

THEUDEMIRUS DUX



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THEUDEMIRUS DUX

The last of the Goths

**The Duchy of Aurariola and the
end of the Visigothic Kingdom of
Toledo**

**Rafael Barroso Cabrera, Jorge Morín de Pablos
and Isabel Sánchez Ramos**

Access Archaeology





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Introduction

Among the central characters of the events that led to the ruin of the Visigothic kingdom in 711, alongside the already legendary names of King Roderic and Count Julian, shines the somewhat elusive figure of another, lesser-known but no less illustrious Visigoth, Duke Theudimer of Aurariola.

Founder of a dynastic principality that for decades kept the flame of the Visigothic kingdom alive, even within the borders of Islam, Duke Theudimer remains largely unknown for most people, with perhaps the exception of Levantine historiography, which has always considered him something of a founding father for a territory lacking clear historical references. Not in vain have Levantine historians, especially those linked to the valley of the Segura River, presented the noble Theudimer with legendary characteristics, almost Promethean: the Visigothic duke, like a true eponymous hero, is depicted as the mythical reference of a country, the *qūra* of Tudmīr – a district born under a treaty signed between Theudimer himself and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Musa, son of the conqueror of Spain – which would eventually give birth to the kingdom and region of Murcia. Thus, in the search for a collective sentiment that would define the personality of a territory that never fully considered itself Castilian, but also not entirely Aragonese, some scholars saw in the mythical figure of the Visigoth Theudimer the longed-for reference that would mark the beginning of the true history of the region. In a way, and with due regard for the logical spatial-temporal distances, it can be said that Theudimer of Aurariola has meant for south-eastern historiography what King Pelayo might represent for the collective consciousness of Asturias. Although it is true that the shadow of Theudimer extends broadly across the entire Levantine area, the name and figure of the Visigothic duke have become indissolubly linked especially to Murcia and its region.

But what is really known about this nobleman to attribute to him such historical significance? In reality, there are just a handful of literary documents that refer directly to him, and even among these some are contradictory or purely legendary. As if these difficulties were not enough, most of the literary references are related to the treaty signed in 713 between the Visigothic duke and the son of Musa b. Nusair, with only a couple of them concerning his political and military actions under the reigns of Egica and Egica-Wittiza, and his actions after the Arab conquest. As can be seen, there are only a few brief notes presenting him as an ambitious nobleman and a prominent and victorious military leader. In view of this brief historical documentation, contrary to a certain nostalgic and traditionalist vision propagated by 19th-century writers, especially by authors such as F. Navarro Villoslada, who painted the noble Visigoth with the colours of a restorer of Spain (another in the line of Pelayo of Asturias and García of Navarra), the historical Theudimer appears as the prototype of an ambitious aristocrat involved in the complicated political intrigues that surrounded the life of the Visigothic court in the late 7th and early 8th centuries. Indeed, if anything seems clear about the figure of Theudimer of Aurariola – the historical figure, not the legendary hero – it is precisely that he was a complex and paradoxical personality, befitting a truly tumultuous historical period such as the last decades of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo. In this sense, it can be rightly said that Theudimer was, as much as any other great historical figure, a child of his time and within the specific circumstances of his century, in the purest Ortegaian sense of the term, i.e. historical circumstances marked by a kingdom divided into factions vying for control of the throne and a

military invasion arising amid political chaos, which would have unpredictable consequences for the survival of the kingdom as well as for the development of peninsular history.

Taking into account all the data outlined here, approaching the protagonist of our study necessitates a detailed and thorough analysis of the literary sources and their scrutiny alongside the advances that archaeology has revealed in the southeastern peninsular area over the nearly five decades since E. Llobregat's classic study. In fact, as we have previously indicated, we are dealing with a character for whom there are sparse, more or less disconnected, and sometimes even contradictory literary references, which does not mean that, taken together and once placed in their true historical context, they do not allow us to sketch a faithful outline of an important chapter in peninsular history. In this regard, archaeology, and very specifically the investigations around the Pla de Nadal palace, can help fill many of the gaps that various chronicles have left to posterity. This important archaeological site, well known thanks to the impressive research work developed in the 1980s by archaeologist Empar Juan and architect Ignacio Pastor, holds many of the keys to the mystery behind the figure of Theudimer of Aurariola. Built under Byzantine and Toledan courtly patterns, Pla de Nadal was undoubtedly intended to become the palatial residence of the Goth nobleman in what should have been the capital of the Duchy of Orospeđa or Coastal Carthaginensis. However, historical circumstances prevented the complex from fully developing as a palatial residence as such. As happened with many other aims, the Muslim conquest also swept away Theudimer's dream of creating his own kingdom. Forced by the invasion to engage in battle somewhere near Orihuela, Theudimer was at least able to save his prestige and position from the general collapse, albeit at the cost of losing his primary power centre.

In any case, and beyond what future archaeological research may reveal, an impartial and dispassionate approach to the figure of the Visigothic duke cannot be undertaken without first reconstructing the historical precedents that led to the formation of the *qūra* of Tudmīr, specifically the conquest of the territories occupied by the Byzantines and the creation of the Duchy of Aurariola, as well as through a critical analysis of the historical sources that have preserved the Theudimer affair and his actions in the events following the Arab landing in 711. In this precise sense, it can rightly be said that the figure of Theudimer can be understood as the story of tragically thwarted ambition, but also as a significant example of the various positions taken by the Visigothic nobility, and with them the rest of the Hispanic population, in response to the new political situation created by the Arab invasion, i.e. rebellion, pact, submission. If the first option is clearly exemplified in the figure of Pelayo in Asturias, at least after the unsuccessful journey of the Gothic magnate to Cordoba, and also in some illustrious *al-muwallad* ('renegades'), such as 'Umar ibn Hafsun or Ibn Marwan al-Yilliquī, the second, with different nuances in each case, is the one adopted by Gothic nobles, e.g. Casius in the middle Ebro Valley or our Theudimer in Aurariola. The third and last option, perhaps the least studied by researchers, is also the tragic fate that destiny had in store for the majority of the population: servitude or conversion.