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PART 3

Mass violence and imperial expansion (1)

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CHAPTER 10

Rome versus Carthage

The Second Punic War battlefield of *Baecula* and the siege of *Iliturgi*¹

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INTRODUCTION

In 208 BC, having taken Carthagonova, Scipio the African directed his campaign towards the upper Guadalquivir valley, in the present-day province of Jaén (Figure 10.1). The fall of Carthagonova was a moral and strategic blow to the Carthaginians in the Punic War, as it deprived their armies of their main supply port and provided the Roman army with a considerable booty of weapons and other resources. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it tipped the scales in favour of Rome, leading the principal Iberian leaders in the conflict to pledge support to it.

For its part, the Carthaginian army found itself territorially divided, perhaps in an attempt to sustain the territorial cohesion of a fictitious domination of an extensive territory and, on the other hand, to ensure the necessary control of that territory to guarantee the supply of their respective armies.

In this context, the classical sources² provide us with a detailed description of the location, structure and unfolding of the Battle of *Baecula*. This has allowed us to develop an archaeological survey methodology that takes into account the topographical information provided by the sources and combines it with selective archaeological survey samples aimed at checking the validity of the proposed hypothesis through the intensive use of metal detectors (Bellón et al., 2004). We have analysed more than 20 case studies using this method. Each case had to meet a series of topographic conditions determined from the sources (proximity to an Iberian *oppidum*, the presence of a river close to the battlefield, a terraced structure, etc.), as well as offering validating archaeological data.

In 2004, we located the first evidence of a Second Punic War battlefield on the hill known as Cerro de las Albahacas (Santo Tomé, Jaén), a setting that has

become a paradigm in terms of its organisational structure and the corpus of documented finds (Bellón et al., 2004, 2009, 2013, 2015a). Since then we have undertaken a project for the systematic analysis of the battlefield and the identified camp areas, a site that covers a minimum estimated area of 500 hectares (Bellón et al., 2015c).

Here we consider it expedient to point out the validity of the methodological system of cross-referring philological and archaeological data, given that they should not necessarily be seen as antagonistic on the basis of a historiographic tradition that has interpreted them as such.

The fact is that traditionally *Baecula* has been identified with the present-day town of Bailén, also famous for the battle in 1808 during the Peninsular War in which General Castaños fought the Napoleonic army. According to Brewitz (1914) and Kromayer and Veith (1903–1931), basing themselves on data from Schulten and Lammerer, a topography similar to that described by the sources could be found in an area close to the locality that, along with the toponymic affinity, would confirm the location of the Second Punic War battle. This philological presupposition, which was completely lacking in archaeological data, subsisted as a historiographic tradition (Domínguez Monedero, 2015) until the need to contrast it with archaeological data was proposed.

THE BATTLE OF *BAECULA*: THE AREA AND SCALE OF THE CONFRONTATION

We believe it opportune to reveal certain estimates of the human scale of the battle, which took place two kilometres from an Iberian *oppidum* with some 20 hectares of fortified perimeter, making it one of the largest settlements in the territory of Cástulo and one with a considerable strategic potential.

This is the scenario in which the Roman army (possibly made up of some 40,000 troops) found itself. They faced a Carthaginian army whose size is more difficult

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²Mainly Polybius (X 38–40) and Titus Livius (XXVII 18, 1 a 20).

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