hypothesis: continuity or discontinuity.

## CONTINUITIES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD: THE ARTEFACTS

Some of the more relevant signs of continuity come from the imported items, such as Greek ceramics, Punic style amphorae (most of them coming from the Cadiz Bay area, not from North Africa) or stratified glass beads, just to mention the more conspicuous. In the small settlements of the Mira river valley, such as Fernão Vaz, Ourique (Beirão, 1986; Beirão & Correia, 1991), and the Neves-Corvo area (Maia & Correa, 1985; Maia & Maia, 1986; Maia, 1988) and in Mesas do Castelinho, one can find the same Greek forms; usually the so-called “Castulo’s cups”. The conspicuous presence of such items can be interpreted in different ways: one can assume that it is a sign of sequential settlements, so close in time that the same type of item occurs in both of them, or that is a proof of contemporary use, in other words, that the late phase of the small settlements is contemporary with the earlier occupation of the major fortified settlements. The defenders of the internal change process can choose the first hypothesis, and those preferring the invasion/migration explanation can just choose the other one.

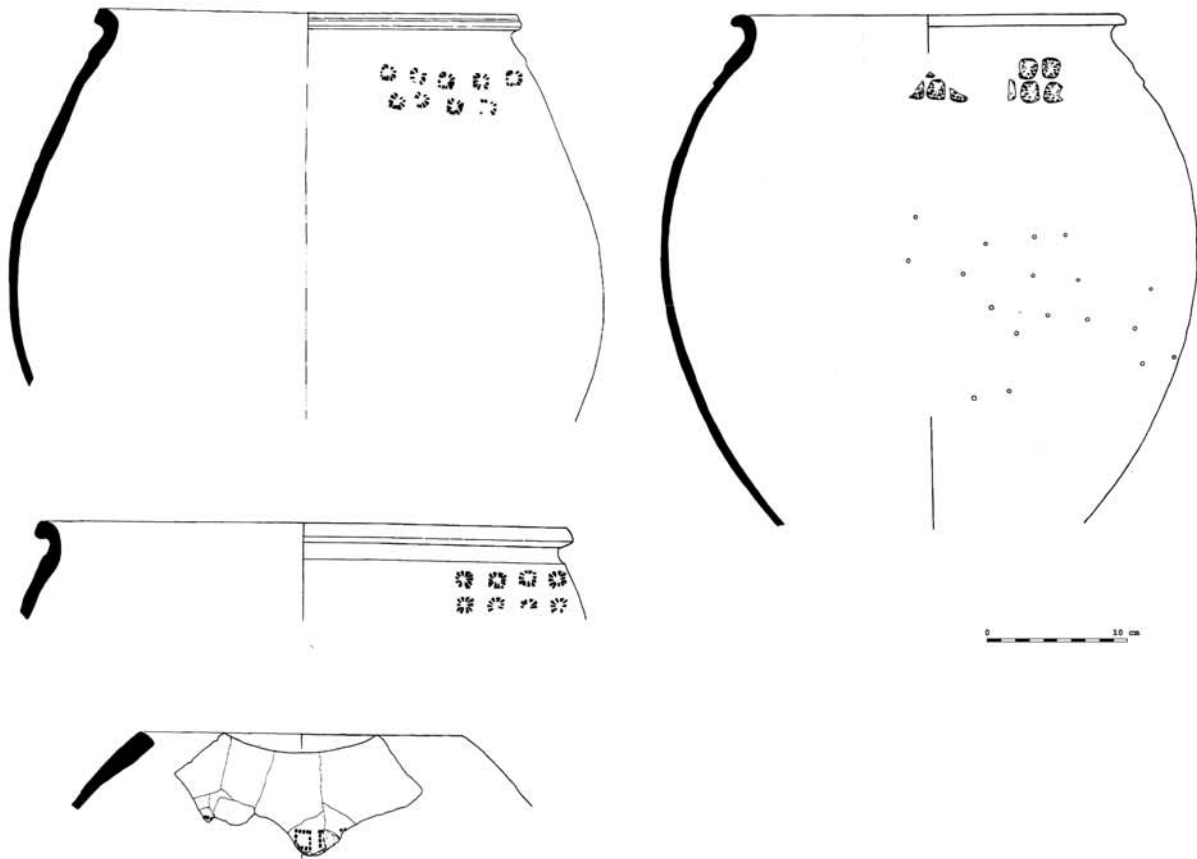
It is quite obvious that is impossible to prove either of them against the other. So this chronological issue will remain unsolved, as there is no expectation of achieving such a fine degree of dating archaeological artefacts that allows the choice of one of these possibilities and the firm exclusion of the other. Of course, a quantitative approach can be useful to understand whether we are dealing with the same waves of commercial exchange, or if, on the contrary, those ceramics arrived in different commercial contexts. Unfortunately the volume of the available data does not permit any sort of comparison, in Mesas do Castelinho or in the other regional archaeological sites. Nevertheless, despite these dating difficulties, it is quite clear that we cannot assume that there was one first phase in the southwest Iberian Iron Age related to the Mediterranean cultures and another one, later, when those relationships disappeared in the face of some new continental connections, as has been frequently assumed (Beirão & Gomes, 1980; Beirão, 1986). The later Pre-Roman or Second Iron Age was still in touch with the Mediterranean areas, receiving the same imports that we find in the former period. We have already discussed this issue elsewhere and we do not have sound new evidence permitting any change of view (Arruda, Guerra & Fabião, 1995; Fabião, 1998).

## SIGNS OF RUPTURE OR INNOVATION

The major innovation or change that we can see in material culture of this period (the so-called Second Iron Age, from the late fifth century BC on) is a new ceramic group: the matrix-impressed ceramic, also known as stamped decorated ceramic (*cerâmica estampilhada*, see Fig. 3). This ceramic group seems to be absent in earlier periods, but from the late fifth century BC it became an important ceramic group in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula.

This ceramic group included handmade large storage vessels (possibly with some finishing on a slow movement wheel) with horizontal lines of medium-size matrix stamps impressed on the upper part of the body. The available evidence frequently presents the same stamp impressed over and over again in one or two single lines, with little variety of stamps found in each settlement, which means that we have many decorated vessels in each settlement, but few different stamps presented per site. These vessels occur in association with other ceramics, such as a large quantity of handmade wares, with a clear preference for dark surfaces, but also with wheelmade wares with light surface colours. There are even some wheelmade ceramics with light colours and painted strip decoration, both monochrome and bichrome, that are well known in other areas or periods where the stamped vessels are absent (Fabião, 1998).

The presence of this supposed new element – handmade ceramics with dark coloured surfaces and chiefly the stamped ware – is the most relevant argument sustaining the thesis of rupture with former traditions. It could even be the strongest argument for the supposed Celtic migration/invasion. Actually it is not easy to support the dramatic change hypothesis on such archaeological arguments. On the one hand, this is because we know that the idea of a new period dominated by the tradition of handmade pottery is a biased argument. In reports on the small open site of Fernão Vaz, Ourique, in the Mira river valley, the supposed Mediterranean architecture and some imported items were always emphasized, while the evidence was ignored that 90,8% of the sherds collected on the excavation, but never fully



### 3. Matrix-impressed ceramic (*cerâmica estampilhada*) from the site

published, were handmade ceramics (Beirão, 1986, p. 116, Tableau VI; see more comments elsewhere: Arruda, Guerra & Fabião, 1995; Fabião, 1998). Unfortunately we have no data for the sites of the Neves-Corvo area, but it seems probable that some sort of overemphasis on the Mediterranean imports could also give a biased idea of the data found.

The stamped wares are also usually used to demonstrate a Celtic connection for the Second Iron Age of the southwest area of the Iberian Peninsula. The argument seems to be strong, as one can find many cases of stamped ceramics in the so-called Celtic European areas. As discussed elsewhere, however, there are some unsolved problems of chronology and historical geography, as there are large gaps between those European areas where the stamped ceramic is known and the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula. Last but not least, the evidence from our region seems to be more ancient than the supposed prototypes found at the core of the Celtic world (Arruda, Guerra & Fabião, 1995; Fabião, 1998). We may conclude therefore that there is no settled interpretation of the data, there are both the supposed elements of continuity and those apparently showing some sort of rupture, and this is not the place to discuss such issues.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT AT MESAS DO CASTELINHO: OBSERVATIONS AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The settlement of Mesas do Castelinho is a remarkable site among the other small hills of the area due to the clearly anthropic nature of its contours. The ancient stone ramparts have been worked as retention structures that gave the aspect of *mesas* (literally, tables) to both of the fortified areas of the site. The upper one, with its rounded shape, is popularly called the “upper table” (*mesa de cima*), the lowest with its trapezoidal shape is called the “lower table” (*mesa de baixo*). The frequent use of earth as a construction material, for both large earth walls (*taipa*) and adobe bricks, caused the whole site eventually to bury itself

under the disaggregation of these earthen constructions and the subsequent rebuilding over the debris of the former constructions, forming the peculiar *tell* configuration so typical in the Mediterranean area.

The archaeological site extends over two main areas. The upper platform with a broad circular shape, which was the most severely affected by the great destruction of 1986, is termed Sector A. The lower platform, larger and trapezoidal in shape, adjacent to the Mora creek, is termed Sector B. This latter is better preserved as it was almost unaffected by the 1986 destruction, except in a small peripheral area. It seems that the primitive fortification embraced both platforms, as the site topography suggests. Besides that, excavations in both areas show no different chronologies in the early building phase. Along considerable sections of the ancient ramparts, mainly in the western parts, we can observe some topographical discontinuities at a lower level that strongly suggest the existence of other constructions (Fig. 2).

In the present state of research it is not easy to understand the precise configuration of the settlement in its early phases. The evidence is provided by three areas of excavation. One group is in Sector A (A1/A2/A3), the other two are in Sector B (B1 and B2). All of them have different extents, and all of them have more recent occupation phases superposed, but the areas in Sector A (A1/A2/A3) were severely affected by the 1986 destruction. All of these issues limit our perception of Mesas do Castelinho's more ancient occupational periods.

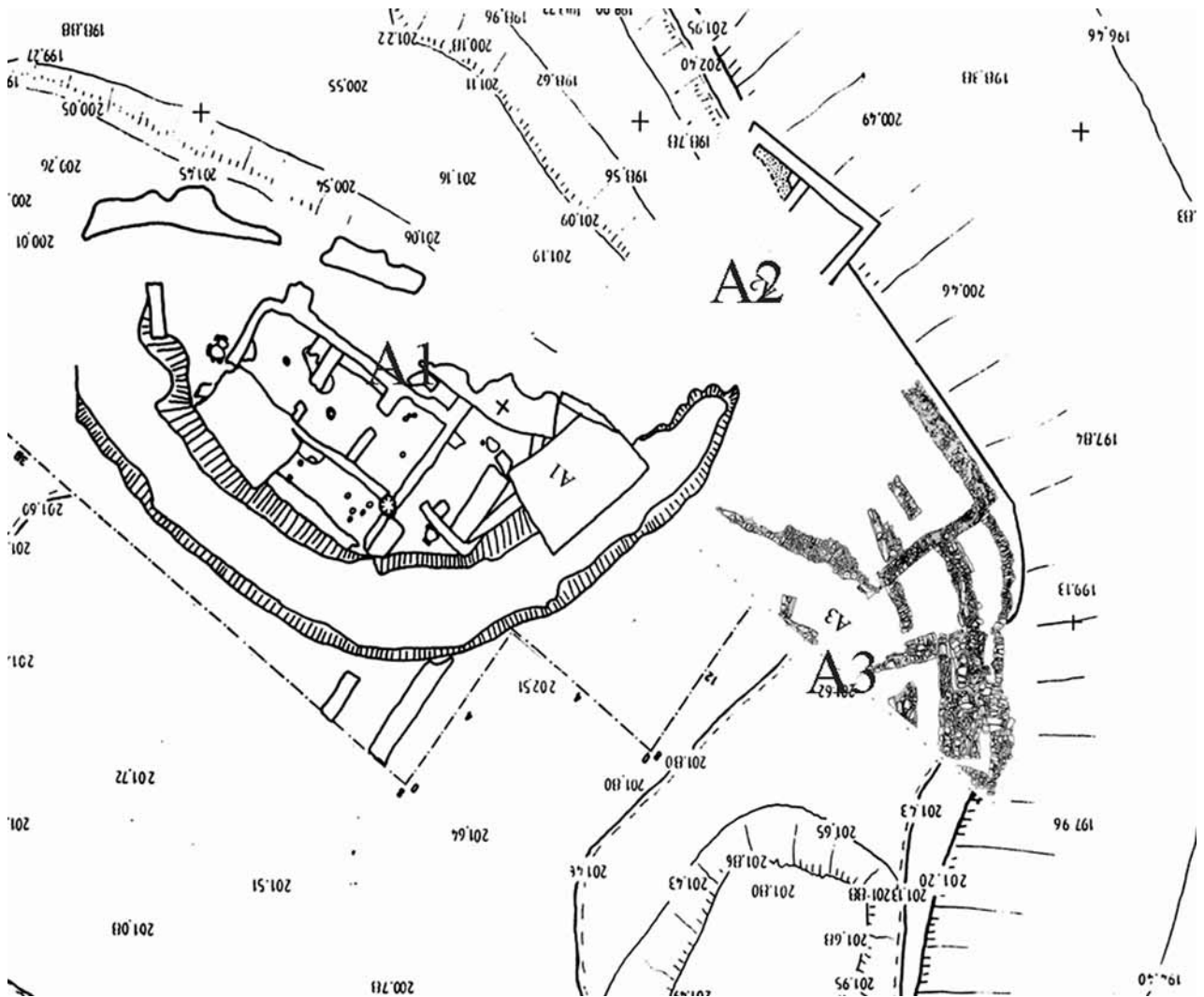
## SECTOR A

Our works in Mesas do Castelinho in the first years concentrated on the upper platform, more affected by the 1986 destruction, as our project in those first years had the character of a rescue excavation. In that area we have identified and excavated a small Muslim castle from the Omayyad period. For obvious reasons this is not the place to comment on those issues on which we have already reported (Guerra & Fabião, 1993; *Iid.*, 2001).

### Sector A1

In this area it was possible to identify and excavate some ancient strata in association with a large, thick, stone wall made with schist blocks – schist is the geological substratum and so it is also the main raw material for building in all the occupation phases. Related to this large stone wall we have found several clay or stone pavements with post holes, all of them showing a very precarious settlement that we think can be assumed to be the very first stages of the settlement. Unfortunately the whole area was strongly affected by later buildings, from the pre-Roman, Roman Republican and Muslim periods, and also by the 1986 destruction. These foundational strata produced large vessels with stamped decoration, some Greek Attic potsherds (one of them with red figure decoration, unfortunately out of its primitive depositional context), handmade dark coloured wares and light coloured painted wares. In the other areas of this sector we cannot find these layers, either because they were already destroyed or because they do not exist at all. It is very hard to understand what could have been the relationship between these strata and other issues going back to the foundational period, such as the fortifications that surrounded the entire site.

No other archaeological features related to the foundation period were found in all the excavated area. Buildings from late Iron Age period (*c.* third century BC) and the Roman Republican period, and chiefly the Muslim military structures, were all the building evidence we have, with the related strata. The more important building phases in this area are those from Roman Republican times, dated from late second to early first century BC, and, of course, the Muslim castle (Guerra & Fabião, 1991; *Iid.*, 1994) (see Fig. 4). In some cases we have Muslim occupation strata down to the bed-rock, and in other areas there were Roman Republican levels directly upon the bed rock, that means upon the geological past of the site prior to any human occupation. That is why it is not easy to determine what absence of evidence could be due to more recent destructions and what was due to the simple absence of any sort of occupation back to the foundational moment.



4. Preserved constructions in the Sectors A1, A2 and A3

### Sector A2 and A3

The excavation in these parts of Sector A aimed to date the construction of Mesas do Castelinho's fortifications. We know that we have severe limitations, as the 1986 destruction cut the greater part of the sedimentary sequence near the inner area of the fortifications, so it was not an easy task. The extent of the destruction left just some small areas preserved and so we cannot expect to have many artefacts in the foundation contexts for dating purposes. Nevertheless it was possible to verify that the fortification system was based on several rectangular houses, with "blind" walls facing the exterior, which means that all those compartments had no windows or doors to the outside, but were open to the interior of the settlement. These houses, or just compartments of one single building complex, are divided by simple walls (Fig. 4).

The overall form of the settlement in the foundation phase was that of a so-called "blind settlement", composed of a sequence of houses or compartments juxtaposed with one of the walls of the next one and having defensive functions. Seen from outside, the different shape of each house or compartment would present the general appearance of a broken line, instead of a linear defensive wall. As the upper platform (Sector A) has a general circular shape, the inner plan of the settlement in this area should be a circular perimeter with several houses disposed in a radial plan. It is difficult to speak about a truly defensive wall, as the defensive function was actually performed by the walls of the various houses or compartments. The major part of these buildings were destroyed in 1986. With the doubts we have about the definition of these buildings, we cannot tell if they were different houses or just many compartments of the same building, due to the small inner areas preserved. Nevertheless it was possible to document strong ancient

destruction strata, chiefly composed of stones. The evaluation of the volumes of those destruction levels clearly show that the houses or compartments should have had two storeys.

One variation was recorded in the defensive structures at A3, where a more complex defensive building was preserved. In that area, a curved wall connected two of the house walls facing the exterior. The space between the houses' walls and the outside curved reinforcement was filled with a chaotic disposition of schist blocks; which clearly indicates that its function was just filling the gap between the round wall and the outside walls of the houses or compartments. The final result was a strong defensive rampart more than two metres thick (Fig. 4).

The more important issue in the excavation of these parts of Sector A (A1 to A3) was the absence of other buildings from the foundational phase, besides those already mentioned. It is possible that all the constructions of Mesas do Castelinho's early period were those juxtaposed buildings – as the great stone wall and the pavements and post-holes recorded in the inner area can be interpreted as an occasional occupation perhaps related to the moment when the inhabitants were building all the defensive structures and houses connected with them. If this observation is correct, in the earlier phase Mesas do Castelinho may have an ample inner area with no buildings at all, perhaps reserved for other functions or activities.

At some point dating from the late second century BC, many major transformations took place in the upper platform. As the archaeological record of this phase was marked by a significant presence of Italic imports it is hard to not relate those changes to the Roman presence or influence. We used to define this period of Mesas do Castelinho's settlement as its Roman Republican phase in close connection with the Roman conquest of this region.

The new period was marked by huge earthworks with the general destruction of all the defensive system and the juxtaposed houses. The whole of the urban landscape was changed. The old radial disposition was replaced by a new orthogonal design. Unfortunately, across the whole area we can just record some fragments of this new urban design, due to the 1986 destruction and the overall disturbance caused by the Muslim occupation. Nevertheless it is clear that the new orthogonal urban landscape was the norm from second until the first century BC (Fig. 4). In the entire upper platform (Sector A) we found no evidence for an occupation in the Julian-Claudian Roman period. All the imported Italic items dated from the late second and first centuries BC. This preliminary observation seems to corroborate the analysis of Carlos Jorge Ferreira, the archaeologist who conducted the first rescue excavations at Mesas do Castelinho (Ferreira, 1992). However, the surface evidence from Sector B, the lower settlement area, clearly shows that the site was still occupied until the end of the first century AD, or even in the early second century AD.

Other final comments from the excavation of the upper platform are: first, there is no relationship between the buildings juxtaposed to the settlement's defences, dated from the Iron Age (fifth to third centuries BC), and the Roman Republican occupation period, as there are no signs of Italic imports within the houses; second, a major change in the urban landscape seems to be related to the beginning of a local Roman presence; third, even though we have no well preserved buildings from the Roman Republican phase, we have enough signs of a peculiar orthogonal design and the great amount of Italic imports show the importance and opulence of this phase, correcting some wrong ideas that one can have from poor badly preserved structures; four, for some unclear reason, the upper platform seems not to have been in use in the early Empire, although the evidence from the lower platform demonstrated that the settlement was still occupied in that period.

For several reasons, chiefly related to rescue actions, but also due to preservation purposes, the first years of excavation at Mesas do Castelinho were concentrated on the upper platform. The lower platform is better preserved and, after the excavation in the upper platform, we had no doubts that the study of the lower one would provide some answers to our questions. So, when the conditions were right, we moved to Sector B.

## SECTOR B

In the early years of the Mesas do Castelinho project we performed just some small conservation actions in the lower platform (Fig. 2). The first excavation campaign was conducted in 1996 when, again for preservation reasons, we dug a test pit in the area of the long cut made by the 1986 destruction. That long cut, about 15 metres long, was already recorded by Carlos Jorge Ferreira in his first

intervention in 1987 (Ferreira, 1992, p. 22 and Fig. 4). Our task was to produce some more information before the whole area was buried again for preservation purposes.

### Sector B1

The first excavation in the lower platform was just a test pit in the long cut left in the south-east area of the platform by the 1986 destruction. We dug almost 5 metres until we reached the bedrock. A thick rock wall marked the foundation of the settlement in this area, something different what we had found in the upper platform (Sector A). Due to the destruction we were not able to determine the total thickness of the defensive wall. Fortunately, the section cut by the site's former owner allows the measurement of the defensive wall – about 2 metres thick, with two well shaped faces and a fill of schist blocks (Ferreira, 1992, p. 22 and Fig. 3). Unfortunately the artefacts collected in the lowest strata were very poor, just some small uncharacteristic potsherds, that are not useful to date the building of the settlement's fortification – the area corresponding to the outside in this specific place was already destroyed.

Nevertheless we dug some Pre-Roman Iron Age strata related to the early phase of occupation. These strata are connected with the defensive wall and it is important to stress that this level of the stratigraphic sequence was not reached by Carlos Jorge Ferreira, as he just found a deep rock layer, which actually corresponded to the interior of the fortification wall (Ferreira, 1992, p. 22, and Fig. 4). In 1986, when the part of the hill fort was destroyed by a bulldozer, the external face of the settlement wall was cut, but the entire wall was not removed. What the first archaeologist to work at Mesas do Castelinho saw, therefore, was just the interior of the defensive structure and he was not able to understand what might have been the large stratum formed with a chaotic mass of stones, beneath the pavements of the early Roman Republican houses (Ferreira, 1992).

The Iron Age strata were also not rich in artefacts, but it was possible to retrieve some handmade dark ceramics and some vessels made with light clays and decorated with painted bichromous red and black lines. We also found some structures, but due to the small area excavated it was not possible to understand the shape and size of the houses or the compartments they would delimitate.

More important than the chronological record was the possibility of seeing the relationship between the late second-century BC Roman Republican house pavements and the interface destruction of the old Iron Age fortification. Actually the pavements are in a higher level than the interface, which means that those houses were built at a time after the destruction and collapse of the old Iron Age defensive wall. In other words, in the Roman Republican period Mesas do Castelinho was no longer a truly fortified settlement, at least in that part. However, as we have noticed the general absence of Italic imports in the corresponding destruction strata of the upper platform's fortification, it becomes clear that it could have been a general pattern in all the settlement. Once again, due to the 1986 destruction and to the small area of excavation, it was not clear what could have been the Roman Republican houses. Actually what we found from that period was just fragments of some superposed compartments, with no clues about their possible function. A rich artefact record allows us to establish the chronological frames between the late second century BC and the third quarter of the first century BC.

Over the destruction levels of the latter Roman Republican houses we have found a thick disturbed deposit (more than half a metre thick) very rich in artefacts, dating from the Roman Imperial and Muslim periods, along with some potsherds from Roman Republican and Iron Age periods. It was quite clear that all of them were not in a primary depositional context. The reason for the formation of such a deep disturbed stratigraphic unit seems quite clear just by looking at the lower platform. This platform is occupied by an olive tree plantation. From oral information from local people and also judging by the size of the trees, it seems that they were planted in the 1960s. The platform presents a regular flat surface, suggesting that some earthworks were undertaken there before the plantation, maybe transporting some of the surface earth to the eastern part to make it more level with the western part. Hence we interpret the disturbed stratum as an unquestionably anthropic formation, dating from about fifty years ago.

Despite the lack of preserved strata, we have clear confirmation of an important early Roman Imperial occupation of the settlement. This is verified by some surface-collected items in the lower platform, but such evidence is absent from the upper platform. On the other hand we have found an

amount of Muslim artefacts that strongly suggests that some kind of occupation from that period may have existed in the lower platform, something that was not clear in the extensive surface observation.

After the end of all the rescue and preservation actions at Mesas do Castelinho, we decided to concentrate our efforts on the lower platform, as it was the best preserved area of the site. From then on, it would be just the scientific agenda commanding the project. As we had already had a glimpse of the eastern part of the platform, due to the test pit dug near the long cut made by the 1986 destruction, we decided to excavate in the western area of the platform.

### Sector B2

In the new area named Sector B2 it was possible to design a very different approach, no longer a rescue or conservation action, but a true research plan for the study of the settlement's residential area, by an open-area strategy excavation. We chose to excavate 150 square meters, in the south-western part of the lower platform, from the inner face of the fortification, clearly identified by the great discontinuity on the ground, to the central area of the settlement.

The foundational phase included some rectangular houses, each with a central fireplace built upon a stone base, made from earth (both earth walls and adobe divisions). The houses are juxtaposed to the defensive wall without any door opening to the exterior, which means that there were no entrances to the settlement there. The defensive structure of this early phase used the external walls of the houses to support a chaotic stone accumulation, limited by another wall. Hence there was a regular schist stone wall as the external face of the fortification, parallel to the external walls of the houses, and the space between them was filled with stones. The final result was a 4 metres thick stone wall, a truly defensive structure, more powerful than that identified on the upper platform. This structure was also useful to understand what we found in the stratigraphic test pit of Sector B1. What we found there was just the inner filling of the fortification system. This strong stone mass, recorded by Carlos Jorge Ferreira in his 1987 excavation (Ferreira, 2002, Fig. 4) and also observed by us, was the outer face of the first Iron Age houses juxtaposed to the fortification.

In a plain stratigraphic observation, what we have recorded was a relationship between the chaotic mass of the stone fill, the vertical exterior walls of the Iron Age houses and the exterior face of the fortification superposed to the stone fill. The physical stratigraphic sequence was very clear: the earliest buildings were the Iron Age houses, after them came the random stone fill, and the latest feature was the exterior stone wall completing the fortification. We have no sound evidence to establish a chronology for each feature, as we have chiefly the Iron Age houses' interiors for archaeological data, and small potsherds found within the fill did not allow any chronological conclusions. It is thus possible that the very first phase of settlement at Mesas do Castelinho was just a village with no defensive walls other than the exterior façades of the houses (the so-called "blind settlement"), and that the defensive wall was a second stage of this earlier occupation. Naturally we could also admit that the observed stratigraphic sequence was the various steps of one coherent building programme and that the settlement was fortified from the beginning.

The peculiar "radial" organization that we have recorded in the upper platform was not visible in this area. We dug two large rectangular houses which had their longer sides parallel to the defensive structures and not perpendicular as was the case of those from the upper platform (Fig. 5). These houses seem to have different rooms but we are unable to identify different functions for them, as excavation of this deepest layer was only possible in restricted areas, to preserve *in situ* the more recent buildings – the excavation of this area has a truly scientific agenda, but the conservation issue was also always present. From the point of view of artefacts, all the houses have the same pattern, confirming the observations made both in the upper platform and in Sector B1, that this was a fifth-century BC foundation with no more ancient periods. Once again, the so-called "Castulo's cups" Attic wares were present.

Above the Iron Age phase we have found a cluster of four rectangular buildings in a juxtaposed sequence, all of them with doors facing east and with no doors to the west, which means with no communication to the settlement's exterior. All the doors communicate with an open area, a distribution space or a supposed street, although there was no clear confirmation, as we had no evidence for the other side of it, due to the small dimension of the area under excavation. It was clear that those buildings were constructed upon the interface destruction of the defensive wall, in the Roman Republican period, confirming what we already suspected from the excavation of the stratigraphic pit of B1. No signs of violent





buildings on the other side, facing those already excavated and with their doors also facing the street. Consequently, we felt that we needed to design a more ample strategy: first, by extending the excavation area to the opposite side of the lower platform's limit, second, by promoting an ample geophysical prospection campaign across the settlement.

### **Geophysical prospection**

The geophysical prospection campaign was done with georadar (the most suitable method for this type of settlement) by Eastern Atlas German Geophysics, according to our plan. We wanted to know, chiefly, the appearance of the lower platform's urban setting, so some scanning with distinct deepness record was essayed. We also wanted to clarify if there are actually any buildings in those lower ground discontinuities near both the upper and lower platforms (see Fig. 6, Areas 2, 3 and 7).

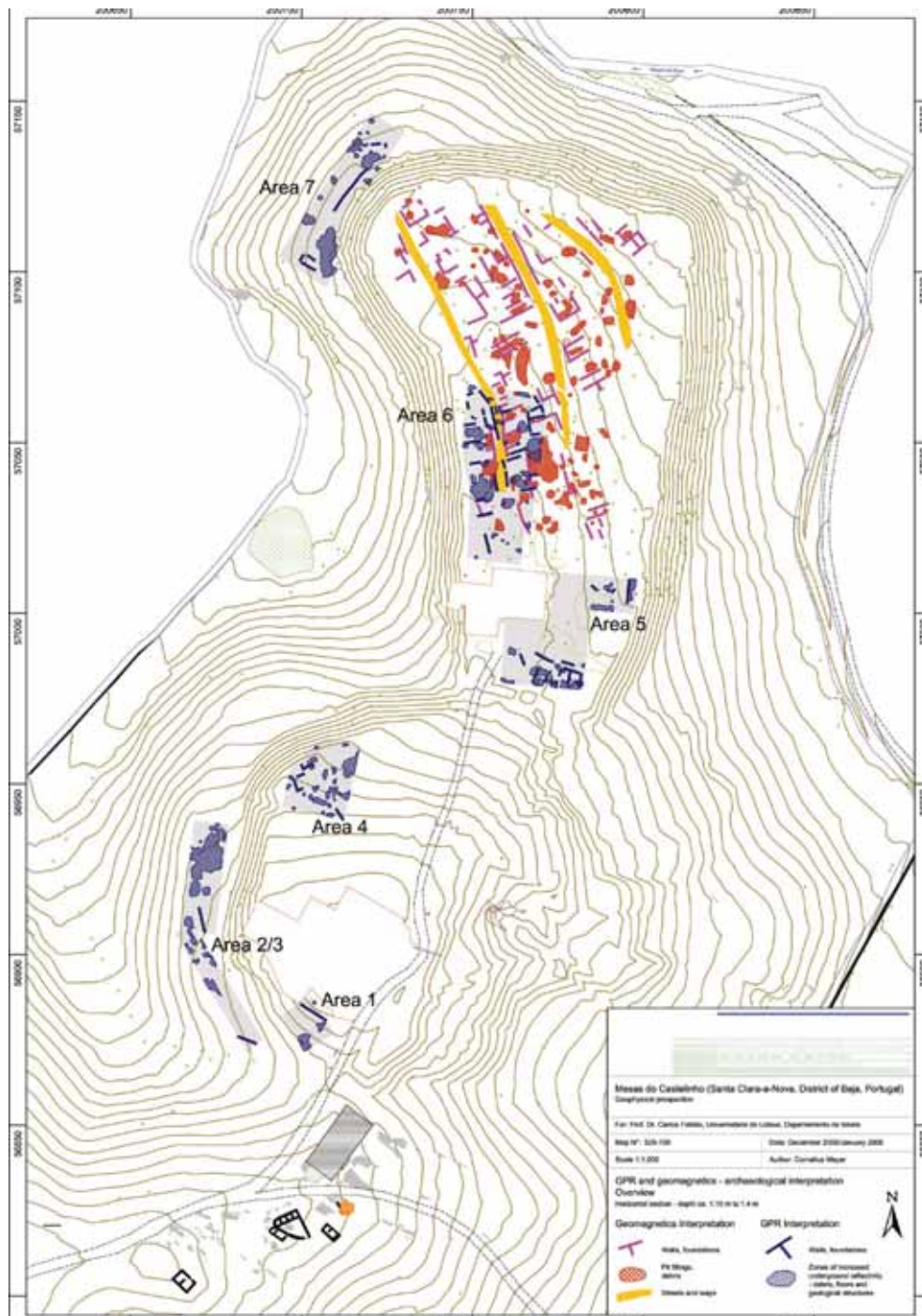
The distinct deepness scanning records demonstrated the existence of many buildings, but we can scarcely identify a clear urban plan, as we expected. The areas already excavated may provide some clues to understanding the apparent chaos. We have dug many features where ancient walls were used in more recent buildings. The continuous walls and other features recycling former ones, which are frequently hard to understand, even in direct stratigraphic observation, generate lots of "noise" in the georadar images. Actually it seems that three long north-south streets can be seen. One already identified in Sectors B2 and B3 had acted as the settlement's major axis, but it is not clear whether there was communication between them or if they belong to the same building programme. Unfortunately, due to the settlement's peculiar deposition process, the intra-side prospection is not useful to answer this question. So, we face two possible conclusions: either there is no such regular urban plan at all, or the regular plan actually exists, but the continuous recycling of features makes it difficult to understand just by the georadar medium. From our experience of areas already excavated, mainly Sectors B2 and B3, we think that there was a regular careful planning of the settlement in the late second or early first century BC, with a strongly changing dynamic until the late first century AD, but we have to admit that we need a more consistent knowledge of the site to confirm this idea (Fig. 6). Unfortunately among the several features identified by georadar we do not have complex structures that might be interpreted as possible public buildings, an important feature of any truly urban plan. So, despite some evidence for a large urban design related to the Roman presence, we have insufficient data for considering Mesas do Castelinho as a truly Roman town.

### **Sector B3**

At the beginning, Sector B3 was just an eastern extension of the Sector B2 excavation area, aiming to clarify the nature of the distribution area facing the four Roman Republican buildings. As we came to understand that we are actually dealing with a street (we have named it "street number one"), we decided to transform what was just a small scale excavation into a large narrow area crossing the entire lower platform of Mesas do Castelinho's settlement (Figs. 2 and 7). This excavation is still in progress, so all the comments above should be seen as preliminary remarks that still need some confirmation.

The excavation revealed a street 4 metres in length. On the eastern side of this street we found two similar large houses 30 square metres in area, quite different in size and shape from the other four on the western side of the street. The latter were just simple long rectangular buildings, while these two were large and strong houses of two storeys and two compartments in the lower floor (Figs. 7, 8 and 9). The lower floors of both houses have one central fireplace in the largest compartment with some sort of adobe-built chimney. The residential function of these buildings is clear. To reach the second floor, there are two solid stone stairs juxtaposed to the façades of each one, near the access door to the lower floor (Figs. 7 and 9). Both houses have the same disposition and structure, each with a single door allowing communication with the street (Figs. 7 and 9). Another important aspect of these building is their structure; each one has four independent walls, unlike those located on the western side of the street, where the same wall serves two buildings. The existence of the upper floor may justify this difference, as it was necessary to support a heavier load, so we can also assume that the other four houses have no second floor. This particular issue is also important as we have recorded the presence of other walls, both north and south of the excavation area, suggesting that there are at least two other similar large houses in the unexcavated areas nearby.

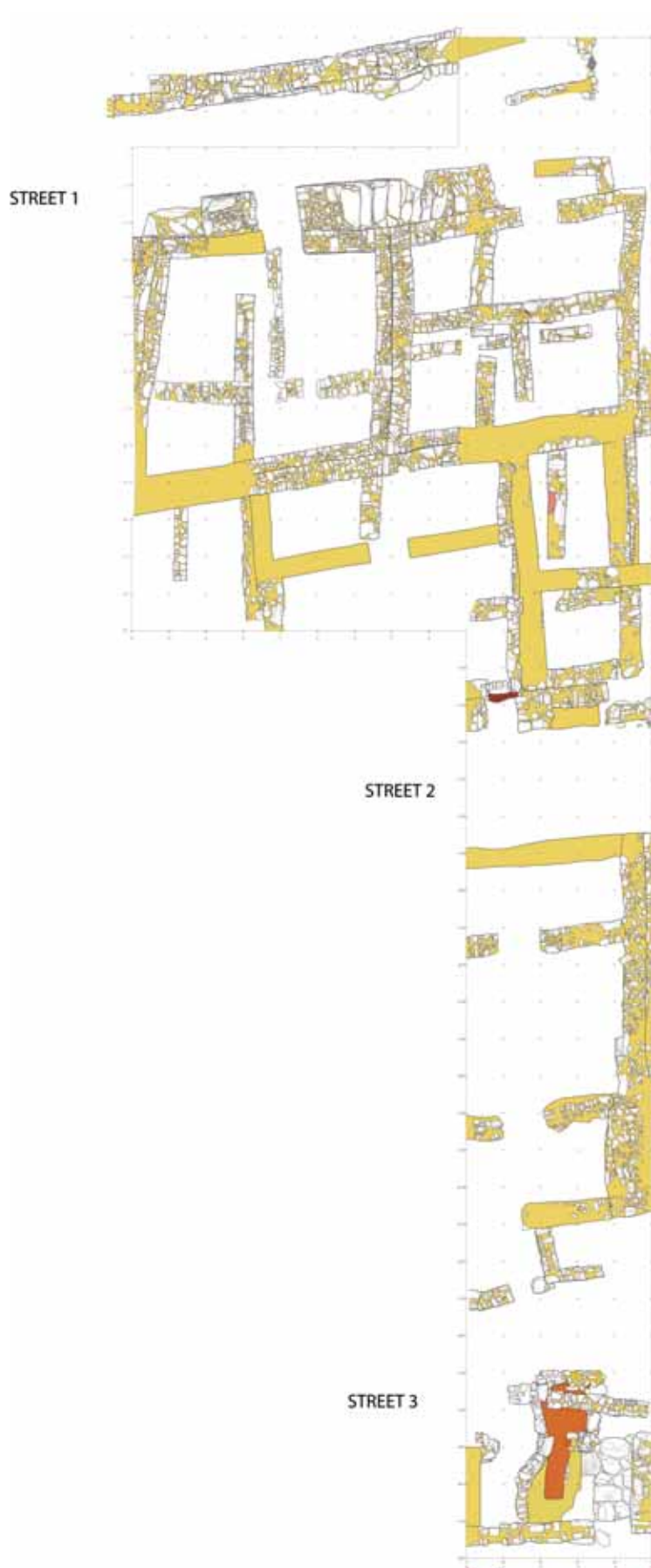
To the rear of these houses there are other constructions with very different functions and no direct relationship with the houses, as there are no doors allowing any sort of communication between them (Fig. 7).



6. Archeological interpretation overview of GPR and Geomagnetic prospection at Mesas do Castelinho

These different functional areas are related to working activities. We found a large food oven in one of the houses and some smiths' furnaces in the other one. All these buildings seem to be connected with another street (we have named it "street number two"), of the same length and parallel to street number one. The supposed second street is identified by geophysics (Figs. 6 and 7), but actually we have to admit that the small excavated area is insufficient to prove such a function.

At a time hard to date with precision, but maybe still in the Augustan era, the whole area was deeply changed. Street number one was cut by a poorly built new house and lost its former function. The large houses from the western part of the street were divided into smaller compartments, probably also



with residential functions as we have found several fireplaces (Fig. 10). The exotic ceramic imports, such as Italic, Gallic and Hispanic *terra sigillata* or south Hispanic Baetican amphorae still arrived at Mesas do Castelinho but apparently in minor quantities and in a context of clear decadence and progressive settlement abandonment, clearly shown by the buildings of this period. The site was eventually abandoned in the late first or early second century AD.

In the other excavation area of Sector B3 it was possible to identify an area that can be interpreted as another street, and so we may talk about three main streets, as interpreted from the geophysical record, all of them about 4 metres in length (Figs. 6 and 7). They would have been the main axes of the lower platform between the end of the second or early first century BC, and it seems that they lost their former function during Augustus' reign. This is not the time or place to present the entire collection of rich artefacts or building evidence from Mesas do Castelinho but it is relevant to discuss its fate under Roman rule.

#### DISCUSSION

Mesas do Castelinho is an Iron Age hill-fort settled in the late fifth century BC in a place with no previous occupation. Hence it represents a new setting strategy quite different from the previous regional settlement pattern, on one hand, because it corresponds to a huge demographic concentration not recorded earlier in the area, but also because its setting means the actual systematic abandonment of several small settlements in the area. No specific or relevant natural resource explains the choice of this particular settlement's location, but we think that the control of a natural communication route, a pass across the uplands

7. General plan of the Roman buildings in the Sector B3



8. Image of a two compartments house, of the Roman Republican period



9. Front wall of a two floors house of the same period



10. Compartment of a Roman imperial house in the B3 Sector

on the border between the Alentejo plain and the Algarve coastal areas, may be seen as the better reason for that option – actually the same reason for the importance of Almodôvar, about 9 kilometres to the east, in historical times. From its foundation until the Augustan era, Mesas do Castelinho was the major settlement in the entire region, hence we may say that its foundation was a landmark for a new era, one that ends with the creation of the Roman Province of *Lusitania*.

The native settlement was touched by Roman influence from the early times of Roman presence in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, and we have not found any solid evidence for destruction or any kind of physical violence. The early contact is attested in the archaeological record by the presence of Graeco-Italic type amphorae and Campanian A, but also by a consistent growing pattern of the settlement, with no evidence of any demographic retraction or partial abandonment. This early contact is not just attested by the evidence of exotic imported items but also by major transformations in the urban design, quite different from the previous one. The coincidence between the growing presence of the Italic items and the urban transformations strongly suggests a close connection between them. That is why we think this new urban design was related to Rome; despite there being no direct known Italian types for the new houses' general shape. The first period of building dating from Roman Republican period clearly shows a high level of quality, a sign of prosperity that is evident during the second and first centuries BC. The new political and military context due to the Roman conquest did not seem to affect the settlement. On the contrary, the local native populations seem to have adapted quite well to the new times and the exuberant signs of prosperity, shown by the volume of the imported items, and even a certain monumentality of some of the new buildings strongly suggests that Mesas do Castelinho lived in a new era, more opulent than the previous one. We may conclude that all the instability and conflicts related to the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula affected neither the settlement nor the

social and economic *status quo* locally. Nevertheless we stress that the Roman influence is not clear in the new architectural patterns or in the inner organization of the domestic spaces, but it is also clear that those new architectural patterns have no direct ancestors in the local native traditions. Those new houses are more like those known in the Iberian Peninsula's Levantine area, so we may admit some sort of architectural diffusion induced by the Roman conquest, but this is just a preliminary observation, requiring more study.

Another major change related to the new Roman phase of Mesas do Castelinho is the suppression of the defensive structures of the native settlement. The evidence for this suppression was suspected during the excavations on the upper platform (Sector A) but totally confirmed in all the excavated areas of the lower one (Sector B), so we may assume that was a general pattern in all the Iron Age settlement. As we cannot find any trace of violent destruction or signs of siege and conquest in the stratigraphic record, we think that the suppression of the defences was a voluntary, negotiated act. Once again, the stratigraphic evidence shows no signs of attempts to rebuild those defensive structures, chiefly in the lower platform, where all the Roman Republican-era houses were built upon the interface destruction of the defensive wall.

According to the literary sources, during the great military campaigns of 195 BC in the Ebro river valley (*Hispania Citerior*), M. Porcio Cato imposed the destruction of the defences of the major native towns as an act of unconditional submission to the new Roman power. The consul's deeds were enthusiastically recorded by several authors, such as Livy (34, 17, 11-12), Appian (41), Plutarch or Zonaras (9, 17), among others. It may represent a current Roman strategy to deal with *Hispania's* native populations or just a good example inspiring other later Roman provincial governors' acts. Naturally, we have no intention of looking in the literary sources for an answer to our archaeological questions, but it is impossible to ignore such an impressive account, that fits so well with Mesas do Castelinho's archaeological record.

Another relevant change at Mesas do Castelinho in Roman Republican times was coin circulation. We found in the excavations several coins corresponding to individual losses, which suggest an important change in the local economy. This monetary economy is related to the major urban changes. The coins are also relevant to understand the regional network connections of the settlement. Among coins issued in several towns in southern Spain, all of them from *Hispania Ulterior's* Roman Republican province, and those issued in Rome (both *asses* and *denarii*) there are two major coin groups. One is bronze coins from *Murti*, nowadays Mértola, on the Guadiana river at the limit of navigation from the sea. The second is lead *tesserae* from *Ossonoba*, nowadays Faro, in Algarve's coastal area (Fig. 14). These coins strongly suggest the Mesas do Castelinho's general communication network: one way east as far as the major Guadiana port, and another north-south axis, through Serra do Caldeirão's uplands, to the southern coastal areas. These two axes may be the clue to understanding Mesas do Castelinho's regional importance. They were also the most direct natural means of access to the sea from this inland area.

The great development of the settlement in Roman Republican times changed dramatically in the subsequent period. From the Augustan era onwards, major changes occurred in Mesas do Castelinho, this time pointing to a rapid decay of its previous importance. From the urban point of view, the streets have changed, at least some parts were cut and occupied by small houses; the former large houses were divided into smaller compartments with poor quality building techniques (Figs. 8 and 10). We can notice a general decadence, in strong contrast with the former period. The archaeological record is quite clear, pointing to the beginning of this decadence process in the last quart of the first century BC. This decay process led to the site's final abandonment one century later, in the late first or early second century AD. This chronological context suggests that the new Augustan policy, chiefly the creation of new Roman provincial organization, could be the clue to this dramatic change (Le Roux, 1995, pp. 62-70). The creation of *Lusitania* as a new Roman province in the westernmost part of *Hispania* occurred in 27 BC, which corresponds with the moment when the decay begins at Mesas do Castelinho. Once again, we do not want to force any close connection between the major facts of Great History and the probable minor facts of Mesas do Castelinho's story, but the chronological coincidence is striking, and it seems quite obvious that such a major change might have affected the new province's landscape. Besides that, the creation of new province was just one part of the new complex political and administrative programme. The spatial reorganization includes the setting of the *conventus iuridici*, ample administrative areas and also self-governed civic communities, whatever their status was. Naturally, we should not

assume that all these new settings were created at the same time; there were different rhythms and maybe different chronologies for every level of these complex new Augustan administrative buildings.

In this region, *Pax Ivlia* (nowadays Beja) was the most important new creation, as a Roman colony and *conventus iuridici* capital. The Roman colony promoted by Octavian (Faria, 1986, p. 13; Id., 2001, pp. 352-353) was settled in an old native hill-fort. Actually we have no idea why that precise place was chosen. The literary sources and epigraphy provide scarce information and, unfortunately, we are not well informed about its archaeological remains (Fabião, 1998, I, pp. 255-258; Lopes, 2003). Maybe it was one of the most important Pre-Roman native towns, or it just fits well into the new landscape design projected by the new Roman administration. The settling of former soldiers was plausible and an extensive rural cadastre within an area of rich soils is confirmed (Lopes, 1996; Mantas, 1996a; Id., 1996b; Lopes, 1997; Ead., 2003); but actually we do not know if that was the reason for establishing the colony or just its consequence. Despite the lack of consistent information we may assume that this town, with its new urban features, new organization and community government, new consumption patterns and all those features usually assumed within the “Romanization” concept, should become the paradigm for major settlements throughout the area. This new paradigm would have had a strong impact on all the Pre-Roman native organization and even those that were slowly changing during the conquest process. Although Mesas do Castelinho is 75 kilometres from the great new administrative centre of *Pax Ivlia*, it is plausible to imagine some kind of social and economic impact on it. The new capital was turned into the major pole of attraction for commerce and the distribution of imported items and it may have exercised some attraction for local populations (Fig. 14).

The great Augustan reform in the new province of *Lusitania* included the constitution of those entities named *populi* by Pliny, of which there were 45 in the whole province, (*Nat. Hist.*, 4, 117). According to Pliny, these *populi* had different statuses, such as *colonia*, *oppida veteris Latii* or just *oppida stipendiaria*, although with some lacunae (*Nat. Hist.*, 4, 118), which means that we know the total number but not all the names and places. Jorge Alarcão claims that they also received the name of *civitates*, as happened in other parts of the Roman Empire (Alarcão, 1990, pp. 359-360). Whatever their designation it seems clear that they were the new political and administrative basic unit.

Based on both literary sources and in the archaeological record it seems the Romans did not perform major changes in settlement patterns or even political or ethnic organization during the conquest, as the process was based on submission, tributary imposition and other similar strategies, but not a coherent or systematic foundation of new centres. It seems that Rome preferred to use the already existing settlement network. The great rupture was caused by the new Augustan provincial organization, founding new towns, choosing some of the pre-existing ones for new political and administrative dignity, and reshaping the limits of the new territories for tributary purposes. Both the official and (in some sense) artificial nature of the new landscape design was underlined by landmarks (*termini*) defining the new frontiers. In the Iberian Peninsula's southwest it is clear the political preference was for the existing native towns located in coastal areas or on the banks of navigable rivers, in other words, for those more connected with a previous Mediterranean way of life. Among these towns we can find those that had close relationships with Mesas do Castelinho, including *Murtili* and *Ossonoba*, at least, since Roman Republican times, as proved by numismatic evidence. *Murtili* was an important place, as a port connecting the coastal areas and the hinterland, for its location at the navigable limit of Guadiana river (Fabião, 1987, pp. 146-148; Luís, 2003, pp. 101-102). *Murtili* had the status of *oppidum veteris Latii* in Augustan times, according to Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.*, 4, 117), and municipal status with its magistrates according to epigraphic evidence (*IRCP* 96). The local citizens were inscribed in the *Galeria* tribe (Alarcão, 1985, pp. 101-102). In Algarve's coastal areas, the Augustan political process selected three new central places for new political responsibilities; *Balsa*, *Cil(i)pes* and *Ossonoba*. According to their names, it seems that all of them were Pre-Roman towns, although it is not clear if their location in Roman times was the same as their original site. As we have seen, *Ossonoba* was the more closely connected with Mesas do Castelinho, not just by direct geographic proximity, but also by the significant number of *Ossonoba's* lead *tesserae* found there. This presence is even more pertinent as it is usually said that these peculiar coins were intended for a restricted circulation just within the territory of the emis-

sion centre. All of these new urban centres would have seemed very attractive to all the people living in the old hill-forts of the hinterland (Fig. 14).

We should not exclude the strong possibility of the relevant political promotion of another town near Mesas do Castelinho. Actually there is one town nearby whose location is still unknown, mentioned as the [*civitas* or *populus*] *Aranditani*, an *oppidum stipendiarium*, in Pliny's list (*Nat. Hist.*, 4, 118). It is also referred to in the Roman itineraries as *Aranni* (*It. Ant.*, 426, 3) and *Arani* (*Rav.*, 306, 13) or in Ptolemy's Geography (*Geog.*, 2, 5, 5) as *Arandis* (Guerra, 1998, p. 287). The different proposed locations for this town are based chiefly on Antonine's itinerary, although with some strong and unsolved doubts. According to the itinerary, *Aranni* was 60 Roman miles away from *Ossonoba*, which should be a good reference. But the itinerary also says that the distance from *Aranni* to *Salacia* (nowadays Alcácer do Sal, near the Sado River estuary) was just 35 Roman miles, which is not possible, unless we do not read it literally. Actually 95 Roman miles (c. 140 kilometres) as the distance between *Ossonoba* and *Salacia* is not possible, as a straight line between them as points on a map measures not less than 100 Roman miles (Fig. 14). Usually, scholars avoid the subject by claiming it as an error in the itinerary, but that is just one of the possible answers to the problem. Another solution may lie in another interpretation the itinerary's text, which should not be read in a literal sense, as one of us had already discussed elsewhere (Guerra, 1998, I, p. 288). Those 35 Roman miles between *Arandis* and *Salacia* may correspond to just one part of the distance from the first town to the point where this *via* (the one from *Baesis* to *Ebora*) joins another one, coming from *Salacia*. Actually, another part of the itinerary mentioned the distance between the junction of the *viae* and *Salacia*, with the bizarre and impossible distance of XVI (16) miles between *Salacia* and *Ossonoba* (*It. Ant.*, 418,6). This is impossible unless we admit the distance as that between *Salacia* and the place where the *via* joins the other road going to *Ossonoba*. If one admits that this is the sense of the itinerary's text, we should add the three distances indicated: 60 Roman miles (*Ossonoba*-*Arandis*), plus 35 Roman miles (*Arandis* to the junction of the *via* going to *Salacia*), plus 16 Roman miles (from the junction to *Salacia*), i.e.,  $60 + 35 + 16 = 111$  Roman miles, that means roughly 165 kilometres, a plausible distance between *Ossonoba* and *Salacia* (Fig. 14).

Assuming the correctness of this calculus, *Arandis* should be located not far to the north of modern Ourique, in other words, a location in modern Garvão (in the Ourique county) seems plausible (Alarcão, 1990, p. 362). This supposition needs archaeological confirmation, only possible if and when systematic survey or excavation can be done in that place. Some Roman remains are known there, nevertheless they are insufficient in number and grandeur to argue for the location of a town. Another possible location for *Arandis* is the area near the modern village of S. Bárbara de Padrões, in Castro Verde county. The association of the ancient town and the modern village was defended by Manuel Maia, based both in Leite de Vasconcellos' observations (Vasconcellos, 1930-1931, pp. 231-232) and on his own archaeological work (Maia, 1987, II, p. 134). More recently J. Pedro Bernardes joined this proposition with some more arguments (Bernardes, 2006). It is quite clear that there was a large Roman site in S. Bárbara de Padrões, with a sanctuary where numerous Roman lamps were found (Maia & Maia, 1997), but, once again, there is no monumental evidence to sustain the existence of an ancient town, and J.P. Bernardes arguments for a supposed failed urban feature do not seem to agree with the references we have from both Roman itineraries (*It. Ant.*, 426, 3 and *Rav.*, 306, 13), proving a strong longevity.

There are no doubts about the Pre-Roman origin of the placename *Arandis*, but the adoption of an indigenous name does not guarantee an Iron Age Pre-Roman occupation. For instance, in *Ebora*, also a Pre-Roman placename, all the excavations in recent years failed to find any evidence for an indigenous previous occupation. With all these unanswered questions, it is impossible to know if *Arandis* was actually an indigenous settlement chosen to assume new regional importance, perhaps from Augustus' reign, as the mention in Pliny might suggest, or if on the contrary it was just a new Roman feature adopting an ancient Pre-Roman name. Based on a spatial analysis/evaluation, Jorge Alarcão postulates a regional importance for *Arandis*, whatever its location (Alarcão, 1990, pp. 362, 367). It should be the head of a large territory in the western part of the lower Alentejo region, bordering in its northern part with *Mirobriga* and *Pax Iulia*'s territories and with *Murtili* in the east. Assuming the urban functions, we would expect to find some evidence for public buildings, even though we do not have to expect the same monumentality known in other towns. Nevertheless *Arandis* should have some signs of its central function as a politically organized community with its own magistrates. The absence of both monumental features and epigraphy at



Garvão and S. Bárbara de Padrões did not allow conclusions about the actual location of the ancient town in those locations. We do not need to think about any failed urbanization process to explain the lack of evidence, as did Bernardes (Bernardes, 2006, pp. 156-157) – as usual, the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.

These arguments, absence of evidence for public buildings and epigraphy, are actually strong in Mesas do Castelinho's case. In this important Iron Age and Roman Republican settlement there is no evidence for urban features under the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods and this is a clear absence according to all the research already done there. This absence actually means the choice of another place to play the role of local *civitas* capital both under Augustus and in the context of the general extension of civic privileges under the Flavians (Le Roux, 1995). That is why we can assume Mesas do Castelinho as a case of failed Roman town.

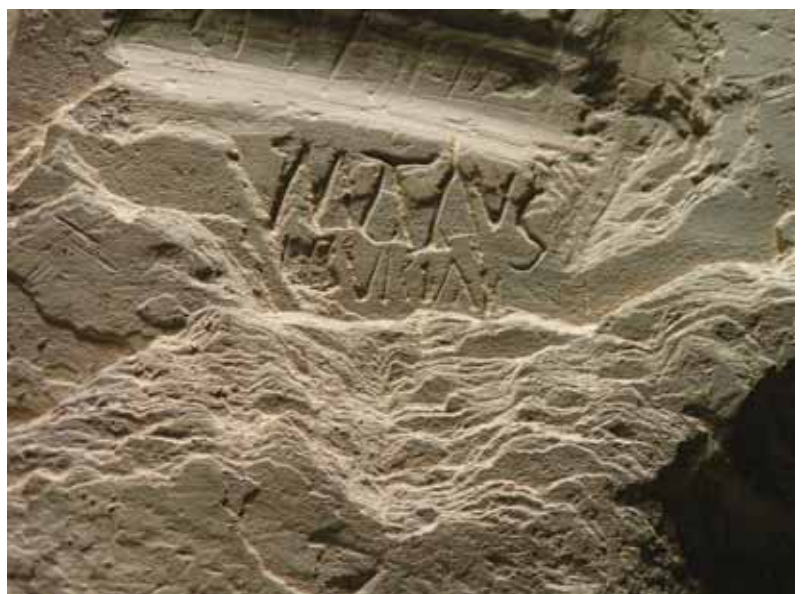
We argue for the absence of testimonies of public epigraphy as a relevant feature because we actually have epigraphy at Mesas do Castelinho, but it is an example very different from those known in the other towns. It is a very atypical epigraph where the expected urban epigraphic habits are absent, even the use of capital letters so frequent in the *Conventus Pacensis* area (Fig. 11). The support is a rough slab of local schist, reused as building material in a Roman Imperial house, which allows an older chronology for the epigraph, maybe not later than the Augustan principate. Despite some resemblance to other Augustan epigraphs from the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, such as the so-called small schist slabs (*pizarras*) from the mining districts (Gimeno Pascual & Stylow, 2007), it is actually a very distinct feature. The Mesas do Castelinho epigraph is a large block (70 x 34 x 6,5 cm), with an inscribed



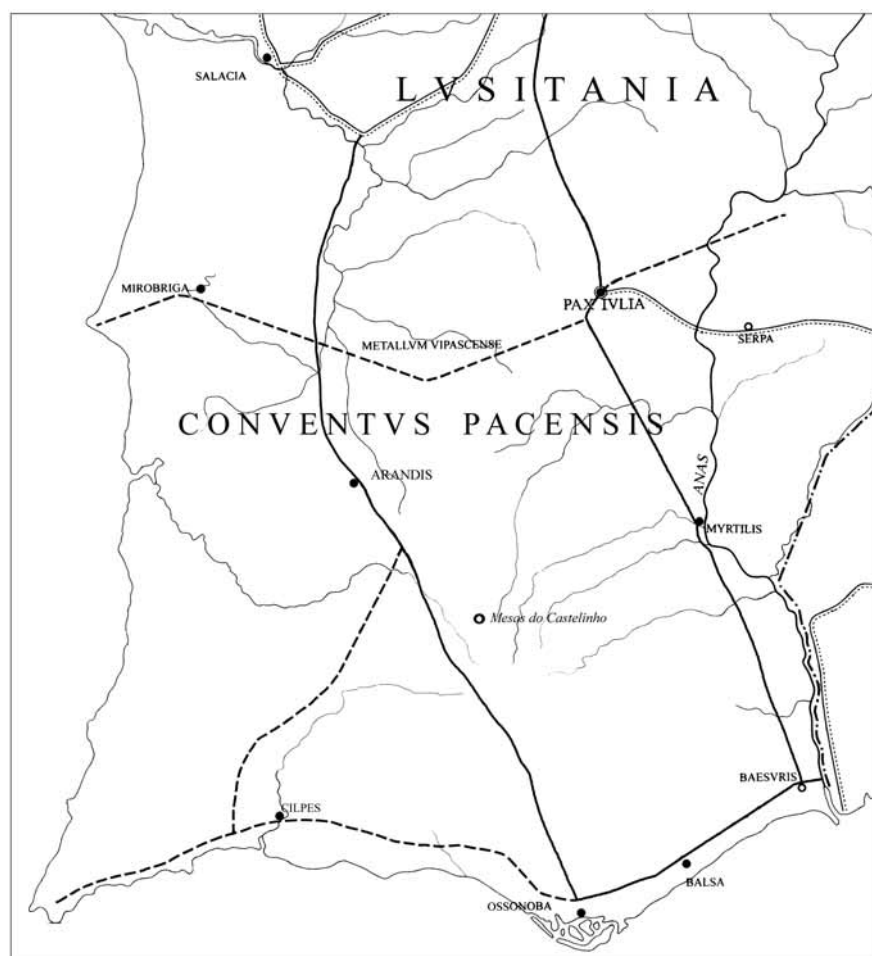
11. Inscribed schist slab of Mesas do Castelinho



12. Part of the stone where it's possible to read, among several problematic sequences, the name SILVANVS



13. Part of the inscription, identifying a MANTAIVS EBVRIAE



14. Mesas do Castelinho in relationship with the main Roman road network in southern Lusitania

face that seems to have been engraved on many different occasions and also by different hands, forming a complex palimpsest that is hard to read due to the many superimposed sequences. Both the different engraving acts and hands are visible by the *ductus* diversity, by the different engraving incisions of the letters and also by the distinct dimensions of the messages (Figs. 11, 12 and 13). It is also a non-official document and it seems that there was no intention of writing a complete text, but many obscure different messages.

From the generally chaotic sequences on the slab we may identify two with some certainty, both using cursive writing. In the first one, inscribed in a central area of the slab with large and clear letters, we can read SILVANVS (Fig. 12). In the other one, in one of the slab's extremities, in a prepared area we can read the names MANTAIVS EBVRIAE (Fig. 13), also inscribed with the

same cursive letters with some nexus. These three personal names are very suggestive. The first one, Silvanus, is proof of the Latinizing of personal names, a well documented process in this area. More interesting are the other two, Mantaius and Eburia, both of them well known indigenous names in the western Iberian Peninsula but not previously attested in this area. Their presence can be justified both by the ancient chronology of the epigraph and also by the inscription's popular style (that means non-official or not erudite), indicating a still poorly Romanized context. But this literacy evidence can also be seen as a relevant proof of the assimilation of Roman habits.

As we have seen, this integration process occurred while Mesas do Castelinho was progressively being excluded from the new administrative organization. The settlement's abandonment occurs while the new province's geography was shaped. In this new world the new towns would seem much more attractive than the old indigenous hill-forts set apart from the major *viae* and in a peripheral position in relation to the new privileged towns, despite their ancient grandeur. Other new features acted, so to speak, against Mesas do Castelinho. Actually from Augustus' reign we have clear signs of increasing extracting activities in the so-called "Iberian Pyrite Belt", namely in its westernmost part. Aljustrel (*Vipasca's* mining district) and S. Domingos, near Mértola, became very active mining areas. Although there was some previous exploitation back to the pre-Roman era and also the Roman Republican period, in Augustan times important amounts of archaeological data are known (Domergue, 1983; Id., 1987; Id., 1990), some minor mines, such as Brancanes, near Almodôvar, even have signs of Augustan exploitation (Domergue, 1987). These extracting activities required large numbers of workers, not just slaves, but also freedman, as we can see from the well known legal fragments conserved on the famous bronze inscriptions (Domergue, 1983). The same documents give us some hints about all the other activities taking place in the mining area, not to mention all

those required for the necessary agricultural activities needed to feed such huge concentrations of people. It is easy to understand the major impact these new activities had on the local population. In fact its powerful attraction had a very large effect in many areas of the Iberian Peninsula, as we can see in numerous epigraphs related to immigrants from far away lands. The absence of mines near Mesas do Castelinho reinforces the general idea of the settlement's peripheral condition. Even Brancanes was too far away. Mesas do Castelinho was definitely apart from the new Roman provincial world.

Last but not least, Mesas do Castelinho was also affected by another major change. It seems that, in the Iron Age and even in Roman Republican times, its importance lay in the control of a natural route crossing the uplands of the Serra do Caldeirão. The new Roman road network seems to have used other natural passes to cross the uplands. The new administrative and economic geography redesigned the path network. Although there are doubts about the precise local path network, mainly due to all the doubts about *Arandis'* precise location, none of the north-south *viae* seem to have used the natural pass through the uplands controlled by Mesas do Castelinho (Fig. 14). Thus isolated from the major roads, the old settlement was condemned to obscurity.

The prosperous settlement decayed. Excluded from the new Augustan political/ administrative geography, with no relevant mining resources nearby and distant from the major roads, it was hard to survive. Its population left, looking for the new opportunities provided by the new Roman provincial world.

Mesas do Castelinho's settlement dynamics is very interesting in a long-term local perspective. It was an important site from fifth until first centuries BC. The first century AD decline leads to a long period of abandonment. After that, the settlement was once again occupied in Muslim times, in the Ommyad and first *taifa* period (ninth to eleventh centuries) when a small castle and a rural settlement were built, occupied and once again abandoned (Guerra & Fabião, 1993; *Iid.*, 2001). In the absence of relevant natural resources, it seems plausible to postulate the settlement's major importance related to the control of a natural pass through the uplands. Hence, its relevance increases when there are no strong and centralized powers ruling the area. That is why it was important in the Iron Age and Roman Republican times, and has declined when the Roman province of *Lusitania's* was created. A similar reason justifies the Muslim reoccupation in the Ommyad period, and also its final abandonment when the Almoadhs promoted the powerful unification of the *Al-Andalus*.

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