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Domestic architecture and social differences in North-Eastern Iberia during the iron age (c.525-200 BC)

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Per citar aquest document:

Belarte, M. C. (2008), Domestic architecture and social differences in North-Eastern Iberia during the iron age (c.525-200 BC). Oxford Journal of Archaeology, 27: 175–199. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0092.2008.00303.x

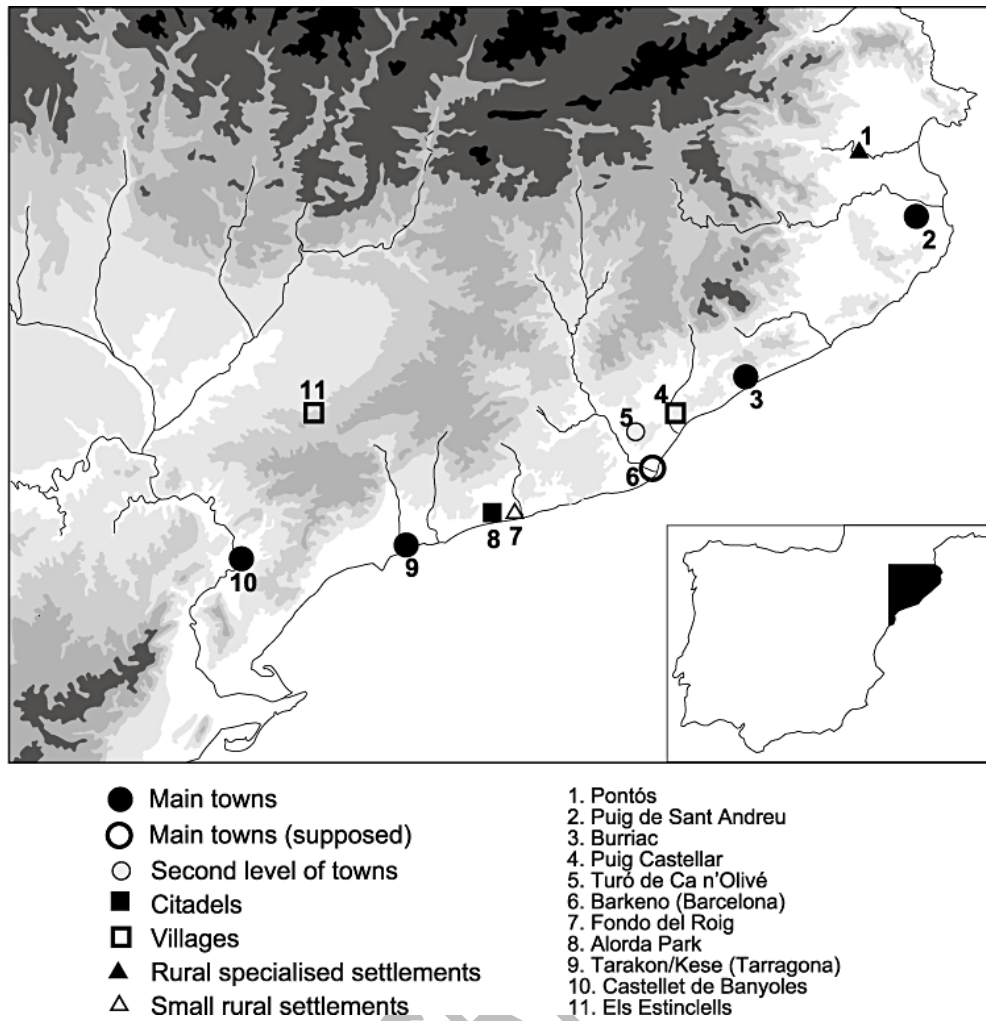Aquest arxiu PDF conté el manuscrit acceptat per a la seva publicació.

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the organization of societies in north-eastern Iberia (present-day Catalonia) during the Iron Age, using data provided by domestic architecture and settlement organization. I offer an analysis of the social differences detected in the dwellings based on a sample of houses excavated at different types of settlement. Although many Iberian houses had simple layouts and small surface areas, some larger dwellings at the main sites are distinguished by the shape of their ground plans, their surface areas, architectural features, and central locations; these houses are believed to be the residences of the Iberian elite. Such dwellings are not found at all sites and the data suggest that there was a relationship between the category of the settlement (or its function) and the types of dwelling in it.

Introduction

Archaeological research in the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula (present-day Catalonia) has been intensive during the last 25 years. Archaeological surveys and excavations have been undertaken on many Iron Age sites. This research has provided a large amount of information about settlement patterns, urban planning, and architecture. Territorial organization has been studied in depth and has revealed the existence of a hierarchical structure to the settlements. Large-scale excavation of various sites has also revealed information about urban planning and domestic architecture, although in many cases (particularly at the larger sites) only a small part of the total site is known. Moreover, information about domestic architecture has frequently been relegated to second place and not used nearly enough as a social indicator.

As several researchers have demonstrated for different periods, domestic architecture can be a good indicator for analysing societies (Cutting 2006), including such subjects as socio-economic status and household wealth (Kramer 1979; Kamp 1987), social complexity (Kent 1990), and hierarchy and power (Whalen and Minnis 2001). I have also chosen to analyse this subject in order to advance our understanding of the Iron Age societies in the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula. All the sites I describe here were inhabited during the Iberian period (late sixth to late second century BC), although the data I analyse mainly correspond to the third century BC (Fig. 1).

Main towns
Main towns (supposed)
Second level of towns
Citadels
Villages
Rural specialised settlements
Small rural settlements

1. Pontós
2. Puig de Sant Andreu
3. Burriac
4. Puig Castellar
5. Turó de Ca n'Olivé
6. Barkeno (Barcelona)
7. Fondo del Roig
8. Alorda Park
9. Tarakon/Kese (Tarragona)
10. Castellet de Banyoles
11. Els Estinclells

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Map of the studied area showing the main sites mentioned.

Settlement patterns, territorial organization, and urban planning in the iberian iron age

Recent Iberian Iron Age territorial studies have recognized the particularities of different Iberian peoples in various regions (Grau 2003, 261) and have used these to trace the approximate boundaries or limits between the territories. In some cases, these boundaries correspond approximately to the different ethnic groups described by the ancient sources in the area corresponding to the Iberian culture (Grau 2003; Sanmartí 2004, 23).

Another achievement of recent research into the settlement patterns of the Iberians is the definition of different types of settlement (both by size and function), which were organized according to a hierarchical structure inside each territory. Depending on the region of the Iberian culture, researchers have identified small variations in these patterns, which correspond to similar situations. In the north-eastern area (present-day Catalonia) the following categories of settlement can normally be distinguished:

1) The first level of settlement organization is made up of large sites covering several hectares (normally from 5 to 10 ha); these sites are considered to be the main towns in each territory. In addition to their size, they are defined by the following elements: density of occupation and urban planning, fortifications of a certain complexity, public buildings (shrines), complex dwellings, artisan activities, storage capacity, high quality imported goods, and evidence of an administration.

2) The second level of site can be considered as those towns of between 2 and 3 ha. These settlements were also fortified and appear to have been densely populated; they also show evidence of artisan activities and high quality imported goods.

3) A third category would be sites of less that 1 ha, the functions of which could be quite diverse. Here we can include several types of settlement:

   a. Citadels: residential sites with major fortifications. Their internal organization reveals a certain complexity and shows evidence of high status dwellings, although no public buildings.

   b. Villages: settlements with a simple urban layout, unfortified although sometimes with an encircling wall for protection; normally located on a high point in the terrain in order to be able to overlook and control the surrounding territory.

   c. Rural settlements: normally unfortified and specializing in particular economic activities (storage, artisan activities such as metalworking, etc.).

4) The last category in the system is made up of small, dispersed rural settlements.

For the Catalan area, the complete system with the four above-mentioned categories is not as clearly documented before the fourth century as it is during the Classical Iberian Period (400–200 BC), although differences in the size of the sites, as well as the specialization of the functions of some settlements, can be already detected during the Early Iberian Period (525–400 BC).

This question has been analysed in depth by many researchers in different papers (Asensio et al. 1998; Sanmartí 2004), so I will not deal in detail with the definition of those categories. I have only described the different types of settlement briefly as a framework in which to place my analysis of Iberian houses.

In any event, this settlement pattern suggests that Iberian society was hierarchically organized with a system in which some towns had the administrative and political control of their dependent territories, while other settlements had a more economic or residential function. In analysing the internal organization of the settlements (particularly the houses), we should expect to find some indications of this hierarchical structure.

At this point we should mention the general features of Iron Age Iberian urban planning. Although there is no one single type of settlement, the Iberian sites share some common traits that can be summarized as follows:

• Predominant location on the summit or sides of low hills.

• Choice of places with good natural defences.

• Frequently built with defensive walls (sometimes reinforced by towers and moats).

•Distribution of houses in rows, sharing party walls.

Thanks to large-scale excavations carried out in several areas, we have a fair knowledge of the interior organization of these settlements, particularly as far as their domestic architecture is concerned. Their urban planning is relatively simple, although there is a certain diversity depending on the size and category of the site. The simplest Iberian settlements had a wall surrounding the inhabited area, against which the houses were built. In some cases there was an open central area, possibly with buildings for collective use. Sometimes rows of houses were laid out on different terraced levels on hillsides, with parallel streets, also on different levels, separating the rows of houses. Finally, larger sites may present a more complex distribution, with several streets separating rows or groups of houses. In all cases these settlements show clear evidence of prior planning, with a separation of built-up areas and non-built-up areas reserved for the movement of people or collective activities.

Iberian architecture seems to have been non-specialized: public buildings and houses were built using identical materials and techniques and had similar ground plans; the function of structures or the distinction between dwellings and other buildings is not always clear. However, using the data acquired in recent years it is possible to distinguish several categories of building, as well as different types of houses. In spite of the interesting and abundant evidence on this subject, there is no recent synthesis compiling all the data on Iberian domestic architecture. I analysed the Catalan area in my Ph.D. (Belarte 1997), but the evidence of domestic architecture has greatly increased in the last ten years. In this paper I attempt to update the data on Iberian houses and to revisit the information about social organization provided by them.

The iberian house: building techniques, area and general features in the use of space

Building materials and techniques

Although the study of building materials and techniques is not the main point of this paper, it is necessary to say something about this subject. The basic materials used were stone, earth, timber, and straw. The houses had stone foundations and mud or sun-dried mud-brick walls. Occasionally, the walls were completely made of stone. The roofs were made of timber covered with rushes and a thick layer of mud mixed with straw. The use of tiles was unknown before the second century; they are an exogenous element introduced by the Romans and there is very little evidence of them in the Iberian settlements that continued to exist under the first period of Roman occupation. This means that tiles were not really adopted by the Iberians, who continued to build earthen roofs even during the second and first centuries BC.

The floors and walls were normally plastered with earth or lime. In addition, walls were often painted with simple, coloured patterns (normally red). At the end of the third century BC, and probably thanks to the influence of other Mediterranean peoples (the Carthaginians and the Romans), new materials were introduced for house finishings: floors were made with pottery fragments mixed with lime (a kind of opus signinum), and walls were plastered with a mixture of lime and sand.

House plans and the use of space

Iberian-period dwellings derived from the type of houses built in the period immediately before. The first forms of urban planning appeared in the different regions of the Iberian area at the beginning of the first millennium BC (Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age). By 'urban planning' I mean that the internal organization of a settlement followed a regular pattern resulting from a preconceived plan. These sites with an early urban planning were made up of rows of rectangular-shaped, juxtaposed houses with rudimentary party walls. They were separated by streets and consisted of ten to 20 houses with approximate sizes of between 20 and 30 sq m.

The Iberian house did not follow a stereotyped pattern, and differed from other Mediterranean dwellings, particularly those of the Romans. There was no one single type, nor a typical Iberian house. Neither do the written sources tell us anything of the Iberian dwellings or the organization of their domestic space.

The shape of the houses was partly conditioned by their location in the settlement and the topographical conditions. Normally the buildings were organized in rows and shared party walls; free-standing houses surrounded by streets are also documented at several settlements, but this type of distribution seems to have been less frequent. Although the ground plans of the houses were mainly rectangular or square, trapezoidal forms are also documented, mainly where the houses which shared party walls were arranged (Figs. 2–7).
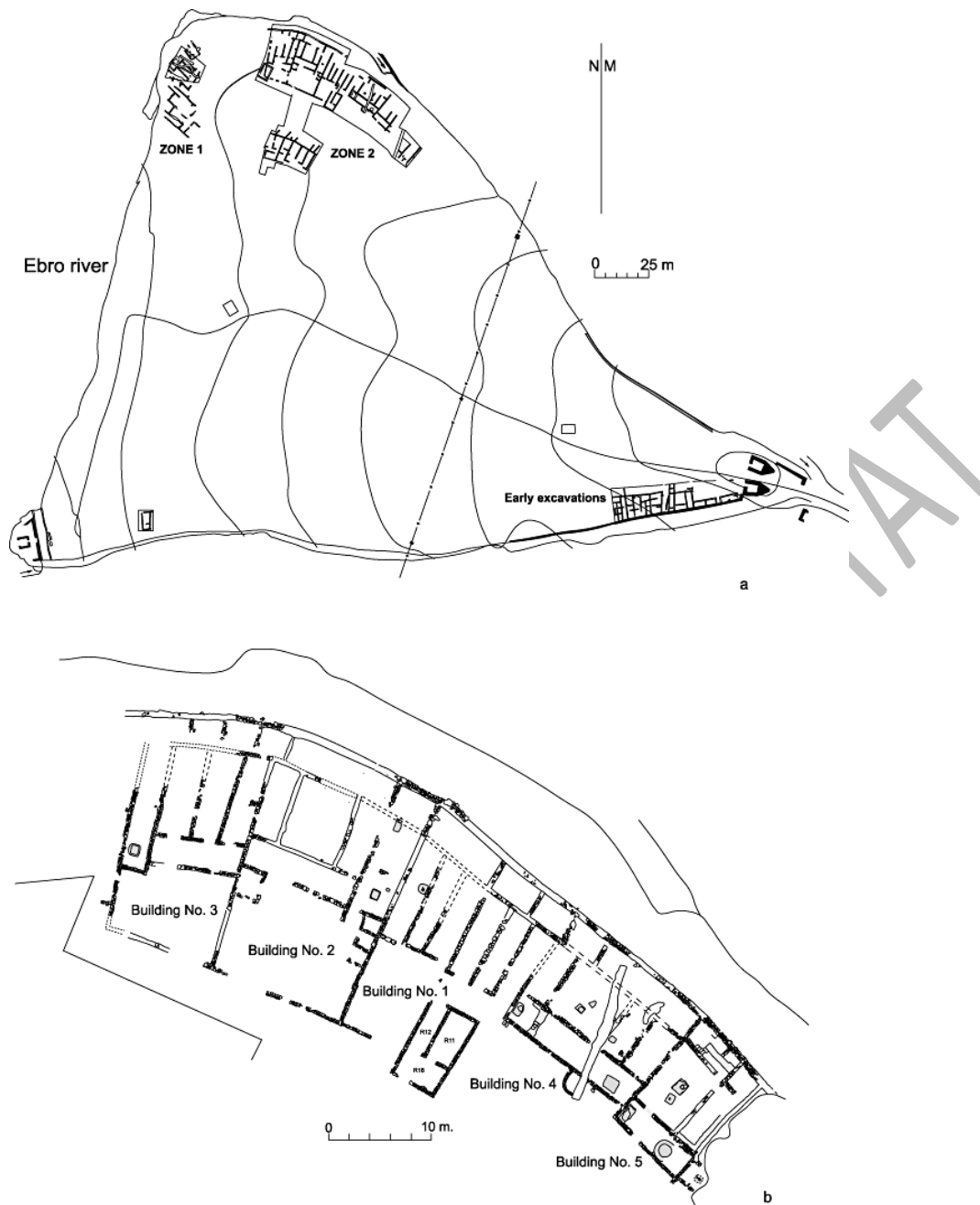
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Plan of Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Tarragona) (after Asensio, Miró and Sanmartí 2005, 624, fig. 1C).
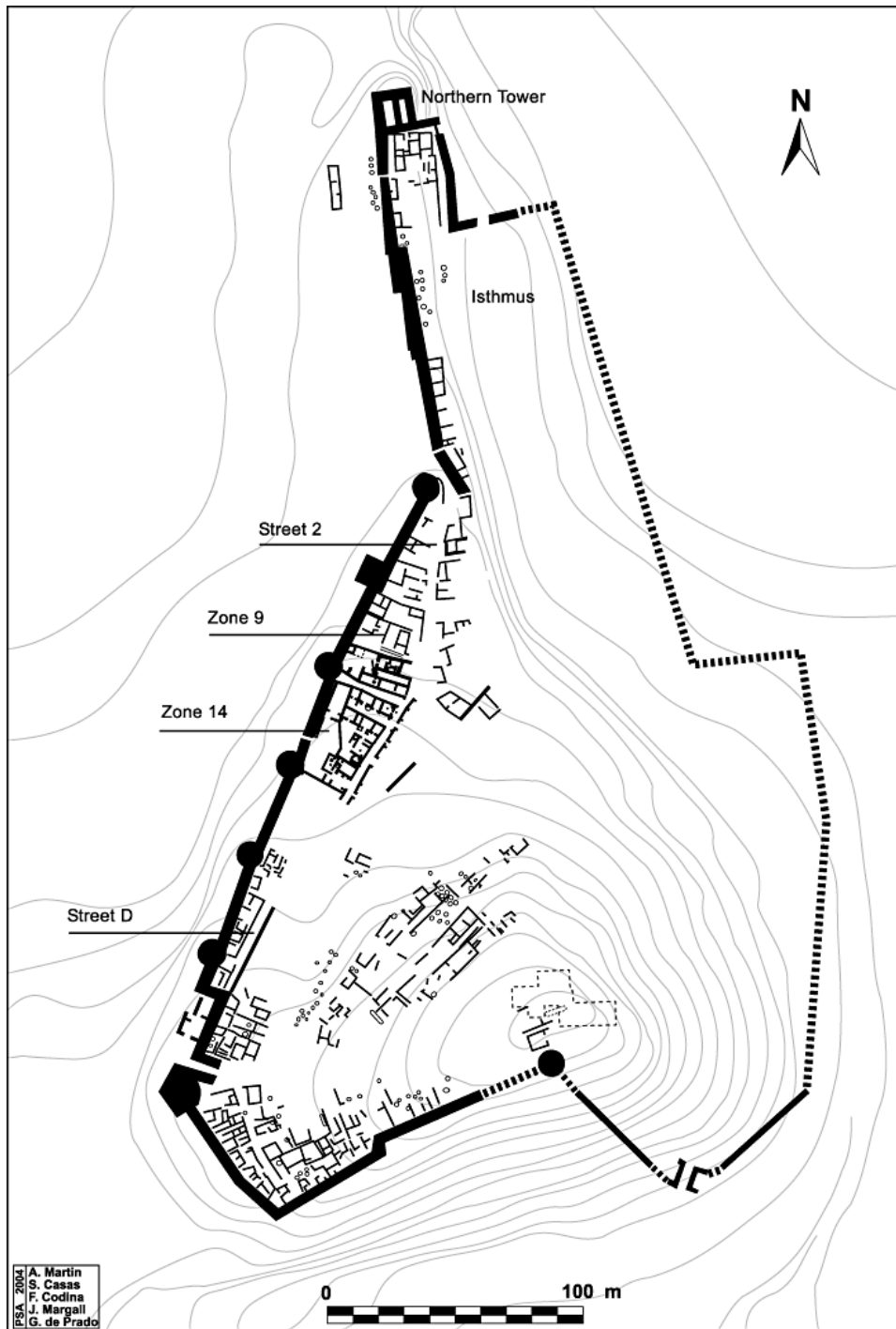
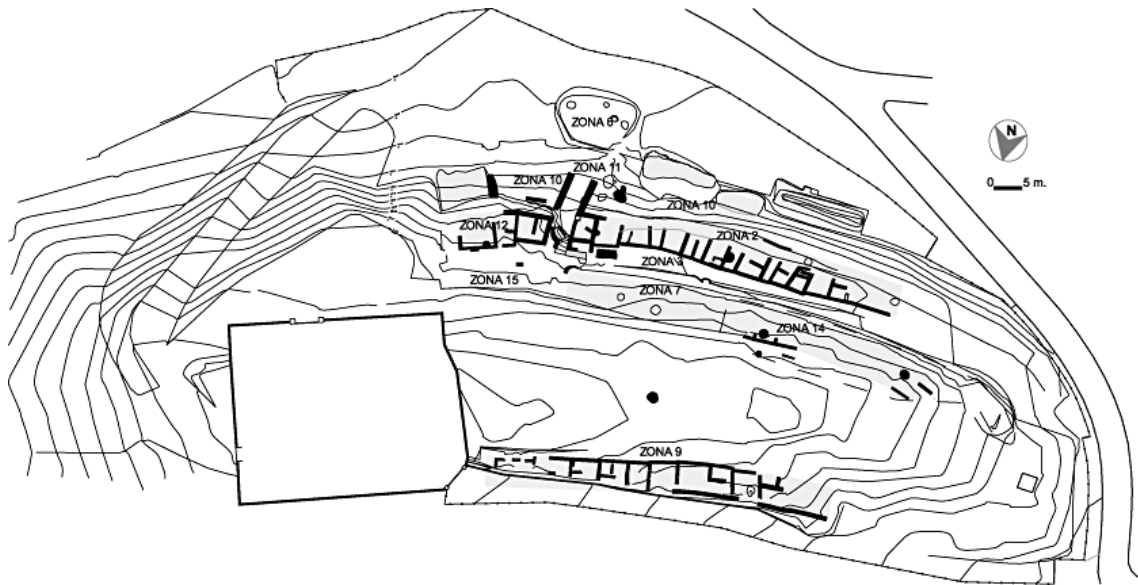Open in figure viewer

Plan of Puig de Sant Andreu (Ullastret, Girona) (after Martín 2005, 341, fig. 3).

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Plan of Turó de Ca n'Olivé (Cerdanyola, Barcelona) (after Francés et al. 2005, 512, fig. 6).

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201   AS   202   AA

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streets
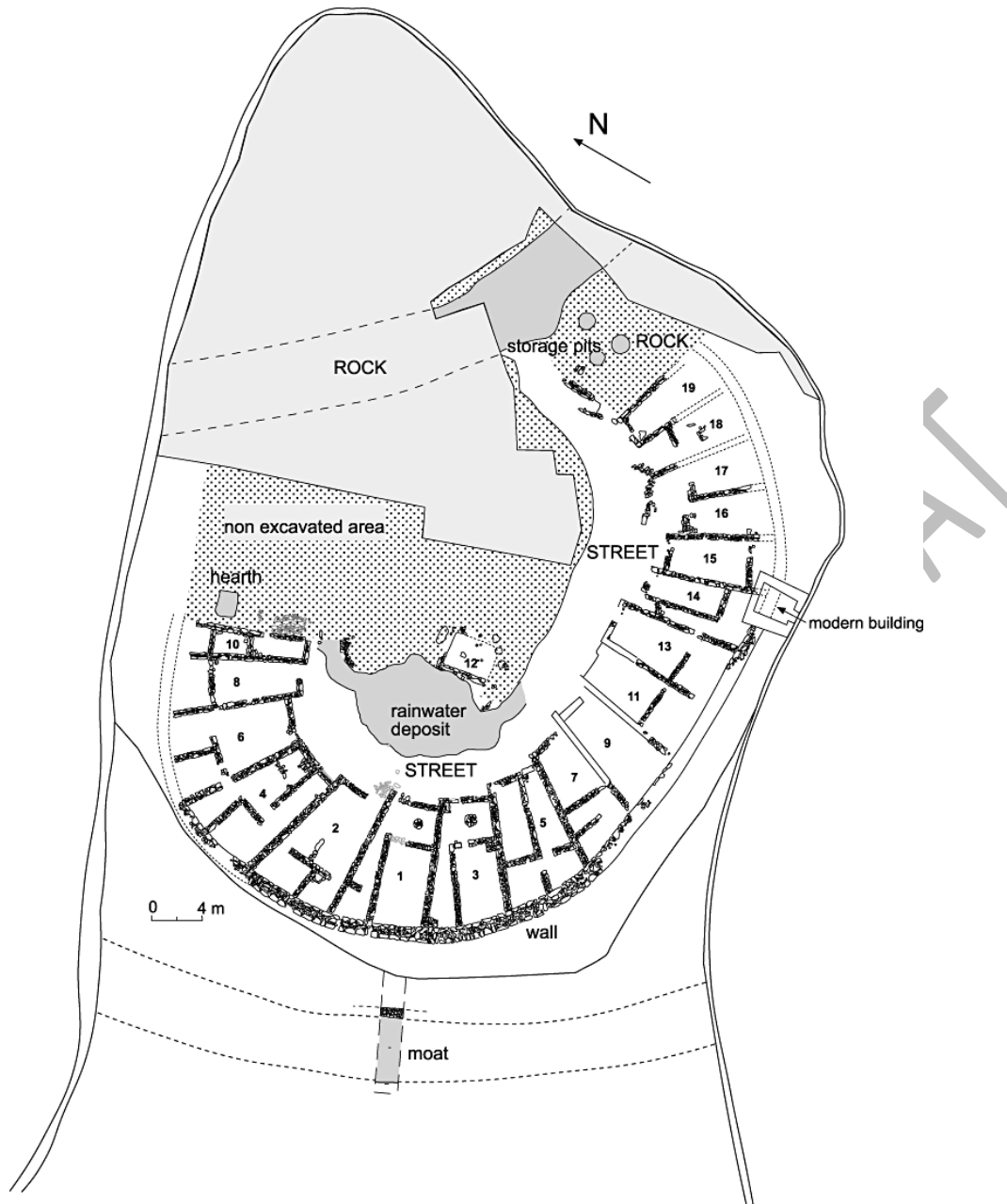houses

Plan of Alorda Park (Calafell, Tarragona) (after Asensio et al. 2005b, 613, fig. 4b, modified).
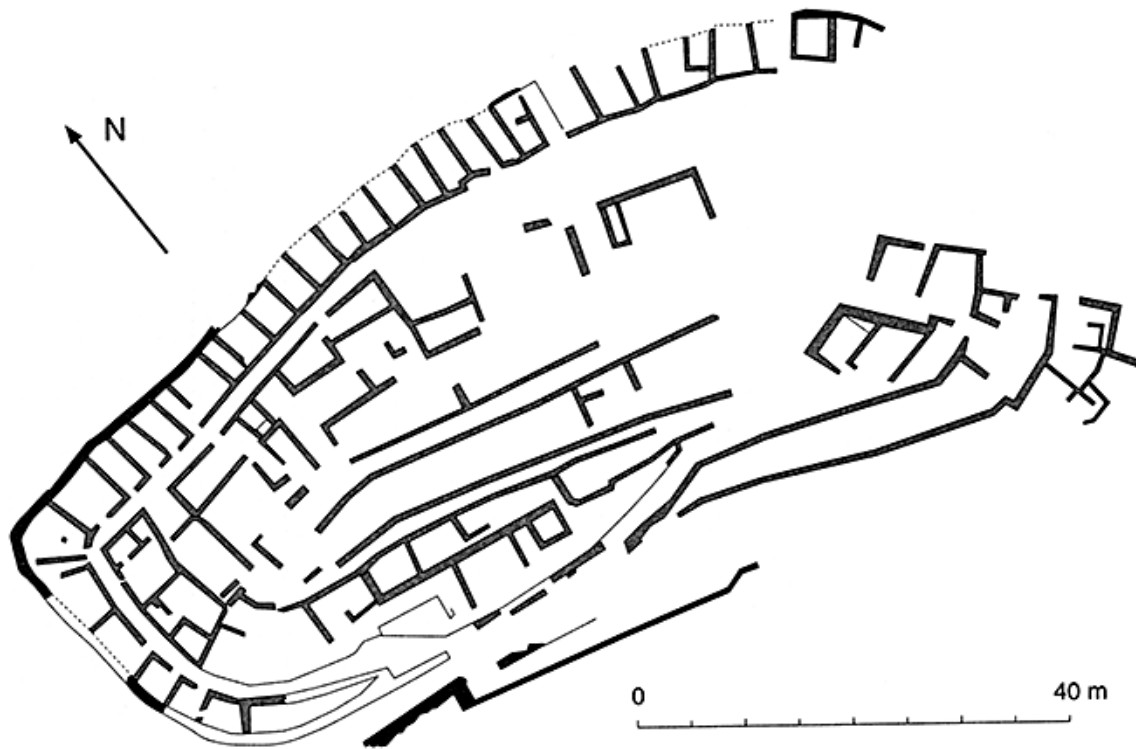
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Plan of Puig Castellar (Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Barcelona) (after Ferrer and Rigo 2002, 21, fig. 2, modified).

Plan of Estinclells (Verdú, Lleida) (after Asensio et al. 2005a, 477, fig. 2A).

The inner space of these rectangular houses was subdivided into a number of rooms that varied from two to 20. Their ground areas could also vary enormously – from 20 sq m to 500 sq m. Logically, there is a relationship between the size of the house and the number of rooms. The simplest Iberian dwelling had a single multifunctional room and the different domestic activities were not always separated by walls. In all the sites and periods of the Iberian culture there were some simple houses of one, two or three rooms, with sizes of between 20 and 50 sq m. However, all the sites also had some more complex houses of over 50 sq m, and often more of 100 sq m, and with a multiplicity of areas.

Several studies of Iberian urban planning and architecture published during the 1970s and 1980s described the house as being normally of the simple type, with one to three rooms and ground areas of 25–30 sq m (Gusi and Olària 1984, 34–5; Maluquer de Motes 1986, 31). However, subsequent archaeological research undertaken at many settlements (in particular the excavations carried out since the late 1990s), as well as the revision of some sites that had previously been excavated during the first decades of the twentieth century, demonstrated that the diversity of size, number of rooms and types of ground plan in Iberian houses is much greater than we could have suspected even 20 years ago.

In my synthesis of Iron Age domestic architecture in the Catalan area (Belarte 1997), I tried to systematize the house plans using the archaeological data we had at that time and I proposed a typology of Iberian houses. I distinguished two main types that I called a and b. Type a derived from the Final Bronze Age houses of one simple rectangular room. In this group I put the domestic buildings with a rectangular or trapezoidal plan and ground areas of between 20 and 35 sq m. This type included several sub-types, according to the number of inner spaces separated by walls (ranging from a simple house without partitions to a three-roomed house) and the layout of the different spaces or rooms. Type b dealt with larger houses from 40 to 300 sq m. They had square or rectangular ground plans and were more complex, being subdivided into four or more rooms. In type b I distinguished a certain diversity in the complexity of the plans; the more complex of them had corridors to access the different rooms of the house. Although this typology may be still considered valid, the data provided by the excavations of the last ten years allow us to speak of a greater variety of houses. Moreover, in my earlier research I was unable to study in enough depth the relationship between the types of house and the types of settlement. In another part of this paper I will continue the discussion of the diversity of architectural plans and the function of the different types of house inside the settlements.

I will now look at the functional distribution of space in Iberian dwellings. Although there was no standard type of Iberian house, we can normally identify the following rooms or activity areas:

•A space containing a hearth, normally referred to in archaeological literature as a 'hearth room' (Bonet and Guérin 1995, 93). The hearth was normally in the centre of the room, although it was sometimes to one side. This room was used for cooking and other activities associated with the preparation of meals (including their consumption), and is also believed to have had a social use, which is why researchers often refer to it as the 'collective room'. The social function of these areas is particularly evident in the largest and most complex houses, in which the hearth room floors and walls were more carefully plastered and sometimes even decorated. Finally, it should be noted that the hearth room did not have a precise location in the house, although it was usually larger (20–30 sq m) than the other rooms. For one-room houses this is logically the only area that can be easily identified.

•A storage space or pantry identified by a large number of amphorae, jars or other storage vessels. This space was normally quite small and was located at the back of the house (far from the entrance and consequently from the light), and far from the passage areas.

•A milling area, identified by one or more querns. This activity was sometimes carried out in the hearth room, but in many houses it had a separate area.

•An area dedicated to artisan activities, like metalworking or wine- and oil-making. Although these activities were mainly carried out in specialized, non-domestic areas, several parts of their production processes could be undertaken in domestic contexts.

•Ritual spaces. Although not all houses had a space reserved for these practices, the larger and more complex houses had a small room for domestic rituals. Evidence of these ritual practices can be seen in the remains of infants or animals buried below the floors or in other domestic features.

•Rest areas: identified by the absence of activity and sometimes by the presence of benches built against the walls. These are the most difficult spaces to identify.

Looms were not located in a special area of the house. Loom weights are often concentrated in groups, in the hearth room itself, or in a storage room where they were kept for later use. On the other hand, there does not seem to have been a specific place for spinning.

The specialization of space and the existence of separate rooms for each activity depended on the level of segmentation of the house. If the house had only two rooms separated by walls, the same room had to be used for two or more activities; if the house had more than two rooms, each of them was reserved for only one activity. We could also imagine that there were separate rooms for men and women, at least in the more complex houses. Nevertheless, and despite the attempts of some researchers (Guérin 2003), the data available on the Iberian house have not allowed us to distinguish a clear gender segmentation of space and most of the rooms seemed to have been shared by men and women, even if not at the same time. In any case, the distinction between the areas reserved for men and those for women is rarely evident from the architectural remains, even for other societies, such as the Greeks, whose domestic architecture is better known (Jameson 1990, 104).

I will now look at some examples in the northern area of the Iberian culture (present-day Catalonia) that could illustrate the diversity of plans and the use of spaces, and I will attempt to interpret the meaning of this diversity.

The iberian house: some examples in catalonia

As I have already mentioned, Iberian settlements were organized according to a hierarchical territorial pattern. The different categories of settlement seem to have made up some kind of confederation or territorial area corresponding to political entities, which in turn correspond approximately to the different Iberian peoples mentioned in ancient texts, at least from the Middle Iberian Period (400–200 BC) (Sanmartí 2004, 23). Ideally, I would have liked to choose one of these territorial areas in order to analyse the domestic architecture at each kind of settlement in the hierarchical organization. Unfortunately there is no one complete territory that has provided an extensively excavated example of every category that allows us to do so. For this reason, the settlements I have chosen for the sample of houses belong to different territorial entities, mainly located in the coastal area of Catalonia (Fig. 1); all have provided enough information to allow the different types of houses to be analysed and I hope this sample will serve to illustrate the diversity that existed, as well as indicating their function in a given type of settlement. I have chosen several sites occupied during the third century, in order to compare the different uses of space at various kinds of settlement from the same period.

The houses of the main towns: Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Tarragona) and Puig de Sant Andreu, Ullastret (Girona)

First of all, I should like to explain my reasons for choosing El Castellet de Banyoles as an example of an Iberian town. The category of main towns or central places is the least known of all the different types of Iberian site. Although they have been one of the main areas of interest for researchers (particularly during the first part of the twentieth century), none of them has been extensively excavated. Consequently, even though the larger sites in this category (Ullastret in the Indiketia region, Burriac in the Laietania region)1 have been known for a long time, they are not really well known from an archaeological point of view, and the information gained from the early excavations is particularly unhelpful in the analysis of their architecture. Ullastret is currently the only main town that is being extensively excavated. It has revealed interesting information about its urban planning and domestic architecture; however, the amount of published information on this subject is still relatively small when the size of the site (about 12 ha) is considered. In Burriac, the excavations are extremely small for the size of the site. Another main town is Tarakon-Kese in the Cossetania region; in this case, even though it has been more recently excavated, the information on dwellings is very limited due to the fact that Roman Tarraco and the modern city of Tarragona were built over the proto-historic settlement. Another central site currently being explored is El Castellet de Banyoles, one of the main settlements in the Iberian territory of Ilercavonia. I believe our current knowledge of one area of this site could serve as a qualitative sample of the general organization of domestic architecture; moreover, this site was occupied during the third century, a period for which we have a large amount of information for the other types of settlement.

El Castellet de Banyoles was a town of 4.4 ha located on a high, triangular-shaped platform overlooking the River Ebro (Fig. 2a). It was abandoned at the end of the third century BC, in the context of the Roman conquest. Several archaeological excavations carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century revealed the importance of the site. Those excavations discovered two pentagonal towers that defended the entrance to the site, and a densely occupied residential area was also excavated near the entrance. In addition, the occasional finds of sets of coins, as well as several exceptional ritual silver objects (Serra Ràfols 1941), indicated the importance of this site, which may have had a temple or a shrine. Finally, the more recent discovery of an Iberian text written on a lead sheet means that we can assume it also had an administrative or economic function (Asensio, Miró and Sanmartí 2002, 198). Although this settlement is not as large as Ullastret or Burriac, it can be considered to be a town if we take into account the following factors: a ground area of several hectares, a defensive system of a certain complexity, the (apparent) density of its urban planning, the probable existence of religious buildings, and the use of writing for economic purposes.

Since 1998, a University of Barcelona research project team has been excavating the northern area of this site, at the opposite end to the previously described entrance area (Asensio, Miró and Sanmartí 2002; 2005). This work has allowed us to distinguish two types of clearly differentiated domestic building:

Firstly, a set of buildings whose rear walls formed the town's rampart. Three of them (buildings 1, 2 and 3) were 300–310 sq m, 350–360 sq m and 250 sq m respectively (Fig. 2b). They all had the same layout, each with a courtyard or large open space, around which there was a variable number of rectangular-shaped rooms (six to eight). The layout of these rooms did not seem to follow a regular pattern, although in all cases from the courtyard one could enter a rectangular room that gave access to the rest of the rooms,

which were also rectangular in shape. Only one room in each building (normally the largest) had a hearth in the middle. Unfortunately, few finds have been made in these buildings, making it difficult to study the areas from a functional point of view. These rows of buildings are completed, to the eastern side, by other, smaller dwellings with plenty of evidence of domestic and artisan activities; for example, building No. 5 had 100 sq m of ground area, six rooms, no courtyard, hearths in almost all the rooms, and a circular oven surrounded by traces of smelted lead, probably used by artisans (Fig. 2b).

The rest of the houses documented at the site had much simpler dimensions and structure. Their ground area (even though still quite large) was smaller (70 to 75 sq m on average) and their structure was more regular, with square ground plans and a subdivision into four spaces of similar size (Figs. 2a and 10.4). The study of these houses is also conditioned by the scarcity of finds.
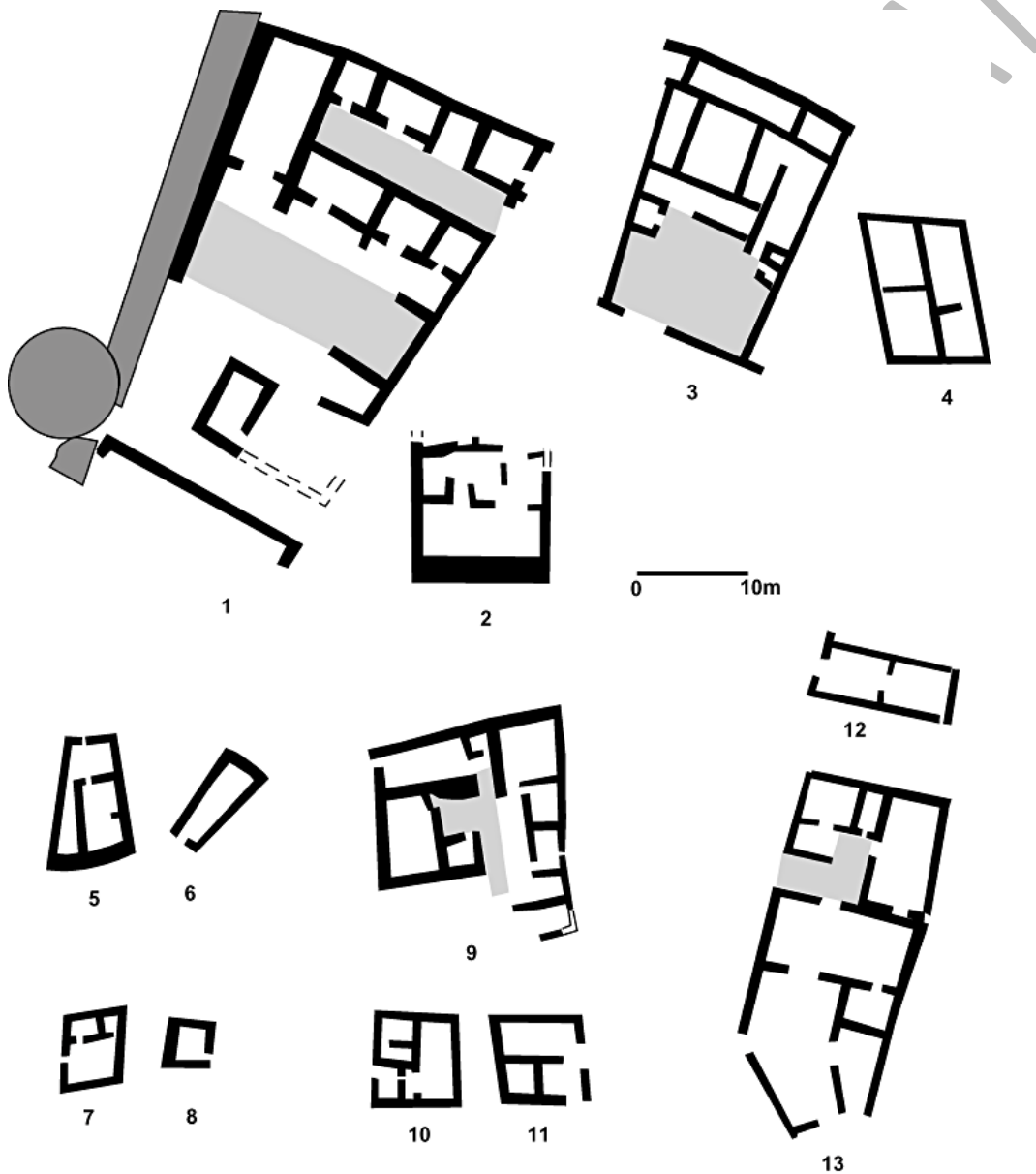
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Schematic plans of houses in different kinds of Iberian sites: 1–2: houses of Ullastret (after Martín et al. 2004, 268, fig. 4, modified, and Maluquer de Motes and Picazo 1992, 28, modified); 3–4: houses of Castellet de Banyoles (after Asensio, Miró and Sanmartí 2005, 625–6, modified); 5–6: houses of Estinclells (after Asensio et al. 2005a, 477, modified); 7–8: houses of Puig Castellar (after Ferrer and Rigo 2002, 73, fig. 43 and 55, fig. 26, modified); 9–11: houses of Alorda Park (after Asensio et al. 2005b, 613, modified); 12–13: houses of Mas Castellar (after Pons 2002, 119, fig. 8.18, modified).

From this information it seems clear that there were two types of residential building and that the large, complex houses were on the perimeter area of the site, adjoining the wall; artisan activities could also have been carried out in a building located in this area. The central area seems to have been occupied by a quarter of simpler houses.

The evidence of domestic architecture provided by this settlement seems to be confirmed by the data from Ullastret (Fig. 3). There, recent research has documented the existence of more complex, higher status dwellings also related to the fortification of the settlement. The best known to date are in the area known as Zone 14 (Fig. 10.1): two complex houses, with a total surface area of up to 1,000 sq m, built during the fourth century BC, structured around courtyards, with multiple rooms and a high degree of functional specialization. These houses have been interpreted as the residences of two related extended families belonging to the aristocracy that ruled this important settlement and its territory (Martín et al. 2004, 265). Internally, there are areas for metalworking, rooms with domestic functions, storage areas, places for milling, representational rooms and finally places for worship. Some of the rooms were paved with lime mortar or opus signinum and their walls were plastered with hydraulic mortar. Moreover, the construction of these houses involved the privatization of a street and the access to one of the towers. A review of earlier excavations allows us to put forward the hypothesis that this site contained other residences of this type (Martín et al. 2004, 266).

Previous excavations had shown the existence of other dwellings of a certain status and complexity, with three or four rooms and an area of not more than 100 sq m (Maluquer de Motes and Picazo 1992) (Fig. 10.2). At the current stage of research into this settlement we are unable to say how many of these higher status houses it contained and there is still insufficient data to correctly evaluate the significance of these 'aristocratic' dwellings in the context of the site.

The houses in a second category settlement: Turó de Ca n'Olivé (Cerdanyola, Barcelona)

This category includes densely populated sites covering more than one hectare. The chosen example is a site that was inhabited from the end of the sixth century to the first century BC (Francés et al. 2005), although several reconstruction phases have been detected. This is one of the rare examples of settlements occupied throughout the whole Iberian period. In a first phase, during the First Iberian Period (525–425 BC), a particular building technique dating from the Late Bronze Age was used: a depression was cut into the rock and the houses were built against it. These houses had rectangular ground plans and only one room of about 20 sq m with few domestic features (only hearths have been documented). The houses seem to have been only shelters, with the domestic activities being performed outside according to their excavators.

The settlement was reorganized during the Classical Iberian Period (425–200 BC): a perimeter wall was built and the houses annexed to it (Fig. 4); these houses were larger (from 25 to 40 sq m)2 and had two, three or four rooms. The size of the houses grew during the third century and they had many domestic features (slab floors, hearths, benches). Artisans' workshop areas have also been documented, including an area for metalworking with a forge, furnaces and hearths. The existence of storage pits inside some houses or in their proximity indicates that some families in this town may have controlled a certain concentration of economic resources. During the third century, the storage pits were located outside the settlement walls but next to the entrance. Finally, we should note that this site has produced a large number of high quality imported ceramics from this period (Francés et al. 2005).

There do not appear to have been many differences between the houses, and the excavators have not yet provided any detailed descriptions. This is why I can only give a general description here.

The houses in a fortified residential citadel: the Alorda Park site (Calafell, Tarragona)

This is a small, fortified settlement of about 3,000 sq m that was occupied from the end of the sixth century to the second century. As in the case of Turó de Ca n'Olivé, this site is one of the rare examples to have been completely excavated and to have provided information over a long period of time, covering the whole Iberian era. Its excavators have interpreted it as a fortified site with a residential function (Asensio et al. 2005b).

The first houses on this site were of the simple type (one room). During the fourth century the houses became bigger and compartmentalized and some of them were subdivided into three rooms. Finally, in the third century, the diversity increased and the houses became more complex (Fig. 5); they had from one to ten rooms, were between 15 and 280 sq m in ground area and some of them had annexed rooms. Most of the domestic units had more than two rooms and their surface areas were mainly between 40 and 60 sq m (Figs 10.10 and 10.11). Three houses clearly exceeded this size: House 201 with 280 sq m (Figure 10.9), House 202 with almost 80 sq m, and House 203 with slightly over 90 sq m. Unfortunately, there were not enough finds in these houses to be able to attribute a specific use to each of their rooms. Each of these large houses had one or two rooms with a hearth, several storage rooms and possible domestic places of worship. In spite of the differences in the ground plans, all these houses had one common element: the entrance from a corridor located at right angles to the wall, which opened onto the street and gave access to the different rooms in the house. The largest, No. 201, also had an upper storey (we can be sure of this at least for Room AN, where some fragments of its opus signinum floor and lime plaster were found mixed with the remains of the collapsed earthen walls), and a central courtyard. This house consisted of two wings separated by a double corridor, which allowed access to the rooms situated on either side; it seems likely that this dwelling was the result of joining two houses together.

This is the only example of this type of settlement that has been completely excavated, not only in its total extent but also for its entire period of occupation. It has provided important evidence of an evolution in the complexity of house plans. This is also suggested by the excavated area of Turó de Ca n'Olivé, although in that case the evolution of the house plans is less obvious. Finally, it is important to point out that the houses in Alorda Park have provided high quality imported materials, which could be an indication of the wealth of the inhabitants. The complexity of the dwellings and the high status of the imported goods found at this settlement suggest that it was a seat of the local Iberian elite.

Rural houses. Some examples of settlements: Puig Castellar (Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Barcelona) and Estinclells (Verdú, Lleida)

One of the categories of settlement in the Iberian territories is the fortified village covering several thousand square metres. One of them, Puig Castellar near Barcelona, is a 4,000 sq m site that was occupied from the middle of the fifth century to the third century. It was extensively excavated in the early twentieth century, which is why the archaeological register does not always provide enough information to analyse the functions and use of the spaces. More recent research has allowed us to study and to document more carefully a series of houses (a review of nine previously excavated houses and 13 excavated between 1998 and 2002) (Ferrer and Rigo 2002). I am using these data for my analysis of the settlement. This was a village of a few thousand square metres with an enclosing wall against which the houses, most of which were quite small with a simple ground plan, were built (Fig. 6).

Two types of houses have been documented, although they are both rather simple structures. The simplest and smallest houses were between 11 and 20 sq m in area and had a single room without internal partitions (Fig. 10.8), whose only domestic feature was apparently a hearth. This is the simplest type of house, with a multifunctional space where all the domestic activities were carried out around the hearth. The larger, more complex houses were between 20 and 40 sq m and had two or three rooms (Fig. 10.7). We can distinguish a space for cooking (with a hearth), as well as one or two rooms for storage (with benches) and domestic activities such as milling. According to the excavators, it is not possible to make a connection between the different plans and their use for different functions or activities. The larger houses did not contain higher status objects or a larger quantity of imported ceramics, although it has to be said that, in general, few imported goods have been found at this site.

Another, more recently excavated, site in this category is Els Estinclells (Verdú), a 2,000 sq m rural settlement inhabited during a shorter period at the end of the third century (Asensio et al. 2005a). Although this site is not located near the coast, data from its excavation add interesting information to the study of village houses. Els Estinclells contained 18 or 19 houses, built against a wall (Fig. 7). The central part of the site was an open area, which contained a place for gathering rainwater, a furnace, some storage pits, and other excavated structures. As in the previous example, two main types of houses have been documented at this settlement. There was a group of six larger houses with ground areas of slightly over 50 sq m and three or four rooms (Fig. 10.5), plus a second storey; the rest of the dwellings (12), with ground areas of between 20 and 40 sq m, had only two rooms (Fig. 10.6) and no second storey. All the houses had a residential area plus a storage space; the larger houses also had an activity area with circular stone structures, which could be related to milling or handicraft activities.

The two different types of house are similar to those documented at Puig Castellar. It seems that at this kind of site the difference between the dwellings is less accentuated than in the main towns. These villages do not show any evidence of important concentrations of wealth or the presence of elite groups; nevertheless, even in these simplest settlements some differences between the houses can be detected.

Rural houses: the specialized site of Mas Castellar (Pontós, Girona)

This is a 1,000 sq m rural settlement occupied from the end of the third century to the beginning of the second century. It also controlled an area of 2.5 ha occupied by storage pits (Fig. 8). This village was dedicated to the production and storage of grain, and had a notable residential function, with different types of houses (Pons 2002).
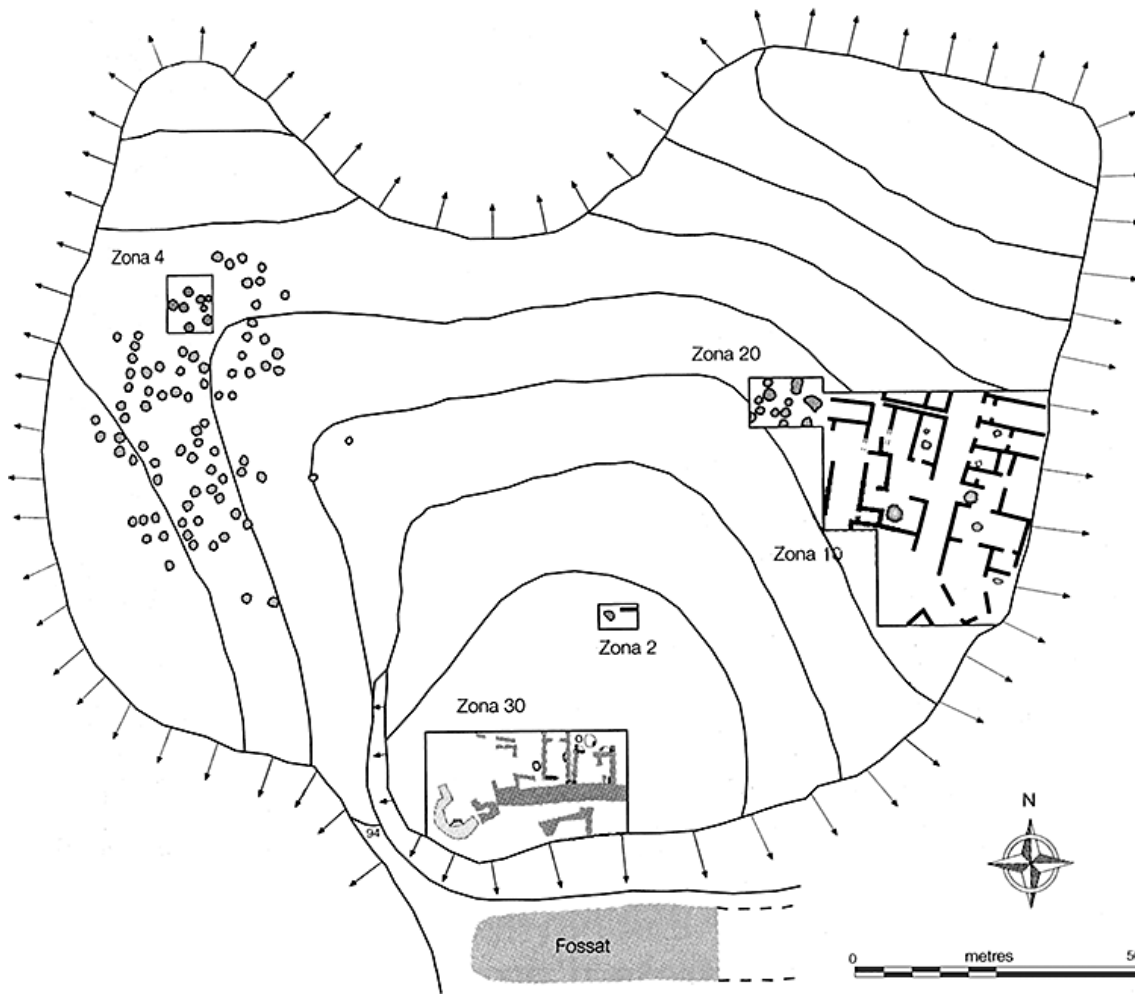
Open in figure viewer

Plan of Mas Castellar (Pontós, Girona) (after Pons 2002, 97, fig. 8.1).

The excavations have identified three complex dwellings (the best preserved is over 400 sq m and has eight differentiated rooms) and two simple houses with two or three rooms between 40 and 45 sq m in surface area (Figs. 10.12 and 10.13). The two simple houses are made up of a domestic room (hearth room) complemented by a pantry or a resting room. The complex houses have a clearer separation of activities: House No. 1 had, in addition to the hearth room (or cooking room) and storage area, specialized spaces for processing activities (milling, ironworking). Moreover, the hearth room of this house showed indications of ritual activities (a fragment of marble altar, burnt dog bones, a human jaw, and ritual vessels); a small room annexed to the hearth room also had a ritual function (Pons 2002, 120–36). As I have already indicated, rooms with a specialized ritual function are only documented in the more complex houses.

Other Iberian settlements excavated in Catalonia have provided evidence of specialized economic activities. These include Les Guàrdies (El Vendrell, Tarragona) (Morer and Rigo 1999) or Turó de la Font de la Canya (Avinyonet del Penedès, Barcelona) (Asensio, Cela and Morer 2005, 177–95). They all contained several structures with a clear commercial purpose, particularly storage pits, sometimes accompanied by artisan features (ironwork in Les Guàrdies) and a small dwelling area. In none of these examples were the houses as complex as those I have described in Pontós.

Rural houses: farms (Fondo del Roig, Cunit, Tarragona)

This is a third century rural settlement made up of a single building organized around one or two courtyards, with a preserved surface area of 360 sq m (Garcia, Morer and Rigo 1996, 179–96). The information gathered from the excavations is not of sufficient quality to allow us to attribute functions to the different rooms or parts of the building, although it seems that the northern area had a residential function and the southern area had a more commercial use, as a working or storage area. We can interpret this site as a farm of a certain complexity (Fig. 9).
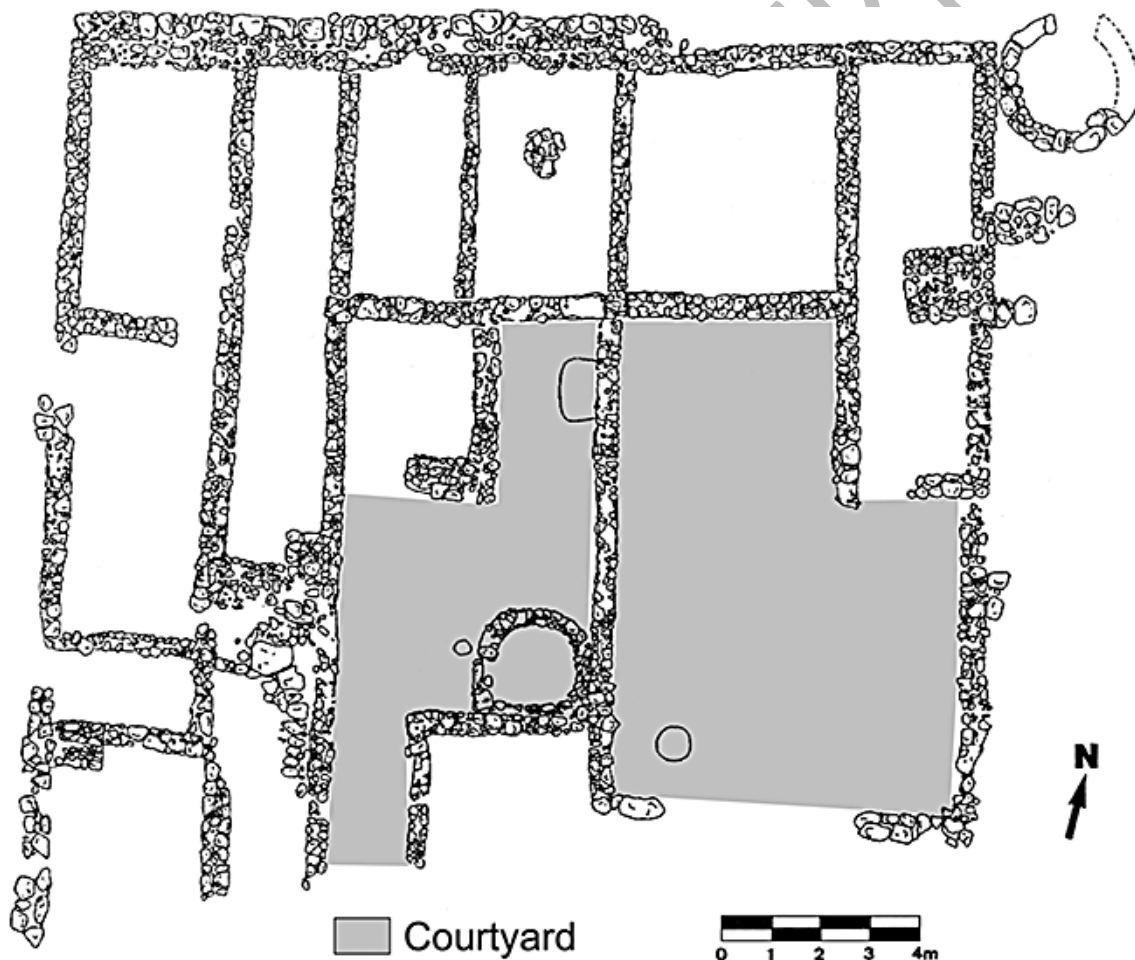
Open in figure viewer

Plan of Fondo del Roig (Cunit, Tarragona) (after Garcia, Morer and Rigo 1996, 185, modified).

We still do not know enough about the rural settlements, so I am unable to say whether El Fondo del Roig is a typical site or an exceptional one. The fragmentary data provided by the excavation of other settlements suggest that those in this category should normally be simpler.

From the houses to their occupants: types of house, social differences, and hierarchy

The examples I describe are an indication of the existence of a certain diversity of house type during the Iberian period, although they also show the relationship between the category of the site (or its function) and the type of dwellings in it. The differences in shape and size of the houses are more accentuated at the sites I have considered as 'main towns', as well as in fortified citadels (Fig. 10). On the other hand, at the rural settlements the picture seems to have been more uniform, with the exception of some sites with specialized economic functions, such as Mas Castellar de Pontós.

The hierarchical organization of the houses inside a settlement and the differences between the types of houses documented in each category seem to have been a reflection of the hierarchical organization of the settlements within a given territory. This settlement pattern – sedentary and hierarchical, with a certain specialization of the settlement at a regional level, agrees with the definition of regional polities given by anthropologists (Johnson and Earle 2000, 247–8). Moreover, the evidence of four levels of settlement in the hierarchy would allow us to consider the Iberian confederations as archaic states (Flannery 1998, 15–57). In any event, in regional polities the settlements were dominated by an elite class that controlled the production and economic resources. In the Iberian instance, the larger and more complex houses could have been the residences of the elite who controlled production and trade. In regional polities, the family played an important role in the economy and daily production was organized around households (Johnson and Earle 2000, 249). Iberian settlements also reflect the important role of the household in the economy. As I have already mentioned, several productive activities, such as milling, spinning or weaving, as well as certain artisan activities, were carried out in the house.

This interpretation is consistent with the archaeological data we have on the economy of the period. From the archaeological remains we can gauge that the introduction of new technologies like iron tools or rotary querns brought about an increase in production after the sixth century BC. The use of the plough may have been particularly important in allowing a major expansion of the fallow land system within a short period (Sanmartí 2001, 112; Alonso 1999, 39). Later, the growth of sites with specialized functions (such as Pontós) and the emergence of many small rural settlements during the third century have been interpreted as indications of an increase in agricultural production. The production surpluses would have been controlled by the elite classes, as is suggested by the complex residences associated with storage structures at sites such as Pontós.

These larger and more complex houses (described in Castellet de Banyoles, Ullastret, Alorda Park, and Pontós) are not unique to the Catalan Iberian area, as similar houses are well known in other regions of the Iberian area, for example at La Bastida de les Alcusses (Díes Cusí and Álvarez 1998) and Castellet de Bernabé (Guérin 2003, 260–91) in Valencia and El Oral in Alicante (Abad and Sala 1993; 2001). In each case these larger houses contrast with the mainly simple dwellings at the same sites. They have been broadly interpreted as the houses of the wealthier, or Iberian elite classes; nevertheless, researchers do not fully agree on the composition of the groups that lived in these houses or on their social and legal category.

Although these houses do not correspond to a normalized type, they share several common elements:

- A ground area of at least 100 sq m.

- Unique architectural elements (columns, opus signinum floors, plaster, etc.).

- Indications of wealth such as a large quantity of imported, high status pottery.

- Location in a central or important place within the settlement, sometimes near the wall and even with private access to an element that is a part of the settlement's defensive system. This could indicate a relationship between wealth, power and the protection of the site.

- In many cases, the rooms of these houses are organized around an open courtyard, which could create and preserve a private environment and, in several examples, separate two areas of the house. In some cases there are entrance halls that hide the view of the interior of the house from the street.

- The existence of a room reserved for ritual practices.

These indicators – the larger size, the complexity of the layout, and the location – are those mainly used to infer the higher status and wealth of the inhabitants. Other indicators from the above list cannot be so easily identified: plaster could have collapsed or remained unidentified (particularly in early excavations), and artefacts are not always preserved if the settlement has been abandoned (Díes Cusí and Álvarez 1998). Moreover, the presence of high status goods is not sufficiently reliable proof that the house was the residence of members of the social elite, since, as some ethnographical studies have shown (Kamp 1987, 289), we cannot easily evaluate the real meaning that the proto-historic societies gave to certain objects or to their accumulation. The number of household possessions does not necessarily have a correlation with wealth, but could possibly be an indication of the number of women in a household, with the objects perhaps having come from dowries.

In the study of other early societies, the size of the land occupied by a house has been interpreted as an indicator of the wealth of the occupants (Kamp 1987, 287; Nevett 1999, 31). However, a greater size could also correspond to a larger number of occupants, and the differences in ground areas could even indicate the coexistence of different levels of an extended family. Smaller houses (between 20 and 50 sq m) can be associated with nuclear families, but the more complex houses could correspond to extended households (composed of a large number of members), probably made up of several families linked by kinship bonds. These differences could therefore indicate the different stages of a household (a couple without children, a couple with children, a couple with children and other dependents, etc.) (Kamp 1987, 287; Kramer 1979, 157–8; Nevett 1999, 31). However, even if the larger size and greater number of rooms are the most obvious indicators of the above, we must take into account all the evidence provided by houses to interpret their meaning. If a large ground area could be explained by a given stage in the household, certain architectural elements, the control of defensive structures, or activities carried out in it suggest a relationship between several households and their higher status in the settlement.

Of importance for the present discussion is the fact that the Iberian sites are composed almost exclusively of domestic buildings. Public buildings, as well as specialized structures such as shrines, are only documented – and sparsely at that – in the main settlements. Apart from them, all the social, political and cultural activities took place in the domestic context. Consequently, dwellings with a large ground area (which are mainly concentrated at the larger sites) may have had a social or political function as well as a domestic one. As I have already indicated, in the larger and more complex houses the hearth room itself has often been interpreted as a social gathering place ('collective room'), an area of social reproduction behaviour in the sense defined by Blanton (1995, 108).

From my point of view, the power of the elite classes was evident in their houses, symbols of their socio-economic status. These dwellings, therefore, were centrally located at the main sites, controlling crucial elements like walls or economic resources, and they were also reproduced on different scales in other categories of settlement. In some small villages or farms we cannot distinguish any evidence of these wealthier dwellings but, as Flannery indicated for many archaic states (1998, 17), authority may not be present in the latest stage of the settlement's hierarchy. The dwellings of the elite were also the seats of social, political and administrative activities, and these functions were not necessarily carried out at every settlement.

At this point it would be interesting to say something about the chronology and evolution of these dwellings. In my sample of Iberian houses I have mainly showed houses as static elements, whereas houses and settlements are in fact dynamic and constantly changing. The reason for this is that I have chosen sites that provide the highest quality data for domestic architecture and the use of space, and such settlements were only occupied for a short time. When several occupations have been superimposed, the information about complete houses is frequently much less and unclear. Evidence of transformation or rebuilding can sometimes be inferred from the study of the architectural remains, but the changes in the use of space are not easily documented. Normally, what we are able to analyse for each room of the house is a set of domestic features that were built at the same time as the house itself (but the function of which could have changed when it was last used) and a set of objects corresponding to its last use. Moreover, the sum of all the preserved domestic features could correspond to activities or uses carried out successively, rather than simultaneously, in the room.

However, I will try and summarize the evolution of Iberian domestic architecture. Although there are few remains from the sixth and fifth centuries and most of the available data come from the fourth and third centuries, the examples described here allow us to distinguish a certain evolution in the complexity of dwellings from the First Iberian Period to the Classical Iberian Period. The ground areas of the houses and the complexity of their layout increased, particularly during the fourth and third centuries. Moreover, some examples provide evidence that the larger and more complex dwellings were built at an advanced period in the life of the settlement, and not during its first stages. At least some of these dwellings could be the result of the enlargement of previously existing houses, or rather the joining of two earlier simpler houses. This seems to have been the case with House No. 1 at Pontós (Pons 2002, 120–36) and the houses in 'Zone 14' at Ullastret (Martín et al. 2004), and possibly House 201 in Alorda Park.

The latter point cannot always be demonstrated, as we are often only able to document the last period in the life of a house, and not earlier architectural changes. Some of the houses cited had a 'double' structure, with two similar bodies and at least a hearth in each one; these structures may indicate that they were occupied by two family cells (related or unrelated by kinship). So we come back to the relationship between ground area and

family structure. Each one of these complex houses could have been inhabited by an extended family composed of two nuclear and monogamous cells, or possibly by a polygamous family with two or more wives, as Dietler has suggested for the complex dwellings excavated at the proto-historic site of Lattara (Dietler et al. in press). Asian societies provide plenty of examples of houses formed by several units or bodies corresponding to an equivalent number of joined family cells (Janowski 1995). In any case, the need to enlarge the family unit or household could also have been in response to economic needs (the joining of two nuclear families could have allowed them to carry out some complementary productive activities) (Kamp 1987, 286), or a way for the elites to consolidate and demonstrate their status (Flannery 2002). This second option could have been the case with the Iberian societies.

Finally, we should not forget that larger dwellings sometimes involved the appropriation of public spaces (streets) and structures of public use (access to defensive elements). This could indicate a relationship between wealth, power and the protection of the settlement. In my opinion, this is more significant than the differences between ground areas, since the later ones could be related to a larger number of members in the household. Moreover, the use of public spaces as an indicator of power not only implies the willingness to mark a social differentiation, but also the acceptance of such differences by the community – yet another indicator to support the idea of consolidated elite classes during the Classical Iberian Period. The evolution of domestic architecture in the studied area, at least from the point of view of its complexity, seems to indicate that the Iberian elites established their position during the Classical Iberian Period, at the same time as the hierarchical settlement pattern characteristic of these societies was fully consolidated.

Acknowledgements

Footnotes

1. Indiketia, Laietania, Cossetania, and Ilercavonia are all names of Iberian peoples known from the written sources.
2. The ground areas of these houses have not been indicated in the publications; we have calculated them from the general plans of the site published in Francés et al. 2005. These plans are quite small and therefore the calculated areas are approximate.

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