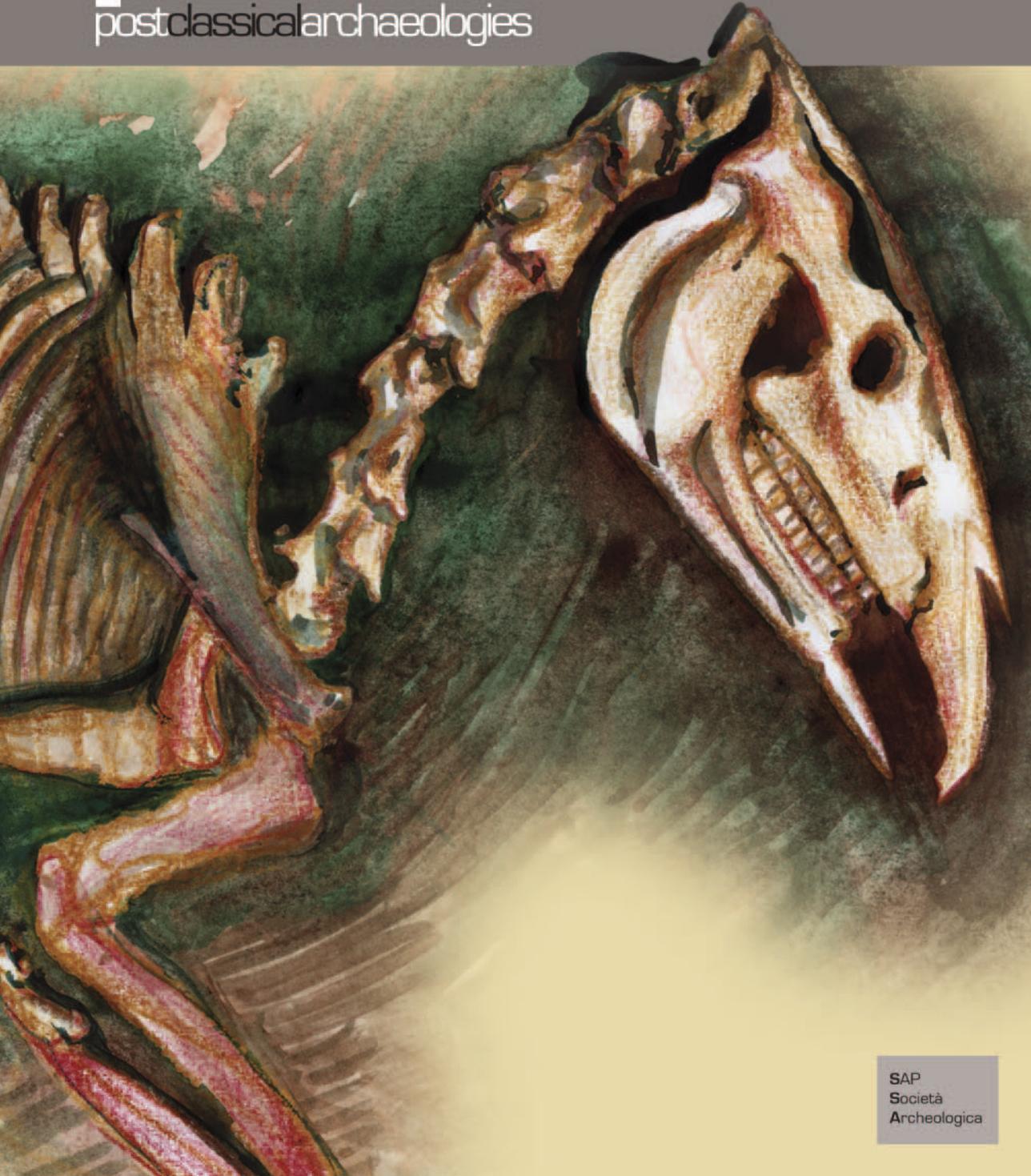


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CONTENTS PAGES

EDITORIAL

5

RESEARCH - RETHINKING POST-CLASSICAL CITIES

**C. Corsi**

The *suburbia* of Late Antiquity between spatiality and function. A discussion in the light of a few case studies from northern Italy

7

**S. García-Dils de la Vega**

From *colonia Augusta Firma* to *Astigi*. Urban transformations and Christianization of space in Late Antique Écija (Seville – Spain)

43

**J.M. Macias Solé, A.V. Ribera Lacomba, M. Rosselló Mesquida, F. Rodríguez Martorell, Ò. Caldés Aquilué**

*València la Vella*: A Visigothic city to place in history?

69

**M. Fecchio**

La risorsa animale agli albori di Venezia urbana. I resti faunistici altomedievali dello scavo di Ca' Vendramin Calergi

93

**B. Lefebvre**

Post-and-plank construction between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries: examples from recent excavations in Moissac (France)

122

BEYOND THE THEME

**J. Oller Guzmán, S. García-Dils de la Vega**

Praying in the dark: religious practices in the emerald mines of the Eastern Egyptian Desert between the Early Roman and the Late Antique period

147

**J.M. Carrasco, O. Olesti**

Late antique *villae* in the *Ager Tarraconensis*. Territorial and fiscal transformations

177

**R. Valente, M. Jackson, J. Crow, S. Turner, D. Athanasoulis** Tracing interconnected lifeways in the rural Aegean (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD): the case of the utilitarian artefacts of the Apalirou Environs Survey Project (Naxos – Greece) 205

**M. Malvaso, U. Tecchiati, M. Motto** Analisi archeozoologica delle sepolture animali della prima età moderna (?) di Santa Maria delle Lacrime a Treviglio (BG) 227

**F. Sini, M. Avanzini** La complessità storica degli alpeggi sulla montagna di Brentonico: una proposta di catalogazione delle architetture di malga 251

#### PROJECT

**R. Goffredo, G. Dato** Patti di collaborazione e pratiche di comunità di patrimonio in Puglia: il progetto CAP70014 285

#### REVIEWS

Caroline Goodson, *Cultivating the City in Early Medieval Italy* - by **A. Chavarría Arnau** 309

Philippe Pergola et al. (eds), *Perchement et Réalités Fortifiées en Méditerranée et en Europe, V<sup>ème</sup>-X<sup>ème</sup> Siècles / Fortified Hilltop Settlements in the Mediterranean and in Europe (5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries)*; Federico Marazzi, Chiara Raimondo, Giuseppe Hyeraci (eds), *La difesa militare bizantina in Italia (secoli VI-XI)* - by **A. Chavarría Arnau**

Veronica Aniceti, *Animals and their roles in the medieval society of Sicily from Byzantines to Arabs and from Arabs to Norman/Aragonese (7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c. AD)* - by **M. Fecchio**

Josep M. Macias Solé, Albert V. Ribera Lacomba,  
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## ***València la Vella:* A Visigothic city to place in history?**

### **1. Introduction**

This paper aims to present the current state of play of the investigations carried out in the archaeological settlement of València la Vella (Riba-roja de Túria, Spain). València la Vella is located on a fluvial terrace, between the right shore of Túria river and the Clavills' ravine (figs. 1-2). Its maximum altitude is 96,81 m a.s.l. and presents a pronounced slope down to the river, with a ver-



Fig. 1. Maps of location. 1, València la Vella; 2, Pla de Nadal; 3, *Valentia*; 4, *Edeta*; 5, Serra Calderona; 6, *Carthago Nova*; 7, Begastri; 8, Elo; 9, *Reccopolis*; 10, *Dertosa*; 11, *Tarraco*.

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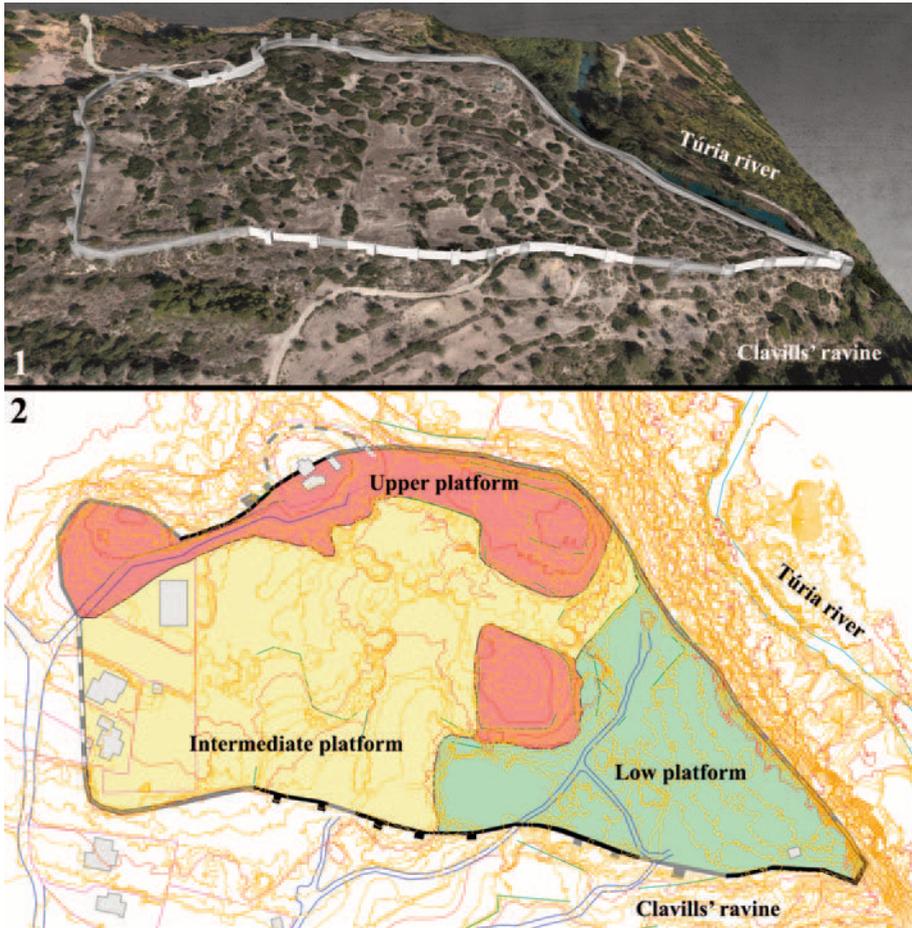


Fig. 2. 1, DTM with the 3D reconstruction of the city walls; 2, contour lines map.

tical escarpment of about 40 m. The nearby ravine was the natural access road to the river course. The Visigothic city is placed in the Natural Park of Túria River, which extends between the cities of València and Vilamarxant (Valencian Country, Spain). The archaeological settlement belongs to the current municipality of Riba-roja de Túria and is situated 16 km from the modern city of València, the ancient Roman city of *Valentia*, and 4 km from the Visigothic palace of Pla de Nadal, dated to the early 8<sup>th</sup> century AD (Juan *et al.* 2018; Ribera 2015).

The reference to the place-name, València la Vella, already appears in 1374, and its ruins were mentioned by all the great chroniclers of the Kingdom of

València. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the investigation tried to identify València la Vella with some of the cities mentioned in classical sources, such as the Roman city of *Pallantia*. Later, modern scholars also suggested that it could be the Roman city of *Etobessa*, the Iberian *Lauro* or even related to the Carthaginian settlement.

Despite the monumentality and visibility of its defensive walls, València la Vella has always been unknown to Valencian archaeology. We had to wait until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to establish the main features of the site. First, the excavations of the Servei d'Investigació Prehistòrica (SIP, Diputació de València, 1978-1980), in collaboration with the Universitat de València, demonstrated its Late Roman chronology, disproving the preceding theories. The excavation was caused by a railway project, which destroyed a stretch of the Wall and part of the northwestern sector of the settlement (fig. 6). Several stratigraphic surveys were carried out and a building next to the Wall was partially documented. Despite these results, the archaeological investigation did not continue due to the absence of scientific interest in this historical period. Thus, the València la Vella site remained the great unknown of Valencian archaeology. In 1998, the Autonomous Government of València authorised the carrying out of topographical and archaeological surveys. This work allowed us to date the city construction to the Visigothic period and outline a brief overview of its historical issues (Rosselló 1996, 2000). Despite the damage the site has suffered for centuries, this intervention proved its archaeological potential.

Since 2016, the Riba-roja de Túria city council and the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology have promoted a cultural heritage project. The annual archaeological excavations allowed us to date the construction of the walls and to identify its urban planning project. These actions have coincided with the annual Christian and Visigothic Archaeology Courses, except in 2020 and 2021 due to the sanitary restrictions caused by Covid pandemic. The excavations have been carried out with the economic collaboration of the Cultural Area of the Diputació de València.

From the social and economic point of view, the project enjoys an excellent location and infrastructure which helps to promote tourism and social diffusion. On the one hand, the city of València la Vella is inserted in the Parc Natural del Túria (fig. 1.1). It is a new strategic project developed and promoted by the Generalitat Valenciana. València la Vella is the only Visigothic settlement in a rural environment with a nearby metro station, and the site is accessible by car and bus with easy connectivity with the metropolitan area of València. The project includes, in addition to the Visigothic perspective, trenches, bunkers and different structures built during the Spanish Civil War. The coincidence of different defence infrastructures suggests that València la Vella was a fundamental geostrategic node in the territory over time.

## 2. Historical framework

One of the most significant current discussions about València la Vella is its terminological definition (*castellum*, *castrum*, city...) and the historical context in which the construction originated. From our point of view, we opted to understand València la Vella as a newly created Visigothic city (Ribera et al. 2020a; Macias et al. 2021). As archaeological work is in progress, it is becoming increasingly tricky to ignore this enclave in the Visigothic and Byzantine Hispanic context. In recent years, the issue of València la Vella has grown in importance. However, the archaeological area is still tiny compared to its inner wall space. Therefore, the finds and the arguments presented here are being renewed and reviewed by the scientific community and, in the same way, by the excavation team of the site in the future.

Archaeological research has determined it was probably a Visigothic city built during the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Liuvigild and in a context of the confrontation between the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo and the Byzantine Empire, which had occupied the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula. It has been considered the result of the Visigothic reaction to the Byzantine occasional presence in the city of *Valentia* (Ribera et al. 2020a). The city continued until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, possibly disappearing with Islam's arrival. The proximity between the cities of València la Vella and *Valentia*, only 16 km away, raises many questions. This was not a common connection, but neither was it exceptional. We can mention the relationship between the episcopal seat of *Auso* (Vic) and the nearby nucleus of Roda de Ter, separated by 7 km; the Visigothic foundation of *Reccopolis* and the episcopal city of *Ercavica*, separated by about 22 km; or the military complex of Sant Julià de Ramis and its episcopal center in *Gerunda*, 6 km away. In all these cases it is evident that closeness implied a complementary relationship.

The presence of a new Visigothic urban foundation causes numerous doubts. It was an *ex novo* city, built uniformly, whose wall presents a single structural phase, and an inner walls space where terracing structures and urban distribution have been documented. The archaeological works have established that the city came to occupy a surface of more than 5 ha and was surrounded by a wall at least three meters high and a considerable number of defensive towers. Inevitably, the extent of the project and its foundation in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century suggest that it may be the result of a royal initiative to control the territory, but it was not, in any way, a royal residence.

However, we recognise that this hypothesis needs to be verified with more data. València la Vella's foundation consolidated Toledo's position by placing a walled city on a hill dominating the valley, a ford of Túria and its river route from *Valentia*. Its foundation belongs to the phenomenon of "incastellated" cities, with which we are acquainted in *Reccopolis*, *Eio* and in the less well-known Roda-

l'Esquerda. On the other hand, for their nearness, ancient *Valentia* and València la Vella represent a duality that is still undecipherable, and for the latter a historical role about which the sources are silent. València la Vella corresponds to a new city prototype whose greatest representative is *Reccopolis*, while *Begastri* and *Eio* are on a lower scale, besides the still imprecise cases of *Victoriacum* and *Ologicus*, mentioned by historical sources but unknown archaeologically. These examples fit into the phenomenon of urbanism in post-Roman Europe of Byzantine derivation that has been widely studied in European research (Rizos 2017; Zanini 2003).

It must be noted that we do not have enough historical data of the city of *Valentia* in the initial phase of the Visigothic period. We know the bishopric of Iustinianus and the later presence of two bishops, one Catholic and the other Arian, who represented *Valentia* at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Toledo (589). The archaeological evidence has introduced new data into this debate, specifically that obtained in the Roman Circus of *Valentia* (Ribera *et al.* 2020a, pp. 84-90). Despite all these uncertainties, the historical context of the founding of València la Vella is directly related to the Hispanic conflict produced by the expansion of Emperor Justinian I and the resulting reaction of the Visigothic state. In this framework, we must regard the political expansionism developed during the reign of Liuvigild.

### 3. The archaeological evidence

Over the past seven years, the archaeological strategy has been conditioned by two circumstances: the property regime of the enclave and the need to date the city's foundation with precision. In this regard, the excavation has been carried out on public land plots, the defensive wall and an adjacent intramural area. Obviously, the backbone of the archaeological site is the layout of its defensive perimeter, well-visible for centuries. It is also the most attractive scientific asset, on the basis of which studies and dissemination strategies have been concentrated (Huguet *et al.* 2020; Macias *et al.* 2020).

The perimeter is approximately 1,000 meters long and has been the object of intensive prospecting and a new planimetry (figs. 1-3). It preserves a trapezoidal scheme that adapts to the river terrace. The wall runs between 80 and 97 m a.s.l., and the Túrria river passes about 56 m a.s.l. Two semicircular appendices in the northwest sector have been established, based on the contour lines and historical photography, which must be confirmed in future investigations. The southern front is about 420 meters long, the most visible stretch (fig. 13), while the others remain covered by stratigraphic sedimentation. The width of the rampart ranges between 1.80 and 2.00 m and is composed of a double masonry wall (65-80 cm thick) and filled with rubbish (*emplecton*). The outer face of the wall stones is regularly tilled while the interior has not been worked. In this way, the adherence of

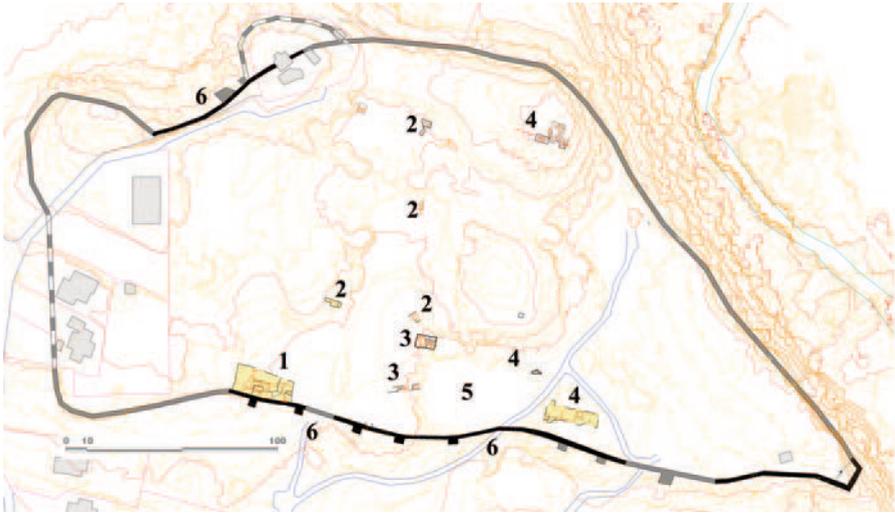


Fig. 3. Archaeological plan. 1, main excavation area next to the wall; 2, test pits with habitat evidence; 3, terrace walls; 4 public buildings; 5, commercial square?; 6, wall gate?

the external walls with the central filling was facilitated. The stones are joined with lime mortar and the interior filling is a mixture of small stones, remains of mortar and decomposed marls.

The stratigraphic analysis indicates that before the construction of the Wall, the surface was lowered and levelled. From here the marls of the *emplecton* might have come, while the stones used by the construction could have obtained from close quarries or outcrops of rocks. Its itinerary does not show any attempt to adapt to the irregular terrain, but rather the arrangement of the stone rows gradually adapted to the unevenness of the orography (fig. 4). The walls were plastered with lime mortar but, possibly, this did not cover the entire surface of the stone. The distribution of the stones in horizontal rows sometimes had an orderly and uniform scheme. In the segments studied, the size of the stones did not always follow a decreasing order established as the walls were raised.

There is a technical and temporal homogeneity in the sections studied. We have not identified construction phases in this defensive system and there is no evidence of *spolia* from Roman buildings used in its building, not even in the corners of his towers. It was a unitary work that did not require construction materials from distant places. We have also not documented holes on the outside walls from scaffolding. The construction of the Wall was organised in layers of 2 to 3 feet in height. In this way, after the lime mortar had been set and the corresponding interior filling done, another work team could continue raise the Wall, while the last team moved on to another section of the Wall's perimeter.

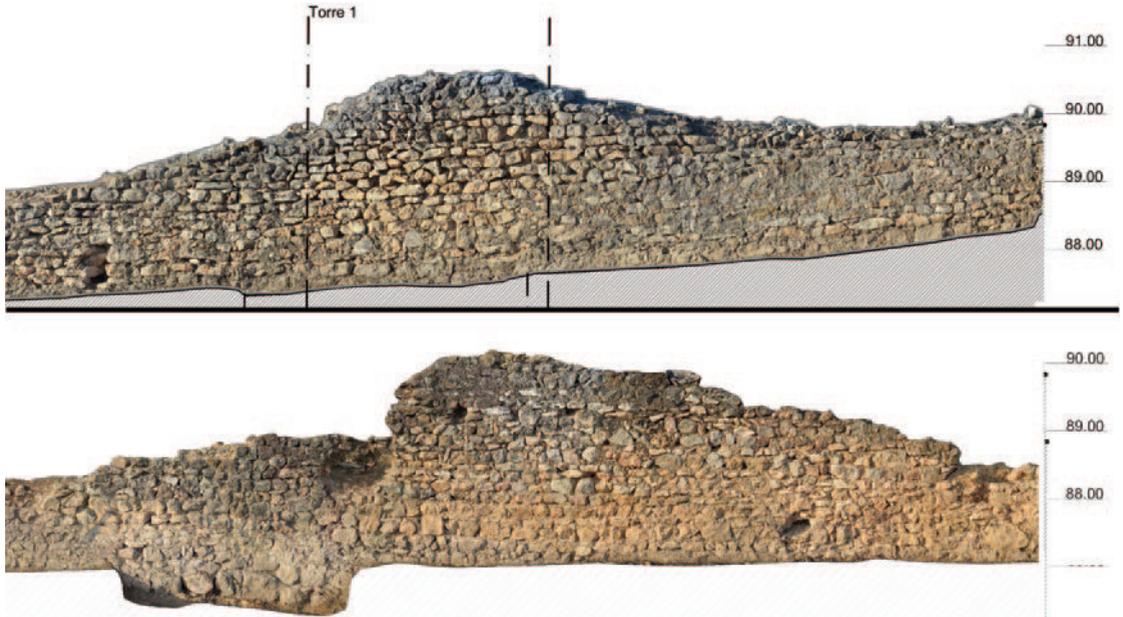


Fig. 4. Examples of photogrammetric documentation of the wall, and inner sides.

The maximum preserved height of the wall is 3.30 m, and we can hypothesize a final height of 5 or 6 m. The upper walkway is narrow, but an interior wooden platform could be widening the passage area. We have documented a small double staircase opened in the wall during the construction process. It is elevated in relation to the ground of the internal corridor, which required a wooden ladder to access the walkway (fig. 7). The enclosure was reinforced by external square towers measuring 3 x 3 m. Its construction technique is the same as the wall. Furthermore, the towers were not built against the outer face; their walls were joined to the two walls of the rampart. It was a unitary construction process that favoured the walls' solidity of the rampart to the lateral pressure of the fill (fig. 5.3). Eight towers have been identified and, considering the length of the perimeter, a total of 25 and 28 are estimated. However, the lack of information about the sections adjacent to the river escarpment could reduce this number.

The distance between the towers is variable (15.05 m, 16.30 m, 18.75 m, 24.10 m, 24.60 m, 26.90 m, and 26.95 m) and the orography of the terrain conditions this. The first buildings were not built next to it in the few excavated areas next to the perimeter. We propose, as a hypothesis, the presence of a pseudo-intervallum that increases the military relevance of the foundation of the settlement. Discoveries should confirm this theory, but for the moment, we can only verify structures close to the wall in a later chronological phase.



Fig. 5. Structure of the wall. 1, lower base; 2, *emplecton*; 3, a connection between the tower walls and the rampart's external walls.



Fig. 6. View of a tower destroyed in the last century.



Fig. 7. Double staircase opened in the wall during the construction process. It is half-height, which requires a wooden ladder.

Concerning the different archaeological surveys carried out at some points inside the settlement, it has been possible to demonstrate the existence of a well-structured urbanism adapted to the orography, with three large areas or urban platforms at different levels (figs. 2-3). This distribution is still visible in the current agricultural plot due to the few changes made over the centuries. Consequently, many agricultural terraces are fundamentally the result of old divisions or small internal walls built in the Visigothic period. The most precise historical image of this reality is the photographic flight of 1976, taken prior to the destructive processes mentioned above.

Upper city or acropolis. It corresponds to the highest sector, approximately between 90 and 97 m a.s.l. altitude. The acropolis adjoins the river escarpments and the northern periphery. To the South, the enclosure is delimited by a thick terracing wall, which could also be an internal defence. Its scenographic pre-eminence and the orography of the surroundings raise the possibility of a north-western gateway of the wall, between two small natural elevations. In this place, there are two large piles of rocks which suggest the presence of two nearby towers that indicate the existence of monumental access. The delimitation of the area, and its corresponding subdivision, have been established based on the perimeter of the wall, the terracing walls and the contour lines. Current data indicates that it was presided over by a large building at the western end (fig. 10). Excavation and delimitation works have revealed the regular use of lime mortar pavements with a solid constructive preparation of river pebbles. Many fragments of ceramic roofing material, like Visigothic *tegulae* and *imbrex*, were also recovered. Some cuts have also been documented, showing a rectangular building with terraced walls and a W-E orientation. Its technical characteristics and location suggest that it was an important public building. From a scenographic point of view, it was also a visual reference both inside and outside the city.

The city intermediate platform is the largest urban area, growing between 87 and 92.5 m a.s.l. This sector had a smooth and homogeneous slope and was easily developable. Based on the different findings, we can interpret this sector as the residential area of the city and, possibly, the densest urbanized zone. In the stratigraphic soundings, we have consistently obtained positive results (fig. 3). The residential rooms are characterized by mud walls over a masonry base with clay as a limber. The pavements were made of compacted clay and the roof would be composed of vegetal elements. In these buildings, storage silos and the remains of small furnaces specializing in manufacturing of glass and metals have been documented (figs. 8-9). From a stratigraphic point of view, we emphasize the works located next to the wall, which have made it possible to document its constructive evidence and a second phase related to the occupation of the *interval-lum* belonging to the original project. This was a new phase of occupation of the internal perimeter corridor that was probably linked to the disappearance of the original military function of the enclave. The installation of a glass workshop next to the wall partially cut off the access to one of the stairs that led up to the walkway (fig. 9), which is the most significant fact in this process documented until now.

Besides, the excavations developed have revealed the execution of an extensive terracing system between the middle and lower platforms (figs. 13-14). A thick wall associated with a narrow street located on the upper level has been documented as a dividing wall. Modern agricultural margins currently hide these retaining and delimitation structures. However, the stratigraphic surveys and aerial photography show the complexity of an urban structuring system whose global circulation system still needs to be identified. We have already identified



Fig. 8. Residential structures close to the wall.



Fig. 9. Glass furnace close to the wall.



Fig. 10. Public buildings on the upper platform. 1, lime mortar pavement; 2, Spanish Civil War trench; 3, Visigothic terracing wall.



Fig. 11. Orthophoto of the public building excavated at the end of the 1970s.



Fig. 12. Edeta's funerary inscription reused in the public building (fig. 11).

a communication doorway – ramp or stairs? – between both platforms, and the urban synchrony of certain elements suggests that this structure would be part of the city's original design.

The city's lower platform reaches the angle formed by the Túria river and the Clavills' ravine. Most of its defensive perimeter is covered by dirt, and the remains of a large bastion at its eastern end stand out. From this place, arrival from *Valentia* and the union between the ravine and the river, close to a fluvial passage today hidden by a canefield, would be controlled. It is an unknown city area and extends between 80 and 87 m a.s.l.

Currently, the primary known element of this area is a large public rectangular square located next to the wall. The square has been identified from geophysical surveys, the absence of architectural elements and the presence of buildings on its perimeter. It borders on the terracing structures of the upper platform and evidence of irregular cobblestone, made of small stones and ceramic fragments, has been occasionally discovered. One of the southern accesses to the city has been documented in this sector, which allowed direct entry to the square. On the other side, the perimeter road can be traced through a cut in the natural rock, a retaining wall, and next to the wall, a rough and solid cobble pavement in the entrance area.

The northern limit of this square is defined by a large building more than 30 m long. Its dimensions and construction technique indicate that it was a public



Fig. 13. Partial aerial view of the transition zone between the intermediate and lower platforms.

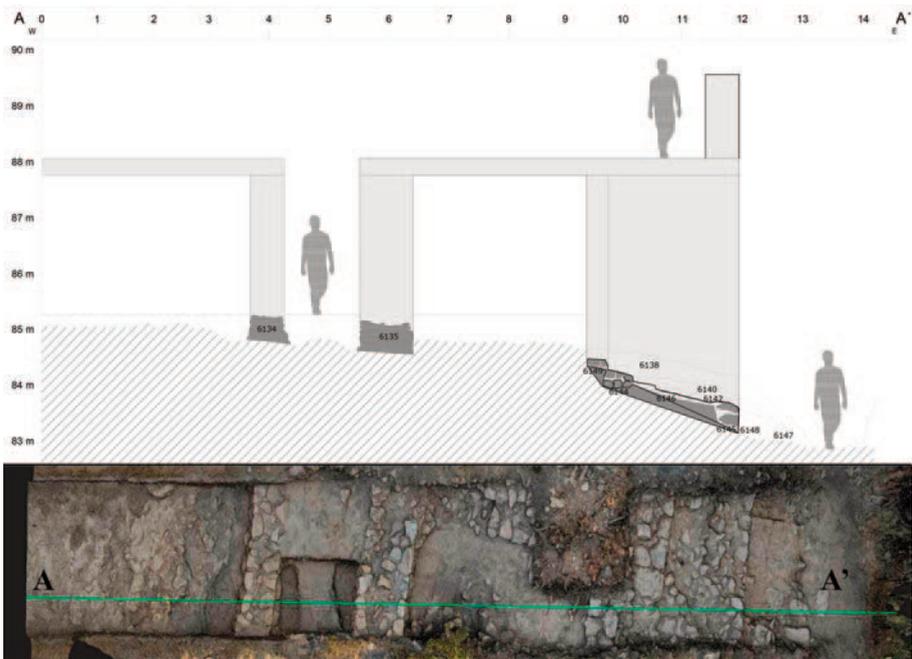


Fig. 14. Orthophoto and reconstructive hypothesis of the terracing walls between the intermediate and lower platforms (according to A. Ribera and I. Fernández).

building open to the square, but it also had an urban function. The rear side of the building was part of the terracing system of a slight orographic elevation located in the center of the lower urban platform. The building was documented in excavations from 1978-1980 and is characterized by the use of *opus africanum* in the lime mortar masonry walls. The few identified remains suggest a high level of conservation because it is located next to the slope of the central mound (fig. 2.2). The building had a tower at its western end and early excavations indicate a fast collapse or sudden abandonment.

At the eastern end of the public square, there is a rectangular building exhumed, not excavated, between 1978-1980 and its archaeological documentation is restricted to a few brief reports (Huguet *et al.* 2020, p. 61). It was built with lime mortar masonry and stood out because of its *opus quadratum* foundation formed by reused ashlar stones (fig. 11). These are limestone stones from the Serra Calderona quarry, located about 18 km from the site. This stone is common in constructions of the near Roman city of Edeta (Llíria), which was abandoned at the time of the foundation of València la Vella. A link between both cities has recently been suggested. The Roman city, located about 12 km from the Visigothic one, could have been the object of architectural plundering for constructing relevant buildings for the new Visigothic city (Ribera *et al.* 2020b). The excavation reinforced this hypothesis in 2022 when a fragment of an imperial funerary inscription, similar to other epigraphs from Llíria, was recovered (IRPV IV 36 and 113, Corell 2008). This stone block was found inside a masonry wall as a simple construction component (fig. 12).

This rectangular building is approximately parallel to the wall and is 15 m away from the South Gate. There is space for a hypothetical corridor between the building and the wall and it was the nearest construction to the access and its external measurements are 6,4 m wide by 24 m long. It is divided into two separate parts with two rooms. Despite the current low level of conservation, two entrances can be identified at its ends that respectively led to a second interior room. As mentioned above, the reuse of ashlar stones from Serra Calderona stands out as support for the jambs of one of the internal doors and as lateral reinforcements of the masonry wall. The level of structural destruction does not allow us to differentiate whether these ashlar stones were part of a wall of *opus africanum* or were simply elements of structural cohesion and support for the main beams. We have occasionally identified remains of whitish interior plaster. Unlike those found on the city walls, these remains indicate the intention to cover the entire Wall. The available stratigraphic information does not provide data regarding its functionality and chronology. It could be a public building related to the control of external access and linked to the public or commercial activity of the square. Concerning the abandonment process, the excavation report specified, "The entire building collapsed at an unknown time, and some of the ashlar stones of the walls fell, one on top of the other, like dominoes placed in a row...".

Finally, in the city surroundings there are various sections of an unstudied aqueduct, built in lime mortar masonry with hydraulic lining inside. We must determine if they correspond to Roman pipes or were built for the Visigothic city. This last interpretation would highlight the enclave's relevance and would show a coincident element with *Reccopolis* (Martínez Jiménez 2020). On the other hand, a possible dunghill from the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century has been documented on the city suburb. This stratigraphic fact reveals an organizational capacity related to the agricultural activity of the city.

#### 4. The artefacts

The recovery of late Roman coarse and cooking ware, amphorae and coins is a typical pattern in these archaeological interventions. This has been especially significant in the stratigraphies adjacent to the Wall and in the storage silos filling, where macrofauna also abounds. In the case of València la Vella, it should be noted that the material recovered does not differ from that obtained in the post-Roman city of *Valentia* or contemporary rural settlements of this territory. Although the economic system of the Visigothic period evolved towards regionalisation and self-sufficiency, this new Visigothic city was perfectly connected to the Mediterranean basin's cultural, commercial and economic life. This intense commercial activity is consistent with the military theory established for the foundation of València la Vella. This role could constitute an element of economic revitalisation due to the mobility of the soldiers and their military pay, which would break with a regionalised economy. Their supply needs would encourage trade relations with the nearest coastal cities. This was the case of València la Vella, where its relevance and proximity to the port of *Valentia* facilitated the development of similar commercial activities.

Metal detector methodology has been used since the 2018 campaign. This technique not only consists in surveying the pile of dirt removed, but also the archaeological layers that were about to be dug, and even the superficial surface of all the settlement (Caldés 2019, pp. 105-106). This methodology has enabled us to recover several metal items, mostly coins, which are of tiny size, almost imperceptible at sight if the sediment is not sieved (fig. 15). Also, the coins found on the surface of the space inner walls were georeferenced, and when we passed that information into a GIS, it allowed us to identify zones with a high percentage of coin finds, which were potential zones to be excavated in the following campaigns.

Provided that València la Vella was founded without any existing former settlement, it is logical to deduce that all the coins found inside its walls must have formed part of the currency during the Late Antique period. The relative number of coins that this space has yielded is surprising, given the premise affirmed dur-



Fig. 15. Relevant coins from València la Vella. 1, Antoninianus of Claudius II recovered in a Visigothic layer; 2, Nummus of Constantius II\*; 3, Visigothic tremissis minted in Liuvigild times, but imitating legends of the byzantine emperor Justin II. Recovered next to the walls\*; 4, Counterfeit of a visigothic Liuvigild's tremissis, Toledo's mint. Recovered next to the walls\*; 5, Hispanici minimi of 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. AD, unknown mint\*; 6, Hispanici minimi of 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. AD, unknown mint\*; 7, Hispanici minimi of 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. AD, unknown mint; 8, Byzantine nummi of Justinian I, mint Carthage; 9, Ostrogothic nummi of Totila (Baduila), mint Rome; 10, Vandalic nummi of early 6<sup>th</sup> c. AD, mint Carthage\*. \*Photo Ruth Pliego.

ing the last century that during that time the amount of currency in use was small, and mostly of gold. This vision has been rejected in the last few decades (Marot 2000-2001). About the state of the coins, we must stress out that they are mainly made of copper/bronze, very worn, clipped, cut in halves, or punched out, which indicates that they had been in currency for some centuries. Also, the small module of 1 cm or even less, their state of clipping and the fact that the flans are usually smaller than the dies, makes them difficult to clean and identify. A hundred of the pieces cannot even be ascribed to some defined group.

Among the identifiable material, in these campaigns we have found a small but significative number of coins minted before the year 300 AD, basically Iberian coins from the nearby mint of Arse (*Saguntum*), worn imperial asses and *an-*

*toniniani* of Gallienus, Claudius II, beside imitative posthumous coins of the second. The most abundant coins found, with almost a hundred samples, are the *nummi* of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, mainly from the house of Constantine.

The coins previously mentioned can be found in great number in archaeological sites of the zone, but what is most surprising is the presence of issues from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. AD. The first group of pieces is small, but rich, and it is composed of Late Roman and Vandalic coins, and even a Ostrogothic piece, incredibly scarce in the Iberian Peninsula (Marot 1997, p. 187). We interpreted those pieces as brought by the Byzantines, when they arrived at the south and south-eastern coastal line of *Hispania* around the 550 AD. In this sense, almost 50 byzantine coins have already been found in València la Vella, all of them minted in Cartage by Justinian I, mostly *minimi*. These coins fit well with another kind of *minimi*, the peninsular group (Pliego 2020), representing around 25 pieces. Its issuing has been discussed, with some researchers pointing to a Visigothic origin and others claiming that some of them are Byzantine anonymous coins from southern Spain. The last group are two Visigothic gold tremissis, one is imitative, using models of Justin II (565-578 AD), and the other is a forgery of copper, with a thin sheet of gold on the surface, and bears the name of Liuvigild and the mint *Toleto*.

The overview of the case of the currency in València la Vella is interesting, since the coins recovered are found in layers from the 560-625 AD period. It fits well with the pieces found in Punta de l'Illa (Cullera) and with the recent revision of the coins from València (Pliego 2020, pp. 140-143), defining a territory linked to the currency of Central Mediterranean. The great number of issues from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. AD found in València la Vella points out that this settlement had a significant role during the war between the Visigoth kingdom and the Eastern Roman Empire. We expect that the future recovering of coins associated to pottery, not only in this settlement but in other dynamic centres of the Mediterranean coast of the Iberian Peninsula, will clarify some aspects about the behaviour of coin currency during the Late Antique centuries.

As in many other Mediterranean centres, ceramics constitute the most abundant part of the material finds. Quantitatively, there is a rich regional craftsmanship based on manufacturing of pots, casseroles, jars and other utensils for domestic use. These pieces of evidence show an ethnographic culture characteristic of the current Valencian territory, where vessels typical of this region are combined with others made in the same workshops but influenced by foreign vessels. Most of the pottery analysed in València la Vella comes from the intermediate platform and the area adjacent to the wall, where stratigraphic analysis has shown constructive synchrony between the wall and the nearby residential building (Huguet *et al.* in press).

So far, the actions carried out on the wall have found how the defensive canvas was directly settled on a simple regularisation of the geological terrain, as well as, at some points, a compact strip made with remains of natural level, small

stones and lime, which served as reinforcement and union between the same geological level and the lower blocks of the wall (Huguet *et al.* 2020, p. 64). However, the latest actions have shown a series of fillings that amortise some cuts prior to the construction of the wall. We have yet to determine the functionality of these cuttings, although we believe they should be understood as actions contemporary to the construction of the wall itself.

Regarding the ceramic dating, the most significant chronological material corresponds to the ARSW D1 Hayes form 93/107 (El Mahrine 21) (Hayes 1972, p. 171; Mackensen 1993, p. 413s) and a North African amphora type "Spatheion" transitional between the Bonifay type "Spatheion" 2B and 3A (Bonifay 2004, p. 126, fig. 68.12 and p. 127; cfr. p. 128, fig. 69). The appearance of both vessels can be dated to around 550 and 580 AD (Hayes 1972, p. 171; Bonifay 2016, p. 544 and p. 558). Also noteworthy are regional specimens of the Keay 72 amphora and reported fragments of eastern Mediterranean amphorae (LRA 1B1, 2, 4 and 5), and late *unguentaria* of the Hayes LRU1 type (Rodríguez *et al.* in press). Finally, we must note the dominant presence of cooking and coarse ceramics from the regional area, which indicate a chronological horizon from the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pascual *et al.* 2003).

On top of these cuttings is the construction of the defensive wall. Next to the internal facing, a robust level of regularisation is introduced, which is also present in the foundations of the annexed domestic area and the supposed pseudo-*intervallum*. An ARSW D1 form Hayes 107 and another specimen of Hayes LRU 1 eastern unguentary are noted in this context. Concerning the amphorae, we found, in addition to a pivot of North African amphora Keay 62, quite a few regional individuals of the Keay 72, 71 (Cau *et al.* 2019), and ebusitan Keay 79 type. On the other hand, we also found many pieces of cooking and coarse ware belonging to the Valencian territory. The dating of this context and its confrontation with the preceding context helps us circumscribe its chronology in a range close to 570/580 AD (Bonifay 2016, p. 558; 2019, p. 297).

The last of the contexts studied corresponds, by stratigraphic position, with the latest one documented in València la Vella (Rodríguez *et al.* in press). This ceramic phase could be the transformation of the interior corridor or pseudo-*intervallum*; this is arranged directly against the defensive Wall and interpreted as a set of domestic waste. We must mention the presence of ARSW D shapes such as Fulford 50, Hayes 91D, 101, 93/107 (residual), 107 and 108. Regarding the amphora containers, a pivot stands out from ebusitan amphora RE0103B, a rim from Keay 62E, various individuals from "Spatheion" 3A, and various reports of amphora from the eastern Mediterranean (LRA 1B1, 2 and 4). Also still present at this time are Keay 72 regional amphorae and Hayes LRU1. Concerning the dating of this late context, we consider that, with the current data, we must circumscribe the chronology within the 7<sup>th</sup> century and, possibly, in the first quarter of this century.

## 5. Hypothetical conclusions

The first results obtained in this new research project have already provided enough information to introduce València la Vella into the scientific debate on forming new cities in the geopolitical context of Visigothic Hispania. It is an analysis that is not limited only to the Valencian territory but transcends the Hispanic southeast and the process of consolidating Toledo's kingdom. However, the incipient state of the research still sets out more questions than answers. Consequently, current archaeological research does not doubt that the historical reconstruction of the territory of València requires understanding the specific role of the city of València la Vella.

The study of the internal and external line walls, with their defence towers, reveals a planned and monumental urban project for its time, which can hardly be interpreted as a simple defensive *castrum*. Based on its characteristics, plus the different buildings and activities that have already been documented, we have suggested that its formation was the result of a direct intervention of the Visigothic central power and a relationship between the appearance of this new city and the stoppage of construction activity in *Valentia* has been established.

The excavations next to the wall enable the establishment of a date of urban foundation between the years 570/580. The ceramics of the construction levels are conclusive, and we must consider the recovery of two Liuvigild tremisses that provide another concordant post-quem reference. On the other hand, the residual artefacts obtained suggest the possibility of a previous and minor human occupation on this hill. We have yet to identify pre-Visigothic architectural evidence, but this possibility gives more relevance to the territorial control characteristics of the fluvial enclave.

For these reasons, we have proposed the creation of València la Vella as a centre of administrative and military control over a large territory. The *ex novo* construction of València la Vella involved a considerable building effort, which could only be undertaken by public initiative. It was located on a changing border between the Visigoth kingdom and the new Byzantine Hispanic province, Spania.

Although we do not have enough historical information to include *Valentia* in the Byzantine province of Spania, neither in the Visigoth kingdom before 589, our hypothesis incorporates its territory in the war scenario that emerges from the *Renovatio Imperii* of Emperor Justinian. This interpretation is based on the topographical characteristics and the chronology of València la Vella. It coincides with the historical process of the foundation of enclaves for the political consolidation of this dynamic frontier, where the construction of walls was an important feature (Diarte *et al.* 2022). Thus, we can mention the fortified nucleus of Tolmo de Minateda (episcopal seat of *Elo*), the episcopal seat of *Begastri* on an elevation near the river Quípar, plus the settlements of Mula on the Almagra hill, Lorca (*Eliocroca*) and Orihuela (*Aurariola*).

This reality reveals an important construction dynamic based on defensive centres generated by the Byzantine invasion and the resulting Visigothic reaction, especially during the reign of Leovigild. According to our first hypothesis (Ribera *et al.* 2020a), King Liuvigild was probably the founder of this city in a strategic position in the interior of *Valentia*, right where its agricultural lowlands end and the pre-coastal mountain range begins. It would be an exceptional place to stop Byzantine expansion inland and to serve as a camp for attacking it. However, we should not underestimate the capacity of the Byzantine Empire to generate defensive enclaves of the scale of València la Vella. Current research cannot determine yet the Visigothic or Byzantine promotion of some of these settlements, which are mentioned in the so-called Pact of Teodomiro in 713.

Concerning the most probable hypothesis, the supposed rivalry between València la Vella and *Valentia* could have been brief because, in the III Episcopal Council of Toledo, the Catholic and Arian bishops of *Valentia* signed its acts jointly. This suggests that the ancient Roman city was already in the Visigothic orbit. In any case, this new reality would not affect the commercial vitality suggested by coins and ceramics, and we still have no explanation. Thus, the period between the arrival of the eastern Romans in 555 and the above-mentioned Council of 589 is a fascinating historical period but too brief for the chronological precision of the current archaeological record. Furthermore, this new interpretative approach re-thinks the location of remarkable historical episodes traditionally placed in *Valentia*, which could have occurred in València la Vella. We are referring to the location of the Arian episcopate or the site of the mint of Suinthila, who completed the Visigothic expansion of the peninsula after expelling the eastern Romans.

The stratigraphic evidence indicates that València la Vella continued throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century and no signs of quick anthropic destruction have been found. There is no evidence of later occupation, and the abandonment would have occurred between the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It has been suggested that this date coincides with the construction of the Pla de Nadal palace complex, located just 4 km from València la Vella. The Pla de Nadal complex is another of the great questions of post-Visigothic archaeology, whose current remains only correspond to a small portion of an extensive settlement destroyed, in the 1980s, by agricultural works and the layout of the Mediterranean highway. We do not know the overall characteristics of this settlement and there is no direct stratigraphic data on the chronology and historical evolution of the only preserved building, whose monumental and palatial features are unquestionable. Its architectural model and the quantity and quality of its decorative elements are unparalleled in Hispanic Visigothic archaeology. The knowledge of this reality is fundamental to understand the first phase of the process of Islamic implantation, for which it is difficult to set the parameters of the archaeological materials and appreciate the previous hierarchization of the last Visigothic settlements.

The epigraphic remains found in Pla de Nadal have allowed the proposition that Theodemir was the promoter of this building. At the same time, its destruction is associated with the razzia of Emir Abd al-Rahman I in the year 778-79 to put down an important revolt supported by the Abbasids that broke out in the lands of València (Juan *et al.* 2018). Despite the epigraphic and architectural evidence, the relationship between Theodemir and the Pla de Nadal complex is not fully accepted. The relevance of the last Visigothic governor, the *dux* Theodemir, who gave his name to the Pact of *Tudmir* (Gutiérrez Lloret 2012) is fundamental. So, there is an intense debate on the understanding of the Hispanic Southeast – from Lorca to Riba-roja de Túria – and particularly on the identification of the Roman-Visigothic *Valentia* with the city of *B.I.nt.la*. The identification of Theodemir as the owner of the Pla de Nadal implies the logical perception and coincidence of the Visigothic territory administered by him with the coastal area of the ancient province of *Carthaginensis*. According to our hypothesis, after the signing of this treaty, Theodemir was able to build a residence on the northern limit of the coastal zone of the extinct *prouincia carthaginensis*. If the two settlements were consecutive in time, we should place the abandonment of the fortified city of València la Vella with the arrival of the Arab-Berber army.

### Abstract

The results obtained in the València la Vella project introduce this archaeological site into the scientific debate on forming new cities in Visigothic *Hispania*. Our research argues that it was a Visigothic city built during the reign of Liuvigild and in a context of confrontation against the Byzantine Empire. The research has already provided enough information to determine the urban and military character of the settlement: extension, terraced urbanism, craft activities, and public buildings. The relationship between the city and the nearby Pla de Nadal archaeological site must also be confirmed. Both sites are essential for recognising the impact of the Arab-Berber conquest on the territory of the ancient Roman city of *Valentia*.

**Keywords:** fortified city, Visigothic enclave, Liuvigild, Byzantine empire, urbanism, *minimi*

*I risultati del progetto València la Vella permettono di inserire questo sito nel dibattito sulla formazione delle città nella Spagna visigota. La nostra ricerca suggerisce che fosse una città visigota sorta durante il regno di Leovigildo nel contesto di un conflitto contro l'impero bizantino. La ricerca ha fornito dati sufficienti per determinare il carattere urbano e militare dell'insediamento: estensione, urbanizzazione terrazzata, attività artigianali e edifici pubblici. La relazione tra la città e il vicino sito di Pla de Nadal deve essere confermata; entrambi i siti sono fondamentali per riconoscere l'impatto dell'invasione arabo-berbera nel territorio della città romana di Valentia.*

**Parole chiave:** città fortificata, enclave visigota, Liuvigild, impero bizantino, urbanistica, *minimi*

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