URBANIZATION IN IBERIA AND MEDITERRANEAN GAUL IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BC

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X • THE PROTOHISTORIC SITE OF LA CELLA (SALOU, TARRAGONÈS): A MIXED COMMUNITY OF MEDITERRANEAN ORIGIN

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Abstract

In 2010, the *Grup de Recerca Seminari de Protohistòria i Arqueologia* (GRESEPIA) of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili began an archaeological excavation project at the site of La Cella (Salou, Tarragonès) site at the request of the Salou Town Council. These archaeological digs revealed a settlement with a very regular urban layout and complex houses of considerable size. The site can be dated to between the beginning of the 4th century BC and the middle of the 3rd century BC. Among the ceramic materials recovered, it is worth highlighting the imports, especially the high percentage of Punic sherds. The urban planning, architecture, findings and even the chronology of the site make it different from the Iberian settlements usually attested in the same area and suggest important influences from elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Keywords: urbanism, architecture, imports, Greek, Punic, Iberian

Resum

L'any 2010, el Grup de Recerca Seminari de Protohistòria i Arqueologia (GRESEPIA) de la Universitat Rovira i Virgili va iniciar un projecte d'intervencions arqueològiques al jaciment de La Cella (Salou, Tarragonès), a instàncies de l'Ajuntament de Salou. Aquestes excavacions han permès identificar un assentament amb un entramat urbà molt regular, amb uns habitatges complexos, de mida considerable, que pot datar-se entre inicis del segle IV i mitjans del III aC. A més, entre els materials ceràmics recuperats cal destacar les importacions, especialment les provinents de l'òrbita púnica, amb percentatges molt elevats. Aquestes característiques, la planificació urbanística, l'arquitectura, el conjunt de materials i fins i tot la cronologia del jaciment el fan diferent dels poblats ibèrics documentats habitualment al mateix territori, i mostren una gran influència mediterrània.

Paraules clau: urbanisme, arquitectura, importacions, grec, púnic, ibèric

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1. Introduction

The protohistoric site of La Cella is located in Cap de Salou (Salou, Tarragonès) on the northern slope of what remains of a hill that dominates a wide bay extending to the present city of Tarragona (Fig. 1). The site was discovered by N. Alsina, M. Carreras and J. Guinovart, who collaborated with Dr Salvador Vilaseca, during the 1940s. However, it was not until 1958 that it was mentioned by Lluïsa Vilaseca in the journal *Ampurias*, in which she indicated the existence of the architectural remains of what could be an Iberian settlement. This was confirmed by a large number of pottery sherds of different types, amongst which the Attic ceramics and certain coins were particularly noteworthy.

The site is not preserved in an ideal state as the space occupied by the archaeological area has undergone profound natural and anthropogenic transformations. It was used as a stone quarry from 1905 to the early 1970s, when the part of the settlement closest to the sea was destroyed due to extractions made by the Works Council of the Port of Tarragona. Although we cannot know the exact extent of the damage to the archaeological remains, on the basis of old photographs we can suppose a loss of around 25% to 30% of the settlement's structures.

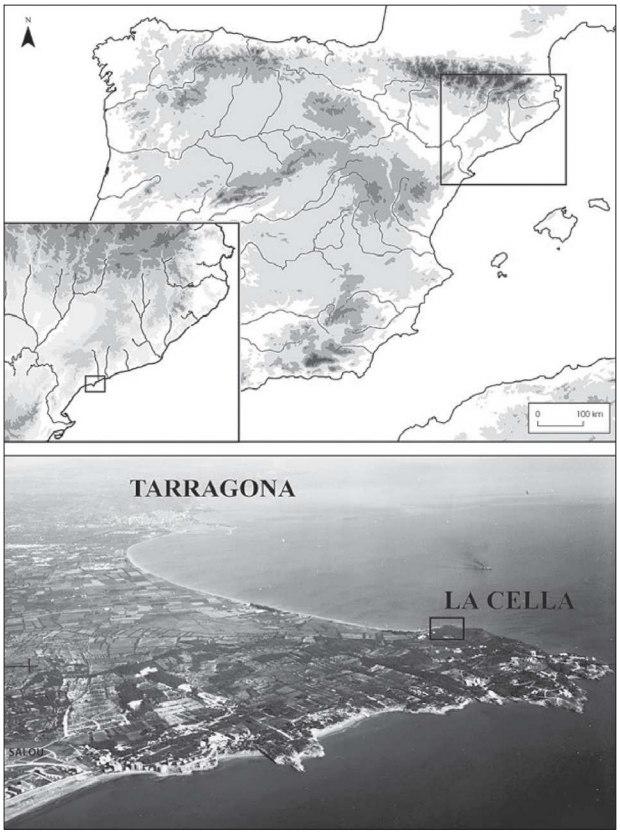


Figure 1. Location of the protohistoric settlement of La Cella (Salou, Tarragonès). Photograph from the SACE Archive <http://cartotecadigital.icc.cat>, 1963-12-06, Reg: RFSACE.4071. Institut Cartogràfic i Geogràfic de Catalunya.

In 2010, Salou Town Council contacted the Universitat Rovira i Virgili to ask for its assistance in carrying out an archaeological excavation at the site. Annual excavations were begun and are still ongoing; these have documented a protohistoric settlement with a large quantity of imported materials and a regular urban plan. Its occupation period stretches from the beginning of the 4th century BC until the middle of the 3rd century BC.

2. Landscape and settlement

The La Cella settlement is located on the summit and the north slope of a hill, which means it has an excellent view of its surroundings. Towards the east extends the bay extends between Cap Salou and the city of Tarragona. To the north, we can see a good part of what is now known as Camp de Tarragona, from the valley of the Francolí River to pre-coastal mountain range. Visibility is only impeded to the west by the geomorphology of the hill on which the settlement stands (Adserias 1998).

The interior space at the foot of the hill was at one time occupied by marshland around which were located other small settlements. A pollen column carried out in 2007 in one of these marshes, the La Tanca lagoon (La Pineda, Vila-seca), gives us data that indicate changes to the environment of the ancient site between the 4th and the 2nd centuries BC caused by a decrease in the forest cover and the intensification of human activity, in particular agriculture and livestock farming. These changes seem to have ceased by the 2nd century BC on and the site remained unchanged until the Roman period (Palet and Riera 1997 and 2009; Riera *et al*. 2010).

3. Urban plan

The information gained from the archaeological interventions made at the settlement suggest that the urban layout was based on rectangular plots of approximately 12.8 m x 9.6 m, which were placed side by side in a repetitive way and which, in some cases, were combined vertically or horizontally. The urban layout was delimited to the west and the north-west by a perimeter wall divided into two sections that were joined at an angle of 120 degrees. A large part of the urban plan is defined by the residential buildings that were attached to this wall. Connected to these buildings and separated from each other by circulation

FIGURE 2. Aerial view of the site of La Cella de Salou. GRESEPIA 2016 (Photogrammetry obtained using a drone).

spaces or streets were two construction blocks of houses (BC and BE) following the same urban pattern. Each block consists of houses that share a common rear wall at the back of the rooms. This wall also allows the construction of the same type of house in a fishbone shape and in a north-south direction. This regularity of construction is further accentuated the fact that the distance between the three parallel walls (the exterior walls of the western block and the two dividing walls that form the main axes of the other two blocks) is also consistently 32 meters long (Fig. 2 and 3).

The defence system was constructed by means of a wall (UE 1514) approximately 0.90 m width. An external structure (UE 1512) was built to reinforce the intersection where the two walls that made up this system met (Diloli *et al.* 2016). This new construction is a sloping shape and its width varies between 2.10 m and 2.20 m, which, when added to the dimensions of the wall, would make a total width of more than 3 m. In its interior space is a tower-shaped building (Building T) divided into two twin rooms (T1 and T2) of approximately 25 m² separated by a wall of 0.80 m (UE 1513). A triangular structure (UE 1520) was added to reinforce the wall that delineates the space T2 (UE 1519), and this in turn would have increased the width of the wall to 2 m, thus prioritizing the strength of the structure and reducing the useful space of one of the twin rooms (Fig. 4). To this perimeter wall that defined the defensive structure (T) a new construction (UE 1515) was added that protrudes perpendicular to the line of the wall, possibly with a defensive function that would be related to one of the entrances to the town (PO1) (Diloli *et al.* 2016). These data thus show a tower (Building T) divided in two with a rectangular base. There are similar constructions at other sites in nearby areas, such as the YZ tower at Alorda Park (Calafell, Baix Penedès) (Sanmartí and Santacana 1991) or the tower at Castellot de la Roca Roja (Benifallet, Baix Ebre) (Belarte and Noguera 2002). Moreover, this has an embankment (UE 1512) that protects and reinforces one of its corners whilst also increasing its height. Finally, on the exterior, the tower flanks

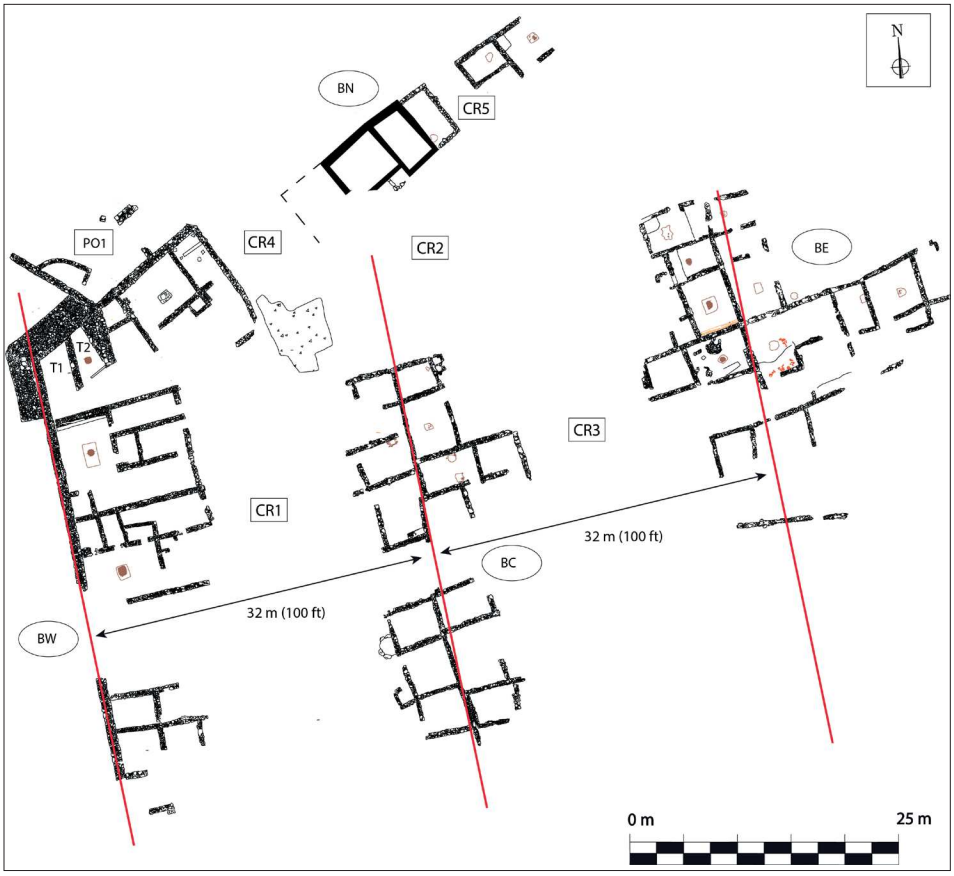


FIGURE 3. Plan of the settlement of La Cella showing the regular distance of 32 m (100 feet) between the wall and the blocks of buildings.

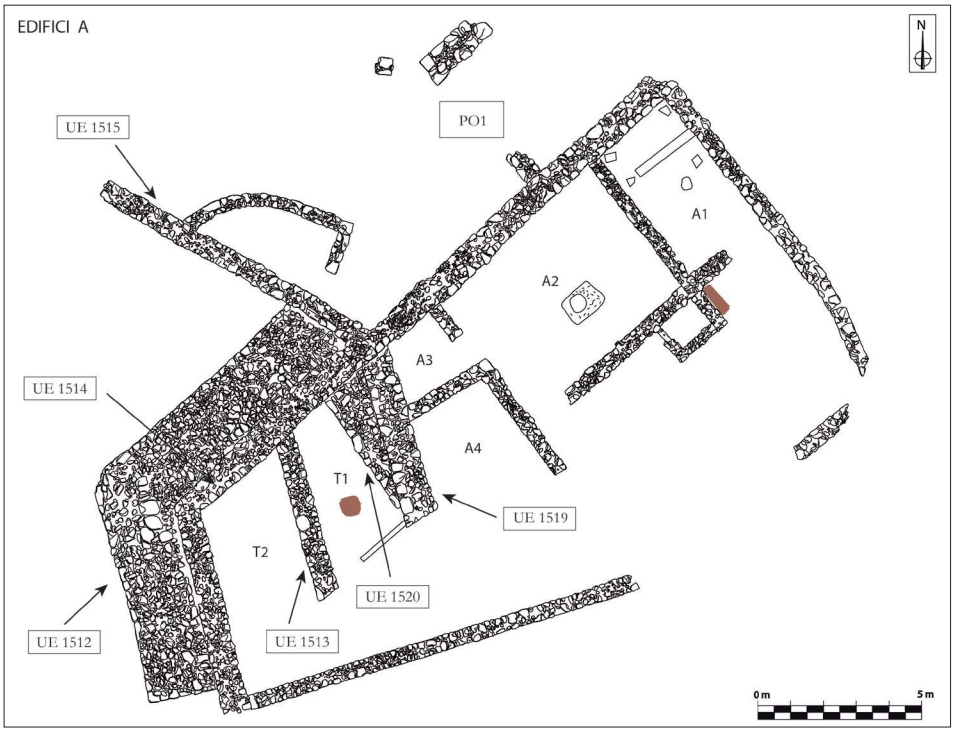


FIGURE 4. Plan of Building A of the settlement of La Cella.

what may have been an entrance (PO1) to the settlement which, if this the case, will have been extensively damaged by the modern road that used to cross the archaeological site.

The set of complex houses adjoining the defensive wall of the town opens onto the two main streets (CR1 and CR2) located in the site, which follow the same 120º angle in the layout of the defensive wall system. There is another street (CR3) between the two blocks of buildings that make up the central area of the site. In all cases, the dimensions of these streets are considerable, ranging from 7 to 10 meters wide. They were paved with layers of gravel and small stones, with crushed

ceramic fragments, a fact that distinguishes them most Iberian streets in the north-east of the peninsula, which are mostly paved with pebbles or made simply of beaten earth. The result is a compacted pavement with a very uniform surface due to a layer of clay that descends the hill in the west-east direction to facilitate the drainage of rainwater and channel it to specific points (Diloli *et al.* 2016). Streets of similar dimensions are only found at the site of Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Ribera d'Ebre) (Álvarez *et al.* 2008; Sanmartí *et al.* 2012); at other settlements the average width is 3 m. In the northernmost part of the settlement there are two narrower streets (CR4 and CR5), about 3.5 m wide, which define possible secondary roads that crossed the settlement in the north-west/south-east direction. It should be pointed out that currently in the case of CR4 this distance has been altered by the demolition of an area adjoining AG4.

4. Domestic architecture

One of the main features of this site is the great similarity in terms of the dimensions of all the houses identified. They are large buildings (between 80 and 120 m^2) compared to the average size of Iberian houses (around 30-40 m^2) and are organized into several rooms that divide up the useable space. Buildings with similar dimensions have been documented at other settlements in the north-east of the Iberian Peninsula, but they are always unusual constructions within the general urban plan of the settlement. Of these, we can point to the building C-D-O and the complex houses 201, 202 and 203 at Calafell (Asensio *et al*. 2007); buildings 1, 2 and 3 of the Castellet de Banyoles in Tivissa (Asensio *et al.* 2011); zone 14 at Puig de Sant Andreu d'Ullastret (Codina *et al.* 2009) and the Singular Buildings A, B and D of the Molí d'Espígol in Tornabous (Monrós 2010).

At La Cella, within this type of large housing we may differentiate two categories: one characterized by dwellings ranging from 110 to 120 m^2 and always supported by a closing wall with a perfectly defined perimeter and a minimum of six rooms; and another defined by houses at least 80/90 m^2 with a minimum of four rooms and more ill-defined limits, due to their poorer state of conservation (Diloli *et al.* 2016).

These houses contain spaces that can be interpreted as domestic storage areas in the form of small rooms that are less than 4 m^2 and always located at the back of the houses away from the entrance and the passageways. There are also small square areas, of less than 1 m^2, attached to the internal walls of buildings at the ends of what we interpret to be entrance courtyards (Diloli *et al.* 2016). Their function is uncertain, but they could be small domestic storerooms or animal feed repositories.

If we focus on the construction technique, most structures correspond to low stone bases that do not exceed 50 cm and have a width that ranges between 0.4 m and 0.52 m, supported directly on the natural rock, without any constructive ditch. The structures were built using simple masonry whereby small and medium-sized stones were slightly trimmed and cemented together with clay and then sealed with yet smaller stones. In some cases, for example in Building B, it has been possible to demonstrate *in situ* a layer of clay coating and whitewash on the walls based on lime. The walls are built of clay on the stone bases, but it is not possible to determine the construction technique since there is no clear evidence of the use of adobe or marks that could demonstrate a specific wall construction procedure.

The use of the natural rock itself as a base for the walls, especially in the central block, should be noted. The objective of this technique could be to delimit the construction and also obtain material for the construction process (Belarte 2001).

A geometric analysis of the walls hints that the pattern of these houses is based on the repeated use of a rectangular module of 5.12 m by 3.2 m with several internal subdivisions. This type of construction approach, similarly to the urban plan, is based on the use of a 0.32 m foot (Fig. 5). This has already been identified at other sites from the Iberian period in the north east of the peninsula, such as the Y-Z tower of Alorda Park (Calafell, Baix Penedès) (Olmos and Puche 2008), the inner quarter of Zone 1 of Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Ribera d'Ebre) and the tower of Castellot de la Roca Roja (Benifallet, Baix Ebre) (Olmos 2012).

In addition, we have observed what seems to be the use of additive proportions in this module. In this sense, the sum of a given number of shapes with a certain proportion results in a larger shape with a similar proportion (Olmos and Puche 2008). This theory is demonstrated by dividing the length by the width of these modules (5.12 m / 3.2 m), resulting in 1.6 m. This number would indicate what could be an approximation to the use of the golden ratio or "divine proportion" (1.618). Therefore, the constructive approach of these modules would be to make squares of 5.12 m (16 feet). To achieve this, a diagonal would be defined from the middle of

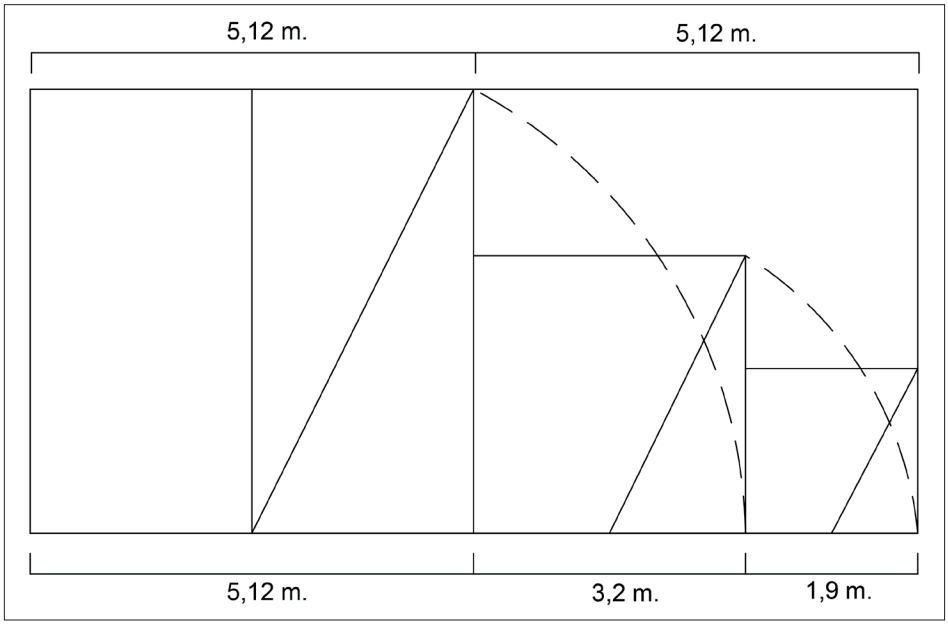


FIGURE 5. Construction of the golden ratio.

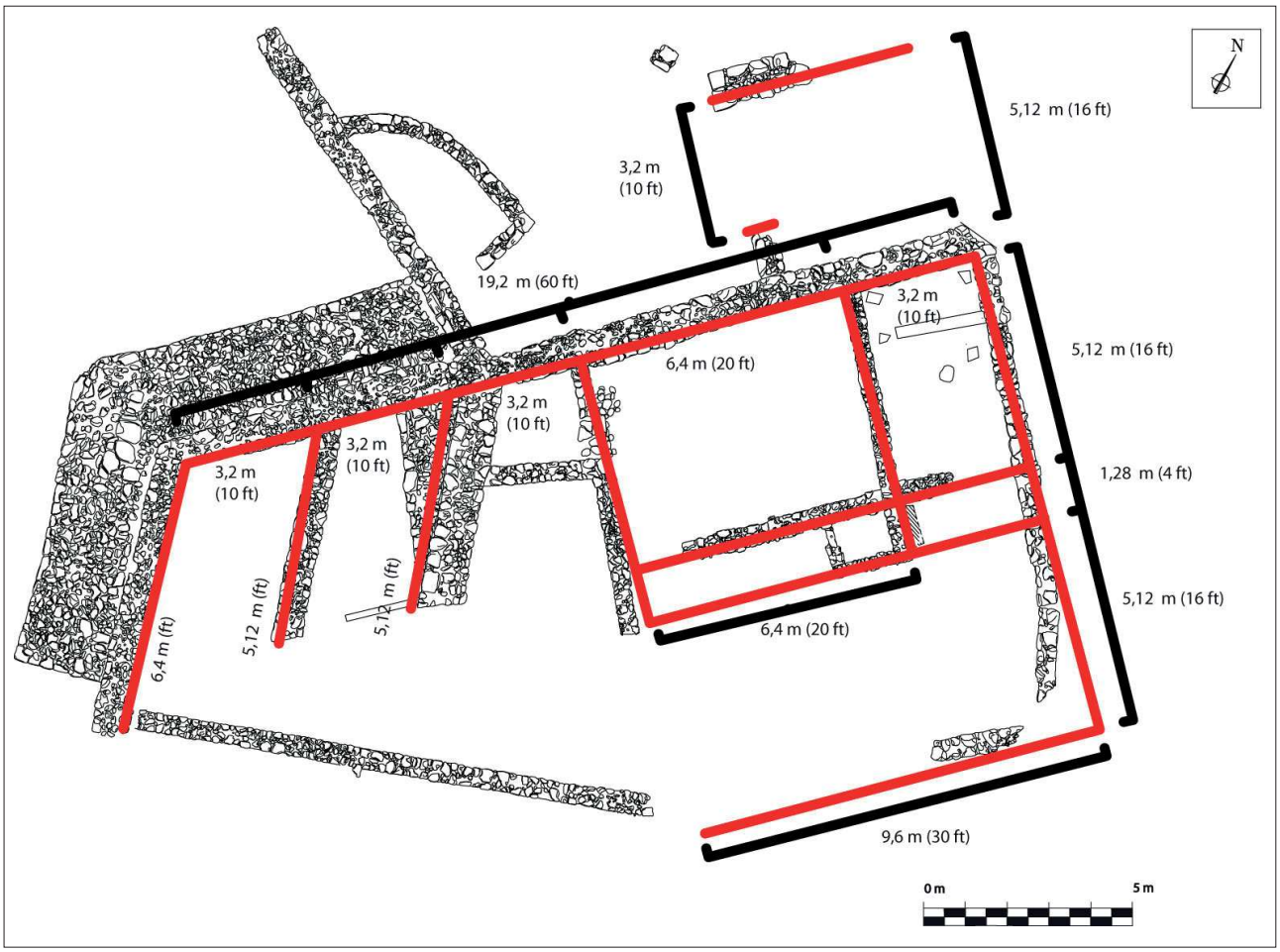


FIGURE 6. Plan of Building A and proposed metrological interpretation based on the use of 0.32 m as the unit of measurement.

one side to one of the opposite angles. This diagonal would extend until the base and in this way would define the rectangle of divine proportion, with a base of 3.2 m (10 ft). All the necessary subdivisions would be made from here: for example, lowering the diagonal of this new rectangle with a base of 3.2 m we would obtain a new base of 1.9 m, and so on (Fig. 6), thus generating a regular urban plan based on previous mathematical planning.

5. Imported ceramics

The ceramic finds have been divided into two groups according to class: one group includes the amphorae, and the other one is the tableware. In total, 1,048 individuals have been differentiated and classified according to three different counting systems: the total Number of Fragments of each type (NF); the Minimal Number of Individuals (MNI), which includes all shapes, whether they be rims, bases or handles; and the Typological Number of Individuals with *ponderation par un* (TNI), which also includes elements with shapes in addition to all those reported of the same type with a value of 1 (Asensio 1996, 63).

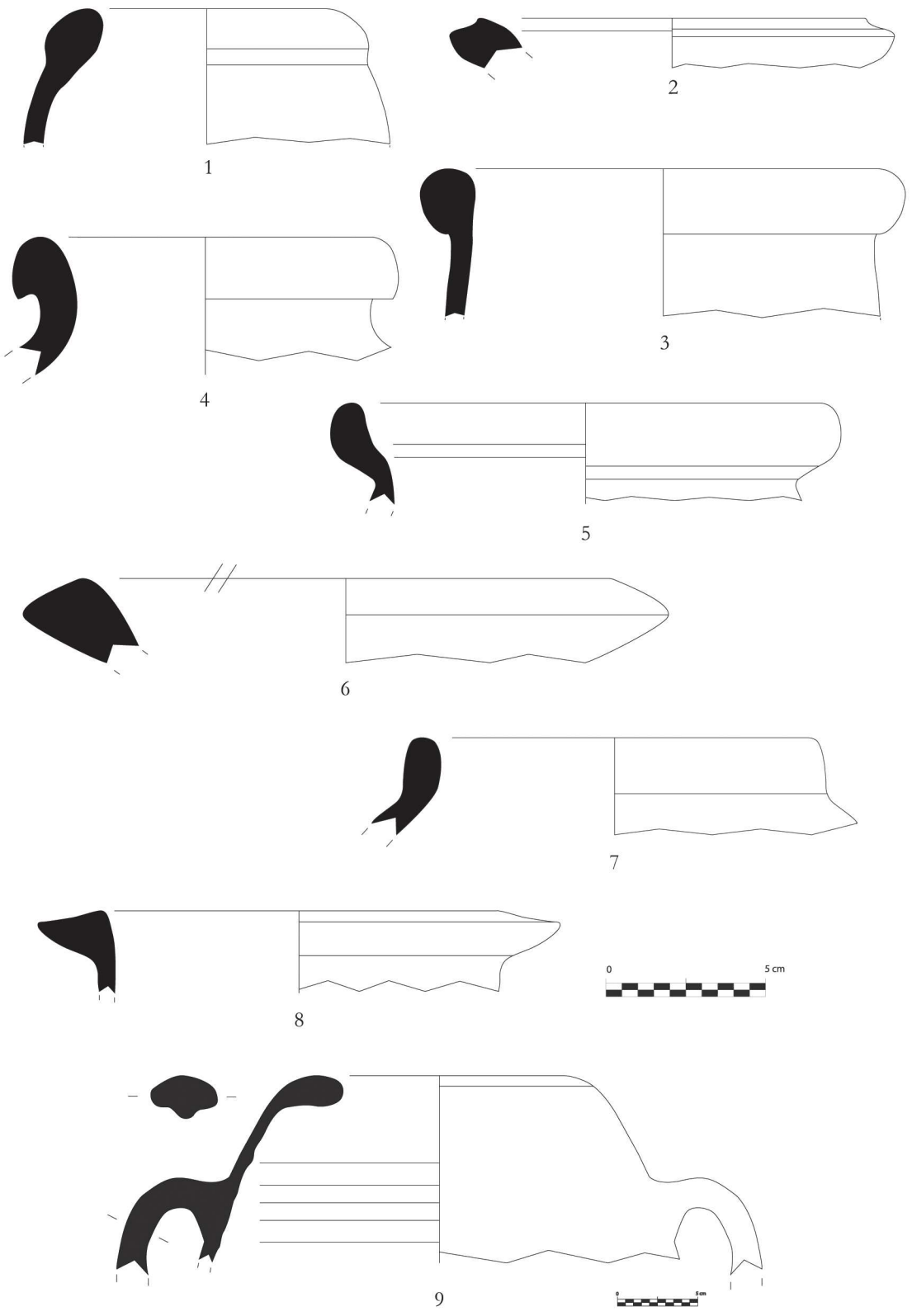
The import index for the amphorae is almost 30% of the total in all the counting systems (Fig. 7 and 9). We should point out that the vast majority of the total volume of these imports is of Punic origin, more specifically, Punic-Ebusitan amphorae. Within this group, the T.8.1.1.1 (Fig. 7 núm. 1) and T.8.1.2.1 (Fig. 7 núm. 3) types clearly stand out, accompanied by a smaller amount of type PE22. In addition to these productions, and to a lesser extent, several central-Mediterranean amphora rims have been identified (PCM), which are not frequently found on the coastal sites of southern Catalonia, such as types T.2.2.1.2 (Fig. 7 núm. 4) and T.4.2.1.2 (Fig. 7 núm. 9), and an amphora rim T.1.2.1.3 (Fig. 7 núm. 7) from the Strait of Gibraltar (PCE) area. Aside from this Punic production, which is of quite low quality compared to the Punic-Ebusitan amphorae, amphora containers from the Greek central-Mediterranean region have also been located, such as amphora rims MGR-3 (Fig. 7 núm. 5) and MGR-5 (Fig. 7 núm. 6), as well as various rims of the same model of Greco-italic amphora or Will1a (Fig. 7 núm. 8). Finally, sherds of amphorae from Massalia have also been recovered, although, as there is no shaped element, it is not possible to identify the types to which they belong (Cots *et al*. 2016; Diloli *et al*. 2016). Chronologically, the presence of all of these containers defines a period of occupation that goes from the beginning of the 4th century BC (400/375 BC) to the middle of the 3rd century BC (250/240 BC).

As for the tableware, we find very different import percentages depending on the counting system used. The main cause is the high fragmentation index of common Iberian pottery which, moreover, cannot be easily distinguished from the amphora fragments of this same origin. Thus, using the TNI methodology, with or without *ponderation par un* (Asensio 1996: 63), the import percentages are around 20%, whereas using the NF, the import rates are only 5%. As for the origin of these materials, we observe a division of approximately 50% between the common oxidized Punic-Ebusitan and the black-gloss tableware of Greek origin. In this last typology, Attic black-gloss ceramics have been identified, dating from throughout the 4th century BC. These would include productions from the Rhode workshops (Roses, Alt Empordà) (Fig. 8 núm. 2 i 3), which were produced approximately between the 4th and the 3rd centuries BC, and undetermined black-gloss tableware probably originating in the Italic peninsula. We find a large quantity of kitchenware of Punic origin dominated by Ibizan mortars (Fig. 8 núm. 5, 7 i 8), dating exclusively from between the fourth century BC and the first quarter of the 3rd century BC. Finally, an *olpe* (Fig. 8 núm. 6) made of central Mediterranean pottery has been located, as have some fragments of bases and one rim that, judging by their internal composition, probably originated in the Massalia area (Cots *et al*. 2016; Diloli *et al.* 2016).

6. Conclusions

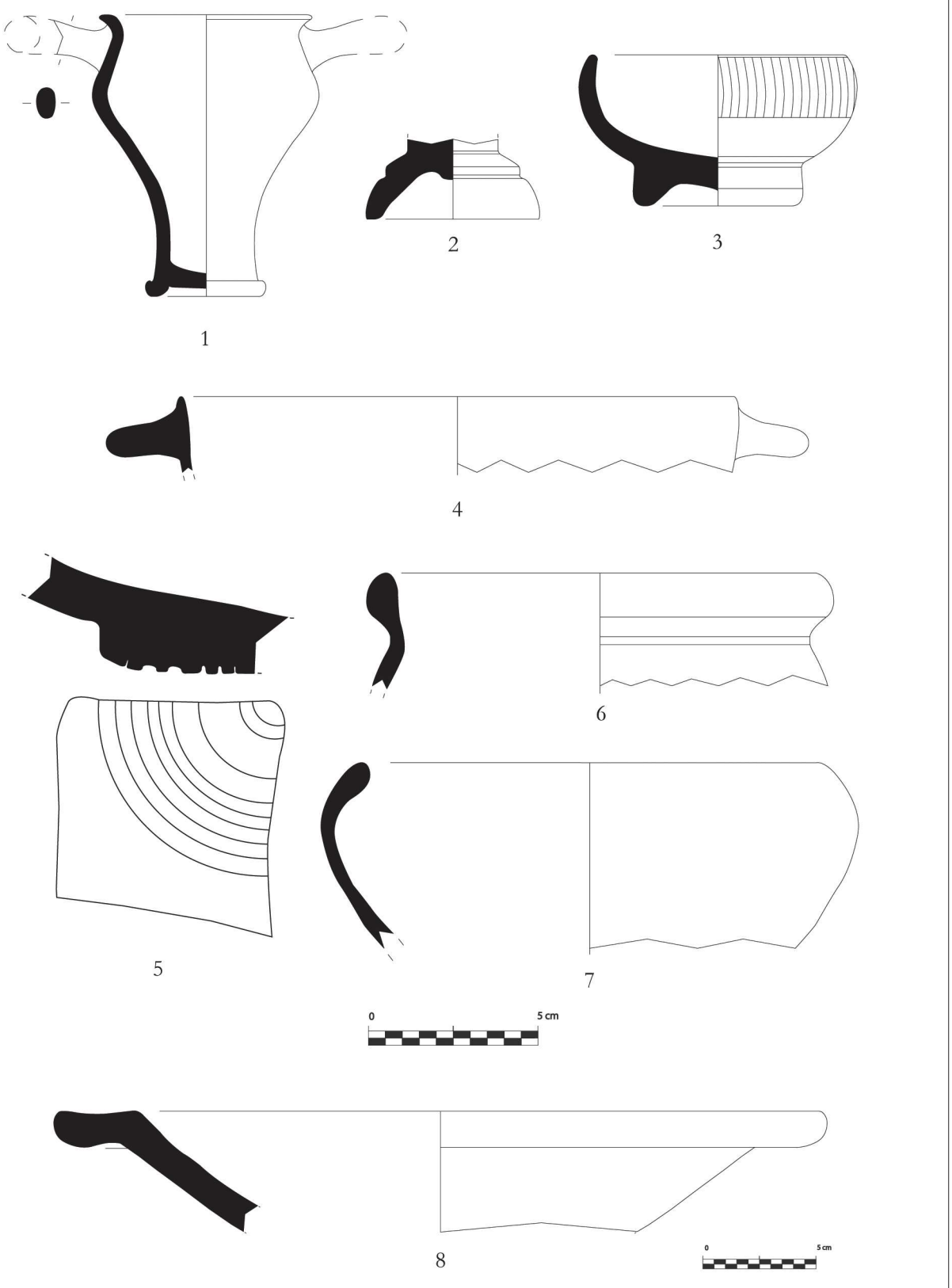
The urban layout and the system used to construct the dwellings at La Cella are highly regular; indeed, the similarities between the dwellings are evidence of considerable planning and meticulous measurement. The size and structure of the houses suggest a society that was socially and economically complex but also one that was quite egalitarian insofar as the houses do not differ significantly from each other. This social composition is totally different from what we are accustomed to finding at the sites in the Iberian Peninsula, where the urban planning of settlements, with highly varied residential constructions, reflects unequal societies. Therefore, the regularity in the architecture at La Cella that allowed these constructions to be carried out in an orderly, economic and viable manner clearly shows that the builders based the settlement on simple forms (Olmos and Puche 2008) and used, as we have seen, a minimum unit of construction based on the Solonian foot (Doric) with an approximate length of 0.327 m. In the case of La Cella, the use of these regular modules, plots and spaces indicates that the builders conceived and carefully planned the settlement from the outset and that they followed a plan and building pattern that divided the ground into a grid made up of squares measuring 10 x 10 Solonian feet (0.32 m) (Fig. 10) which then formed the basis of the building plots.

From this first division of the land the building space was distributed into lots of practically the same shape and size (in this case, plots of 40



1. T.8.1.1.1, 2. PE22, 3. T.8.1.2.1, 4. T.2.2.1.2, 5. MGR 3, 6. MGR 5, 7. T.1.2.1.3, 8. Will 1a, 9. Àmfora T.4.2.1.2.

Figure 7. Ceramic material: imported amphorae.



1. AT-VN 532-561, 2. ROSES 40, 3. ROSES 25B, 4. T-VN 350-354, 5. AE-20/I-167, 6. AE-20/I-109, 7. AE-36/II-36, 8. AE-20/I-167.

FIGURE 8. Ceramic material: imported tableware.

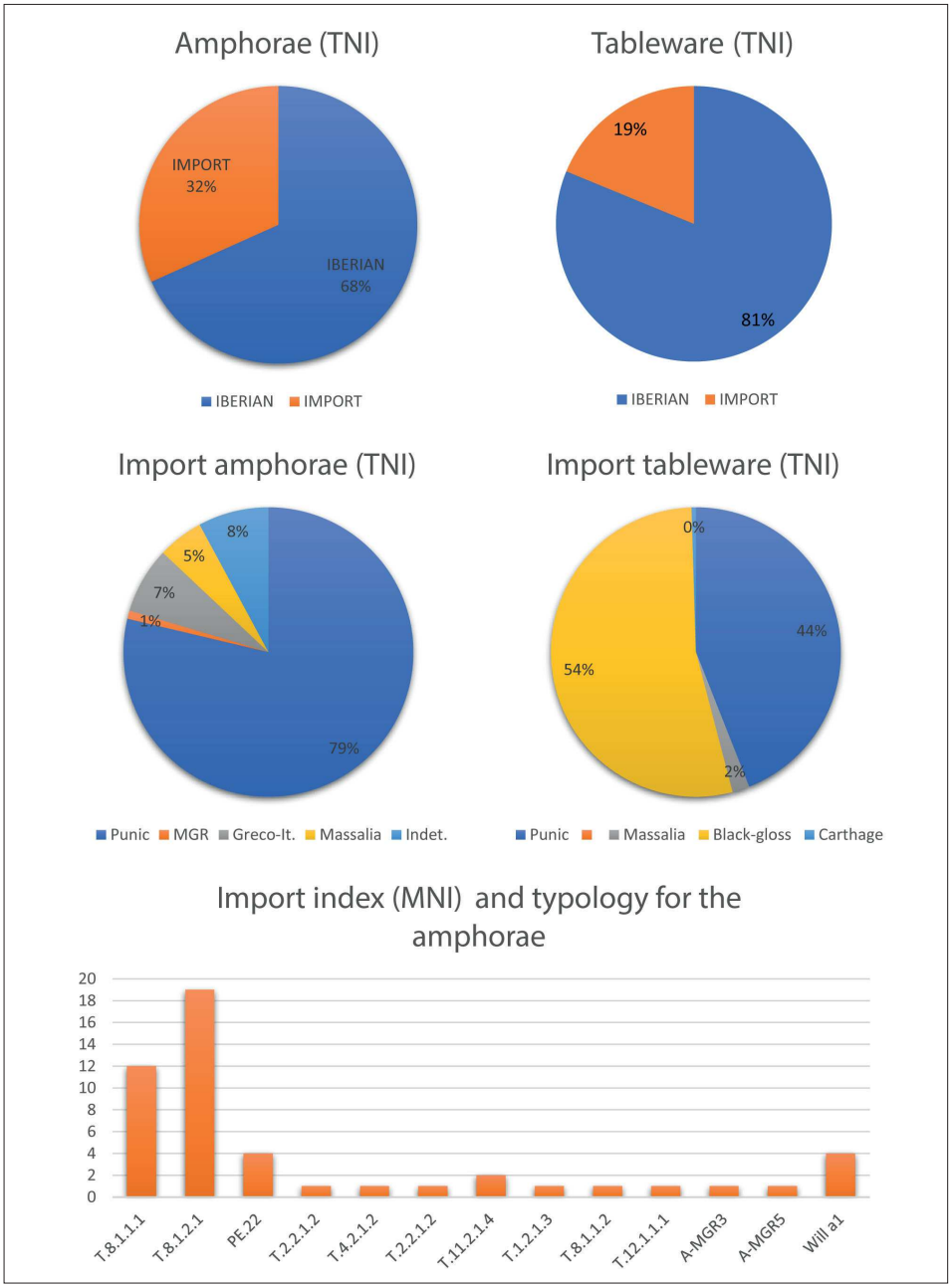


FIGURE 9. Percentages table and typological table of ceramic productions.

x 30 feet of 0.32 m). The houses were constructed from modules of the same type and size (16 x 10 feet of 0.32 m). They shared the rear wall forming blocks that were consistently spaced to a distance of about 100 feet (32 meters). These characteristics are quite common in many Greek colonies, all of which are planned beforehand following a regular building pattern based on a standard measurement of feet (0.32 m). We find remarkable examples in Naxos, Megara Hyblaea and Selinunt in Sicily and in other western enclaves (a comparative table of the main patterns identified in Sicily can be found at Olmos 2011, page 98), and also at sites nearer to La Cella such as the Hellenistic district of Rhode (Roses, Alt Empordà) (Asensio *et al*. 2011).

In relation to imported ceramic materials recovered during the various archaeological excavations, it is important emphasize the clear dual Punic-Hellenistic origin. The amphorae are very clearly Punic in origin. The vast majority of these containers, 80% of the total, consists of Ebusitan types (T.8.1.1.1, T.8.1.2.1 and PE22), while the remaining 20% are Punic productions from the central Mediterranean and southern Iberian Peninsula, as well as from Greek settlements in the south of the Italic Peninsula and the island of Sicily. The origin of the tableware differs somewhat in that around 50% consists of common Punic-Ebusitan pottery, the other 50% being made up of black-gloss tableware of Greek origin. Regarding in this last typology, the ceramics from the Rhode workshops stand out above all the rest.

Thus, on one hand, we observe a planned urban model with many characteristics that suggest that

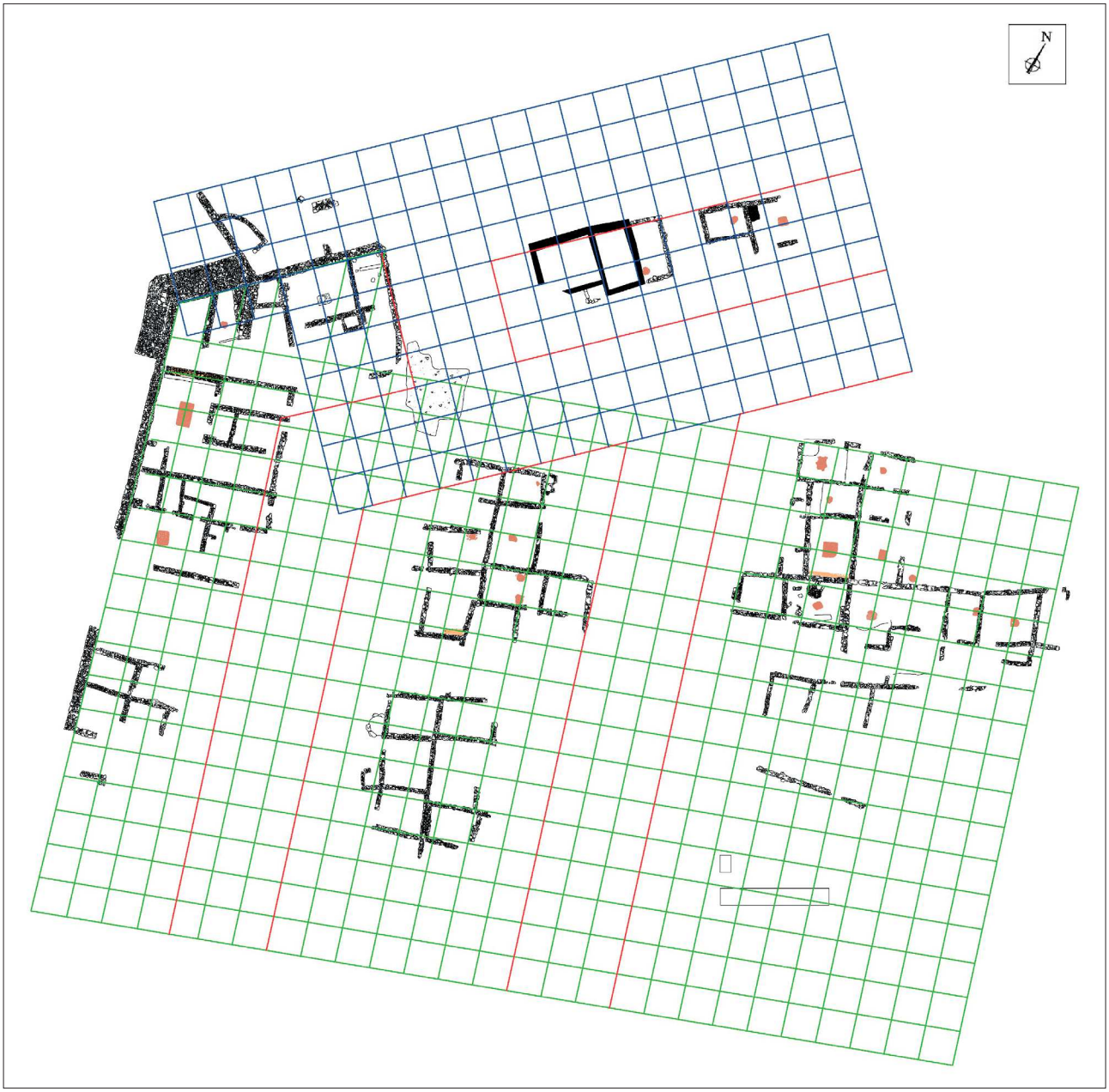


FIGURE 10. General plan of the settlement superimposed with a grid based on the measurement of 10 feet each 0.32 m long and showing the initial urban layout.

the system of proportions used is of Greek origin. On the other hand, we can identify certain ceramic imports that show that the commercial agents in charge of these exchanges were most likely of Ebusitan origin because most of the imported ceramics are basically Ebusitan amphorae and kitchenware with the remaining luxury Greek amphorae and pottery having very much a secondary presence. In addition, we can clearly observe that the builders used the construction techniques commonly employed in the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula, with earthen walls built on masonry bases.

This confluence of ideas of different origins can only mean that there were extensive cultural exchanges or flows between the different Mediterranean communities in the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula during this period. Consequently, the arrival of new urban and architectural concepts, possibly of Greek origin, would have coincided with the arrival of goods of clear Punic origin, thus facilitating the establishment or creation of settlements that, like La Cella in Salou, spearheaded a new system of relationships with the indigenous communities, becoming in the process true trading ports where much more than food and manufactured products would have been exchanged (Diloli *et al.* 2016).

La Cella is thus a settlement with certain characteristics that, given the lack of contradictory data, mean it can be classified as a town. These include

the way the buildings were planned, the size of the dwellings and of the settlement as a whole, the urban layout and the complex and reticular street network. It is an urban centre that, for long as it remained occupied, was integrated into the political organisation of the territory until it reached its zenith during the 3rd century BCE when it was peacefully abandoned. What led the inhabitants of La Cella to desert their settlement? Natural factors have been considered, such as the territory becoming an unhealthy place to live, the exhaustion and consequent lack of resources, epidemics, etc. Political reasons have also been proposed, for example territorial restructuring or the appearance of new forms of government that could have led to certain settlements prevailing to the detriment of others. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind the proximity of Tarrakon-Kesse and its political and economic evolution between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE. As has been proposed for other settlements on the Cessetanian coast (Asensio 2010, 718; López Mullor and Fierro 1994), La Cella may have been occupied by a mixed community and it may have owed its existence to a political and economic desire to maintain a functional space for commercial relations and exchanges on this part of the coastline that would have answered to Tarrakon-Kesse, whilst nevertheless maintaining a neutrality that the principal Cessetanian settlement could not retain due to its political position. An examination of La Cella and Tarrakon-Kesse and their locations in relation to each other shows that the aim was to control the wide bay between that extends between the two settlements, which offered a first-class space in which to construct the port that would be so essential to the commercial interests of the communities inhabiting this region. It is certain that the boom in Ebusitan trade during the 4th century (Ramon 1995) indicates a desire amongst the political elites of the territory for Punic and Greek products that would demonstrate and maintain their status. By establishing and controlling a commercial are at La Cella, the Cessetanian elite would strength these exchanges until political changes both locally and internationally would make La Cella redundant and concentrate all commercial activity in Tarrakon-Kesse, the city that would reaffirm its leading role in the region from the mid-2nd century onwards.

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