

RURAL RELIGION, CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND SETTLEMENT: THE CAN MODOLELL PROJECT



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SORRY WE DID NOT MAKE IT...



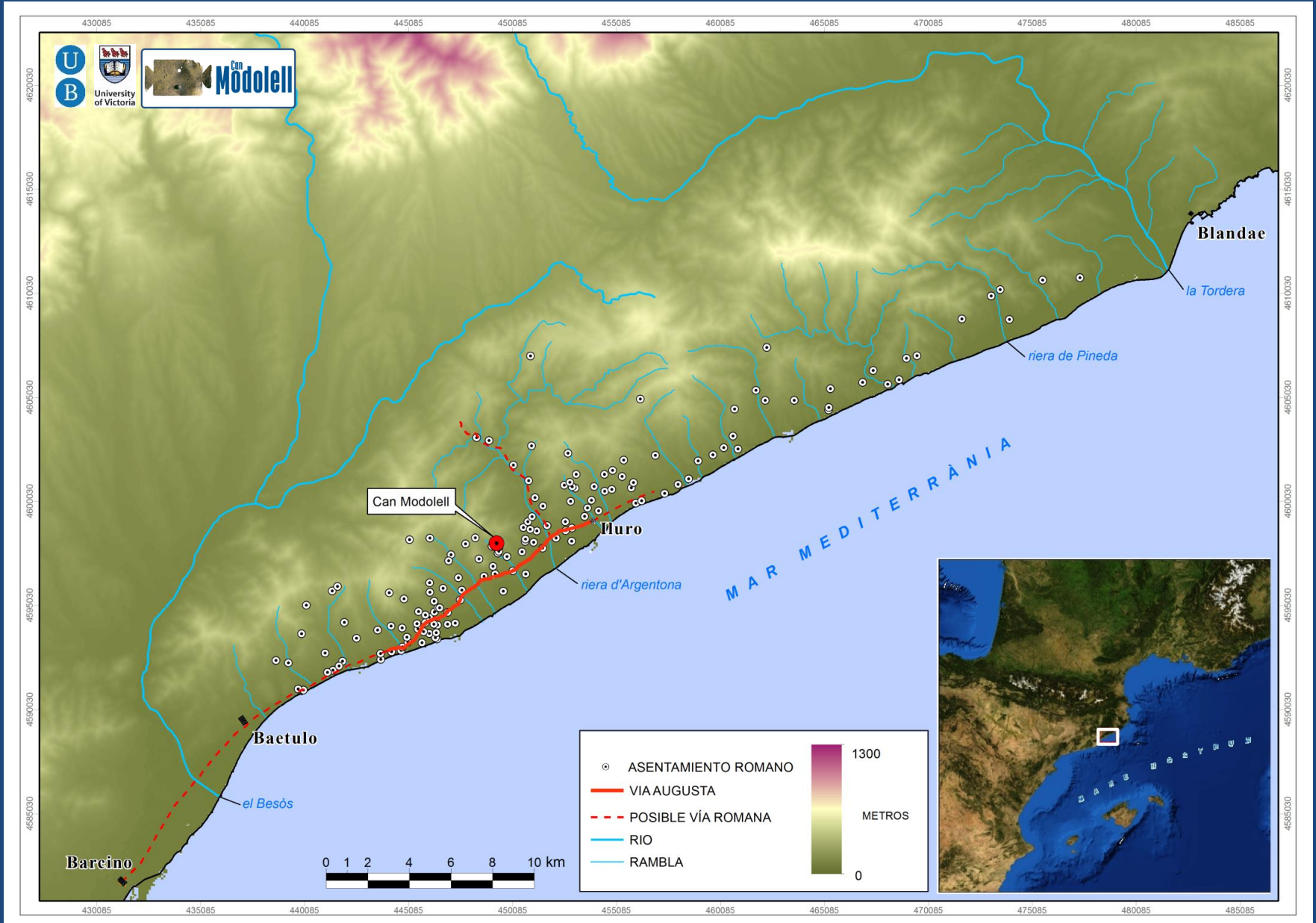
1

LOCATION



2

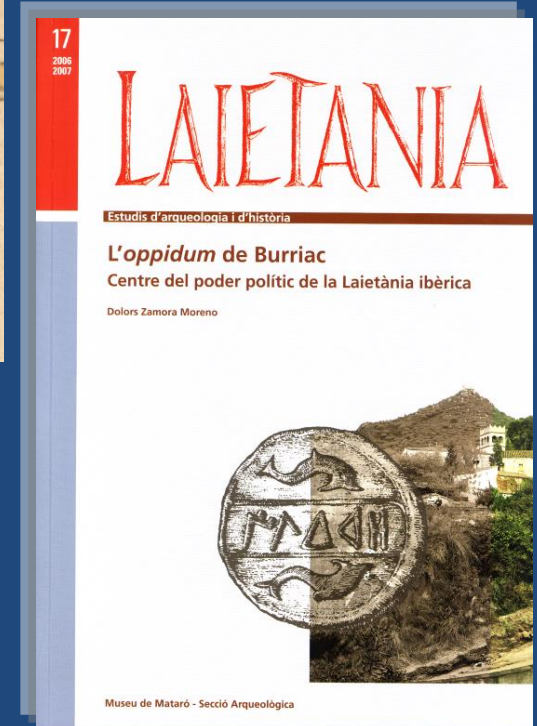
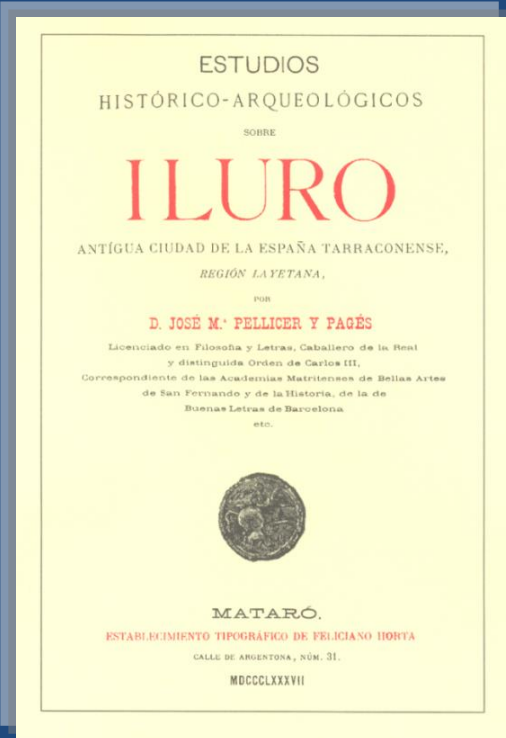
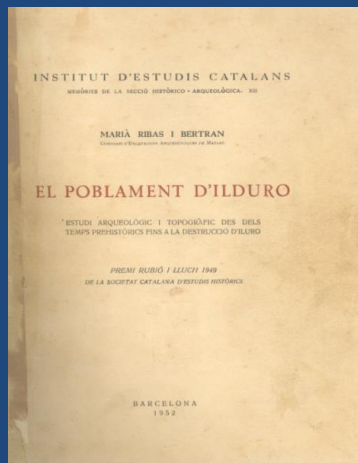
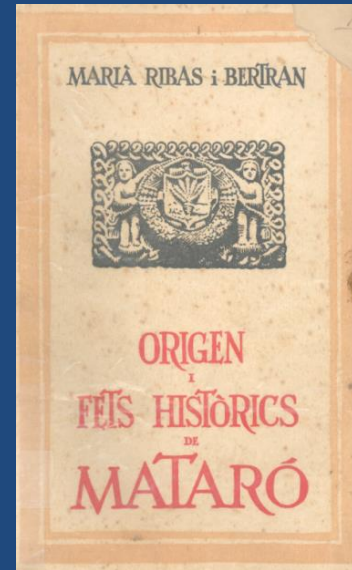
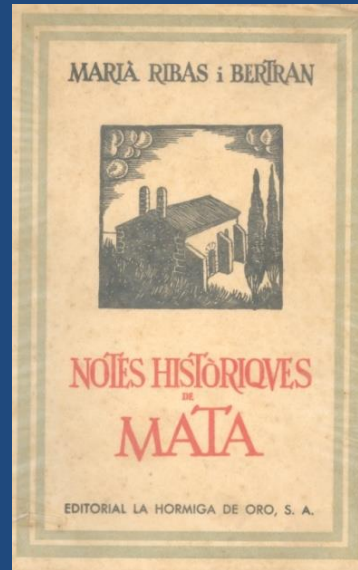
LOCATION AND SETTLEMENT

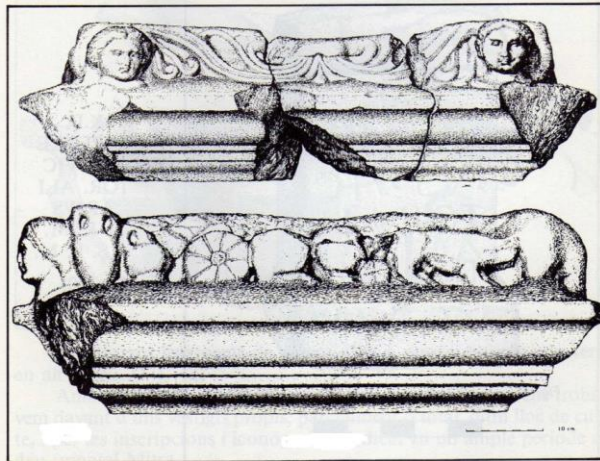


3

PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS





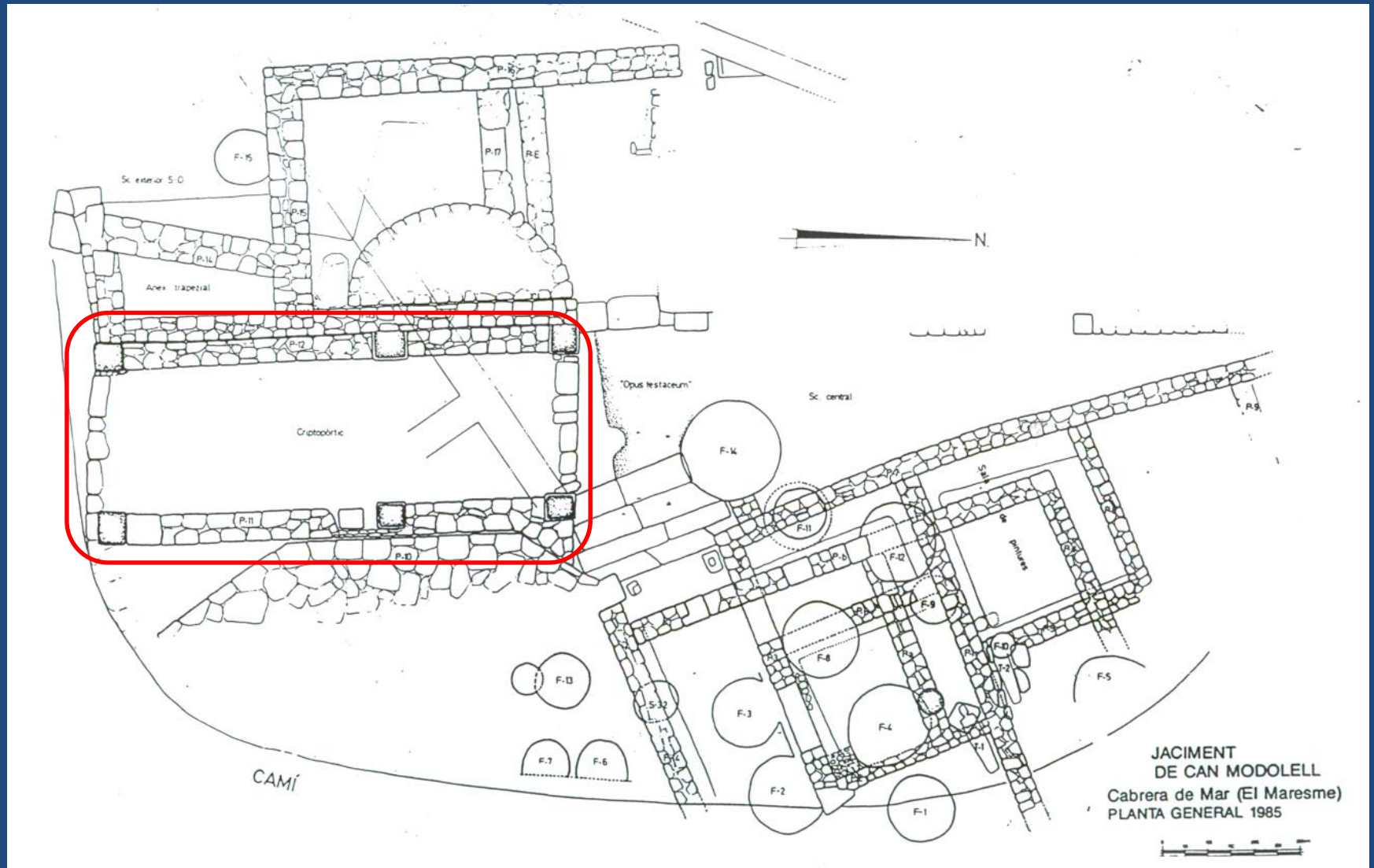


Fragment de mesa d'ara (can Modolell). Dibuixos de Jordi Arenas







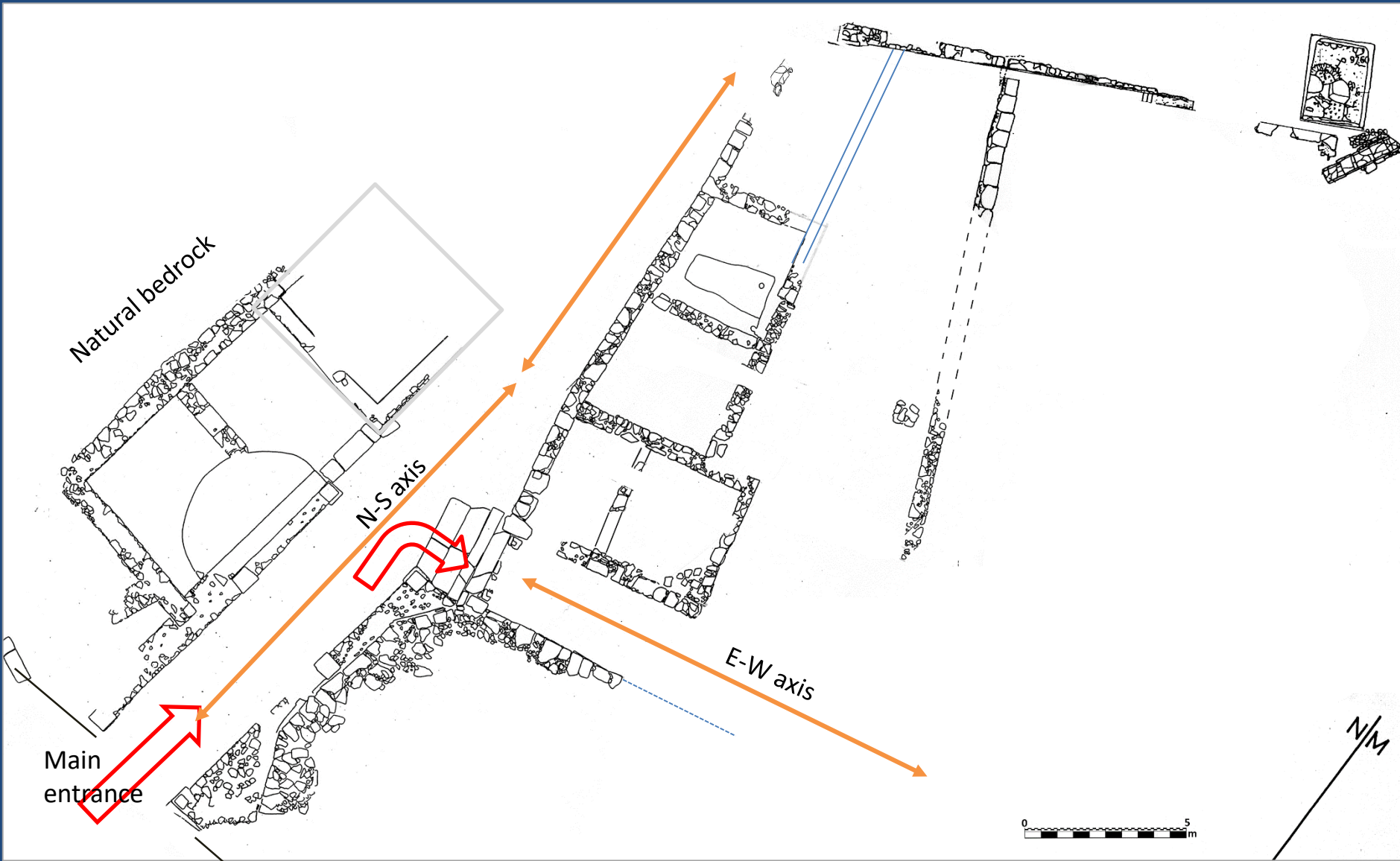




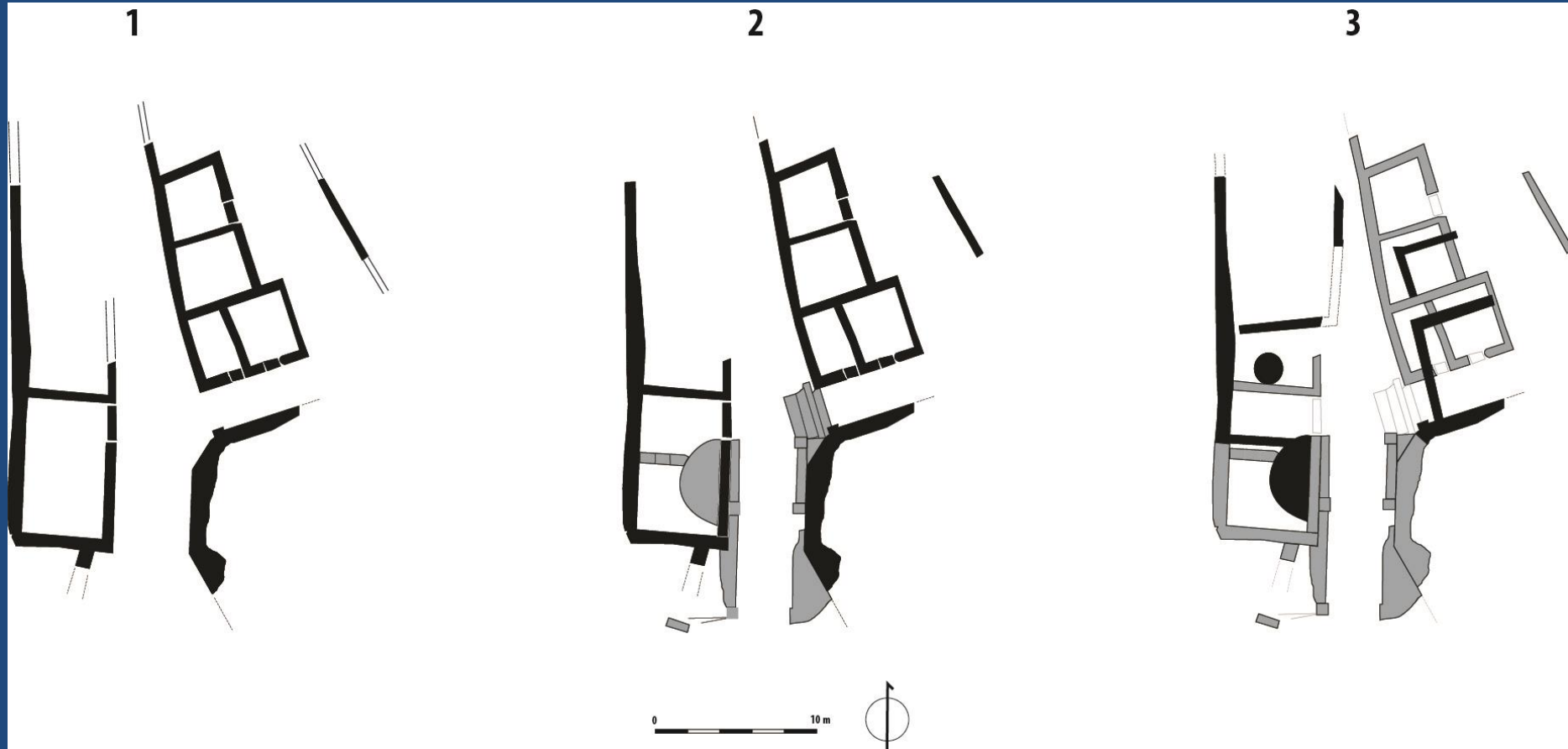


The preservation of the structures





Occupational phases: Phase 1 Augustus/Julio-Claudian period; 2 (2nd c. A.D.; in grey, constructions added to original building); 3 (5th-6th c.; in black, new and re-used structures)





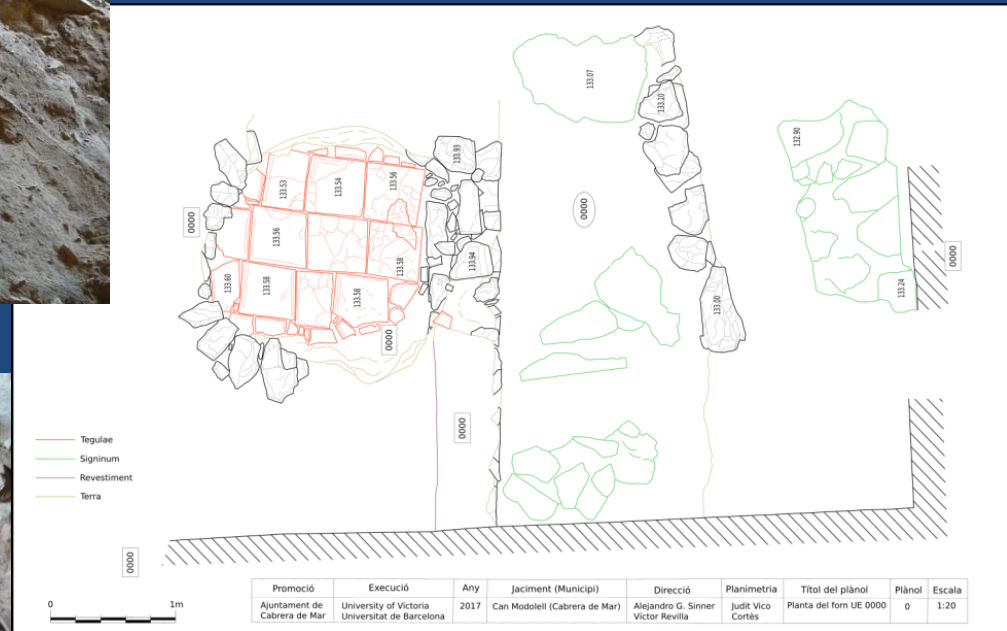


New data on destruction and reoccupation in Late Antiquity



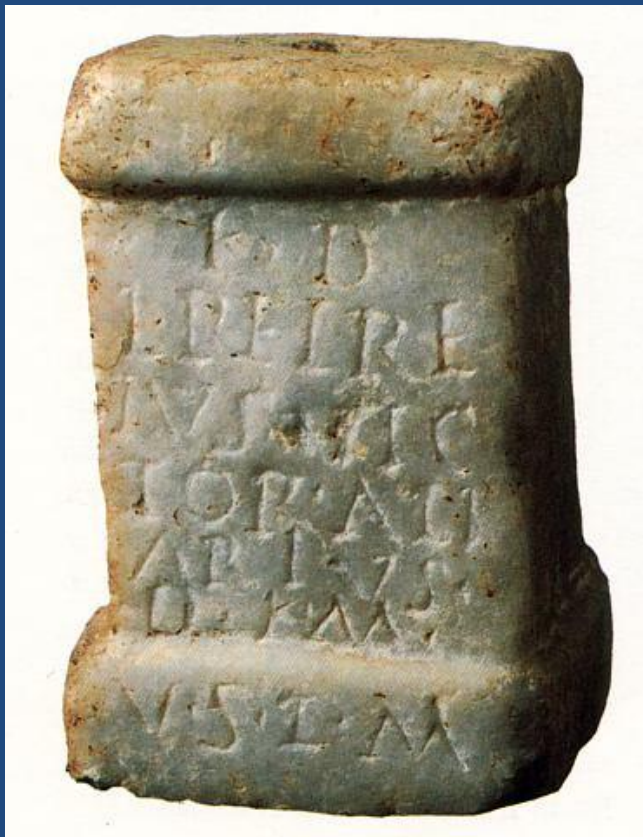


Domestic kiln of Late Antiquity





Destruction layer of Late Antique structures



K(auti) · d(eo)
L(ucius) · Petre
ius Vic
tor · ali
arius ·
d(eo) · K(auti) · M(itrhae) ·
v(otum) · s(olvit) · l(ibens) · m(erito)

IRC I, 85=AE 1983, 628= EDCS 10900803



K(auti) · v(otum) · s(olvuerunt)
Succesus
Elaine
Caesaris

IRC I, 206=IRC v, p. 41=AE 1992, 1096=HEp
 1995, 136=EDCS 04900594



© Francis Verheyden

Barcino (IRBarc 14=IRC IV, 13)



Tarraco (CIL II, 4086=CIL II 14,00846=CIRM 1, 806=CIRM 2, p. 35=RIT 44)



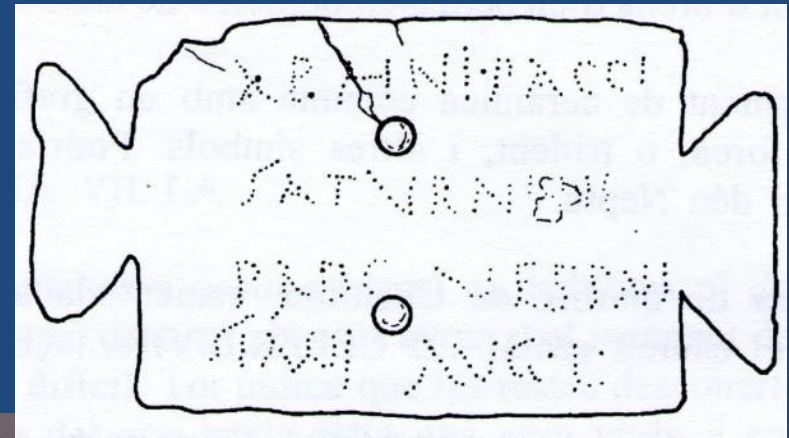
Saguntum (Corell – Seguí 2008)



M(arcus) · M[---] (IRC I, 88a); *[---] · f(ilius) · Celer · Il vir · I[---]* (IRC I, 88b); *[---] stipe* (IRC I, 88c)
 (=IRC V, p. 22 = EDCS 10900806, 10900807, 10900808)

Aphni Pacci
Saturnini
proc(uratoris) Vespasi
{si}ani Aug(usti) l(iberti)

IRC I, 206=IRC V, p. 22=AnalEpi, p. 192=HEp. 2002,
 47=AE 2003, 1012=AE 2012, 832



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Rural religion, cultural identities and settlement: The Can Modolell Project

Alejandro G. Sinner - Víctor Revilla Calvo

Rural cults are an aspect of the religion of Roman Hispania that it is especially difficult to analyze, especially given the paucity of epigraphic and archaeological evidence. This is quite a recent area of research; in addition, we are dealing with often modest religious practices which are difficult to identify in the archaeological record. Particularly problematic is the lack of information regarding cult places. But the main problem has been the dominance of a paradigm that defines rural religion as a marginal space for social life, one that followed its own evolutionary rhythm influenced by a resistance to change. This paradigm has conditioned the study of rural religion in Hispania until quite recently but archaeological work in the last few decades has led to the identification and analysis of a great number of cult sites in the Iberian Peninsula.

This has coincided with a revolution in the way religion is studied, as an area particularly sensitive to cultural change. Lately, various studies have underlined the role of beliefs and rituals in the construction of mechanisms of integration, social communication, and the definition of individual and communal identities. In this context, cult centers are a key element in the analysis of the forms and rhythms of cultural change experienced by indigenous societies (and certain collectives inside them) both during the Roman conquest and later as part of their integration into the provincial system.

SLIDE 1

The sanctuary of Can Modolell (Cabrera de Mar, Barcelona) here serves as a case-study. Characterized by its monumental architecture and its elaborate ornamental program, it was occupied from the early Empire until Late Antiquity. The inscriptions recovered provide information on some of the cults performed and some aspects of the sanctuary's functioning. At the same time, the archaeology of this site raises important problems of analysis and interpretation.

SLIDE 2

Can Modolell lies on the outskirts of Cabrera de Mar, a village 27 km northeast of Barcelona. The site occupies a platform on the slopes of a small elevation forming part of the Catalan coastal chain of hills. The topographic conditions give the site visual control over the valley and the surrounding territory, and generate a monumental effect. The site lies near the coastal section of the *Via Augusta* linking the *oppida civium Romanorum* of Blandae, Iluro, and Baetulo (Plin., *NH* 3.4.22) with the colony of Barcino. The second of these, Iluro (Mataró), one of the cities founded in the context of the territorial and administrative re-

organization of the coast prompted by Rome in the early 1st c. B.C., lies 5 km away. From the Augustan age onwards, the town of Iluro underwent substantial architectural developments, its territory being occupied by a dense network of rural settlements.

SLIDE 3

Archaeological remains have been known to exist at Can Modolell since the first half of the 20th c. The vicissitudes of its discovery and excavation are an excellent example of the problems of archaeological research developed in Spain during the second half of the 20th century. Between 1974 and 1984, the site was the object of a series of excavation campaigns, motivated by its state of degradation and clandestine looting. This remarkable initiative was carried out by local amateurs, without scientific training and in a totally voluntary, but integrated as part as cultural associations in the area devoted to the protection of the architectural and archaeological heritage.

SLIDE 4

This type of association has a long tradition in the region and has been carried out for decades outside the academic world, generating its own dissemination initiatives (local congresses) and publications.

SLIDES 5 and 6

The aforementioned archaeological works uncovered a set of buildings distributed over a large area, without any clear organization, and which were reformed at different chronological moments. The complex included several rooms decorated with a sophisticated ornamental program composed mostly by paintings, sculptures, marble facings and a monumental access flanked by a semi-circular tower-shaped structure preserved up to a height of 4 m.

SLIDE 7

A series of altars were also recovered, some of which were large and made of local stone while others were small in size and made of marble. Other votive objects were also found; unfortunately, most of them have no archaeological context. This evidence, and in particular some inscriptions related to Mithras, led to some hypotheses about the site's religious function.

SLIDE 8

The excavations allowed the occupation of Can Modolell to be dated as running from the Early Imperial era to Late Antiquity, and even seemed to indicate its continuity as a cult site during the Middle Ages and in modern times. However, the lack of a suitable methodology in

the early excavations prevented certain structures from being identified correctly while generating serious errors. The monumental entrance, for example, was initially identified as an underground space, with an attempt being made to match the archaeological remains with the traditional architecture expected in a *mithraeum*.

SLIDES 9 and 10

In 1985, 1994, 1999 and 2012, further excavations took place but mostly as short interventions motivated by the need to preserve the remains. Only the work of 1999-2000, which saw the excavation of a new area, allowed archaeologists to formulate a broader hypothesis about the architecture and evolution of the sanctuary as a whole. Re-examination of this documentation has now formed the starting point of a new joint research project initiated in 2017 and coordinated by the Universities of Barcelona and of Victoria (British Columbia).

SLIDE 11

The known area surpasses 350 m², but the remains suggest an total surface of as much as c.1000 m². The site was occupied between the start of the 1st c. A.D. and an undetermined moment in the 3rd or 4th c. Within this broad period, two main phases have been identified, including a monumental reconstruction dated to the 2nd c. A.D. The first settlement consisted of several buildings organized around a series of open areas. These elements follow the topography of the hill and were organized according to two main axes that determined circulation patterns: the most important one, included the main entrance, has a N-S orientation; the other runs roughly E-W.

On each side of the N-S axis a building was erected. To the west was a rectangular building whose construction cut the natural bedrock to a depth of c.5 m; in this first phase, it was divided into at least two rooms and may have had an upper floor. To the east stood a trapezoidal building accessed through a passage 2.4 m wide, forming an E-W axis. The narrow space between the two buildings could have functioned as a hall. This space connects directly with what seems to be the main access to the complex, an opening 3 m wide and covered by a vault.

Despite the effort required for its construction, this area seems to be just the periphery of a larger settlement that must have extended towards the E of the hill where the site is located. Here, there are two large perpendicular walls that seem to delimit a large space (perhaps a courtyard) articulated on two terraces. This eastern sector therefore displays topographic features suitable for the occupation and frequenting of the site.

SLIDE 12

The complex was reconstructed on a larger and monumental scale in an undetermined moment of the second century A.D.

SLIDE 13

The main entrance was redefined and converted into a corridor as new walls were built attached to the western building and to the polygonal wall. These walls had large pillars topped by *mensulae* inserted at regular intervals. A pavement of large slabs was laid and, over it, a structure to hold a vaulted cover was erected. The large semicircular construction located inside the western building belongs to the same phase.

SLIDE 14

The rebuilding of the main entrance and the semicircular construction could relate to the erection of a superstructure as a kind of façade, which was extended in the western building by an upper storey.

SLIDE 15

At some point during the 3rd or 4th c. the complex went out of use. The initial excavations were unable to determine if it was a progressive or a rapid abandonment. In the western area, the collapse of the upper floor is apparent but up to date; there is no evidence for violent destruction. Many of the buildings were covered by a thick stratum of earth and construction material.

The new structures built on top of this thick stratum in the second half of the 5th c. roughly reproduced the earlier organization of space. The better-preserved western building, erected over uneven ground, was re-used to support new constructions, including a domestic kiln.

SLIDE 16

In the eastern area, new rooms were built, perhaps with a small yard in front. The walls of these new buildings systematically re-used earlier architectonic materials but they do not show technical or ornamental features that could be defined as monumental. Part of a *mensa* of an Early Christian altar has been recovered as well as a significant collection of imported ceramics of the 5th-6th c., suggesting the existence of a new cult center.

SLIDE 17

The final moment of this phase cannot be fixed. Documents of the 11th-12th c. mention a chapel dedicated to Saint John. Successive excavations have found evidence of structures and some very modest inhumations superimposed on top of the late antique phase.

SLIDE 18

The principal evidence that allows us to pin down the function of Can Modolell is epigraphic: a small set of inscriptions, votive in nature, written on different objects and materials and dated to the 1st and 2nd c. A.D. The texts refer to some of the divinities worshiped and some of the dedicants who were acting on their own initiative or as magistrates of a civic community. The inscriptions do not provide information about the organization of the cults; it is only the social condition and function of some of the dedicants that points indirectly towards the importance of the place. This epigraphic corpus presents problems due to the poor conservation of some texts, the disappearance of associated votive objects, and, above all, the lack of archaeological contexts.

SLIDE 19

The most interesting set of texts is related to the cult of Mithras. Inscriptions with dedications to Kautes, one of the god's torch-bearers, have been recovered in a concentration which stands out in Roman Spain

SLIDE 20

Only one text indicates an initiative related to a votive offering: the text refers to a *mensa* (or bench) offered *ex stipe* by the *duumviri* of a town, perhaps the nearby Iluro. This is one of the few inscriptions that allow us to identify a city taking the initiative at a sanctuary in *Hispania*. The offering is dated to the 1st c. A.D. The text accompanying a votive object helps to show how the decorative program of the first building was developed. The coincidence of the founding of Can Modolell and the urban development of Iluro when it was constituted as a civic community (during the first half of 1st c. A.D.) could point to some connection between the development of a local identity and the social and institutional consolidation of the city.

SLIDE 21

It is interesting to note the concentration of evidence related to members of the imperial administration at Can Modolell. A text on a bronze *tabula* names a *procurator* of Vespasian, together with one slave. Its presence, along with a small altar dedicated by imperial slaves, is further evidence for the presence of members of the imperial household.

This corpus presents some interesting elements, like the exact indication of the legal condition (*servi Caesaris, liberti*) or the function (*a procurator*) of some of the individuals attested. The concern to indicate their connection with the imperial family is explained by the position slaves and freedmen occupied in Roman society, and this was even more significant in the case of members of the imperial household.

The presence of personnel attached to the *domus* of the emperor does not seem coincidental. These individuals occupied an ambiguous position in Roman society, as their dependence on a *dominus* or special patron granted them influence even though, at the same time, they had a subordinate legal condition. This situation probably made their

personal position in Roman society somewhat unstable and made them more sensitive to public criticism. Some rural sanctuaries, due to their ideological importance for the population of the territory, could have turned into excellent spaces for initiatives related to these individuals' needs of self-representation, which could not be satisfied within cities. In these places, members of the *familia Caesaris* could exhibit a behavior similar to the euergetism practiced by the local elites, avoiding conflict with these elites and local *seviri*, and showing their personal preferences and the success of their career without generating excessive criticism.

At the same time, frequenting a sanctuary allowed a member of the imperial administration to establish a personal relationship with the local population and its institutions, helping to make administrative actions easier. In a similar way, taking part in the religious life of a territory would contribute to providing roots and psychological stability for individuals characterized by an ambiguous social situation, professional mobility, and cultural specificity. The sanctuaries, as social meeting places, would have acted as spaces for interaction and integration. This fact could have played an important role (in the countryside and in the city) in the case of the so-called "Oriental cults", which offered forms of integration and community that exceeded the framework offered by the polis-religion.

It has been suggested also that the sanctuary of Can Modolell may have been integrated into an imperial property, or that it was located on the margins of one. This hypothesis can be justified through the aforementioned presence of imperial functionaries. Inside such an imperial *fundus*, the sanctuary would respond to the cult needs of the residents. This hypothesis would also suppose the existence of a special relationship between the sanctuary and the territory's population, since the place could then serve as a space of communication between the imperial power and the local society.

Conclusion.

Rural religious manifestations encompass a world of beliefs, ritual practices and complex scenarios, with frontiers difficult to define. This world involved many divinities, of diverse origin, whose attributes and rituals changed over time, in a social, economic and cultural context that was in continuous evolution, particularly in a provincial setting. As a consequence, their study cannot be limited to the search for pre-Roman survivals. Nor is it correct to radically separate the city and its territory as spaces where antagonistic social and cultural forces act: the city as a center of the official religion; the countryside as a space of indigenous beliefs, impervious to cultural change.

At the same time, it is necessary to understand the position of religion in the organization of the life of a civic community and the control it exercised over a territory, as a generator of social integration mechanisms and local identities. These mechanisms were projected out from the towns across a landscape of religious spaces that were linked to several divinities. By means of this religious geography, a community defined its territorial limits, its relationship with other cities or the central power, and part of its identity. These factors were affirmed by identifying special places and associating them with the life of the community by means of myth, memory, ritual and calendar.

Furthermore, it is possible that certain extra-urban scenarios allowed new forms of communication to be created with social groups or specific administrative/professional categories. This fact would help to explain the public interest in divinities that, at first sight, do not seem well integrated in civic religion, but which cannot be just interpreted as “marginal” or as simple expressions of private religiosity. Instead of a reductive duality distinguishing and confronting urban versus rural categories, any new interpretative proposal should be based on an appreciation of the existence of processes that helped to construct religious forms and responded to the needs of the communities and groups acting in the territory, and led to the development of different and complementary scenarios.

SLIDE 22

Can Modolell illustrates the epistemological and methodological difficulties that the study of a cult center can generate. Its incomplete excavation and the partial destruction of its buildings, along with the decontextualization of a great part of its material culture and epigraphy, are common to many Hispanic sanctuaries; however, its architectural ensemble, the richness of its decoration and votive offerings, and the presence of several divinities, combine to make it a good case-study. The interpretation of the site still raises numerous questions that will only be answered with a complete excavation and an in-depth analysis of the material culture recovered.