

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



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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Levantine historiography, which has always considered him something of a founding father for a territory lacking clear historical references.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 Ortegaiian 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.

The South-East of the Iberian Peninsula in the Second Half of the 6th Century: The Imperial Occupation and the Formation of the Byzantine Province of Spania.

From the Byzantine conquest to the reign of Leovigild

Around the middle of the 6th century, one of the most critical moments in the history of the Visigothic kingdom of Spain took place. In the year 552, taking advantage of the civil war that pitted Agila and Athanagild against each other, a Byzantine expeditionary army landed on the peninsula and took control of a coastal strip in the south and east. Although the specific limits of this space occupied by the Imperial troops cannot be determined with total certainty, especially in terms of the extension inland, there seems to be a generalised agreement that the Byzantine dominion extended through a long strip of land that spanned from Cadiz to Denia, with an extension on the other side of the *fretum Gaditanum* around the Algarves. The Byzantine invasion is an event that would mark the historical development of the Visigothic kingdom. In fact, as we will have the opportunity to see throughout this study, from a political and administrative point of view the creation of the Byzantine province (or eparchy according to Honigmann's thesis) of Spania is the institutional precedent of the future Duchy of *Auriola*.

The context in which the Byzantine conquest is framed has to do, on the one hand, with the effort of the Emperor Justinian to restore the Empire to its original borders, as well as with the Visigothic political dynamics and, more specifically, with the civil war that brought King Agila into conflict with the usurper Athanagild. As is known, the death of King Theudigisel in 549 marked the end of a transition period that has gone down in history as the 'Ostrogothic interlude'. The disappearance of the lineage of Theodoric the Great left the Visigothic kingdom without a universally recognised prestigious lineage that could take the reins of power and opened the door to a deep division among the nobility. In this situation, the Visigothic aristocracy made a decision that they would bitterly come to regret for decades.

Indeed, in the absence of an unanimously recognised and strong claimant, the Visigothic nobility decided to proclaim a certain Agila (549-555) as king. According to Isidore of Seville, our only source for these events, the new monarch had to undertake a military expedition against Cordoba, a city that was living an autonomous existence under the supposed continuation of the Empire. The specific circumstances that motivated Agila's attack on Cordoba are unknown as Isidore does not provide any information that can shed light on the matter. We do not know if the city rebelled against the Gothic dominion or, as seems more likely, it was the monarch himself who decided to end Cordoba's autonomy and impose Visigothic sovereignty on it. In any case, it is interesting to underline that Agila's campaign was designed with a strong anti-Catholic undertone, manifested in the sacrilegious offense when the Visigothic troops desecrated the venerated tomb of the martyr Acisclus, whose temple was converted into a stable for horses. The reaction of the citizens of Cordoba to the provocation of the Arian Goths was not long in coming and Agila's expedition ended in the most complete disaster: the king suffered a humiliating defeat in which he lost his son and, worse, the royal treasure. Agila had to flee the city in complete ignominy, seeking refuge within the walls of Merida.



Fig. 1. Byzantine dominions in Spain and North Africa (Wikipedia) (modified).

Taking advantage of the rebellion of Cordoba, or perhaps in conjunction with it, as the story is not as detailed as we would like, the attempt to usurp the noble Athanagild in Seville took place. After the disastrous Cordoban campaign, Athanagild had as his great assets the undeniable loss of prestige of Agila among the Gothic nobility and their fear that a situation similar to what had occurred in Ostrogothic Italy would be repeated.¹ According to the account of Isidore of Seville, it was the usurper who called on the Byzantines for help to support the rebellion. But Isidore's version contradicts that offered by Iordanes of this same episode. According to the latter, at the time he was writing his work an expedition of the Imperial army was on its way to Spain with the aim of helping King Agila.² Iordanes' version is interesting because his account coincides with what we know of Byzantine actions in other scenarios of the time, i.e. Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy, where the Imperial troops would have acted in aid of the legitimate king and not the usurper. Considering that the contrary testimony of St Isidore, we cannot know for certain whether Iordanes' assertion actually

¹ Isid. Hisp. HG 44-46: '*Agila rex constituitur regnans annis V. iste adversus Cordubensem urbem proelium movens dum in contemptu catholicae religionis beatissimi martyris Aciscli iniuriam inferret hostiumque ac iumentorum horrore sacrum sepulchri eius locum ut profanator pollueret, inito adversus Cordubenses cives certamine poenas dignas sanctis inferentibus meruit. nam belli praesentis ultione percussus et filium ibi cum copia exercitus interfectum amisit et thesaurum omnem cum insignibus opibus perdidit. Ipse victus cuius tertio anno Athanagildus tyrannidem regnandi cupiditate arripuit Gothi autem Agilanem apud Emeritam fide sacramenti oblita interimunt et Athanagildo se tradunt. ac miserabili metu fugatus Emeritam se recepit. adversus quem interiecto aliquanto temporis spatio Athanagildus tyrannidem regnandi cupiditate arripiens, dum exercitum eius contra se Spalim missum virtute militari prostrasset, videntes Gothi proprio se everti excidio et magis metuentes, ne Spaniam milites auxilio occasione invaderent, Agilanem Emerita interficiunt et Athanagildi se regimini tradiderunt'* (Mommsen 1894: 285 f). On this episode, see García Moreno 1989: 100-102; Collins 2005: 42-44. Although Isidore's account seems to suggest a simple religious motivation, the truth is that the basilica of St Acisclus must have been a complex composed of a church and a fortress, as proven by the later episodes of Hermenegild and Roderic, and therefore endowed with an obvious military interest.

² Iord. Get. 303: '*contra quem [Agila] Atanagildus insurgens Romani regni concitat vires, ubi et Liberius patricius cum exercitu destinatur'* (Mommsen 1882: 136).

corresponds to reality or if it is a way of justifying the Byzantine intervention in Spain within the always active Imperial propaganda.³

However, elsewhere we have developed an attempt to reconcile both versions. We think, given the contradictions found in Isidore's account, confronted with the parallel narration made by Iordanes, that Byzantine aid must have initially set out to help the legitimate king, as, as it is said, had previously happened in Africa and Italy, and that, due to the dramatic turn of events caused by Agila's lightning defeat at the gates of Cordoba, there was a change in alliances that would force the Byzantines to make a pact with the rebel. In fact, if the first landing of the Byzantine troops took place on the southern peninsular coast, as seems more likely, the Byzantine army would find a very different scenario than might be expected, with Agila withdrawn to Merida and the rebel Athanagild strong in Seville.

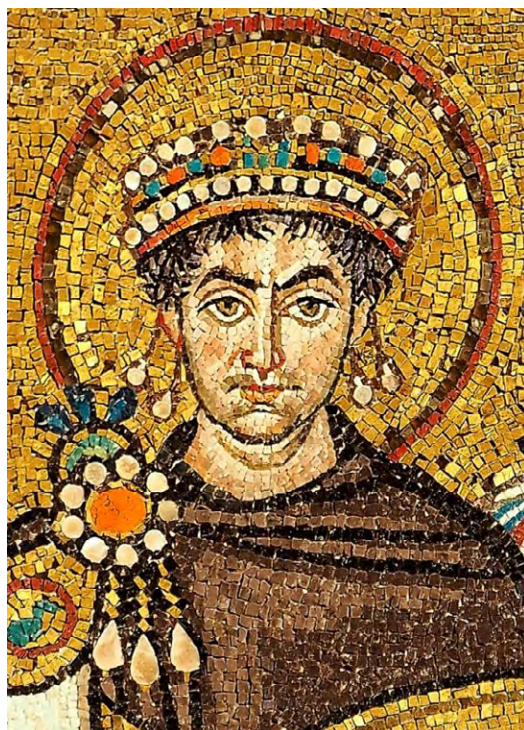


Fig. 2. Ravenna. Church of San Vitale. The Emperor Justinian (527-565) (Wikipedia).

With Agila defeated and without the royal treasure, Athanagild had two options: to fight the invaders or to reach a peaceful agreement with them. Perhaps because he saw himself without strength enough to oppose the Byzantines, or because he feared being caught on two fronts (remember that Agila had taken refuge in Merida, not in Toledo, possibly seeking the protection of his loyalists), Athanagild must have opted to reach an agreement. The Imperial forces, for their part, with a very different set of circumstances than projected, must have accepted the offer of peace in exchange for territories.⁴

In any case, regardless of how the events unfolded, and as was traditional in Byzantine politics, accustomed to taking advantage of any political dissension in the old dominions of Rome to restore Imperial sovereignty, Justinian (527-565) decided to send a military expedition to the peninsula under the command of Patrician Liberius, former prefect of Arles during the reign of Theodoric the Amal, and with experience of war in Sicily, therefore, a connoisseur of internal Gothic affairs. Some authors, however, think it is difficult for him to have actually embarked due to his advanced age and because his presence is documented in Constantinople in the year 553.⁵ Be that as it may, the arrival of the first Byzantine contingent on the Spanish coast took place in the year 552, in the area of the *fretum Gaditanum*, from where it was easier to reach the valley of the Betis (the current Guadalquivir River), probably in one of the ports that the bay of Algeciras had, either *Carteia* (San Roque) or, as seems

³ On the Byzantine occupation and the problems that St Isidore's text entails, see Collins 2005: 42-44.

⁴ Barroso 2019.

⁵ The request would have been made c. 550-551, which is when Iordanes wrote his chronicle: Collins 2005: 44. Although there is a time margin of about a year that would allow Liberius to command the expedition: see Vallejo Girvés 2012: 141-147. For Liberius, see Goubert 1944: 7-11; 1945: 127-129; Morossi 2013: 134-141.

more likely, in *Iulia Trasducta* (Algeciras). The expedition had almost certainly departed from *Septem* (Ceuta), a city that had fallen into Byzantine hands after a disastrous campaign led by Theudis.⁶

The civil war between the Goths lasted for three long years (552-555), during which King Agila seems to have resisted the push of Athanagild and would even have kept him isolated in Seville. Vallejo Girvés believes this proves that the Imperial troops would have come to the aid of the usurper, but in our opinion the opposite seems more plausible. Taking into account the testimony of Iordanes, and given the proceedings of the emperor in the Vandal and Ostrogothic conflicts, it seems more likely that it was precisely the presence of Greek troops that explains the paralysis of Athanagild in Hispalis. Actually, the palsy of Athanagild is better explained by the fear of being attacked from behind by the Imperial troops while marching on Merida. In this situation, a deadlock had been reached: the Byzantines could not advance towards Seville because their allies had withdrawn to Merida, Athanagild could not march towards Merida without fearing the attack of Imperial troops, and Agila, with a weakened and divided army, did not have enough resources to conquer Seville.

Thus, Agila's retreat to Merida after the disaster of his campaign on Cordoba prompted a change of strategy by his Byzantine allies. It must have been at this moment that the pact between the rebel and the Imperial authorities was made, and which would tip the balance towards the usurper. This first pact meant a radical change of alliances that would end the already limited options Agila had to stay in power. As has been said, this would explain why Athanagild remained in Seville after Agila's debacle against the citizens of Cordoba once the Imperial troops had landed, when the logical movement in this situation would have been to march directly with his Byzantine allies against the defeated and demoralised army of Agila and exploit his defeat at the walls of Cordoba. It would also explain why Agila still had assets enough to march from Merida to Seville to face Athanagild's uprising. This movement would be unthinkable if he had not taken for granted the support of the Empire for his counter-offensive. It was undoubtedly the unexpected change of alliances that deprived Agila of the coveted Byzantine military support – and finally the throne. With the change of circumstances, and seeing the danger of repeating the situation that had occurred in Ostrogothic Italy and Vandal Africa, the Visigothic nobility decided to assassinate the king and close ranks with the usurper Athanagild. It is possible that at that moment *Hispalis* (Seville) and Cordoba were under Byzantine dominion, perhaps as a result of a first pact, as we know that years later Athanagild had to conquer Seville again, and *c.* 572 Leovigild did the same with Cordoba.⁷

⁶ Isid. HG 42: '*Post tam felicitis successum victoriae trans fretum inconsulte Gothi gesserunt. denique dum adversum milites, qui Septem oppidum pulsus Gothis invaderant, oceani freta transissent eundemque castrum magna vi certaminis expugnarent, adveniente die dominico deposuerunt arma, ne diem sacrum proelio funestarent. hac igitur occasione reperta milites repentino incursu adgressum exercitum mari undique terraque conclusum adeo prostraverunt, ut ne unus quidem superesset, qui tantae cladis excidium praeteriret. Nec mora praevenit mors debita principem*' (Mommsen 1894: 284). Our preference for *Iulia Trasducta* is because it was the usual port for crossing the Strait and because of the parallel the Byzantine invasion presents with the *modus operandi* of Tāriq in 711 (see below).

⁷ C.C. ad a. 568. '*Hic Athanagildus Hispalim civitatem Hispaniae provinciae Baeticae sitam bello impetitam suam fecit, Cordubam vero frequenti incursione admodum laesit*' (Mommsen 1894: 223). Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 572.2: '*Leovegildus rex Cordubam civitatem diu Gothis rebellem nocte occupat et caesis hostibus propriam facit multasque urbes et castella interfecta rusticorum multitudine in Gothorum dominium revocat*' (Mommsen 1894: 213). In general, for the whole subject of the Byzantine occupation we refer to the studies of Goubert 1944; 1945; 1946; Sanz 1985; Presedo 2003, and, above all, Vallejo Girvés 1993b and 2012 (especially 147-163). From an archaeological point of view, the most complete study of the Byzantine presence in Spain is that of Vizcaíno 2007.

In the spring of 555, with the surrender of the garrison of Campsa, the last stronghold of Ostrogothic resistance, the war in Italy came to an end. Approximately around the same time, in March of that year, the assassination of Agila took place in Merida, and Athanagild was recognised as king by all the Visigothic nobility. Obviously, the Gothic nobles were alarmed at the turn of events in the Western Mediterranean. Once the war in Italy was successfully concluded, the emperor would have more troops and resources for a new campaign in Hispania and thus successfully complete a new phase of his projected *renovatio imperii*. It was then that a second Greek landing must have taken place in Cartagena, this time from Carthage and the bases that the Byzantines had in the Balearic Islands. From Cartagena, Imperial troops advanced towards the coast of Almeria and Malaga, perhaps supported by new landings in these areas, to link up with the bridgehead they had previously consolidated in the Strait area. This at least seems deducible from the testimony of Gregory of Tours and the map of Byzantine expansion in times immediately after Athanagild.⁸ In the same sense, the departure of the family of Bishop Leander from Cartagena could be explained, whose opposition to Imperial policy in relation to the problem of the *Tria Capitula* is well known.⁹



Fig. 3. Solidus of the Emperor Justin II (565-578) (Wikipedia).

Once the civil war was over, a second treaty must have been signed between Athanagild and the Imperial authorities to establish the status quo of the Byzantine occupation. The *pacta* signed by Athanagild and the authorities of Constantinople consolidated Imperial dominion over a wide coastal area that stretched from Denia to *Ossonoba* (Faro, Portugal) and which included a series of cities and strongholds, some of them, e.g. *Carthago Nova*, *Ilici* (Elche), *Malaca* or *Iulia Trasducta* (Algeciras), of considerable strategic-military value as they were important coastal ports that allowed excellent communication with the Imperial possessions in Mauritania II or Italy. Inland, the Byzantine domination extended to *Sagontia* (Gijón) and *Asidona* (Medina Sidonia) in the Strait area, and Astigi (Écija), *Egabro* (Cabra), *Mentesa* (La Guardia), *Iliberris* (Granada), *Acci* (Guadix), and *Basti* (Baza)

⁸ Greg. Tur. Hist. IV 8; Ps. Fredeg. II 48.

⁹ Vallejo Girvés 2012: 185 f.

in the centre, an area that the chronicles refer to as Bastetania. On the eastern side, the Byzantine territories included a strip that reached approximately to *Begastri* (Cehegín) in the foothills of the Sierra de Segura. Somewhat further inland, to the north, was the region of the Orospeđa – of whom we will have occasion to talk about later – which, although it was not conquered by Imperial forces, remained outside the Visigothic dominion until it was subdued by Leovigild.

In 565, Emperor Justinian died in Constantinople, and was succeeded by his nephew, Justin II (565-578). It is possible that, taking advantage of this circumstance and the consequent state of confusion that every transmission of power entails, Athanagild began his military expeditions against the Byzantines, although we have no explicit record in the literary sources except for the aforementioned reference by Gregory of Tours of the numerous campaigns carried out by the king against the cities perfidiously occupied by the Greeks, and Isidore's allusion to the Visigoth's inability to expel them from the kingdom.¹⁰ What is certain is that three years later, in 568, Athanagild launched an ambitious offensive on the Guadalquivir Valley, attacking Seville, a city that he managed to recover again for the Visigoths, and the rebellious Cordoba, which he could not subdue.¹¹ The campaign against the Baetic cities would have been carried out for fear that the Imperials would extend their domination to all of Hispania. However, despite some partial successes and all the efforts deployed, Athanagild proved incapable of repelling the invaders.¹²

The breaking of the treaty by Athanagild is an argument that again suggests that the Byzantines had come to the peninsula in support of Agila and not the usurper. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why Athanagild would break such a recent treaty. Also, in the absence of a *casus belli*, the action of the Gothic monarch took place in a context of lack of legitimacy that could seriously undermine his expectations of success, as the unilateral breaking of a pact would be an important factor in the propaganda war that accompanies every military conflict. This legitimacy would not be disputed, however, if the pacts had been made under the pressure of arms and against the will of the usurper. Nor would it be easy to justify why Athanagild directed himself against such a formidable enemy as the Empire when in the peninsula there were other theoretically less powerful adversaries who nevertheless also constituted a serious threat to the kingdom. This can only be explained because Athanagild must have understood the imminent danger of an Imperial restoration supported from the possessions the Byzantines had in the Baetica province. As we will see below, King Leovigild, with a better strategic vision of the problem, planned his political action under very different premises.

¹⁰ Greg. Tur. Hist. IV 8: '*Regnante vero Agilane apud Hispaniam, eum populum gravissimo dominationis suae iugo adterret, exercitus imperatoris. Hispanias est ingressus et civitates aliquas pervasit. Interfecto autem Agilane, Athanagildus regnum eius accepit. Qui multa bella contra ipsum exercitum postea egit et eos plerumque devicit, civitatisque, quas male pervaserant, ex parte auferens de potestate eorum*' (Krusch and Levison 1951: 140). Fred. Chron. III 47-48: '*Agylanem in Spanias a regnantem, cum esset iniquos suis, exercitus imperiae Spanias ingreditur. Aggyla interfecitur. Atthanaghildus succedit in a regnum, qui ab Spanias exercitum imperii expulit*' (Krusch 1888: 106). Isid. Hisp. HG 47: '*quos postea submovere a finibus regni molitus non potuit*' (Mommsen 1894: 286).

¹¹ Vid. supra n. 7.

¹² Isid. Hisp. HG 47: '*Aera DXCII, anno imperii Iustiniani XXVIII occiso Agilane Athanagildus regnum quod invaderat tenuit annis XIII. hic cum iam dudum sumpta tyrannide Agilanem regno privare conaretur, militum sibi auxilia ab imperatore Iustiniano poposcerat, quos postea submovere a finibus regni molitus non potuit. adversus quos huc usque 'conflictum est': frequentibus antea proeliis caesi, nunc vero multis casibus fracti atque finiti. decessit autem Athanagildus Toletu propria morte vacante regno mensibus V*' (Mommsen 1894: 286).



Fig. 4. Conquests of Leovigild (568-587) (Wikipedia).

Despite the military campaigns led by Athanagild to recover the territories conquered by the Greeks, the situation remained largely unchanged until the reign of Leovigild. In 567 King Athanagild died of natural causes in Toledo and his death opened a period of crisis. The king had died without male heirs. His two daughters, Brunhild and Galsuintha, had married the Frankish kings Sigebert I of Austrasia and Chilperic I of Neustria, perhaps in the hope of obtaining a male heir, something that would not happen, at least not in the monarch's lifetime. Thus, after the death of the king without a clear successor, a five-month interregnum began in which conversations must have taken place among the various factions of the nobility to find what we might refer to today as a 'consensus candidate'. Let us not forget that Athanagild had come to the throne under exceptional circumstances, namely in the midst of a confrontation between noble factions and with a foreign invasion looming. In any case, the final agreement elevated Liuva, probably the *dux* of Narbonne, who soon afterwards appointed his brother Leovigild to the throne. He was undoubtedly the greatest of the Visigothic kings. Fortunately for the Goths, the power vacuum could not be exploited by the Imperial authorities because, bled economically by the costly wars they had waged in Italy and Africa, they limited themselves to consolidating Roman dominion over a wide coastal line that extended from a point near Denia to beyond the Strait. As is easy to understand, this strip was a territory that was well connected by sea with the main African ports under Byzantine control (*Septem*-Ceuta and,

above all, Carthage), a circumstance that posed a latent threat to the survival of the Visigothic kingdom.¹³

Leovigild and the Visigothic counter-offensive

The rise to the throne of Leovigild (572-586) marks a turning point in the history of the Visigothic kingdom. It is true that in recent times some authors, especially Roger Collins, have relativised the dynamism of this monarch, attributing a certain historiographical distortion to the fact that thanks to the work of John of Biclaro we have a punctual catalogue of the deeds of this king that is not given for other previous sovereigns.¹⁴ However, as true as the judgment of the British historian is (especially as regards the precedent of King Theudis), the importance that both John of Biclaro and Isidore of Seville give to Leovigild in their respective works suggests that his reign was a particularly outstanding period in the formation of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo. Furthermore, it coincides with a crucial moment for the consolidation of the kingdom considering the failed precedents of the Vandal and Ostrogothic kingdoms. Among other aspects, this is evident in the political *praxis* developed by the king in order to achieve the recognition of the full sovereignty of Toledo against Constantinople, an aspect that is emphasised especially by St Isidore (HG 51) and recognised practically by all modern researchers.

Alongside the new political guidelines emanating from the Visigothic court, the reign of Leovigild was also characterised by the development of an expansionist policy aimed at unifying all of Hispania under a single sovereignty. Within this context of transformation of the *regnum Gothorum* into a political entity with well-defined territorial limits, coinciding with those of the ancient *diocesis Hispaniarum*, a series of military campaigns carried out by the king against the various peoples inhabiting the peninsula (Cantabrians, Ruccones, *Sappi*, *Rustici* of the Orospea, etc.) should be framed. Taking advantage of the dissolution of the Imperial administration, a series of *gentes* had withdrawn from Gothic domination to live semi-freely or, as in the case of the Suevi in Gallaecia, to create an independent kingdom. Leovigild preferred to deal with this problem before embarking on an uncertain campaign against the Byzantines.

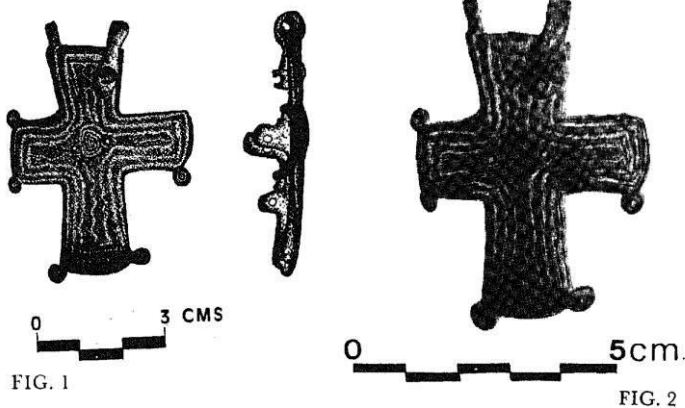
Logically, this dual policy of monarchical consolidation and restoration of the kingdom's borders was bound to clash with the interests of the Empire, which must have seen the movements of its rival as a threat. However, the political context was playing out in favour of Leovigild this time, who was able to develop his successful peninsular campaigns without the menace of the Empire. The reign of Justin II (565-578), indeed, is characterised as a tumultuous period in Byzantine history not only because of its initial confrontations with the Persians, but also because it coincides with the irruption of the Lombards in Italy and the deterioration of the situation in the Byzantine dominions in North Africa. The chronicle of John of Biclaro itself recounts that between 569-571 serious disturbances took place

¹³ Isid. Hisp. HG 47-48: '*decessit autem Athanagildus Toletu propria morte vacante regno mensibus V. Aera DCV, anno II imperii Iustini minoris post Athanagildum Livva Narbonae Gothis praeficitur regnans annis tribus. qui secundo anno postquam adeptus est principatum, Leovigildum fratrem "non solum successorem, sed et participem" regni sibi constituit Spaniaeque administrationi praefecit, ipse Galliae regno contentus. sicque regnum duos capuit, dum nulla potestas patiens consortis sit. huic autem unus tantum annus in ordine temporum reputatur, reliqui Leovigildo fratri adnumerantur*' (Mommsen 1894: 286 f).

¹⁴ Collins 2005: 49.

south by confining the Imperial troops to the coastline, beyond the coastal mountain ranges, which would serve as a natural border between the two kingdoms. Once this objective was achieved, Leovigild would proceed to eliminate potential internal enemies that could hinder a confrontation against the Empire. Once his power was firmly established, he would launch a final offensive against the Byzantines, expelling them from the peninsula.

As has been said, the detailed account of King Leovigild's campaigns sketched out by the chronicle of John of Biclaro allows for an approximate reconstruction of the events. The abbot of Biclaro points out among the most outstanding actions of the Visigothic king an expedition in 570-571 on the



Byzantine positions in Bastetania, the Malacitan area, and the Strait, where he was able to take the strong city of *Asidona* (Medina Sidonia) thanks to the betrayal of a certain Framidancus, probably a German serving the Byzantines.¹⁶ The Byzantine presence could be reflected in some of the archaeological finds in the area, such as the necropolis of Sanlucarejo (Cadiz) or El Tesorillo (Teba, Malaga). In any case, from the Strait area come some personal adornment elements of Byzantine type whose appearance, although sometimes explicable as part of the commercial activity that affected the entire Mediterranean area, it is also likely that on occasions they respond to an effective Byzantine presence in the area.¹⁷

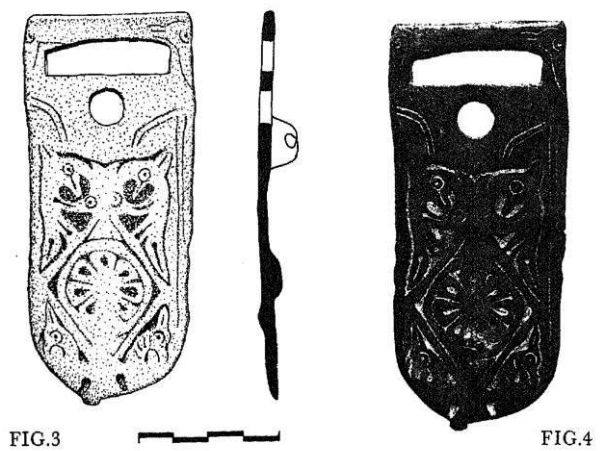


Fig. 6. Sanlucarejo (Cádiz). Belt buckles in Byzantine style. (Mora-Figueroa, 1981).

According to the *Biclarensis*, Leovigild initially launched his campaign against Malaga and Bastetania. The phrase that John of Biclaro uses to refer to the campaign on Bastetania ('he devastated the places of Bastetania') is not entirely precise and has given rise to some

controversy. Thus, contrary to what is defended by most researchers, L.A. García Moreno considers it unlikely that the king conquered cities in the Bastetania area, because the chronicler does not mention it explicitly (as he does with *Asidona* or *Malaca*). But, in our opinion, it seems implausible

¹⁶ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 570.2: 'Leovegildus rex loca Bastetaniae et Malacitanae urbis repulsis militibus vastat et victor solio reddit; 571. 3: Leovegildus rex Asidonam fortissimam civitatem proditione cuiusdam Framidanei nocte occupat et militibus interfectis memoratam urbem ad Gothorum revocat iura' (Mommsen 1894: 212). García Moreno 2008b: 46-52.

¹⁷ Pérez de Barradas 1933; Mora-Figueroa 1981; Serrano *et al.* 1985; Serrano and Alijo 1985; Presedo 1982; Ripoll 1988; Serrano *et al.* 1989.

that there could be effective dominion of the region without control of the urban nuclei, and the fact that he does not carry out any incursions in the area again seems to rule out that option. On the other hand, the interpretation that García Moreno makes of the limits of the Orospeña region – which include territory from *Oreto* (Granátula de Calatrava) to *Biatia* (Baeza) and *Bastia* (Baza) – to justify his thesis seems totally mistaken because it is excessive and because it would imply that the king would have carried out his campaign into the Bastetania area (570) while leaving behind him the majority of the urban nuclei, which would have been the object of another expedition less than seven years later.¹⁸

In our opinion, the most plausible interpretation is that King Leovigild managed to take control of the main cities of the territory located in the basin of Baza and up to the north of Malaga (*Acci*, *Bastia*, *Iliberris*, *Biatia*, *Mentesa*), forming a new province or military duchy that he would name ‘Bastetania’, and whose function would be to pressure the Byzantine possessions in the coastal area of Malaga. In this sense, we share the judgment made by Vizcaíno in relation to the border territories between the Byzantine and Visigothic dominions, well defining as it does the situation of the Orospeña region and its relationship with the birth of the Duchy of *Aurariola*:

In this illdefined borderland, we must consider the existence of a large empty space, a kind of “no man’s land” or “everyone’s land”, where cities like Cordoba would be located. With this, we would find ourselves, keeping our distance, with a model similar to the one recorded in Roman times with buffer states or client states. In our case, it seems that these territories could be encompassed by the name province, a term that John of Biclaro attributes to the Orospeña (Chron. 577, 2) with the sense of independent administrative capacity. Perhaps the same is true of the quote from the Cosmographer of Ravenna (Rav. Cosmogr. IV, 42) about the ‘province of Aurariola’ in a reference from the 7th century, even considering the possibility that both are one and the same territory, given the toponymic problems of the Cosmographer.¹⁹

Indeed, the choronyms we find in John of Biclaro, almost always in relation to military expeditions on rebellious peoples (Bastetania, Orospeña, Cantabria, etc.), seem to correspond to the different duchies created by the Visigothic state for military purposes and territorial control. This way of acting is appreciated in other actions always (or almost always: the exception being Celtiberia) in relation to border scenarios. Thus, through various sources, we have documented the establishment of a province of Cantabria/Autrigonia in relation to the Basque problem, or the creation of the province of *Asturia* in relation to the dominion of the northwest of the peninsula. Leovigild must have also created a military ‘march’ in the area of the Strait, as we will have occasion to comment on a few lines below.²⁰

¹⁸ Serrano *et al.* 1989: 47 n. 86 and 79 ff. The reference to *loca* should be understood as referring to urban centres that would not, however, reach the category of city, as was the case with *Malaca* or *Asidonia*. We will return to the subject of the limits of the Orospeña region later.

¹⁹ Vizcaíno 2007: 121.

²⁰ García Antón 1985. The exception seems to be the Celtiberian province of Carpetania, whose brief existence may perhaps be explained in part by the absence of that military purpose once the Orospeña was subdued, and in part also by the damage it caused to the primacy of Toledo (Barroso 2019).

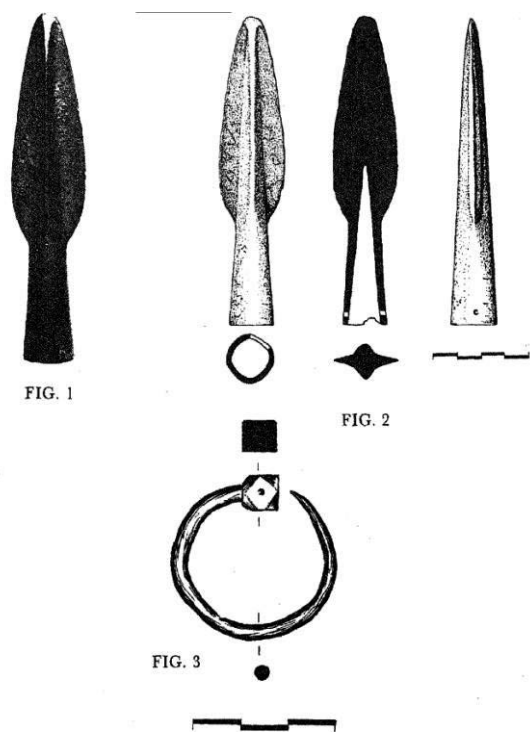


Fig. 7. Sanlucarejo (Cádiz). Spearheads and pendant. (Mora-Figueroa, 1981).

as the *dux* or military chief of the region. Although there are various interpretations concerning the location of the place of Nativola, it seems clear that the group was conceived as a kind of miniature episcopal complex to serve a public cult in some place of the diocese of *Acci*, surely in *Acci Vetus*, as we have defended elsewhere.²¹

It may be interesting to note that the chronology of the epigraph and the onomastics of the commissioner seem to indicate a kinship relationship of the noble Gundiliuva with the dynasty established by Liuva-Leovigild, as well as with the future king Gundemar (610-612). The suspicion of this relationship is accentuated by the fact that the inscription mentions that the *Nativola* complex was raised 'to the glory of the Holy Trinity', a circumstance that has already led A. Canto to suppose that the illustrious Goth would have been one of the seniors who abjured Arianism on the occasion of the Third Council of Toledo.²² If this kinship relationship with Reccared and Gundemar were true, it would shed some light on why Gundemar was chosen king after the death of Witteric, as we will see later. We must remember here that Gundemar's reign was characterized by a change with respect to the guidelines adopted by his predecessor Witteric, which represents a return to the policy

²¹ ICERV 303=CILA IV, 38= CIL II²/ 5, 652. On this section, see Fita 1892; García Moreno 1974a: 53, no. 70; Canto, 1995; Sánchez *et al.* 2015: 241-245. A. Canto (art. cit.) proposes *Iliberris*, but that is impossible since it is a question of two consecrations carried out by two bishops of another diocese, and even of another ecclesiastical province, and at two different times. For the same reason, even less probable is the hypothesis of G. Tejerizo (2012) that it was located at Nigüelas, south of Granada. Our proposal (Sánchez *et al.* 2015) is based on the following arguments: 1) the place had to belong to the diocese of *Acci*; 2) the toponym *Natiuola* actually refers to the name *natiuus*, as proposed by A. Canto; 3) the toponym would refer to *Acci Vetus*, i.e. the indigenous population of the territory of *Acci*; 4) the allusion to *tria tabernacula* and the invocations of the group suggest the imitation of an episcopal assemblage in a space of an urban, or similar, nature.

²² Canto 1995: 344 f.

Precisely in relation to the duchy or 'march' of Bastetania we must pay attention to an inscription relating to a double consecration of temples in the territory of *Acci* (Guadix) found in the Alhambra of Granada. The inscription mentions the consecration of three religious buildings that two bishops of *Acci*, Lilliolus (who signs the Acts of the Third Council of Toledo in 589) and Paulus, would have carried out in honour of St Stephen protomartyr, St John the Baptist and St Vincent martyr, in a place called *Nativola*. According to the dedications, it seems likely that the group was composed of two churches and a baptistery. The dates of the consecrations correspond in the first case to the 'day (*vacat*) year (*vacat*) of our Lord the glorious Witteric king, era DCX(L)V [AD 607]' and in the second to the day 'XI of the *kalends* of February [22nd January], year VIII of the glorious lord Reccared, king, era DCXXXII [AD 594]'. As can be deduced from the epigraph, the group was built at the expense of the Visigothic nobleman (*inluster*) Gu(n)diliuva, who is usually identified

established by Reccared after 589. Basically, this new political turn was nothing other than the return to the principles of collaboration with the Roman element sponsored by King Reccared. In any event, the presence of this noble Gundiliuva in *Acci* demonstrates that the control of the area by the Visigoths was already a consolidated fact in the reign of Reccared (586-601) and serves as proof that Leovigild's armies had effectively conquered the territory of Bastetania and its cities.

It is more difficult to assess the role of some archaeological sites in the Malaga-Granada area that have been related to the Byzantine occupation. Thus, some authors have wanted to see in some necropoleis of the area, such as the Granada sites at Cortijo del Chopo (Colomera) and Las Delicias (Ventas de Zafarraya), or the Malaga one of Villanueva del Rosario II (Antequera), clear testimony of the Byzantine presence in the area.²³ However, as we have seen in the case of the Strait, the value of these archaeological testimonies as proof of the Byzantine military presence is most relative, since not only is there nothing indicative of a military nature in the grave goods, but in most cases, they are necropoleis of earlier, lower Imperial chronology or slightly later, already corresponding to the Visigothic dominion. The diffusion of Byzantine fashion among the Spanish population just a decade later undoubtedly makes it difficult to read these archaeological testimonies.²⁴

The isolation in which the city of Malaga was submerged with respect to the rest of the Byzantine possessions – with which it could communicate only by sea after the Visigothic conquest of the interior territories – must have influenced the loss of military importance of Bastetania, which can explain its disappearance and full integration into the Baetica and Carthaginensis provinces already by the 7th century. Something similar would also happen with the Gaditanian duchy. It is important to underline this aspect again because, with the dominion of Bastetania, Leovigild had also achieved control of the important land route that, through the interior of Baetica, communicated the area of the Strait with the Byzantine dominions in the east. In practice, this meant the isolation of the western possessions with respect to what should be the capital of Byzantine *Spania*, since from now on communications with Cartagena could only be made by sea.

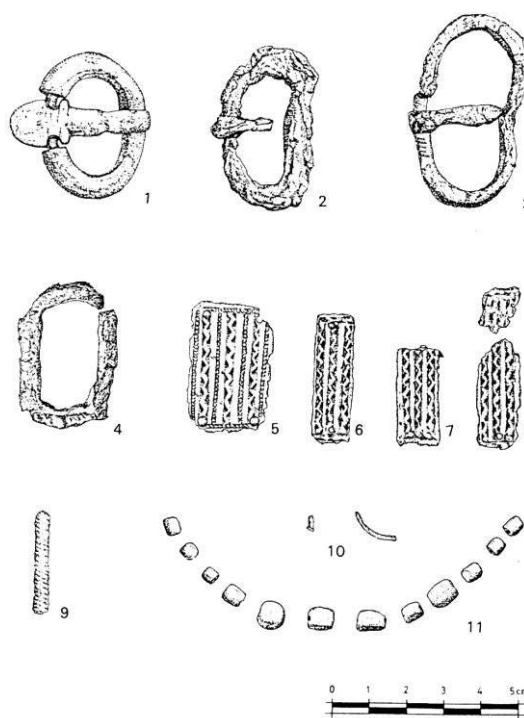


Fig. 8. Necropolis of Las Delicias (Ventas de Zafarraya, Málaga). Funerary trousseau with Byzantine-type elements (Ramos – Toro, 1990).

²³ Luque 1979; Ramos - Lizana - Toro 1990; Ramos - Toro - Pérez 1990; Pérez - Toro - Raya, 1985; Pérez *et al.* 1987.

²⁴ See an analysis of the problem in Vizcaíno 2007: 94-110.

On the other hand, Leovigild's victorious campaign over *Asidona* (Medina Sidonia) opened the door to future actions in the Strait. Just as we think for Bastetania, the territory of the Strait seems to have fallen under the authority of a *dux*, or at least that is what can be inferred from a funerary inscription found in Villamartín (Cádiz), dated 578, where a certain *Zerezindo dux* is mentioned, and who by the name seems to have been the Visigothic authority in charge of the Gaditanian district.²⁵

To complete his action on Baetic lands, the campaign against *Asidona* was also followed up with a new military expedition against Cordoba (572 CE), a city that, deprived of all Imperial aid, ended up surrendering to the Goths. The conquest of *Corduba* represented a notable success for Leovigild not only in military terms, but more importantly, in the economic field, and above all in personal and military prestige, as it allowed him to recover the royal Visigothic treasure that the Cordobans had snatched from Agila. The campaign was completed with the submission of the noblemen of the region who were entrenched in their rural possessions and had the military support of their *clienteles*.²⁶

It is possible that Leovigild's operations in the south were a problem inherited from the previous situation, which had been dragging on since the conquest of Seville a few years earlier by Athanagild and not as an initiative of the king himself. By the way he behaved on similar occasions (e.g. during the rebellion of Hermenegild) it is hard to think that the monarch would have dared to start an offensive against such a powerful enemy without first having the rear well secured. Possibly the threat of a Byzantine attack on Seville, with Cordoba as a support point, forced the Visigothic king to act quickly. In any case, there is little doubt that Leovigild initially planned his strategy with the purpose of stopping any possible attempt at Imperial expansion through Baetica province, especially through the valley of the Betis (Guadalquivir), towards *Hispalis*, to prevent the rebellious Cordobans from linking up with the Byzantine dominions. If this were not prevented, the Byzantines would have a clear path to march on Toledo.

Having achieved this first objective and stabilised the southern front, Leovigild began to consolidate his internal position by carrying out a series of military campaigns against the autonomous powers that lorded over the Iberian Peninsula. In 573 the king led an expedition in the northwest against the *Sappi* of Sabaria (Sanabria). A year later we see him subduing the Cantabrians in the north. This expedition was followed by a new military campaign in the Aregenses mountains (Sierra de la Cabrera, south of Bierzo) carried out in 575, with which Leovigild completed the siege against the Suevic kingdom. The following year the king led his army against the Suevi themselves, whom he managed to subdue. From this moment on, the Suevic monarch was linked to Leovigild through vassalage and his kingdom was politically subordinated to Toledo.²⁷

²⁵ ICERV 153 (=IHC 91). Vives 1969: 153; Vallejo Girvés 1993b: 155; 2012: 217. Unfortunately, the inscription is in an unknown location, although Rodrigo Caro was able to read it in the 17th century.

²⁶ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 572.4: '*Leovegildus rex Cordubam civitatem diu Gothis rebellem nocte occupat et caesis hostibus propriam facit multasque urbes et castella interfecta rusticorum multitudine in Gothorum dominium revocat*' (Mommsen 1894: 213). Collins (2005: 49) assumes that these are peasant rebellions, comparing this passage with that of the *rustici* of Orospeña, but this seems unlikely to us (see below). For a correct interpretation of this passage, see García Moreno 2008b: 50 f.

²⁷ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 569-576 (Mommsen 1894: 212-215). An analysis of the geography of the campaigns in the northwest can be found in Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 47-70.

With the kingdom finally pacified, the Visigothic king could finally turn his gaze towards the Byzantine danger without fear of being compromised in his rear. In 577, Leovigild carried out a new campaign in the lands of the Orospeđa, devastating their cities and castles. Our chronicler states that shortly after this expedition, the king concludes with the rebellion of some *rustici*, subjecting the entire province to the Goths. It is not clear what John of Biclaro refers to with this last paragraph. Some authors interpret it as referring to an area under Byzantine rule without clear leadership, while others prefer to see in them rebellious peasants in the style of the *bagaudas* of the Lower Empire.²⁸

However, although the quote of the *Biclarensis* presents slightly different nuances here and there, the parallel with what has already been seen in relation to the conquest of Cordoba in the year 572 suggests rather that it is a campaign against the rural nobility installed in their fortified villas. It is true that John of Biclaro does not allude here to any type of local leadership, in the style of the situation he describes for Cantabria, whose leaders are branded as *peruasores* ('usurpers'), or for the Aregenses mountains, where the term used here is *loci senior* (chief of a series of local communities of some importance but without reaching the category of city), but the similarity with what happened after the downfall of Cordoba and the identical terminology used in both cases suggest the same explanation of the phenomenon. It is to be assumed, moreover, that the territory of Orospeđa was in a state of political autonomy with respect to the Visigothic kingdom, a kind of limbo between the pressure exerted by the court of Toledo and the increasingly intense influence of the Byzantines, hence the mention made of the condition of 'rebels' that is made of these *rustici*. Obviously, they are rebels, as in the political theory of John of Biclaro there can be no room within the peninsula for political entities alien to Visigothic power.²⁹

A separate issue is the problem posed for the location of the Orospeđa region. Although we will later dedicate a specific section to this question, for now we will limit ourselves to saying that most authors usually fix the location of this province in the southeastern region of the peninsula, a territory that would cover its southeastern quadrant, in a line that would go from Valencia to the south of the territory of Valeria (Cuenca) and from there to *Begastri* (Cehegín, Murcia); i.e. the interior of the current province of Valencia (the regions of Utiel and Requena) and the lands located to the north of the Sierra de Segura in the current provinces of Albacete and Murcia.³⁰ Until the Visigothic conquest, the Orospeđa would have remained in a situation of *de facto* independence with respect to both Toledo and Cartagena, in a phase of border fluidity which, however, did not crystallise into a political entity. Obviously, the submission of the region by Leovigild posed a clear threat to the Byzantine possessions in the east. As happened with the conquest of Bastetania, after the subjugation of the Orospeđa, Byzantine rule was reduced to the Levantine coastal area, in a line that would go from *Malaca* to *Eliocroca* (Lorca), south of Sierra Nevada and the Sierra de los Filabres and east of Los

²⁸ Collins 2005: 51 f.

²⁹ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 577.2: '*Leovegildus Rex Orospeđam ingreditur et civitates atque castella eiusdem provinciae occupat et suam provinciam facit. et non multo post inibi rustici rebellantes a Gothis opprimuntur et post haec integra a Gothis possidetur Orospeđa*' (Mommsen 1894: 215). García Moreno (2008: 80 and n. 189) does some real juggling to reconcile this interpretation in social terms and the reading he has previously made of the events in Cordoba. But, using here Ockham's famous razor, the simplest explanation also seems to be the correct one: after the conquest of the *ciuitates atque castella*, the king proceeded to subdue the local powers of the area. Once this was done, the region would be 'reintegrated' into the Visigothic kingdom.

³⁰ Pace García Moreno 2008b: 47 n. 86 and 79 f. See what was said below in the section dedicated to this issue.

Vélez, and from Lorca to Elda and Denia. Apart from this, there would be the Balearic Islands, which constituted an important naval base for the Byzantine fleet anchored in Carthage.

At this time, the Visigothic presence in Valencia must have also been reinforced. Valencia was a city that posed a serious threat from the north to the Byzantine dominions and which from then on would become the main Visigothic military nucleus in the Levantine area. The revaluation of Valencia as the main political-military centre in the Visigothic strategy after the conquest of the Orospeđa is a decision that, as we will have the opportunity to see later, will have important consequences for the configuration of the future Duchy of Aurariola.³¹ This moment of strong Visigothic military presence in Valencia would correspond to the creation of an Arian bishopric in the city.³²

On the other hand, while militarily crushing the enemies of the kingdom, Leovigild also did not neglect the political and ideological aspect of the confrontation with the Empire. In fact, the second phase of his military strategy was accompanied by a series of political measures aimed at the assumption and public display of full sovereignty in what can be interpreted as a clear challenge to the emperor. Among the measures adopted by the Gothic king, Isidore of Seville points out the adoption by Leovigild of all kinds of *regalia*, i.e. minting of his own coins, royal vestments, revision of the law, and, as the culmination of all his political work, the construction in 578 of a city in Celtiberia, one he will give the eloquent name of Reccopolis, 'Royal City'. That year, incidentally, is the only one in his entire reign that the monarch enjoys peace.³³

The rebellion of Hermenegild and the abandonment of the military offensive

With the rear secured and the regions of Bastetania and Orospeđa conquered, the Gothic menace to the rest of the Byzantine possessions on the coast was more than evident. It is very possible that Leovigild's manoeuvre consisted of occupying the entire foothill region of the Orospeđan mountain range (by the Sierra de Segura from *Beatia*-Baeza to *Begastri*-Cehegín and by the Altos de Chinchilla to *Ilunum*-Minateda), subduing all urban centres of importance, as well as the strongholds (the *ciuitates atque castella* cited by John of Biclaro). The Gothic counter-offensive would only have stopped when faced with the heavily fortified cities, and with the rear covered and susceptible to new military contingents arriving thanks to the use of Byzantine naval force.³⁴ However, it is difficult to think that such a situation could last long – due to the notorious Gothic military superiority and the

³¹ Ribera and Rosselló 2006.

³² As is known, the figure of the Arian bishop is closely linked to the presence of military contingents and the court. See Beltrán Torreira 1989; Mathisen 1997.

³³ Isid. Hisp. HG 51: '*primusque inter suos regali veste opertus solio resedit: nam ante eum et habitus et consessus communis ut populo, ita et regibus erat. fiscum quoque primus iste locupletavit primusque aerarium de rapinis civium hostiumque manubiis auxit condidit etiam civitatem in Celtiberia, quam ex nomine filii sui Recopolim nominavit. in legibus quoque ea quae ab Eurico incondite constituta videbantur correxit, plurimas leges praetermissas adiciens, plerasque superfluas auferens*' (Mommsen 1894: 288). García Moreno 2008b: 81-95. An analysis of the different interpretations that have been defended regarding the founding of Reccopolis in Barroso 2019.

³⁴ We know of the ineffectiveness of the Germans against walled cities and hence the interest in razing them after their conquest (Genseric in Africa and Witiges in Italy), see Thompson 1985: 381 f.

difficulties the Empire was going through. As events were unfolding, the expulsion of the Byzantines was only a matter of time.

Nevertheless, the crisis originated by the conversion of Prince Hermenegild in 580 upset Leovigild's military plans. With the kingdom divided into two factions, one of these with the support of the Imperial court, it was evident that the ghosts of the past which had led to the Byzantine occupation in the times of Athanagild were being reproduced. Hermenegild initiated contacts with the Byzantine prefect of *Spania*.³⁵ At the same time, the supporters of the rebel prince carried out a diplomatic offensive to win the support of the court of Austrasia, governed by Brunhild and Childebert II, mother-in-law and brother-in-law of Hermenegild respectively, as well as that of Guntramn of Burgundy, a declared enemy of the Visigoths.³⁶

However, Leovigild reacted once again with the political cunning that characterised him. On the one hand, the king maintained the marriage commitment between his other son, Reccared, and the daughter of the king of Neustria,³⁷ while initiating an approach to the court of Austrasia.³⁸ Then the king made his master move: he bought Byzantine neutrality in exchange for 30,000 *solidi*, money that the Empire urgently needed to pay for the aid of the Franks of Neustria in their fight against the Lombards. It is also possible, although not certain, that Leovigild committed to return to the Byzantines some locations, such as *Asidona* and *Barbi*, whose bishops are not represented in the Third Council of Toledo (589 CE), and he must have committed to cease any new attack on Byzantine positions.³⁹ Lacking Imperial support, and militarily cornered by Leovigild, Prince Hermenegild was forced to take refuge in the castle of *Osset* (San Juan de Aznalfarache, next to Seville), where he was besieged by the king's troops. However, Hermenegild managed to escape to take refuge in a church in Cordoba, probably in the martyr-basilica of St Acisclus, a traditional bastion of the local nobility. Cornered there by his father, and after a brief parlay with his brother Reccared, the prince finally surrendered to the king.⁴⁰

³⁵ Greg. Tur. Hist. V 38, VI 18 (Krusch and Levison 1951: 243-245, 287 f). John of Biclaro also seems to allude to these contacts when he states that Hermenegild was outside Seville, occupied with political affairs, when his father besieged the city (*Hermenegildo ad rem publicam commigrante*): Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 584.3 (Mommsen 1894: 217), reproduced in n. 40. We also know that St Leander carried out a mediating mission with the Imperial court from the testimony of Gregory the Great (Greg. Moralia, praef. ML 75 509), a legation that must have taken place after 580. For an analysis of this episode, transcendental for the survival of the kingdom, see Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2021.

³⁶ Greg. Tur. Hist. V 40 (Krusch and Levison 1951: 247 f).

³⁷ Greg. Tur. Hist. V 43; VI 18, 33-34, 40 (Krusch and Levison 1951: 249-252; 287 ff; 304, 310-313).

³⁸ Greg. Tur. Hist. V 43.

³⁹ It is also possible that the towns had been previously ceded by Hermenegild as a price for Byzantine military support. In any case, the cities were lost as a consequence of the prince's usurpation. It is also known that Witteric (603-607) conquered *Sagontia* (Gigontia, near Medina Sidonia) and there is also evidence of the recovery of *Barbi* by Gundemar or Sisebut. García Moreno 2002: 119; Vallejo Girvés 2012: 253 ff.

⁴⁰ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 584.3: '*Leovegildus rex filio Hermenegildo ad rem publicam commigrante Hispalim pugnando ingreditur, civitates et castella, quas filius occupaverat, cepit et non multo post memoratum filium in Cordubensi urbe comprehendit et regno privatum in exilium Valentiam mittit*' (Mommsen 1894: 217); Greg. Tur. Hist. V 38: '*Cumque Leovichildus ex adverso veniret, relictus a solacio, cum viderit nihil se praevalere posse, ecclesiam, qui erat propinquam, expetiit, dicens: 'Non veniat super me pater meus; nefas est enim, aut patrem a filio aut filium a patre interfici'. Haec audiens Leovichildus, misit ad eum fratrem eius; qui, data sacramenta ne humiliaretur, ait: "Tu ipse accede et prosternere pedibus patris nostri, et omnia indulget tibi". At ille poposcit vocare patrem suum; quo in grediente, prostravit se ad pedes*

From here the story becomes somewhat confusing, undoubtedly because the Gothic chroniclers avoided providing details of events that could politically compromise King Reccared. But we can get a certain idea of how events must have unfolded from some isolated news transmitted by John of Biclaro, Gregory of Tours, and Pope Gregory I. Thus, John of Biclaro reports that, after the surrender of Hermenegild in Cordoba, the prince was exiled to Valencia⁴¹ and later transferred to a prison in Tarragona. There he would be executed by a certain Sisbert after a vain attempt to make him apostatise from the Catholic faith.⁴² The itinerary followed by Hermenegild in his captivity and the coincidence with the news of a Merovingian attack commanded by Childebert II, brother of Ingundis, on the Narbonensis, suggest that, once Cordoba was conquered, the Gothic army must have headed north of Baetica towards the Levant, and, once in Valencia, marched on *Tarraco* along the via Augusta. The passage of the Gothic army near the dominions of the Empire would also be a clear demonstration of strength to the Byzantines, whose neutrality was not impartial and, therefore, unreliable. Shortly before Hermenegild's surrender, his wife Ingundis and his son Athanagild would have followed the same route to flee to the court of Austrasia in search of Queen Brunhild's protection; they were captured on the way by Imperial troops and sent to Constantinople. Princess Ingundis died in 584 at some point along the way, while her son Athanagild, still a baby, was somehow conveyed to the court of the *basileus*. There he remained for a short while in the power of the emperor as a hostage, who used him as a diplomatic weapon against the court of Metz. However, it seems he did not survive his mother for long; he must have died *c.* 586.⁴³

illius. Ille vero adpraehensum osculavit eum et blandis sermonibus delinitum duxit ad castra, oblitusque sacramenti, innuit suis et adpraehensum spoliavit eum ab indumentis suis induitque illum veste vile; regressusque ad urbem Tolidum, ab latispueris eius, misit eum in exilio cum uno tantum puero! (Krusch and Levison 1951: 245); García Moreno 2008b: 160 f, n. 421; Vallejo Girvés 2012: 235-256. It was the second time that the king had conquered Cordoba (see above n. 7), hence he minted coins with the legend *Cordoba bis optinuit* (Miles 1952: 106, 190 f, n. 30).

⁴¹ From the reading of the passage by Gregory of Tours cited in the previous note, it seems that Hermenegild was first transferred to Toledo, where he would be subjected to public ridicule following the Imperial ceremonial for cases of usurpation (García Moreno, 2008b: 161 ff, n. 423). The assumption is entirely plausible, although it does not appear in the chronicle of John of Biclaro and in our opinion does not fit well with the fact of his certain captivity in Valencia. If Reccared had left from Toledo to face the Frankish attack on Narbonensis, the logical thing would have been to march directly towards Tarragona via Zaragoza, not towards Valencia. In addition, there is a powerful reason that suggests that Reccared would have left with the captive prince from Cordoba itself, i.e. the flight of Ingundis with his son Athanagild (see Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2021: 65-68). In any case, for this purpose it is irrelevant whether the Gothic army was divided in Toledo or, as we believe, in Cordoba itself.

⁴² Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 585.3: '*Hermenegildus in urbe Tarraconensi a Sisberto interficitur*' (Mommsen 1894: 217); Greg. I, Dial. III 31 (Waitz 1878: 535 f); Paul. Diac. HL 3 21: '*Interea Childepertus rex Francorum bellum adversum Hispanos gerens, eosdem acie superavit. Causa autem huius certaminis ista fuit. Childepertus rex Ingundem sororem suam Herminigildo, Levigildi Hispanorum regis filio, in coniugium tradiderat. Qui Herminigildus praedicatione Leandri episcopi Hispalensis atque ad hortatione suae coniugis ab Arriana heresi, qua pater suus languebat, ad catholicam fidem conversus fuerat. Quem pater inpius f in ipso sacramento paschali dies securi per cussum interemerat...*' (Bethmann and Waitz 1878: 103).

⁴³ Paul. Diac. HL 3 21: '*Ingundis vero post mariti et martyris funus de Hispanis fugiens, dum Gallias repedare vellet, in manus militum incidens, qui in limite adversum Hispanos Gotthos residebant, cum parvo filio capta atque in Siciliam ducta est ibique diem clausit extremum. Filius vero eius imperatori Mauricio Constantinopolim est transmissus*' (Bethmann and Waitz 1878: 103 f). For the vicissitudes of the Gothic princess and her son, see Vallejo Girvés 2012: 255-262. The death of the heir is established by an allusion of Venantius Fortunatus (Carm. X 8, 20-25) to Brunhild's relatives, in which only her son Childebert and his children appear. Furthermore, that same year Leovigild sent an embassy to the court of Metz to request peace. Greg. Tur. Hist. VIII 28: '*Igitur, ut saepius diximus, Ingundis a viro cum imperatoris exercitu derelicta, dum ad ipsum principem cum filio parvulo duceretur, in Africa. defuncta est et sepulta. Leuvichildus vero Herminichildum filium suum, quem antedicta mulier habuit, morti tradedit. Quibus de causis commotus Gunthchramnus rex, exercitum in Hispaniis distinat, scilicet ut prius Septimaniam, quae adhuc infra Galliarum terminum habetur, eius dominatione subderint et sic in antea proficiscerentur. Dum autem hic exercitus moveretur, indecolum cum nescio quibus hominibus rusticis est repertum.*

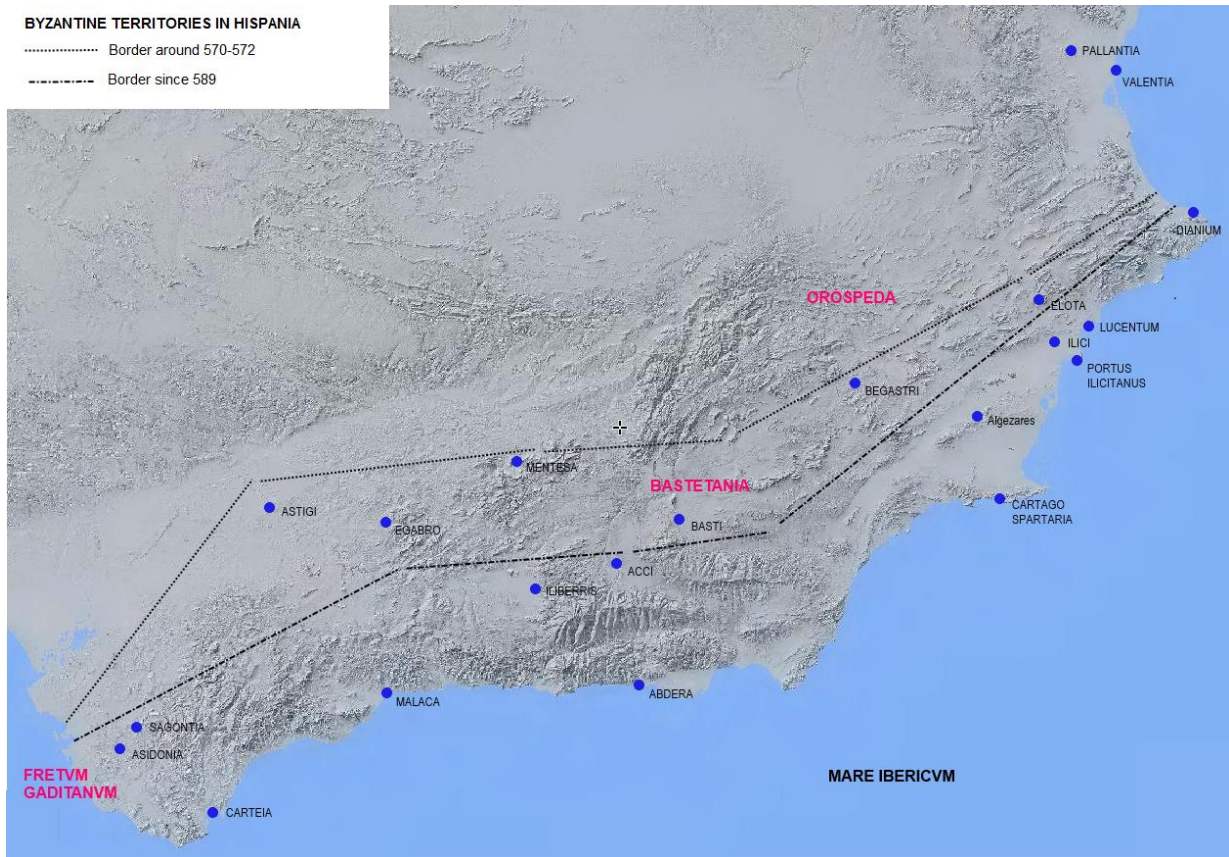


Fig. 9. Boundaries of the Byzantine possessions in the Iberian Peninsula.

In this context, and due to the evident interest it will have for our study, it is worth mentioning here a strange account transmitted by Gregory of Tours about an attack carried out by the troops of Leovigild on a monastery dedicated to St Martin.⁴⁴ We say strange because there is no record of a similar attack on Catholic institutions throughout the war. Not even when Hermenegild took refuge in a church in Cordoba did the king dare to cross the threshold and agreed to negotiate with his son. The attack on a monastery is undoubtedly an exceptional action that must have been motivated by powerful reasons related to Hermenegild's rebellion, and more specifically with the king's attempt to capture his daughter-in-law and grandson, Athanagild.⁴⁵ Gregory of Tours locates the *cenobium* of St Martin on the via Augusta 'between Saguntum and Cartago Spartaria'. Based on these data, M. Vallejo Givés proposed to locate this monastery in the lands of Denia, specifically on the island of Portitxol,

Quem et Gunthchramno rege legendum miserunt, hoc modo, quasi Leuvichildus ad Fredegundem scriberet, ut quocumque ingenio exercitum illuc ire prohiberet...' (Krusch and Levison 1951: 390 f).

⁴⁴ Greg. Tur. De gloria confes. 12: '*In Hispaniis autem nuper factum cognovi. Cum Leuviildus rex contra filium suum ambularet, atque exercitus eius, ut adsolet, graviter loca sancta concuteret, monasterium erat Sancti Martini inter Sagonthum atque Cartaginem Spartariam. Audientes autem monachi, quod hic exercitus ad locum illum deberet accedere, fugam ineunt et se, relicto abbate sene, in insulam maris abscondunt. Advenientibus autem Gothis ac diripientibus res monasterii, quae sine custode remanserant, abbatem senio incurvatum, sed sanctitate erectum offendunt. Extractoque unus gladio, quasi amputaturus cervicem eius, resupinus ruit ac spiritum exalavit. Reliqui vero haec videntes, timore perterriti fugierunt. Quod cum regi nuntiatum fuisset, cum testificatione praecepit omnia quae ablata fuerant monasterio restaurari*' (Krusch 1885: 305).

⁴⁵ Vallejo Givés 2012: 255 f. An attempt has been made to identify this monastery with a foundation by Bishop Justinian in honour of St Vincent the Martyr: Juan and Rosselló 2003: 175-177. For more information see infra.

on the cape of San Martín, although later she retracted this first opinion and preferred to place it, albeit with certain reservations, on the Island of Cullera.⁴⁶

However, the situation of Elda (on the via Augusta, between Sagunto and Cartagena), with its military importance in Visigothic times, and the strategic situation of the archaeological site of El Monastil on the line of communication between the middle and upper Vinalopó Valley, persuade us that the monastery referred to by Gregory of Tours must very likely have been located in this place. The flight of the monks to the insular monastery would then be understandable, taking into account the proximity and good communication of Elda with the *Portus Illicitanus* (Santa Pola) and with the Alicante coast in general. From our point of view, the fact that the monks decided to escape to an island would in itself invalidate the theory that the monastery in question can be identified with that of Punta de l'Illa de Cullera or that on San Martín's Cape. Either of these two, moreover, could perfectly well be where the monks later found refuge after the aforementioned flight, although we are inclined to locate this second monastery on the nearby island of Tabarca, much closer, and well communicated with the *Portus Illicitanus* and the region of Vinalopó, or even with any other point on the ancient lagoon of Elche – which in ancient times had been isolated by the sea. It must be borne in mind that in antiquity the lagoon of Elche was significantly larger than that currently occupied by the salt flats of Santa Pola.⁴⁷ It is true that, to date, it has not been possible to determine in the area any remains of structures that could suggest the existence of a possible monastery, although it has been possible to document here and there some levels of occupation corresponding to the 4th and 5th centuries, and it is not impossible that future interventions may provide some surprises;⁴⁸ after all, it is an area with a strong monastic presence.⁴⁹ Considering that all the factors mentioned, as well as the combination of isolation and proximity to the coast and the proliferation of monastic foundations throughout the Levantine area, the coast of Santa Pola seems to us an appropriate environment and a preferable option for the installation and identification of that second monastery where the monks of St Martin found refuge.⁵⁰

Whatever the final outcome, when interpreting the text of Gregory of Tours, especially in relation to the military importance of the place where the monastery of St Martin was located, it is worth remembering that the action narrated is framed within the context of the flight of Ingundis and Athanagild to the Merovingian court. The referred monastery must therefore have had a strategic and military value important enough to justify such an extraordinary action – corroborated by the testimony of Gregory of Tours – as that carried out by the soldiers of Leovigild. This is precisely in agreement with the archaeological discoveries made at El Monastil of Elda. The site is also located on the border between Visigothic and Byzantine domains (in principle, and until the conquest of the

⁴⁶ Vallejo Girvés 2012: 255 f.

⁴⁷ The reduction in size of the former Elche lagoon, and the consequent variations of the coastline, are due to the continuous alluvial flows of the Vinalopó River (see Fumanal and Ferrer 1998).

⁴⁸ Molina Gómez 2012; Molina and Ortega 2012; Rosser 2014: 61.

⁴⁹ Vallejo 2012: 255, n. 26.

⁵⁰ Since the works of E. Llobregat (1977), the monastery of Cullera has been identified with the *cenobium* for nuns founded by Bishop Justinian of Valencia in honour of St Vincent the Martyr (CIL II2/14, 89). See Rosselló 1995; 2005: 282-285. The islands near the coast seem to provide an ideal area for a life of monastic retreat, affording both isolation and security to the community. As will be remembered, St Fructuosus is also credited with the founding of two monasteries on two islands (Galicia and Cadiz) (Vita Fruct. 6 and 14).

enclave by Leovigild, within the latter), which would explain the fall of the Frankish princess and her son into the hands of the Greeks.⁵¹ As we will have the opportunity to see, the identification of this monastery with the site of El Monastil will have important consequences for the interpretation of the history of the southeastern peninsula.

The foundation of the province of Orospeđa

King Leovigild's campaigns in the south and east of the peninsula must have been the origin of three new military demarcations, at the head of which a *dux* must have appeared: the duchies of the *Fretum Gaditanum* and Bastetania and the 'march' of Orospeđa. We have briefly dealt with the first two when talking about Leovigild's conquests of 570-571. The latter one is of most interest to our topic, as it constitutes the sure precedent of the future *qūra* of Tudmīr. It is therefore advisable, first of all, to try to define the limits of this province to establish the geographical framework in which the events related to the *dux* Theudimer will take place.⁵²

L. García Moreno, when analysing the classical references to this region, assumed that Orospeđa should be identified with the territory inhabited by the pre-Roman Oretani. The author derived the choronym from the name of the tribe that inhabited this region (lat. *oretani*; gr. Ὠρητανοί) and the Greek term πεδίον ('plain'). According to this author, Strabo would have confused the ethnonym '*oretani*' with the Greek word ὄρος ('mountain range'), a confusion that would have led the geographer of Amasia to extend the territory of Orospeđa to the entire system of Betic Mountain ranges. This would result in locating the province of Orospeđa in a wider area than the one proposed here (including Bastetania and the current region of La Mancha) and which, always according to García Moreno, would have to be located around *Oretum* (Granátula de Calatrava, Ciudad Real), a city that would have given its name to the region, and *Mentesa* (La Guardia, Jaén). This would explain why its episcopal seats reappear in the Third Council of Toledo with bishops consecrated c. 577-578, a date that would coincide with Leovigild's campaign in that area.⁵³

It is not impossible that there may have been confusion between choronym and oronym in our source, but we believe it is highly unlikely. It is also true that classical denominations do not always correspond to what they designate in the Visigothic era. The displacement of a classical choronym is not something exceptional in this period, especially when it is related to the creation of new administrative demarcations that could later reach (or not) the rank of duchy. Rather, the displacement of choronyms is a fairly frequent phenomenon in the transition from the ancient world to the Middle Ages. In fact, we have two well-known examples that particularly affected the geography of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo: the duchy of Cantabria in relation to the northern border (approximately the territories of present-day Álava-La Rioja), or, without going so far, that of the same province Carpetania and Celtiberia, a province that did not have a greater historical

⁵¹ Poveda 2003; 2013; Vizcaíno 2007: 246-250. In a way, this episode is reminiscent of the desecration of the church and tomb of St Acisclus by Agila's troops. In both cases it seems obvious that these were exceptional actions in which the military factor was relevant. The significant factor with Agila is that his troops desecrated the sanctuary – using it as a stable.

⁵² Regarding the situation and limits of the Orospeđa, we refer to the works of González Blanco (1996: 109-120) and Salvador Oyonate (2011: esp. 77-81).

⁵³ García Moreno 2008b: 78-80.

significance because its importance decreased with the resolution of the Byzantine conflict and the elevation of Toledo as the undisputed capital of the province Carthaginensis. In this last case we have a province that would encompass two different areas named with choronyms of classical resonances: Celtiberia, which would include the three bishoprics of current province of Cuenca, with its seat in *Reccopolis/Arcavica* (Celtiberia), and Carpetania, which would occupy roughly the *territorium* dependent on Toledo, including all the Mancha territory.⁵⁴

In our opinion, and this is the premise on which we will base our interpretation of the facts, as in the case of the province Celtiberia in relation to Reccopolis, John of Biclaro seems to use the terms *loca Bastitaniae* and *Orospeda prouincia* to refer to two very precise regions that in antiquity were part of the same ethnic reality, but that now -that is, when John writes his chronicle -, for military reasons, had been segregated. For this reason, to move forward with a surer step, it is advisable to first analyse what the classical literary sources have handed down to us about the province of Orospeda and the Oretani.

As can be deduced from the testimony of the classical authors, the Oretani were a pre-Roman people who inhabited most of the current province of Ciudad Real, the north of Jaén, and the western part of Albacete. Actually, the classical authors refer to two different peoples: one of Iberian lineage, who inhabited the southeastern area, and another of Celtic lineage, who did the same in the northern and western part. The former had their centre in *Mentesa Oretana* (Villanueva de la Fuente, prov. Ciudad Real) and to these Appian (Iber. 6 65) seems to refer. Pliny quotes this *Mentesa Oretana* on two occasions: once to differentiate it from the homonymous city of the Bastuli: *Mentesani qui et Oretani, Mentesani qui et Bastuli* (NH 3 25), and a second time to deny that the source of the Betis River was in its vicinity, as many authors of his time believed (and it is true). The other Oretani were, as has been said, a Celtic tribe; Pliny writes that they were called Germans (*qui et germani cognominantur*) to differentiate them from the former (NH 3 25). These Germans Oretani inhabited the northern and western parts of the Oretania and are not of major interest to our study. According to Ptolemy (2 6 58) the heartlands of the latter would be 'Ωρητον Γερμανων or *Oretum Germanorum* (Granátula de Calatrava, prov. Ciudad Real).⁵⁵

Our attention, therefore, must focus on the Iberian Oretani, who were the inhabitants of the region conquered by Leovigild. As for the location of this region, Strabo (3 4 10 and 12) explicitly states that the Orospeda constituted the lower section of the Iberian mountain range, a chain the geographer calls *Idoubeda oros*. This implies, contrary to García Moreno's assumption, that the region of the Orospeda was located south of Celtiberia. According to the Greek geographer, the boundaries of the Orospeda would extend in his time from the field of Cartagena to *Karchedon* (Mastia-Mentesa Bastula) and *Malaka* (Malaga). In this last part, as Strabo himself informs us, the region became more

⁵⁴ Barroso 2019. Although of a somewhat later chronology, the choronyms Asturias de Santillana/Cantabria and Bardulia/Castilla of the Asturian chronicles, Autrigonia/Cantabria of Ravennate, and *Gallia Comata* of the epistolary of St Eulogius could also be cited. The same can be said of the ethnonyms, as is well-known in the case of the Vacceos/Basques (Collins 1988) or in the gloss of the priest Endura (954) to Etym. 17.7.10, where the inhabitants of Aragon are designated as *Celtiberi* and in which some strange *uandali et goti et suebi* are also mentioned, which, due to the linguistic context, can only refer to the Castilians (Menéndez Pidal 1979: 26 ff.). This is not the time to dwell further on the subject.

⁵⁵ NH 3 9: '*Baetis, in Tarraconensis provinciae non, ut aliqui dixere, Mentesa oppido, sed Tugiensi exoriens saltu (iuxta quem Tader fluvius, qui Carthaginensem agrum rigat)*. 3 25: *Mentesani qui et Oretani, Mentesani qui et Bastuli, Oretani qui et Germani cognominantur*' (Rackham 1961: 10 f, 22 f).

forested and rugged, in contrast to the vegetation-free character of the area that faced Cartagena, the so-called ‘Campo Espartario’ (‘Field of Esparto’).⁵⁶ This description allows us to set the boundaries of the Orospeđa with some accuracy.

Indeed, based on Strabo’s testimony, there is today a generalised consensus to locate the region of the Orospeđa in the southeastern quadrant of the peninsula, around the Sierra de Alcaraz and Segura, although we prefer to include the latter, at least for the Visigothic period, within the scope of Bastetania and, therefore, in relation to *Beatia* (Baeza). Thus, the Visigothic Orospeđa would have to have been located only in the wide space north of the foothills of the Sierra de Alcaraz, i.e. the space corresponding to the high plain of the Altos de Chinchilla, with the Segura River and the city of *Begastri* (Cehegín) as southern boundaries. It would, therefore, be an area that would occupy approximately the space located to the east of the line drawn by *Saltigi* (Chinchilla de Montearagón) and *Begastri* (Cehegín). *Saltigi*, and more specifically the geographical point of Higuera, seems to be one of the boundaries that the so-called *Hitaci3n de Wamba* grants to the diocese of Valeria (Cuenca).⁵⁷ In addition, and taking into account what has been said in the preceding lines, we believe that the etymology of the Greek term used by Strabo (*Orospeđion*) would not refer to the already mentioned *Oretani*, as García Moreno defends with such erudition, but that, in parallel with the *Idoubeda oros*, it would be a different oronym, with no link to the Oretani, which could be translated simply as ‘mountainous plain’ or ‘high plain’; an oronym that would refer to the wide plateau between the Sierra de Segura and the course of the Jucar River, known as the ‘Altos de Chinchilla’ or ‘Mancha de Montearag3n’, whose location is, indeed, south of ancient Celtiberia. This plateau was, in fact, a considerable, central and characteristic part (especially on account of the absence of vegetation, a feature already highlighted by Strabo) of the ancient Visigothic province.⁵⁸

On the other hand, from the testimony of John of Biclaro it can be deduced that in the Visigothic period the southern part of this space had been divided off from ancient Orospeđa to constitute a new duchy called Bastetania. This new region would correspond to the mountainous part of the Orospeđa cited by Strabo and would have been detached as an independent military march (duchy) precisely in relation to the control of Malaga and its *territorium*, similar to how the Orospeđa had been

⁵⁶ Geogr. 3 4 10: ‘ἔτερον δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ μέσου διήκον ἐπὶ τὴν δύσιν, ἐκκλίνον δὲ πρὸς νότον καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ στηλῶν παραλίαν: ὁ κατ’ ἀρχὰς μὲν γεώλοφόν ἐστι καὶ ψιλόν, διέξεισι δὲ τὸ καλούμενον Σπαρτάριον πεδίον, εἶτα συνάπτει τῷ δρυμῷ τῷ ὑπερκειμένῳ τῆς τε Καρχηδονίας καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν Μάλακκαν τόπων: καλεῖται δὲ Ὀροσπέδα.’ (‘The second rises from the middle [of the Idoubeda] and runs westwards, however inclining towards the south and the coast that runs towards the Pillars [of Hercules]. At first it consists of bare hills, but after crossing the Spartan plain, it becomes the forest that extends from Carthage to the regions around Malacca. It is called Orospeđa.’); 3 4 12: ‘ὁ δὲ Βαίτις ἐκ τῆς Ὀροσπέδας τὰς ἀρχὰς ἔχων διὰ τῆς Ὀρητανίας εἰς τὴν Βαιτικὴν ῥεῖ.’ (‘Betis rises in Orospeđa, and after crossing Oretania, it enters Betica’). (Strabo, Meineke 1877).

⁵⁷ Barroso 2019.

⁵⁸ πεδίον, τό, (πέδον). A plain, in Hom. mostly sg., Il.5.222, al.: in pl., 12.283, Hes.Op.388, etc.; ἐν πεδίῳ on a fertile plain, opp. ἐν πέτραις, Men.719. b metaph., of the sea, δελφίνοφόρον πεδίον πόντου A.Fr. 150; πόντου π. Αἰγαῖον Ion Trag.60; π. πλόιμα Tim.Pers.89. 2. freq. with gen. or adj. of particular plains (mostly in sg.), πεδίον Αἰσώπου A.Ag.297; τὸ Τροίας π. S.Ph.1435 (but τὰ Τ. π. 1376); τὸ Θήβης π. Id.OC1312; Καῦστρίων π. Ar.Ach.68; τὸ Κυρραῖον π. Aeschin.3.107; τὰ Θετταλικά π. Pl.Pl.264c; τὸ Ἄρειον π., = Lat. Campus Martius, D.H.7.59. b esp. the plain of Attica, IG12.842C7, Hdt. 1.59, Th. 2.55, Is.5.22. And see: <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.html#%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BF%CE%BD>. We also have similar examples, e.g. the Halesian Plain in the Troad (Ἀλήσιον πεδίον) (Strab. 13 1 48) and the Aleia Plain in southeastern Cilicia (Ἀλήϊον πεδίον) (Il.6.201, Hdt.6.95, .953a24, Str.14.5.17, Arr.An.2.5.8, St.Byz.s.uu Ἀλαί and Ταρσός). Strabo himself mentions two similar toponyms in Hispania: *Ioukarios Pedion* (Ἰουγκαρίου πεδίου) and *Spartários Pedion* (Σπαρταρίῳ ὡς ἂν Σχοινοῦντι κα λουμένῳ πεδίῳ) (3 4 9).

configured as a duchy aimed at threatening the Byzantine domains of the eastern area, that is to say with the aim of facilitating the conquest of the cities of *Ilici* (Elche) and *Carthago Spartaria* (Cartagena).

If we accept this premise, in Visigothic times the Orospeđa would roughly occupy the space east of the current province of Albacete and a large part of that of Murcia. The Orospeđa would therefore correspond to the territory between the Jucar River, to the north, and the Segura and Mundo rivers, as the southern limit; that is, the regions of the Altos de Chinchilla and the Campos de Hellín, which indeed constitute a high plain. To the north of it would be the dioceses of Valencia and Valeria; to the east the Byzantine possessions of *Ilici* and *Carthago Spartaria*, with their respective territories, and to the south the Bastetania, with its centre in the Hoya de Guadix. The western limit would be more diffuse and would have to be fixed on the border with the territories of *Oretum* (Granátula de Calatrava), Toledo, and *Segobriga* (Saelices, Cuenca), i.e. the Sierra de Alcaraz. The new duchy, therefore, would comprise all the territory between *Valentia*, *Ilunum*, and *Begastri*, and would aim to threaten Cartagena through the valley of Ricote, while watching for any possible movement that could occur from *Ilici*.⁵⁹ It is no coincidence that this territory partially coincides with the *qūra* of Tudmīr of the Arab period. Nor is it a coincidence that it appears linked, in its early period, to the city of Valentia and, more specifically, with what appears to have been its main military and power nucleus – Pla de Nadal.⁶⁰

In relation to the future administration of the territory of the new province of Orospeđa, already instituted as a military frontier march of the Visigoths with the coastal Levantine part of Byzantine *Spania*, the cities of *Begastri* (Cehegín, Murcia), and *Ilunum* (Tolmo de Minateda, Albacete) must have been promoted. The former by being elevated again to an episcopal chair in opposition to occupied *Carthago Spartaria*, and the latter through an ambitious building programme that will renew its urban structure to adapt it to its new political and military purposes.

For its part, the Bastetania of the Visigothic sources would correspond to the extensive mountainous area that surrounds *Basti* (Baza, Granada), including, of course, the region of the Hoya de Baza as a centre, to the south of the Sierra de Segura and to the north of the Sierras de Baza and the Filabres; i.e. the lands corresponding to the Granada high plateau with its important centres: *Basti* (Baza) itself, *Acci* (Guadix), *Iliberris* (Granada), and *Mentesa Bastula* (La Guardia). The conquest of Bastetania thus implied a double threat to the Byzantine domains of the south and east: directly it was a clear menace to the territory of Malaga (campaign of 570), while indirectly it threatened Cartagena through the communication of *Basti* (Baza) with *Begastri* (Cehegín), a city on the southeastern limit of the Orospeđa.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 577.2: '*Liuvigildus Rex Orospeđam ingreditur et civitates atque castella eiusdem provinciae occupat et suam provinciam facit. et non multo post inibi rustici rebellantes a Gothis opprimuntur et post haec integra a Gothis possidetur Orospeđa*' (Campos 1960: 87). Unless it is a figure of speech, something that seems unlikely to us, the *ciuitates* referred to by John of Biclario can only refer to *Begastri* and *Ilunum*. Contra García Moreno 2008b: 79.

⁶⁰ Calatayud 2015.

⁶¹ For the campaign of 570: Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 570.2: '*Liuvigildus Rex loca Bastetaniae et Malacitanae urbis repulsis militibus vastat...*' (Campos 1960: 80). On this matter we agree with García Moreno (2008a: 79).

The reign of Reccared

The diplomatic game: papal mediation and the clan of the Servitanus

The death of Leovigild in 587 temporarily put an end to the Gothic expansionist policy and opened the way for the Toledan court to begin a new political stage. As has been indicated above, it is true that even before the death of the king, the paralysis of the Gothic military offensive on the Byzantine territories had been noted, but it is also true that this pause in military activity was due to a circumstantial factor, such as the rebellion of Hermenegild and the rarefied situation in Gallaecia, rather than to Leovigild's true intentions. Strictly speaking, therefore, we should speak of an armistice rather than a true peace treaty between the Visigoths and Greeks. In fact, it is difficult to think that Leovigild would not have tried to renew his previous military policy just at the moment when circumstances were favourable for the Goths if we take into account his advances in that direction. In any event, the death of Leovigild occurred when the truce with the Byzantines was still in force and this was the scenario his successor to the throne inherited. Thus, it is in this context that we must explore the first measures taken by Reccared *vis-à-vis* the Byzantine problem.

In an initial phase of his reign, Reccared resumed the issue, prioritising diplomatic contacts over military confrontation. Certainly, other practical considerations must have also prevailed apart from the mentioned continuity with the policy developed by the Visigothic court in the final years of Leovigild's reign. After all, Reccared's ascent to the throne had not been as peaceful or as calm as the literary sources suggest, hence, before embarking on a military campaign against a powerful enemy, the outcome of which could be more than uncertain, the monarch preferred to consolidate his power within the kingdom without opening a new theatre of war.⁶²

As for the Byzantine occupation, King Reccared tried to involve not only the Holy See in his diplomatic policy, but also certain bishops of some seats occupied by the Byzantines who looked favourably on the unifying project that was being forged in Toledo following the conversion of the Goths to Catholicism at the Third Council of Toledo. This was undoubtedly the case of Bishop Licinianus of Cartagena and, very probably – given the reprisals the Byzantine authorities would exact – of two other Baetican prelates: Januarius of Malaga and Stephen, of unknown seat.⁶³ The diplomatic efforts would have been carried out by Eutropius, former abbot of the Servitanus monastery and one of the most influential characters in Reccared's court. Shortly after the Third Council of Toledo, Abbot Eutropius was appointed bishop of the see of Valencia. From here Eutropius began an extensive epistolary relationship with Bishop Licinianus of Cartagena. It is very possible that the two prelates knew each other previously, as the highly plausible possibility has been

⁶² Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015.

⁶³ Vallejo Girvés 2012: 297-299.

considered that both were of North African origin and had previously professed in the Servitanus monastery.⁶⁴

Whatever the circumstances, Eutropius's relationship with Licinianus, and the suspicious pro-Visigothic attitude of other Byzantine prelates, particularly Stephen and Januarius, after the conversion of 589, must have been interpreted in the court of the *basileus* as an open stance in favour of the Visigothic polity, which logically must have been viewed with some concern.⁶⁵ In this rarefied setting, the recall of Licinianus to Constantinople, where he had had to answer to the Imperial authorities (*occubuit Constantinopoli, ueneno, ut ferunt, extinctus ab aemulis*), and his subsequent death (according to popular rumour by poisoning), would take on its full meaning in terms of the support he would have voiced for Reccared's plans to gather the bishops of *Spania* collaboratively in discussion of the *pacta* signed by Athanagild and Justinian.⁶⁶ On the other hand, and as has already been said, the Byzantine reaction cannot be detached either from the drastic disciplinary measures adopted by the Imperial authorities with respect to Januarius of Malaca and Stephen, which in



Fig. 10. Solidus of the Emperor Maurice (582-602).

practice led to the sudden deposition of the disobedient bishops, ordered by the *magister militum Spaniae* Comentiolus, as well as with the crossing of actions between the Toledan court and the Holy See, as recorded in the epistolary relationship maintained between Reccared and Pope Gregory.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Bishko 1949-1951: 499 ff; Barroso and Morín 1996a; Vallejo Girvés 2012: 245. It is possible, although the assumption is based on an erroneous location of the monastery, which Bishko supposed was near Játiva (i.e. within Byzantine territory), but which undoubtedly must be located in Arcavica (Cañaveruelas, Cuenca), near Reccopolis.

⁶⁵ For this subject, see Barroso and Morín 1996a; Vallejo Girvés 2012: 245 ff, 299-304.

⁶⁶ Bishko 1949-51: 500. See also Pérez de Urbel 1934: 207; Codoñer 1972: 52 ff.; Beltrán Torreira 1991: 500 ff.; especially Vallejo Girvés 1991; 2012: 299-304. For his part, Madoz (1948: 24) assumes that Licinianus' mission in Constantinople was nothing less than to prevent the abuses of the patrician Comentiolus against the Spanish bishops. But, even in such a case, that would only reflect a partial aspect of the crisis. The underlying reason seems to be the one indicated in these lines and defended by the majority of researchers.

⁶⁷ Greg. I Epist. XIII 47 and 49-50 (Hartmann 1899: 410-418). Vallejo Girvés 2012: 297-299, 359. On the ecclesiastical problem raised by the dismissal of both prelates, see Orlandis 1984a: 96-103; Presedo 2003: 59-61.

The recourse to diplomacy will last until after 595, when Reccared understood that his efforts to resolve the conflict with the Byzantines through peaceful means were doomed to failure. From that moment on, the king decided to adopt a new strategy that involved a militarisation of the area and a political-administrative reorganisation of the territory of the Orospeña. In this sense, there is the strengthening of certain enclaves of strategic and military importance, specifically *Valentia* (Valencia) and *Ilunum* (Minateda), to the north and west of the Imperial positions, while, in parallel, the creation of two new bishoprics (*Elota* and *Begastri*) is decided in opposition to the Byzantines of *Ilici* and Cartagena in order to organise a parallel religious and administrative structure.

The failure of Reccared's pacifying policy. Minateda and the problem of locating the Elotana episcopal seat

Logically, the Byzantine occupation of the Levantine coastal area had decisive weight in the historical development of the territories of the two newly created provinces: Celtiberia and Orospeña.⁶⁸ The papal refusal to mediate in the conflict between Toledo and the Byzantines, and the consequent failure of the conciliatory policy undertaken by King Reccared after the Third Council of Toledo, prompted a drastic change in the Visigothic political-military strategy. This change was also driven by the increasingly aggressive policy developed by Emperor Maurice and the sending to the peninsula of the *patricius* Comentiolus to put Spanish affairs in order. Clearly, following the conversion of Reccared, the emperor must have understood the danger posed by the evident sympathy the consolidation of the Visigothic kingdom aroused in an increasingly important sector of the local population.⁶⁹ From this moment, and given the failure to reach an amicable agreement, the Visigothic court had no other option but to resort to arms if it wanted to end once and for all the conflict that had provoked the Imperial occupation. It is within this context of preparation for an ambitious military campaign against the Byzantine positions that we must look to frame the revitalisation of the old urban nucleus of *Ilunum* (El Tolmo de Minateda, Albacete) and the reorganisation of the province of the Orospeña.

Thus, indeed, during the first half of the 7th century, *Ilunum* became the most important population centre in the entire region of the Orospeña, being, in fact, the only site that includes characteristics that can be considered fully urban. Its influence is even felt in numerous archaeological sites in the south of the province of Cuenca that are theoretically assigned to the diocese of Valeria. Also, the archaeological interventions at El Tolmo de Minateda account for the importance of this place in the transition between the 6th-7th centuries, having documented there evidence of continuous settlement until the Emirate period.⁷⁰

As we have said, the findings of material culture are analogous to those that can be seen at other sites in the southeast of the province of Cuenca, proof of the impact *Ilunum* had on its immediate territory. On the other hand, the city is located in an area open to cultural influences coming from the Byzantine and Mediterranean worlds in general, strategically situated on the road from the *regia sedes* to *Carthago Spartaria*, near *Saltigi* (Chinchilla de Monte-Aragón), at the point where the road

⁶⁸ We reproduce here part of our researches: Barroso 2019.

⁶⁹ Vizcaíno 2007: 740.

⁷⁰ Cf. Gamo 2006; Barroso 2019. For the archaeological site of Minateda, see the bibliography cited in the following footnote.

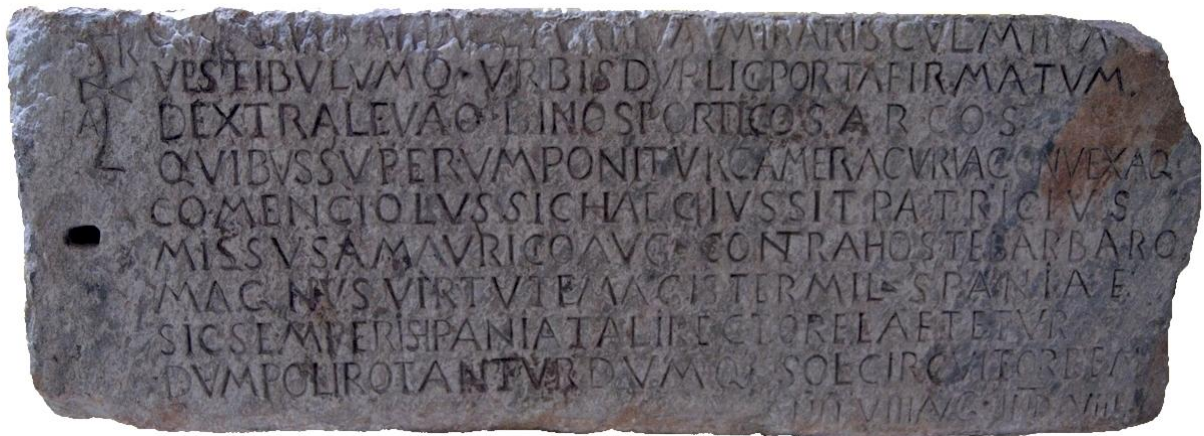


Fig. 11. Museo de Cartagena. Inscription of Patricius Comentiolus (Wikipedia).

converges with the route from Toledo to Valencia. The site stands on a rocky hill that dominates the vast plain of the Campos de Hellín. It was reinforced by a wall built according to Byzantine parameters, aspects that give it an obvious military character in relation to the defence of the surrounding territory. Among other outstanding points, the site has an important basilica with a baptistery, as well as preserving remains of a complex set of annexed constructions, giving the city a monumental aspect, one suggestive of an ancient episcopal seat.⁷¹ In this sense, Alfonso Carmona assumed a derivation of the current toponym of Minateda from the Arabic *Madīnat Iyyih* ('City of Iyyih'), a name that would have given the form *Medinatea*, with which the place is documented in the 13th century.⁷² The chronology and monumentality of the remains excavated at the site of El Tolmo de Minateda, as well as its identification with the Arab city of *Iyih*, one of those mentioned in the famous pact of Tudmīr, signed between Duke Theudimer and the son of the governor of *Ifriqiya* 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsā at the beginning of the 8th century, have led its excavators to believe that the old Visigothic bishopric of Eio/Elo was located there.⁷³ Two recent works by Lorenzo de San Román have returned to the subject, once again identifying Minateda with the old bishopric. However, the final conclusions of these studies are based on the same principles previously defended by L. Abad Casal and S. Gutiérrez Lloret, that is the features of the remains discovered at El Tolmo de Minateda, the philological arguments, the presumed territorial logic, and the subsequent evolution of the site.⁷⁴

As is known, *Elo*, along with *Begastrī*, was one of the bishoprics founded by the Visigoths in Cartaginensis to replace the seats of *Ilīci* (Elche) and Cartagena, cities that were both then under Byzantine rule.⁷⁵ Yet, while the identification of *Begastrī* with Cehegín, next to Caravaca de la Cruz (Murcia), poses no major problem, linking *Ello/Elo* to Minateda is not as evident as it is often made

⁷¹ Abad and Gutiérrez 1997; Abad - Gutiérrez - Gamo 2000a; 2000b; Gutiérrez 2000; Gutiérrez - Abad - Gamo 2005; Abad *et al.* 2008; Gutiérrez and Cánovas 2009.

⁷² Carmona 2009; Pocklington 2010: 120 f.

⁷³ This has been repeatedly proposed by L. Abad Casal and S. Gutiérrez Lloret in different publications (see above, n. 71). It is an opinion that seems to be widespread in research (see Vizcaíno 2007: 205 f, 220-224; Carmona 2009: 17).

⁷⁴ Lorenzo de San Román 2016a (esp. 286 f); 2016b: esp. 557-569. Of course, there is no epigraphic, literary, or numismatic support for this identification, despite which S. Gutiérrez Lloret and E. Juan continue to defend this hypothesis, presenting it as fact: Gutiérrez and Juan 2024.

⁷⁵ Vives 1961.

out to be. Indeed, some years before the majority opinion identifying *Ello* with Minateda, A. Yelo Templado had postulated the location of this bishopric in Cieza (Murcia) based on a study of the Arab sources.⁷⁶ On the other hand, R. Pocklington, through a rigorous study of the toponymy and the Arab sources behind the so-called pact of Tudmīr, thinks that there were at least two cities called *Iyyih/Iyih*: one in the plain of Albacete corresponding to Minateda, and another not far from Murcia, at the site of Algezares. This latter city would, in his opinion, be the episcopal seat mentioned in the conciliar acts of Visigothic times.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, in our opinion there are enough reasons to question that either of the two sites mentioned, Minateda or Algezares, can be identified with the Elotana episcopal seat. In principle it is worth noting that the philological arguments are far from clear and have been contested by different authors.⁷⁸ It is known that the original toponym of the Visigothic bishopric corresponds to an ancient nucleus documented in the itineraries with the name of *Ello/Ella* (and variants).⁷⁹ This implies that the term Elotana, as the episcopal seat was designated in Visigothic times, would be a derivation from an adjectival form (*regio* or *ciuitas Elotana?*), similar to the one given for *Ilici/Ilicitana*, and which, in Latin, was frequently used for the formation of choronyms and toponyms (Bastetania, Oretania, Contestania, Lusitania, Carpetania, etc.).⁸⁰ In this sense, the passage *Ella*>**Elotan(i)a*>*Elotan*>*Elota* can be better understood if we consider the evolution of other well-known late Hispanic toponyms with the suffix *-ania* (Contestania>Cocentaina), or the much more abundant ones in *-ona* by generalisation of the use of the accusative (*Tarraco*>*Tarracona*, *Barcino*>*Barcinona*, *Asido*>*Asidona*, *Pompelo*>*Pompelona*, *Turiasso*>*Tarazona*, etc.). In this way, we can speculate that the evolution was made through the adjectival forms *Elotana regio* or *Elotana urbs/ciuitas*. The case would not be exclusive of *Elo/Elota*, as has already been said, and can be compared with the *regio Deitana* of Pliny (NH 3 13; Str. III 4 12) and its evolution from *Deita* (the nucleus that would have given name to the region)>*Deitana urbs*>Totana.⁸¹

On the other hand, there are well-founded reasons that allow defending that the name of the city in Visigothic times could have been effectively *Elota* and not *Elo/Eio*, as Felipe Mateu y Llopis supposed years ago.⁸² Unfortunately, the city did not issue currency during the Visigothic rule and therefore we cannot know for sure the name it held at that time. But there is nevertheless a sure indication of what it could have been: the signature of Bishop Winibal, as it appears within some manuscripts of the Acts of the Seventh Council of Toledo. Indeed, the bishop's signature at this council, held in 646,

⁷⁶ About *Begastri*, see Yelo 1978-1979a; González Fernández 1984. For *Ello/Elo*, see Yelo 1978-1979b. Cf. also Vizcaíno 2007: 220-224, 246-250.

⁷⁷ Pocklington 1987; 2008: 83 ff.; 2015: 35-37. Against Carmona 2009: 14-17.

⁷⁸ Both P.B. Gams and later A. Vives and F. Mateu y Llopis placed *Elo* in Elda. Subsequent archaeological research places it at the site of El Monastil. On this subject we refer to the studies by Llobregat (1973; 1977; 1978; 1983); Poveda 2003; Peidro 2008a; 2008b; Poveda 2013; Poveda *et al.* 2013, with the bibliography cited there.

⁷⁹ Itin. Anton. Wess. 401.1 *Adello*; Raven. 304.11 *Eloe*. It appears located between the *stationes* of *Ad Turres* and *Aspis* (Itin. Anton.) and between *Turres* and *Celeret* (Raven.). See Roldán 1975: 51-53, 121.

⁸⁰ Yelo 1978-1979b; Poveda 1991.

⁸¹ On the problem that Pliny's text presents with respect to this *regio*, see Silgo 2012 and bibliography cited there.

⁸² Mateu y Llopis 1956. It should be noted that the form *Eio*, which appears recorded in most of the codices, must be an error in the textual transmission due to the similarity in Visigothic writing between the letters *l* and *i* (cf. Flórez ES 7 (1766): 219; Pocklington 1987: 190; Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 269 ff.).

suggests that the name of the city was *Elotham(m)*.⁸³ It is true that the form *Elotham(m)* constitutes a *unicum* within the signatures of the Elotana bishops, since in most of the conciliar acts the seat usually appears mentioned almost always in adjectival form (Elotana and variants). In this respect, L. Silgo assumes that the form *Elo*, as the city is designated in the conciliar acts of Visigothic times, is only a graphic variant. For this author, the toponym Elda ‘would still be closer to an eventual phonetic Romanization **ele(e)ta*’, a form that would correspond to some Navarrese toponyms.⁸⁴ Before continuing, it is also worth noting that the form *Elotham(m)* coincides exactly with the name that the city held in the Arab era, which constitutes a weighty argument that cannot be easily dismissed.⁸⁵ In fact, as Mateu y Llopis pointed out, this previously mentioned indication seems to be confirmed through the legends of the Arab emissions of the ceca *al-Watah* (الوطاة) in the name of Hišām II (year 1011 CE) and Abd Allāh al-Muayṭī (this last one in the years 1014/15 CE and 1015/16 CE) on the occasion of his proclamation to the caliphate. Later, in the year 1045, al-Musta’in Abu Ayyūb Sulaymān b. Hūd of Zaragoza also mint currency in the city. This emission proves that the city had fallen into the hands of the Banū Hūd of Zaragoza. For that year, as Mateu y Llopis points out, no emissions of al-Muayṭī are known here, which seems another indication in favour of the identification of *al-Watah* with *Elota/Elda*.⁸⁶

On the other hand, the legends of the Arab coins would confirm the logical evolution between Elot(h)a>*al-Watah*>Alūṭa>Elda due to the loss of the internal post-tonic vowel and the sonorisation of the strong dental. Mateu y Llopis observes the different treatment that the double alveolar receives in Valencian and Mallorcan languages (domains of the amiries) compared to Catalan. In the former, the double alveolar gives the geminated consonant *ll* (*molle*) while in Catalan it gives *tll* (*motllo*), hence the derivation of Elda from an Ello could be perfectly plausible. He also emphasises that Elda is an enclave of Castilian language in the territory of Valencian domain and that the evolution Ello>Ēlota>Elda within this context is perfectly plausible.⁸⁷

Against these arguments, R. Pocklington denies the premise and assumes that the reading of the Arabic script *الوطاة* as Elota defended by Mateu y Llopis is unacceptable, proposing other alternative readings (*al-Wata*, *Ulūṭa*, *llawaṭṭa*). However, his argument seems weak – the readings proposed by Mateu are perfectly coherent with the name of Elota, something that is also now accepted by the

⁸³ ‘*Vvinibal Dei miseratione ecclesiae sanctae Ilicitanae, qui et Elotham, episcopus...*’ Cf. Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 265-268.

⁸⁴ Silgo 2013: 135 ff., no. 145. The name would be related to the Iberian *Illu* and Basque *Iri*, *Iru* (‘city’), in turn coming from *ilti/iltu*, which we also see in other toponyms in the Iberian-speaking area (*iltirta/iltirda*, *iltiturgi/iltiturgi*) and constitutes a closer form for Elda (Silgo 2013: 164-172; Galmés de Fuentes 2000: 181 ff.).

⁸⁵ As Yelo does (1978-1979b: 22). Not to mention that in the dispute held in 1239-1240 between the archbishops of Toledo and Tarragona regarding the ownership of the see of Valencia, the confusion in the reading of the name of the see of Sanibilis (*Elotanae/Ilicitanae* [*ecclesiae*]) played an important part in the controversy. Lorenzo (2016b: 550 ff.) attributes it to the hypercorrection of a scribe who had seen the double signatures of Winibal and Leander. But it is not necessary to go that far. The similarity of the names would have been more evident in the manuscript tradition: it would be enough to break down the -o- into -ci- and give an Elcitan reading.

⁸⁶ Mateu y Llopis 1956: 33-36. Miles 1954: 43, no. 159; 85, no. 357.

⁸⁷ Miles 1954: 38 ff. If, in addition, the pronunciation of the name of the city in Visigothic times was *Elotham* instead of *Elota*, the change from a voiceless to a voiced consonant in the Romance toponym would present even fewer difficulties. But this is unlikely to be the case because in the manuscript tradition it appears preferably as *Elotana/Eiotana* and because in such a case the use of ṭā’ instead of ḍāl in the legends on Arab coins would be surprising.

majority of specialists in Arabic numismatics.⁸⁸ Pocklington goes to the extreme of affirming that, in any event, ‘and even if we accepted [for *الوطنة*] the pronunciation “*Elota*”, its identification with Elda would be extremely difficult because in the Arab era Elda must have been El-la or El-lo, as has already been demonstrated’.⁸⁹ But this opinion is nothing more than *a priori* based on the classical Latin form of the toponym that is precisely excluded by the form Elotham that we have seen appear in the signature of Winibal to the Acts of the Seventh Council and that confirm later the amiries and hūdies emissions. In this sense, the Arab coins of the *Alūṭa* mint show unquestionably what the stage of this process was for the first decade of the 11th century. And that stage is conclusive with the equation *Elota*>*Alūṭa*. And, therefore, that the suspicion, previously referred to, of an evolution *Ello*>*Ellotana*>*El(l)otania*>*Elota* is not out of the question in the least.

It is true that the location of the *al-Watah* mint at Elda, although a majority opinion among Arabists, is not entirely confirmed and that its location has been the subject of debate. Mateu y Llopis expressed his opinion as an hypothesis only, never with absolute certainty, but leaving established the principle of non-contradiction with the Visigothic and Arab sources.⁹⁰ But, despite the doubts that this identification may raise, G.C. Miles argued at the time that to elucidate this question, which he himself qualified as unclear (*‘non liquet’*), the fact that the aforementioned Muayṭī had been governor and then lord of Denia could be relevant.⁹¹ Having said this, it is obvious, therefore, that the mint must have been in the domains of Muayṭī himself, raising two options: Elda, or a mint of that name in Mallorca. But, as Mateu y Llopis reminds us, ‘in Mallorca there is no locality of this or similar name’.⁹² So, discarding this second option, all the data coincide in locating the mint of *Alūṭa/Elota* in the taifa of Denia, which agrees with the identification of this mint/seat with Elda. Elda, and more specifically the nearby site of El Monastil (<lat. *monasterium*) – probably an Arab *ribāṭ* erected on an old Byzantine and Visigothic military fort⁹³ – offers a suitable place to serve as the centre of the numismatic emissions of the new emerging power in Al-Andalus. In a way, the historic evolution of Elota would show an undeniable similarity with another case well known to us and whose importance would also be related to its possible military function – the city of *Elbora/Vascos* (Navalmoralejo,

⁸⁸ See Miles 1952: 43, no. 159, 85, no. 357; Mateu y Llopis 1956: 35 ff.; Delgado, s.a.: §310 (Canto and Ibn Hafiz 2001: xxxiv, 147); García Moreno 1989: 265; Canto and Ibrahim 1997: 36, no. 10; Canto 2012: 27, fig. 28; Ariza 2010: 114, no. 58; 2014: 120 ff., fig. 9. Different identifications have been proposed for this mint. F. Codera (1878: 24 ff., n. 1) first, and O. Codrington (1904: 195) later, suggested Huete (Cuenca), while the identification with *Elota* had been proposed by Vives and Escudero (1893: xxvii, no. 1, xxxiii). The reduction to Huete is flatly rejected by Miles (1950: 53) because the Arabic name of that city was *ويذة*. The location somewhere in Mallorca cited by Qazwīni as *الوطنة*, also proposed by Codera and followed by Prieto Vives (1926: 105), was rejected by Miles 1950: 53, no. 6 and Mateu y Llopis 1956: 36.

⁸⁹ Pocklington 1987: 197, no. 72.

⁹⁰ Mateu y Llopis 1956: 39.

⁹¹ Miles 1952: 53 ff., no. 14; Mateu y Llopis 1956. Against Yelo 1978-1979b; Pocklington 1987: 197, no. 72.

⁹² Mateu y Llopis 1956: 36. Similarly, Miles (1950: 53, no. 6): ‘Prieto himself was undecided, for he spelled the name “*Elota*” but referred to the supposed place in Mallorca, which surely cannot be read “*Elota*”.’

⁹³ The identification of El Monastil and Elo has been defended in various works by Poveda (1991; 1996; 2000b; 2013). The toponym derives from the Latin *monasterium* from the Mozarabic dialect (Asín Palacios 1944: 123; Llobregat 1973: 49). The hypothesis that it was an ancient *ribāṭ* was suggested by M^a. Jesús Rubiera and later taken up by Sanchis Guarner and Llobregat (1973: 49). Pocklington (1987: 197) considers it unlikely that it was a Visigoth monastery and thinks only of a Muslim *rābīta*. However, the existence of a *ribāṭ* argues for the strategic and military importance of the site, and if we add to that the proximity to Elda, the Latin toponym *monasterium* and our interpretation of the news about the monastery of San Martín provided by Gregory of Tours (see above), it is truly difficult to follow him on this point. On the strategic importance of El Monastil, see Vizcaíno 2007: 246 f. Furthermore, the archaeological remains and structures found at the site support its identification with a monastery during the 6th and 7th centuries: Poveda *et al.* 2013; Poveda, 2019.



Fig. 12. El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete). Aerial view of the archaeological site (Photo: Salvador Sánchez).

Toledo). Indeed, like Elota, Elbora also minted coins (although this one in Visigothic times) and later seems to have been converted into a Muslim *ribāt*.⁹⁴

Actually, if the identification of the Alūṭa mint with the fortified site of El Monastil is accepted, the duality of *Ilici/Elota* becomes much more obvious and understandable from an historical point of view. The link between the bishoprics of *Ilici* and *Elota* is recorded in two of the subscriptions of the corresponding titleholder: that of Bishop Winibal at the Seventh Council of Toledo (646 CE) and that of Bishop Leander at the Eleventh Council (675 CE). Significantly, both prelates only sign as holders of a double seat at the first conciliar meeting they attend, while in the remaining synods they simply appear as holders of the *Ilicitana* seat, which in any case is affirmed as the main seat of the unified diocese.⁹⁵ This is logical because the mother chair, and the oldest, was *Ilici*, a seat that already had a recognised pre-eminence in the Spanish environment even before the Byzantine occupation.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Barroso *et al.* 2018a.

⁹⁵ Apart from the bibliography cited above, see Flórez, ES 7 (1766) 214-220, 221-236; García Moreno 1974a: 131, no. 295, 133 ff., nos. 303-307; Vizcaíno 2007: 224; Lorenzo de San Román 2016a; 2016b: 539-580. VII Conc. Tol. (646): ‘*Vvinibal, Dei miseratione Sanctae ecclesiae Ilicitanae, qui Elotanae, episcopus haec statuta definiens, suscripsit*’; XI Conc. Tol. (a. 675): ‘*Leander ecclesiae Ilicitana, qui et Elotanae episcopus, haec gesta synodica a nobis definita suscripsit*’ (Vives 1963: 257; 617 ff.). Cf. Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 265-272; 2016b: 557-569.

⁹⁶ Vallejo (2012: 131), based on the testimony of Bishop John of *Ilici* (or *Tarraco*), postulates the possibility that it was the seat of an apostolic vicariate granted by Pope Hormisdas in 517. Cf. González 1979: 381-383; Lorenzo de San Román 2016b: 103. The rise of *Ilici* in late antiquity seems to have been at the expense of *Lucentum* (Alicante), see Rosser 2014: 81.

Lorenzo San Román pertinently compared the anomalous situation experienced by the bishoprics of *Ilici* and *Elo* in the 7th century with that experienced almost at the same time by the episcopal seats of Braga and Dumio.⁹⁷ As is known, Dumio had been a bishopric with little jurisdictional standing as it was circumscribed only to the monastery with no *parrochia* or diocese dependent on it. Throughout the 7th century, the bishopric of Dumio was subordinate to the bishopric of *Bracara* (Braga). The decision was due to an incidental event (the deposition of Bishop Potamius), but this subordination would not have been possible if the monastery-bishopric of Dumio had not been located a short distance from the episcopal nucleus of Braga, constituting in reality little less than a *suburbium* of that city. Had it not been so, and even if Martin had occupied the metropolitan see, it is certain that a good substitute would have been found to rule the bishopric of Dumio, something that never happened precisely because of the proximity between both and the limited size of the bishopric-monastery. This was the usual procedure, even in those cases that can be considered exceptional, such as the one that took place during the reign of Egica and Wittiza with the Metropolitan Sisbert of Toledo. In this sense, the attitude adopted in the replacement of the bishopric of Braga contrasts with what we know happened with the bishopric of Seville after the incumbent was claimed for Toledo.⁹⁸

A. Isla Frez describes the degree of subjection of the seat of Dumio with respect to that of *Bracara*, a subordination that, incidentally, was explicitly reflected in the conciliar acts, either because the bishopric of Dumio is not named, or because the dignity of both seats falls on the same bishop, hence this author concludes that:

‘From this we can confirm, first of all, the special character of the bishopric of Dumio and its scarce consistency as such, since, as is known, the canonical tradition prohibited the accumulation in the same person of several bishoprics, so that the one of Dumio would have to enjoy a peculiar situation – the non-existence of the diocese of Dumio. On the other hand, the close relationship that linked the bishopric-monastery of Dumio with Braga and, in a certain sense, the subjection and even the absorption of the former by the latter is revealed.’⁹⁹

As can easily be deduced from this, the history of the bishopric of Elota and its dissolution in the Ilicitana chair represents a clear precedent to what, years later, and for a very different reason, will happen with the bishopric of Dumio. And so, just as we have seen happen in the case of Dumio-*Bracara*, the situation of absolute subordination of the Elotana seat to that of *Ilici* necessarily implies two conditions: the absence of a proper *territorium* on the part of *Elota* and a proximity between the two bishoprics that would justify the disappearance of this last seat. The first is logical due to the origin of the Elotana chair, founded as a kind of *alter ego* of the *Ilici* occupied by the Byzantines and erected on the territory belonging to this last seat under Visigothic rule. The second is undoubtedly the determining factor that would justify the disappearance and absorption of the Elotana seat by *Ilici* once the cause that had originally brought about such an anomalous situation was resolved. This is not easy to explain for Minateda, considering that the site in Albacete is *c.* 50 mi from Elche and in a territory that possibly belonged to Cartagena/*Begastri*. It is also not easy for Algezara, because the

⁹⁷ Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 277.

⁹⁸ For this episode, see Orlandis 1987: 221-223.

⁹⁹ Isla 1992: 6 ff; cf. Barroso 2019.



Fig. 13. El Monastil (Elda, Alicante). Aerial view of the archaeological site (Turismo de Elda).

distance between them is still considerable (c. 44 mi), and also, like the previous one, it must have belonged to the diocese of Cartagena.

The parallel that the case of Elota presents with Dumio could be even closer than it might seem at first if, as we have argued a few lines above, *Elota*-El Monastil is identified with the monastery of St Martin mentioned by Gregory of Tours. In this case, the future Visigothic bishopric would have been created from an old Byzantine monastic centre that would have been elevated to the episcopal dignity to overshadow the *Ilici* chair. In any case, the proximity to *Ilici* would condition the historical development of Elota while providing a satisfactory explanation why the Elotan bishopric does not appear mentioned in the sources until very late, when the Visigothic political power had extended beyond the domain of the Orospeña and the Byzantines had been cornered in the narrow coastal strip.¹⁰⁰

Actually, the bishopric of *Elota* is recorded for the first time in 610 on the occasion of the so-called Synod of Gundemar. We will not linger on the authenticity of this council, which is accepted by most researchers, albeit with some notable exceptions. Suffice it to say for now that even if some forgery, there is general agreement that the event does not seem to have affected the prelates and attending chairs. Accepting this premise, we know that in this council the bishop Sanabilis appears as the holder of the see of Elota. Significantly, Sanabilis occupies the last place within the list of bishop

¹⁰⁰ On the limits and extent of the Orospeña and the Bastetania, see the following section below.

signatories of the *Constitutio Carthaginensium sacerdotum*, showing that his ordination had taken place shortly before the conciliar meeting – if it were not done for it *ad hoc* and with a view to the resolution of the conflict.¹⁰¹ It is worth remembering in this regard that, as J. Vives defended, the appearance of the seats of *Elota* and *Begastri* is usually interpreted as part of the policy of territorial and administrative reorganisation practised by the Visigothic kings in relation to the Byzantine occupation.¹⁰² This policy developed towards the turn of the century and the early years of the 7th century, once Reccared's attempts to conclude a peaceful agreement with the Empire through papal mediation had failed.¹⁰³ In the case of the Elotan seat, and unlike what happens with *Begastri*, where at least we have epigraphic testimony of bishops Acrisminus and Vitalis (although unfortunately lost and doubtful), there are no epigraphic references confirming that Elo had been an episcopal seat prior to the date it is documented for the first time, that is to say before 610.¹⁰⁴ Bearing this in mind, and the fact mentioned above that there is also no mention of bishops prior to Sanabilis, it is highly plausible that this bishopric had been founded very recently, specifically in the time lapse between 595 (end of the diplomatic claim) and 610 (*Constitutio Carthaginensium sacerdotum*), if not in this latter year, as many historians think, as one further consequence of the administrative reorganisation ordered by King Gundemar in the context of the foreseeable conquest of *Ilici*.¹⁰⁵

Just two decades after the Synod of Gundemar, at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633 CE) we find a certain Serpentinus at the head of the seat of *Ilici*. From the data we have, it seems clear that Serpentinus was appointed bishop *c.* 630 and that in the interval of time between that date and the year 625 (the conquest of Elche) the prelate holding that position before the city passed into Visigothic power would have retained his episcopal status.¹⁰⁶ This would indicate that the union between the seats of *Ilici* and *Elota* was not instantaneous, but that there was a transitional period during which negotiations between the parties concerned must have taken place. Curiously, in the Fourth Council of Toledo there is no trace of a prelate for the bishopric of Elota, nor is there a record

¹⁰¹ García Moreno 1974a: 131, no. 295. In relation to the supposed identification of this see with Minateda, the absence of a representative of Elo at the Third Council of Toledo is highly significant. On the other hand, this absence is better understood if the bishopric was located in a place near the coast which, in that year (589), had not yet been elevated to an episcopal see.

¹⁰² Vives 1959-1960; 1961; García Moreno 1989: 264 f.

¹⁰³ On the diplomatic efforts made by the Visigoth king before Gregory the Great, see Vallejo 2012: 284-288.

¹⁰⁴ Hübner, IHC Suppl. 406 and 407. Fernández-Guerra (1879: 23-25) also mentions an earlier bishop named Epenetus, mentioned on a tombstone found near Mazarrón, a town on the coast *c.* 70 km from Cehegín. The testimonies of *Begastri* are, as we say, doubtful and in this last case there is nothing to link him to the see of *Begastri* (González Fernández 1984: 43 ff.). In any case, it is not impossible that the bishopric of *Begastri* dates back to an early Christian tradition prior to the time of the Constantinian peace. Indeed, prior to the establishment of peace in the Church, Christian communities were organised autonomously in different cities, without this implying a diocesan-type territorial base as we know it in later times, especially from the 6th-7th centuries when ecclesiastical organisation became fully established (González Blanco 1993: 139 ff.). This view of the way in which early Christianity spread in Spain coincides with the backdrop described by García Moreno for Baetica province at the time of the Council of Elvira (2007a: 441-448). On the bishops of *Begastri*, see González Fernández 1984.

¹⁰⁵ Not many years before 610, since Sanabilis figures last among the bishops who signed the *Constitutio*. See Flórez, ES t. VII, 1766: 218; García Moreno 1989: 264 ff. We have reduced the generally accepted period by five years because the correspondence between Reccared and Gregory could not have been earlier than six years after the celebration of the Third Council of Toledo (see Vilella 1991a: 179).

¹⁰⁶ On the date of Serpentinus' consecration, see García Moreno 1974a: 133, no. 303. The five-year difference between his consecration and the conquest of Elche complicates the interpretation of the facts and forces us to move into the always difficult terrain of hypotheses. The death of the holder of *Ilici*, the unknown predecessor of Serpentinus, who would have remained in office probably by virtue of a peaceful surrender of the city, would have taken place on those dates (see below).

of the seat for the two councils that followed it, i.e. V, celebrated two years later, and VI, convened in 638. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know if this anomalous situation is because its bishop, Sanabilis, had died and the seat was vacant or because he was sick and could not attend or send representation; or rather, as seems more likely, given the wide space of time elapsed (five years), if it was the result of a provisional situation until the resolution of the lawsuit with *Ilici*.¹⁰⁷ All this seems to corroborate the hypothesis that between the years 625 (conquest of *Ilici*) and 646 (Seventh Council of Toledo) an obscure process developed that would culminate in the disappearance of *Elota* as an independent episcopal seat: the successor of Serpentinus in the episcopal chair of *Ilici*, Winibal, already enjoyed the full and total unification of both seats.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, Winibal already signs the acts of the Seventh Council as the head of *Ilici* and *Elota*;¹⁰⁹ the new prelate must have been consecrated shortly after 638.¹¹⁰ Everything points to the fact that with this bishop the reunification of both seats took place once the peculiar circumstances that had motivated the foundation of *Elota* were over, that is the Byzantine conquest of part of the east and the reorganisation of the territories administered by the *Ilici* seat, which had remained in the power of the Visigoths. But it must be emphasised, because the nuance seems very relevant, that it is a unification, i.e. that we are not facing a double appointment (bishop of *Ilici* and bishop of *Elota*), but that the title corresponds to a single seat: 'bishop of the holy church of *Ilici*, which is also from *Elota*', which clearly indicates the exceptionality of the case.¹¹¹

Before moving forward with this topic, it may be of interest to note that the name of the new prelate suggests a Gothic origin, which seems to point again to the idea already advanced by Vives that the foundation of the *Elota* seat would have followed, in principle, the political will of the Visigothic kings in relation to the Byzantine seat of *Ilici*, a measure parallel to the revitalisation of the bishopric of *Begastri* in relation to Cartagena.¹¹² But, unlike what happened with the see of *Elota*, *Begastri* was able to survive as an episcopal see after the occupation of Cartagena due to several reasons, mainly Toledo's interest in eliminating a competitor and, of course, the destruction of the Byzantine capital after the Visigoth conquest.¹¹³ On the other hand, the previously mentioned possibility of an episcopal tradition in *Begastri* prior to the Visigothic stage should be taken into account. This undoubtedly would have facilitated the transfer of the chair and dignity of Cartagena to *Begastri* without many complications, since it is obvious that once the capital of Byzantine *Spania* was

¹⁰⁷ Lorenzo de San Román 2016b: 553-557.

¹⁰⁸ Vives 1961. Cf. Vizcaíno 2007: 223 f.; Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 280 f.

¹⁰⁹ VII Conc. Tol. (646): '*Vinibal, Dei miseratione sanctae ecclesiae Ilicitanae, qui et Elotanae, episcopus*' (Vives 1963: 257).

¹¹⁰ García Moreno 1974a: 133, no. 304.

¹¹¹ See n. 95 above. On this point we completely agree with Lorenzo de San Román (2016b: 556).

¹¹² Llobregat 1978: 416 ff.; Poveda 1991; Vizcaíno 2007: 223; Peidro 2008a; 2008b; Vallejo 2012: 326-328; Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 270-272. We are referring to the creation or strengthening of the see of *Begastri* in the 7th century, since we do not know whether it existed before that date (see above, n. 104). It is worth remembering that the holder of *Begastri* between 633-646, Vitiginus (<Vitigis, Witigis, plus the Latin suffix -nus), and his representative at the Seventh Council of Toledo, the deacon Egila, also have Gothic names (Schonfeld 1911: 269 ff.). Bishop Theudulfus, of the recently conquered *Malaca*, also had a Germanic name (García Moreno 1974a: 110 ff., no. 232). On the problem of Germanic onomastics, we refer to our reflections in Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 31 f.

¹¹³ Flórez, ES 7 (1766): 122-133.

destroyed, it was necessary to erect (or maintain) a seat that administered the territories previously assigned to the city.

As has been said, the case of *Elota* seems to show serious differences in relation to events at *Begastri*, especially with regard to two essential points. First, by the fact that the titular seat that served as a reference, that is *Ilici*, did not disappear after the Visigothic conquest but continued to hold such status and its holder continued to attend the Synods of Toledo (Councils IV-VI), once the city had passed into Visigothic hands. And, secondly, because in *Elota* there does not seem to exist a previous ecclesiastical tradition that could justify the maintenance of the new episcopal seat once *Ilici* was conquered. In any case, before its passage to Visigothic rule, *Elota*-El Monastil had been nothing more than an important monastic centre belonging to *Ilici* territory, but not a true episcopal seat. As in the case of Braga-Dumio, the proximity between both seats did the rest, favouring first the subordination and then the disappearance of the *Elota* seat by assimilation within bishopric of *Ilici*. However, the existence of a community with a bishop at the head in *Elota* since Constantinian times is a possibility that must be taken into account and will depend on what further archaeological investigations can determine. Nevertheless, if there was one, it would have had a special character in the form documented for some bishoprics of early Christian origin in southern Spain and, therefore, could not compete on equal terms with the prestige of the see of *Ilici*.



Fig. 14. Main population centres in the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula (6-7th centuries).

On the other hand, if the Church of *Elota* could finally trace its origins back to early Christian times, it would become even more difficult to defend its reduction to Minateda, because, possessing the assets of tradition and the evident practical advantages that this location offers so far inland, its subsequent dissolution within *Ilici* could not be understood.¹¹⁴ Obviously, it seems logical that if *Elota* had been located in Minateda, in the long space of time between 595 and the conquest of *Ilici* (c. 625) the

¹¹⁴ We refer again to what was said above in n. 104. If there were some sort of early Christian bishopric in *Elota*, and it is finally to be located, as we think, at El Monastil, the parallel with Dumio would be even more evident: we would be dealing with a bishopric-monastery without territorial jurisdiction created from an ancient Byzantine monastic nucleus. Independently of this statement, we are of the opinion that the creation of the Visigoth bishopric was due above all to the fortified character of the monastery and its excellent strategic location in relation to the conquest of *Ilici*, which explains its later transformation into the *ribat* cited by al-Hamawī between *Laqant* and *Qartaḡana*. As has been seen, this would also explain the strange news transmitted by Gregory of Tours in relation to the monastery of St Martin.

evident practical advantages provided by a seat located so far inland would not have gone unnoticed – advantages that can be summarised in its serving as a point of Visigothic administration in the interior lands of the Cartaginensis province – since between the bishoprics of *Begastri*, *Ilici*, and *Valentia*, up to the diocese of Valeria, there would exist a huge extension of territory lacking episcopal authority, to be precise the entire, wide region of the Manchuela (the lands extending through the southeast of the province of Cuenca and most of the current province of Albacete).

As we have analysed elsewhere, something similar (and for different reasons) would have happened in the Castillian plateau in relation to the establishment of the bishopric of Segovia at the expense of the see of *Palentia*.¹¹⁵ Thus, and as occurred in Segovia with respect to *Palentia*, the survival of *Elo* as an episcopal see would have had a negative impact on the power of the see of *Ilici*, since this implied the reduction of a considerable part of its territorial jurisdiction. And, therefore, ultimately the conservation of the *Elota* seat would redound to the benefit of the Toledo chair at a time when it was immersed in the full process of affirmation as the primatial seat of the Carthaginensis; thus its suppression would seriously harm the interests of the bishopric of Toledo. Lorenzo San Román speaking of the *Elota* seat, in a paragraph that seems openly to contradict what he had expressed just a few lines before, is forced to admit that ‘strangely, without being able to really explain the reason, its independent existence was annulled’.¹¹⁶

To overcome this contradiction, recourse has been made to the hypothesis put forward by Father Flórez, according to which both sees maintained co-titularity, being governed by the same bishop who had a seat in both cities.¹¹⁷ But this only increase the problem, as double-titling is something rare in episcopal signatures. In fact, it only appears in the first two subscriptions of the bishops Winibal and Leander, as Lorenzo himself acknowledges, and in both cases, it seems to be done in a protocol form, which contradicts the subsistence of *Elo* as a seat, since it is never mentioned again. But above all the problem would increase because the combining of two seats in a single prelate was also a practice contrary to canonical tradition, which, as has been seen with Dumio, prohibited the accumulation in the same person of several bishoprics. In this sense, the signatures of Winibal and Leander are extremely clarifying and deny the hypothesis of the illustrious Augustinian Father by supposing that the seat of *Ilici* and *Elota* were the same chair.¹¹⁸

It has been supposed, on the other hand, that after the conquest of *Ilici* the *Elota* seat would have lost the territory it administered in favour of other neighbouring seats (of *Ilici* itself, but also of *Valeria*, *Oretum*, *Saetabis*, and perhaps *Segobriga*) and that this would be the reason for its disappearance as an episcopal seat.¹¹⁹ We cannot think to judge the cases of *Oretum* and *Saetabis* as they are unknown to us, but for *Valeria* and *Segobriga* it is difficult to think that things could have developed in that way. On the contrary, archaeology confirms that the economic and cultural impact of Minateda on the sites in the south of the province of Cuenca was much more intense than the influence the episcopal nuclei of *Segobriga* or *Valeria* could have had on them. This is something clearly seen,

¹¹⁵ On the evolution of the bishopric of Segovia, see Barroso 2019; 2021.

¹¹⁶ Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 286 f.

¹¹⁷ Flórez, ES 7 (1766): 218s; Gutiérrez 2004: 102.

¹¹⁸ See n. 95 above.

¹¹⁹ Lorenzo de San Román 2016a: 296; 2016b: 568 f.



Fig. 15. Reccopolis (Zorita de los Canes, Guadalajara). A. Commercial area. B. Monumental gate. C. Dwellings. D. Palatine residence. E. Horrea. F. Audience room/Basilica. G. Courtyard. H. Via principalis. (Photo: Harvard, Frankfurt and Alcalá de Henares Universities) (Modified):

beyond doubt, in the study of the grave goods of the Cuenca *necropoleis* (especially in the southern area of *Valeria*, the closest to the Albacete territory) and their comparison with the material culture documented for Minateda.¹²⁰

In short, from a political and religious point of view, the disappearance of Minateda as an episcopal seat would have been a measure contrary to the interests of the bishopric of Toledo on account of what it would mean for the aggrandisement of *Ilici* – a seat that we could define as a chair ‘with pretensions’, as it had been an Apostolic Vicariate – in terms of prestige. Moreover, this measure would be detrimental to the Visigothic administration from a political point of view and contra to what the logic of the territorial implementation of ecclesiastical structures dictates because it would leave a large interior territory far removed from its presumed reference seat. From this perspective it would be unthinkable that the bishopric of *Elota* would not have been perpetuated on the Visigothic ecclesiastical map throughout the 7th century, even taking for granted the conservatism of the Visigothic Church in this matter (we have seen in relation to the bishopric of *Segobia*).¹²¹ On the contrary, there is no doubt that the preservation of the *Elota*-Minateda seat would have greatly benefited the cause of the regal bishopric, and, as in other cases, its holder would have asserted his power in this situation. Let us not forget, whatever the terms of surrender of *Ilici*, that it took place in an atmosphere of military superiority on the part of the Goths. Seen in this light, the disappearance of the bishopric of *Elota* and its dissolution within the seat of *Ilici* constitute, in our opinion, irrefutable proof that *Elo* could not have been within Minateda, but somewhere near Elche. If we add

¹²⁰ For all this matter we refer to our study on the Visigothic period in the province of Cuenca: Barroso 2019.

¹²¹ Obviously, the disappearance of the bishopric would be even less understandable if there were a previous episcopal tradition in the city. But, as already said, this is something that lacks confirmation.

to this argument the Islamic coinages, the phonetic evolution of the name, and that both Elda and Elche are located in the Vinalopó valley, while Minateda is outside it (specifically in the Segura valley, and next to the road leading to Cartagena, which seems to link it definitively to the *territorium* of *Begastri*), the possibility of locating *Elo* within Minateda is practically nil.¹²²

Therefore, having discarded location of *Elota* within the Tolmo de Minateda, this latter site must correspond, based on sound logic, and as unanimously recognised by the scientific consensus, with the ancient *Ilunon/Ilunum* cited by Ptolemy (II 6 60) as one of the cities of Bastetania, whose name seems to persist in the Arabic toponym *Iyih/Iyyih*.¹²³ The Greek geographer places it at coordinates long. 11° 30' and lat. 38° 40', close to the cities of *Carca* (probably the current Caravaca de la Cruz, in Murcia) and *Arcilacis* (Archena?). Be that as it might, the geography of the southeast region in Roman times is far from being completely clarified, but in the case of *Ilunum* there seem to be few doubts about its correspondence with the Tolmo de Minateda and its location at the northern end of the Bastetanian region. The problem would then consist in analysing which functions were performed by *Ilunum* and what led to the fortune of this city in the 7th century.

Actually, the reasons for the rise of cities like Minateda have been well outlined in a work dedicated to this question by J. Pedro Blanes.¹²⁴ First, the military purpose of the enclave should be taken into account. Minateda is a city located on a rocky hill that served as a magnificent natural defence against any attack. In addition, the city was equipped with a splendid walled circuit that reinforced the defence of the site, which, undoubtedly, also constituted an important point on the route from Toledo to Cartagena through the valley of the Segura River. Its strategic situation allowed both the Gothic army to be supplied, and the blocking of any Byzantine attempt to extend its dominion beyond the Mediterranean coast. In this sense, Minateda seems to have been built as the focal point of the main rear-guard strategy to protect the border of the Orospeña and eastern Celtiberia. As such, *Ilunum* would control the road network and base of the Visigothic army in its continuous expeditions eastwards, acting at the same time as a bulwark of the Visigothic rear-guard and defence of the major route between Toledo and Levante. We should also remember that very close to *Ilunum*, in *Saltigi* (Chinchilla de Monte-Aragón, c. 30 mi further north of Minateda), the two key routes towards the main Visigothic garrisons in the east converged, i.e. to *Valentia*, and to *Begastri* and *Cartagena*.

In another order of things, it is necessary to underline the function of Minateda as a symbolic element of the representation of Visigothic power in the province of Orospeña and as the principal nucleus of the region within the territorial reorganisation operated as a result of the projected conquest of Byzantine *Spania*. The magnificent monumental complex of Minateda, with its exceptional basilica with baptistery below, and other excavated structures, suggests an urban nucleus of considerable visual and symbolic impact. *Ilunum*-Minateda thus stands as a visual landmark of Visigothic domination over the surrounding territory; a city endowed with a certain monumentality that would attest to the prestige and splendour of the Visigothic court within the province of

¹²² This last argument has already been pointed out in Pedro 2008a: 270, 272.

¹²³ Perhaps also in the case of the current town of Hellín, although Carmona (2009: 8 ff.) and Pocklington (2010: 124 ff.) derive the toponym of Hellín from the Latin *Falianus* > Ar. *Falyan* > Cast. med. *Felin* > Hellín. But L. Molina, editor of the Arabic source known as the *Anonymous Description*, considers that *Falyan* refers to Villena (Pocklington, 2010: 124 n. 32), which seems more reasonable.

¹²⁴ Pedro 2008a: 270-272.



Fig. 16. El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete). View of the site (Wikipedia).

Orospeda. It can be considered, therefore, that *Ilunum*-Minateda was, indeed, the symbol of Visigothic power over the rustic populations of Orospeda, and, in that sense, the *Ilunum* of Reccared could be fully compared with the Reccopolis, the city founded by Leovigild: both cities acted as capitals of new regions (Orospeda and Celtiberia respectively), and both were endowed with walls (with what that represents symbolically) as well as a prominent monumental character.

However, with that being its most evident role, the function of representation of power would not be limited only to purely symbolic aspects. Minateda, indeed, seems to have become the most important nucleus of the Visigothic administration in the region and, as such, would be the centre of fiscal perception of the population in its surroundings, the place where the collection of taxes from this part of the interior of the Cartaginensis province would be deposited. And related to this fiscal function and the reception of tribute is associated the rectangular building with interior buttresses that forms part of the complex excavated next to the basilica – the complex its excavators refer to as a ‘palace to emphasize its administrative, residential and representative nature’, which has been identified as an *aula*,¹²⁵ but which, in our opinion, would correspond to a large *horreum* such as Arce proposed in terms of the large rectangular building at Reccopolis.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Gutiérrez and Cánovas 2009: 95-97, fig. 2.7.

¹²⁶ Arce 2011: 96 ff., 225-229, fig. 15.



Fig. 17. Begastri (Cabezo de Roenas, Cehegín, Murcia). Aerial view of the site.

A third aspect that should be highlighted, being well reflected in the archaeological record, is that, due to its central location, *Ilunum* was built to be the main focus of Christianisation in Orospeña, an area with almost no urbanism and whose main nuclei are submerged in a notorious process of municipal decline (i.e. Valeria, in Celtiberia, c. 90 mi to the north) or outside the territory to be administered (i.e. Begastri, displaced to the southeast). In this way, the monumental building programme excavated at Minateda would have to be explained as an act of ideological reaffirmation of the Visigothic state after the conversion of 589. As J. Peidro affirms, the presumed episcopate of Minateda would actually be ‘a construction intended not so much to house an episcopal seat as to organize and integrate the territory closest to.’¹²⁷ Within this function of territorial organisation should also be included, as one more aspect of it, and not the least important, the diffusion of Nicene orthodoxy. It is well known that, thanks to the commitment of royal power to the Church, the Catholic faith became the ideological adhesive of the new Visigothic kingdom created from the Third Council of Toledo. In the midst of the climate of exaltation following the conversion of 589, the diffusion of the faith was seen as a personal enterprise of the king that redounded to the benefit of the state.¹²⁸ At the same time, and as a counterpart to royal patronage, the ecclesiastical hierarchy became the best ally of power for the diffusion of the new political structures created by the kings of Toledo, among which were, of course, the perception of tributes and the diffusion of an hierarchical

¹²⁷ Peidro 2008a: 272.

¹²⁸ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. A. 587? 7: ‘[Reccaredus] ecclesiarum et Monasteriorum conditor et dilator efficitur’ (Mommsen 1894: 218; Campos, 1960: 96). In this last sense it can also be compared with the great complex erected in the *Natiuola locus* by the *uir inluster Gundiliuva*. See Canto 1995 and Sánchez Ramos *et al.* 2015.

social structure that provided an undoubted cohesion to the kingdom. Within this context of alliance between throne and altar, enclaves such as Minateda/*Ilunum* would have acted as centres of visual and symbolic reference of the state within a rural landscape increasingly Christianised and subjected to the political-administrative structures of the kingdom of Toledo.

Thus, and summarising what has been said so far, the development and success of *Ilunum*, backed by the continuity of the city until the Emirate period, would be related to the concurrence of several factors that in some way fed each other: the political and military interests motivated by the Byzantine occupation, the strategic situation in relation to the road network, the absence of urban entities in the territory – and therefore the lack of competition in that sense – and the religious interest that made possible the diffusion of Christianity in the rural environment with royal support. In a certain way, as J. Peidro intuits, Minateda/*Ilunum* constitutes the perfect counterpoint to Reccopolis in the time of Reccared: what the foundation of Leovigild had been for the province of Celtiberia, *Ilunum* must have been in relation to Orospeđa. And if Reccopolis must be framed within the project of Imperialisation devised by the great Arian monarch, *Ilunum* must be understood in the context of a no less ambitious political project (elevation of Eutropius to the bishopric of Valentia), diplomatic (correspondence with Licinianus and the Holy See; letter writing between Licinianus, Eutropius, and Severus of *Malaca*) and military (campaign against the Roman *militēs*) developed by Reccared with a view to ending once and for all the cumbersome Byzantine problem.

The Visigothic conquest: from Witteric to Suinthila

Gothic military strategy

Having subdued the region of Orospeđa and exhausted the diplomatic channels, Reccared had no other option but to prepare for conflict with the Byzantines. To this end, the king must have considered the remodelling and fortification of *Ilunum*, a city that until then had hardly any importance within the Visigothic territorial order. However, with the change in the political scenario, *Ilunum* became the main centre of the rear guard within the new Visigothic military strategy. This policy that also included an administrative aspect, which resulted in the creation of two new bishoprics that would take charge of the lands belonging to the dioceses of *Ilici* (Elche) and Cartagena (both still under Imperial power) and which had recently been conquered by the Visigothic monarchs: the episcopal sees of *Begastri* (Cehegín) and *Elota* (Elda). In a purely military sense, *Begastri* meant the closure of communication from Cartagena to the interior - that is to say to Orospeđa - through the Segura River valley. *Begastri* also provided secure communication with Bastetania, as well as the closure of land routes between the Byzantine territories of Levante and the Malaga area. For its part, *Elota* dominated access from *Ilici* through the Vinalopó River valley. In this sense, it can be said that the *Valentia-Elota* axis would have had with respect to Ilici the same role we have assumed for *Basti-Begastri* with respect to *Carthago Spartaria* after the campaign of 570. In addition, in the rear guard of both, and in a central position between *Valentia* and *Biatia*, *Ilunum* (El Tolmo de Minateda) was located.

At the beginning of the 7th century, and once the campaigns of Leovigild and Reccared in Bastetania and Orospeđa had been successfully completed, the limits of Byzantine rule must have practically retreated to the coastline,¹²⁹ although we do not know how far they reached. At present, there is speculation about Byzantine rule over *Valentia* from the creation, in the middle of the 6th century, a new residential neighbourhood in the old Roman circus.¹³⁰ But this Byzantine occupation of the city is far from confirmed, and in our opinion it is difficult to see that Imperial rule stretched northwards of Villena. In any event, even in such a case, before 589 *Valentia* would have fallen back into the hands of the Goths, since for that year two bishops are documented for the seat at the Third Council of Toledo, one Catholic (Celsinus) and another Arian (Ubiligisclus), although it is possible that the latter did not have his seat in Valencia itself but in the city located in Valencia la Vella. In this way, we could find ourselves here with a phenomenon of duplication of seats as a result of conquest (as happened with *Begastri*/Cartagena and *Elota*/*Ilici*), although it is also possible to discard an option similar to what happened between Arcavica and Reccopolis and which resulted in the transfer of the episcopal seat of Arcavica to the latter city due to proximity and powerful political reasons. Be that as it may, in the case that now concerns us it seems as if both cities would have acted in a complementary way, at least until the conquest of Byzantine *Spania*: one as a naval port (*Valentia*) and the other as a military centre of the region (Valencia la Vella). In this context, the nucleus of

¹²⁹ Cf. García Moreno 2008b: 47.

¹³⁰ Ribera *et al.* 2020: 69-76.

Valencia la Vella seems to have become the centre of the military mark that administered the Visigothic possessions recently conquered in the *Carthaginensis* coastal region, a territory that *Anonymous of Ravenna* will call *Aurariola*, but that in origin corresponded to a much wider territorial demarcation than the one consigned by the pact of 713 between the *dux* Theudimer and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Mūsā. We will have occasion to talk about this later.

Shortly before 610, the Goths seem to have also occupied *Begastri*, because its bishop appearing that year among the signatories of the Synod of Gundemar. The fall of *Begastri*, a city in the foothills of the Segura Mountains, pushed the Byzantine territories even further back, reducing them to the coastal strip, with hardly any geographical features that could serve as defensive positions. Until then, the protection of the territory seems to have been organised from a network of small, advanced castles or fortresses installed in strategic places. However, Byzantine dominion was based chiefly on the security provided by the walled enclosures of their cities and, above all, on the undisputed power of the Imperial fleet.

Indeed, from the fall of *Begastri*, the main obstacle that stood between the Visigothic kings and their longed-for reconquest of the Levantine coast was the Byzantine fleet. With the sea controlled by the Imperial navy, the Visigothic conquest could take decades. The *Portus Ilicitanus* (Santa Pola) and Cartagena could happily wait for reinforcements from the Byzantine bases in North Africa, Italy, and the Balearic Islands. Of course, the Byzantine ports in the Western Mediterranean also provided the cities of the Levantine coast with abundant supplies of military equipment and provisions, allowing the besieged towns to resist. The archaeological excavations carried out both in Cartagena and in *Ilici* have found large quantities of Byzantine ceramics (TSA, Keay 61, Keay 62, and *spatheia*), indicating the fluid traffic of goods between *Spania* and North African ports.¹³¹ With this situation, it is highly likely that it was the wide reach of the Imperial navy in support of the occupied cities that explains the unsuccessful attempts at conquest by Witteric (603-610), a king whom Isidore of Seville describes as ‘a man skilled in the art of arms, but elusive to victory’.¹³² However, according to the bishop of Seville, the greatest success attributed to Witteric was to snatch from the Byzantines the important stronghold of *Sagontia* (Gigónza, Cadiz) in the Strait of Cadiz.¹³³ It is possible, as we have pointed out before, that he also managed to conquer *Begastri* (Cehegín), since its holder, Bishop Vincent, appears among those who signed the *Constitutio Carthaginensium sacerdotum* of 610. We do not know why Isidore should overlook this success of Witteric’s, perhaps it was simply due to the fact that his reports refer mainly to the *Baetica*, but it is very difficult, given the short lapse of time elapsed, that the conquest of *Begastri* took place under the reign of Gundemar (610-612), even less if we take into account that the chronicler does not assign it to this monarch either. It is possible that, being Witteric, a king not very inclined to the Catholics and to the cause of Reccared, Isidore would deliberately avoid acknowledging that success (in fact the victory over *Sagontia* is not attributed to

¹³¹ Ramallo *et al.* 1996; Reynolds 2015: 187-190.

¹³² Vallejo 2012: 318-323.

¹³³ Isid. Hisp. HG 58: ‘*Wittericus regnum, quod vivente illo invaserat, vindicat annis VII, vir quidem strenuus in armorum arte, sed tamen expers victoriae. namque adversus militem Romanum proelium saepe molitus nihil satis gloriae gessit praeter quod milites quosdam Sagontia per duces obtinuit*’ (Mommsen 1894: 291). The *pacta* signed with the Byzantines after the rebellion of Hermenegild must have required the surrender of some places in the south (*Asidona, Barbi, Sagontia*). Although it is not possible to know which of the two contenders was responsible for this surrender – the prince or Leovigild himself. Cf. Vallejo Girvés 2012: 252-254.

the king himself, but to his dukes) or that the expedition against *Begastri* resulted in a possible failure before Cartagena, which would have obscured the conquest of that city.

With the military situation at a standstill, Toledo must have understood that patience was needed and it would have to wait for more favourable political-military conditions for any final assault. This does not mean at all that the Visigothic court simply folded its arms and let time pass. On the contrary, we know of two important measures adopted by the Visigothic kings to find a definitive solution to the problems posed by the Byzantine occupation. The first of these, which we will deal further with shortly, was the celebration of a synod of bishops of the *Carthaginensis* province in the year 610 (the so-called Synod of Gundemar). The second measure was the creation of a true royal Visigothic navy, a measure that, as we know from Isidore, was a personal initiative of King Sisebut.¹³⁴ Unfortunately, Isidore of Seville does not indicate where the Visigothic fleet was moored, but an analysis of the literary sources and geography can help pinpoint it.

Llobregat points out an interesting piece of news collected by Hydatius. The bishop of Chaves reports that Emperor Majorian (457-461) chartered a squadron to fight the Vandals, but they managed to capture the ships. The chronicler does not precisely indicate where these events took place, merely somewhere 'on the coast of Cartagena'.¹³⁵ Llobregat noticed another text from Marius of Avenches for the year 460, indicating that the Vandals captured the Imperial ships off *Elece (Ilici)*, next to Cartagena¹³⁶. Since *Ilici* does not have access to the coast, the author assumes that the chronicler was referring to the *Portus Illicitanus* (Santa Pola) and that this was also the base where the Visigothic fleet was anchored in the time of Theudimer, at the end of the 7th century.¹³⁷

It is possible that Llobregat is correct, but there have been other suggestions. From the analysis of the texts, the only certain conclusion that can be drawn is that the action took place near *Ilici*, as suggested by the text of Hydatius, and not in the same *portus Illicitanus*, as might be inferred at first sight from the story of Marius of Avenches. In fact, there is no record of a later incursion of the Vandals into Hispanic territory, something that would surely have been reflected in our sources. In sum, all that the literary sources indicate is that the Vandals captured a fleet of Roman ships off the coast of *Ilici*/Cartagena. In our opinion, this account does not invalidate the possibility that the Imperial fleet had departed from Valencia, although, at the time of the event, the best assumption is to locate the point of departure in Cartagena itself.¹³⁸ In any case, what is interesting for our topic is that in the reign of Sisebut the *Portus Illicitanus* must still have been in the hands of the Byzantines,

¹³⁴ Isid. Hisp. HG 70: '*hac sola tantum armorum experientia hucusque carebant, quod classica bella in mari gerere non studebant. sed postquam Sisebutus princeps regni sumpsit sceptrum, ad tantam felicitatis virtutem proveci sunt, ut non solum terras, sed et ipsa maria suis armis adeant subactusque serviat illis Romanus miles, quibus servire tot gentes et ipsam Spaniam videt*' (Mommsen 1894: 294 f).

¹³⁵ Hydat. 200: '*Mense Maio Maiorianus Hispanias ingreditur imperator: quo Carthaginensem provinciam pertendente aliquantas naves, quas sibi ad transitum adversum Vandalos praeparabat, de litore Carthaginensi commoniti Vandali per proditores abripiunt. Maiorianus ita a sua ordinatione frustratus ad Italiam revertitur*' (Mommsen 1894: 31). Through inadvertence, Llobregat (1973: 74) attributes the news to Isidore.

¹³⁶ Marii Avent. Chron. s.a. 460: '*Magno et Apollonare. His consulibus Maiorianus imperator profectus est ad Hispanias. Eo anno captae sunt naues a Vandalis ad Elecem iuxta Cartaginem Spartariam*' (Mommsen 1894: 232).

¹³⁷ Llobregat 1973: 34.

¹³⁸ González Blanco 1985: 59-62.

and therefore could not have been the base of the Gothic navy, as put forward by Llobregat. In the first third of the 7th century, the only valid option for where the Visigothic fleet could have been moored would be the port of Valencia, a city which, from the end of the 6th century and at the beginning of the next, witnessed a time of great urban dynamism, fitting to the great political importance that monarchs such as Leovigild and Reccared granted it.¹³⁹ In addition, from the times of King Leovigild, Valencia had a significant contingent of troops, as certified both by the presence of an Arian bishop in the city (attested by the signatures of the Third Council of Toledo), and the account of the captivity in the city of Prince Hermenegild at the end of 584. Moreover, Valencia was also endowed with a walled complex, which, together with its situation on the border of Imperial territories, make it a perfect candidate as a base for the Visigothic fleet. Furthermore, from Isidore's testimony it seems we can deduce that Sisebut's decision was directly related to the beginning of a new military offensive to expel the Imperial presence from the Iberian Peninsula.

There are also other indications that seem to support the hypothesis that Valencia accommodated the Visigothic navy until right up to the time of the Arab invasion. Two late references in the *Mozarabic Chronicle* of 754, and the Asturian chronicles, recount two important naval actions in later times.¹⁴⁰ Although neither explicitly reports where the events they describe took place, it is evident that these late references cannot be related to Cartagena, since the city had been destroyed by the troops of Suinthila in the course of its conquest. Less likely would be a transfer of the fleet to the *Portus Ilicitanus*, with Valencia to be preferred, because of its port and defensive infrastructures, as well as its significant political, military, and ecclesiastical structures, and having shown itself at all times faithful to the Visigothic kingdom. Chronologically, the first news could be related to the flight of the Byzantine fleet after the capture of Carthage by the Arabs (698 CE) or with the attempt of Emperor Leontius (695-698) to recover the African province.¹⁴¹ Not by chance, the *ad Sebastianum* edition of the chronicle of Alfonso III immediately links this news with the arrival of the Greek Ardabast at the court of Chindasuinth and the Arab invasion of Spain ('*Et ut tibi causam introitus Sarracenorum in Yspaniam plene notesceremus*'). The news transmitted by the chronicle of Alfonso III seems to be framed within the dynamic expansion of the Saracens in the western Mediterranean that culminated with the conquest of Visigothic Spain a decade later. This attempt suggests that, as had happened before with the Byzantine landings of 552, the Arab invasion would have developed on two fronts – in the Strait of Cadiz and on the coast of Murcia. This would explain the interest of the Arab sources in the story of Theudimer and the absence of the coastal cities in the treaty he negotiated with the invaders, as well as the inconsistencies reflected in the stories of the conquest of 711, as highlighted by J. Vallvé.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ribera 2008b; Ribera and Rosselló 2007; Ribera *et al.* 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Chron. Muz. 47: '[***] nomine Theudimer, qui in Spanie partes non modicas Arabum intulerat neces, et diu exaggeratos pacem cum eis federat habiendus. Sed et iam sub Egicam et Uuittizam Gothorum regibus in Grecis, qui equorei nabalique descenderant sua in patria, de palmam victoriae triumphaverat' (Gil, 1973: 34. Cf. López Pereira 1980: 112-115). Chron. Adef. III (Rot.) 2: '*Illius quoque tempore CCLXX nabes Sarracenorum Spanie litus sunt adgresse, ibique omnes pariter sunt delete et ignibus concremate*'. Seb. 2: '*Illius namque tempore septuaginta naues Sarracenorum Yspanie litus sunt adgresse, ibique omnia eorum agmina ferro sunt deletea et classes eorum ignibus concremate*' (Gil *et al.* 1985: 151).

¹⁴¹ García Moreno 1989: 16; Collins 2005: 110.

¹⁴² Vallvé 1989.

The identification of the base of the Visigothic navy with the port of Valencia has important consequences for our study as it supports the hypothesis of a close link between the palatial residence excavated in Pla de Nadal (Valencia la Vella) and the figure of the *dux* Theudimer, protagonist of the news of the *Mozarabic Chronicle*. As we will have occasion to see in more detail later, this hypothesis also makes sense from the analysis of the epigraphic documentation (a tondo with monogram and a graffiti with the legend *Teudinir*) and the iconographic study (Toledo-style reliefs), as well as the material revealed by archaeological research.¹⁴³

The Ideological battle: The Decree of Gundemar and the Synod of 610

Attached to the minutes of the Twelfth Council of Toledo in 681 is a controversial document known as the *Decree of Gundemar*. Strangely, this decree does not seem to have any relation to the aforementioned Council. Specifically, the decree is composed of two different documents: the constitution approved by the bishops of the Carthaginensis in a council held on 23 October 610, and the decree properly issued later by King Gundemar and sanctioning what was agreed in that Synod.

Although most historians consider this document authentic, there have also been discordant voices suspecting a subsequent falsification from the circle of the Bishop of Toledo to justify the elevation of this see to a metropolis of the Carthaginensis to the detriment of Cartagena.¹⁴⁴ For this reason, before analysing the arguments put forward to challenge this document, it would be helpful to say something about the general context in which the *Decree of Gundemar* sits and the background we think supports its authenticity.

As we have had occasion to see, the Imperial invasion of the mid 6th century meant a drastic change in the political structures within the Peninsular. Until then, the Iberian Peninsula was divided into two large barbarian kingdoms (the Suevic kingdom of Braga, and the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo), as well as some large areas that enjoyed broad political autonomy, if not de facto independence (*Corduba*, *Orospeda*, *Cantabria*, etc). The arrival of the Byzantine troops introduced a new factor of political instability, in terms of the real threats presented by the possible reconquest of former lands belonging to the Empire within a political context characterised by the ideal of '*renovatio imperii*', spearheaded by the Emperor Justinian. The arrival of the Byzantine troops in Hispania also had important repercussions on a religious level. First, it introduced a new element of controversy, in this case theological, since Justinian had drafted a condemnation of the *Three Chapters* that had not been accepted by the North African and Western Churches. Second, the Sueves and, above all, the Goths professed the Arian heresy, while the Hispano-Roman provincials were overwhelmingly Catholic, in principle opposed to the condemnation of the *Triá Capitula*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Juan and Pastor 1989; Ribera *et al.* 2015; Calatayud 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Among those in favour of the authenticity of the Decree are Rivera Recio (1955); Orlandis and Ramos-Lisson (1986), Codoñer (1972: 63 ff.), Barbero (1989: 185-188), and García Moreno (1990b). Against, González Blanco (1985: 69-73; 1986).

¹⁴⁵ The question of the *Triá Capitula* is too complex to deal with in a few lines. Suffice it to say here that the Spanish Church learned of the controversy through North African sources, which led them to interpret Justinian's condemnation as also a condemnation of what was agreed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, hence the staunch defence of the Three Chapters by the Western Churches: Barbero 1987.

The Byzantine invasion also had other no less perverse effects in terms of ecclesiastical organisation. On the one hand, some of the episcopal sees under Byzantine control belonged to a metropolitan see under Gothic sovereignty. This affected to a greater or lesser extent several bishoprics of the Baetica (*Abdera, Malaca, Asidona, Egabrum, and Iliberris*). Furthermore, as the Visigoths recovered peninsular territories from the Byzantines, these lands were added to the nearest dioceses held by the Goths, regardless of whether the ecclesiastical tradition justified it or not. It is worth remembering here that this phase corresponds to the conquests of Leovigild prior to the rebellion of Hermenegild (580-585), i.e. within the Arian period of the Visigothic kingdom, a time when the kings of Toledo showed little inclination in becoming involved in the Catholic ecclesiastical administration. In this case, the solution came from the dynamics of conquest and the consequent return of the territories annexed fraudulently to their original dioceses, a process that lasted several decades and did not conclude, for the dioceses of the Baetica, until the Second Council of Seville in 619.¹⁴⁶



Fig. 18. King Gundemar (610-612) according to an 18th century engraving (M. Rodríguez, Portraits of the Kings of Spain. Madrid, 1782).

But in the Carthaginensis the problem posed by the Byzantine invasion was just the opposite to what we have described in the Baetica. Here the episcopal sees of the interior of the province were politically under Visigothic sovereignty, but from an ecclesiastical point of view they depended on a metropolis, Cartagena, which was occupied by the Imperial invaders. This situation posed a delicate question that affected the seat of Toledo very directly. In fact, since the time of King Theudis (511-526), Toledo's episcopal see already appears favoured by royal power. Indeed, the process of promotion of the chair of Toledo was before the Byzantine landings and can already be traced back to the times of the Ostrogothic regency.¹⁴⁷ It is very possible that, in the confusing period that was the reign of Amalaric (511-531), the ambitious Theudis found an important ally for his political plans in the bishop of Toledo, something suggested by the appeal of Bishop Montanus (521-531) to the *comes* Ergar in his epistolary correspondence with his pupil Turibius. Theudis, moreover, was married to a woman of importance from the highest Spanish nobility, probably, as we have suggested elsewhere, a descendant of the lineage of the Emperor Theodosius, so it is not surprising to find this benevolent attitude towards the Catholic hierarchy, and especially towards the prelate of Toledo.¹⁴⁸ From that moment on, and as a logical conclusion of a process of convergence of interests between the Ostrogothic viceroy and the bishopric of Toledo, the prestige and power of the seat only increased. As a matter of fact, taking advantage of the crisis posed by the disappearance of the Imperial administration and the advent of the Visigothic kingdom, the bishoprics belonging to inland Carthaginensis seem to have turned their

¹⁴⁶ Vallejo Girvés 2012: 359.

¹⁴⁷ Rivera Recio 1955.

¹⁴⁸ Barroso *et al.* 2015.

eyes towards Toledo, breaking away from the ties they owed to the metropolitan chair of Cartagena. This situation is recorded in the aforementioned epistle of Bishop Montanus to Turibius, in which he openly speaks of ‘bishops of the [province] Carpetania and Celtiberia’ outside the Carthaginensis.¹⁴⁹ It is evident that the unstoppable rise of the chair of Toledo within the Spanish Church must have aroused a logical suspicion in the sectors most attached to the episcopal seat of Cartagena. At least that seems deducible from the fact that his bishop, Hector, signed the minutes of the Council of Tarragona in 516 – prior therefore to the Byzantine invasion – highlighting his condition of metropolitan of the Carthaginensis.¹⁵⁰

Initially, the situation was somewhat unofficially channelled, more *de facto* than *de iure*, through the separation of the territory of the inland Carthaginensis with respect to the Levantine coastal area.¹⁵¹ This situation is alluded to in the letters of Bishop Montanus and is also reflected in the Council of Toledo of 531, which was attended by the majority of the bishops of inland Carthaginensis, but was boycotted by the prelates of the maritime area. In this context, the convening of the Synod of Toledo in 531 can be understood as a demonstration of Toledo’s strength against Cartagena as well as a notable stance of the bishoprics of inland Carthaginensis in favour of the royal see.¹⁵²

If the relationship between Toledo and Cartagena was already conflictive, the Imperial occupation of the Levantine coast came to further aggravate the situation, since from that moment on the bishoprics of the Carthaginensis came to depend ecclesiastically on a seat that was under foreign dominion. It was obvious that the new panorama offered a favourable solution for the ambitions of the bishop of the royal see, as well as a satisfactory exit for the seats of the interior of the province, increasingly inclined towards Toledo. Following the logic dictated by events, the next step was the constitution of inland Carthaginensis as an ecclesiastical province independent of its old metropolis, which was to be named ‘Carpetana and Celtiberia’. It has already been pointed out that this new administrative reality was already in the making in the time of Bishop Montanus, but now the political situation had taken a considerable turn after the Imperial invasion and the conversion of the Goths to Catholicism, enabling the creation – this time indeed *de iure* – of the new entity. The subscriptions of the prelates Euphemius of Toledo and Petrus of Arcavica to the Acts of the Third Council of Toledo confirm it without a doubt: there is a new province – Carpetana and Celtiberia – with its two reference centres (Toledo and Reccopolis-Arcavica, respectively), in which the seat of Toledo will act as a metropolitan. In the same way, both territories must have been organised on the political plane with the institution of a *comes Toleti* and a second *comes* destined to act as governor of the other province, which, although St Hildephonsus discreetly omits its name, can be none other

¹⁴⁹ Montano, Epist. 2: ‘...quod tamen privilegium decessori nostro, necnon dominis et fratribus nostris Carpetaniae et Celtiberiae episcopis uester coepiscopus fecit’ (Vives 1963: 33). Montanus’ letters are added to the minutes of the Second Council of Toledo (527). On this topic, see Codoñer 1972: 58-64; Orlandis 1984a: 144-146; Thompson 1985: 47 f.; Barbero 1989; Isla 2000-2001: 41-52; Vilella 2003; Martin 1998b; 2006; Barroso 2019; 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Conc. Tarrac: ‘Ector in Christi nomine episcopus Carthaginensis metropolitanae subscripsi’ (Vives 1963: 38).

¹⁵¹ On the Carpetana and Celtiberia province, see Codoñer 1972: 58-64; Orlandis 1984a: 144-146; García Moreno 1988: 156 ff.; 1990: 229-249; Barbero 1989; Isla 2000-2001: 41-52; Vilella 2003: 113-116; Barroso 2019. The names, although merely academic, could also reflect a different pre-Roman cultural substratum that would have somehow fossilized in both regions. However, if Toledo remains the capital of classical Carpetania, *Arcavica* has ousted *Segobriga* from the capital of Celtiberia, surely due to its association with *Reccopolis*. Barroso - Carrobes - Morín 2013d.

¹⁵² Beltrán Torreira 1991.

than the aforementioned Celtiberia.¹⁵³ It is possible that, as Beltrán Torreira supposes, among the various reasons that led to this situation, respect for the figure of Licinian of Cartagena - the great absentee at the synodal meeting of 589 -, a bishop inclined to the Visigothic theses, was a major factor. But, in any case, something that began as provisional ended up being an insoluble problem, until military events led to a new and surprising outcome.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, and parallel to this process of elevation of the see of Toledo, an adaptation of the ecclesiastical structures to the new political reality also occurred in the territory controlled by the Imperial power. It is very possible that the dioceses that had remained under Byzantine rule were constituted as an autonomous ecclesiastical province under the jurisdiction of Cartagena, a city that would act as a metropolitan head of the entire Byzantine province of *Spania*. In this case, the new circumscription would include not only the bishoprics originally suffragans of Cartagena, but also those corresponding to the Balearic Islands, and even those bishoprics of the Baetica under Byzantine control. As we say, the intention of the Imperial court was to promote Cartagena as an archbishopric of all the territory controlled by the Byzantines, thus acting as a counterweight to both Toledo and the Roman seat.¹⁵⁵

Stripped of its metropolitan status, and reduced to heading those territories under Imperial sovereignty, it now fell to the Visigothic kings to reorganise the province with a view to taking back the lands occupied by the Greeks. Logically, the reorganisation process must have taken place after the celebration of the Third Council of Toledo and the conversion of the Goths to Nicene orthodoxy, when the kings of Toledo began to get involved in matters pertaining to religious policy, and especially after the failure of papal mediation in the resolution of the Greco-Gothic conflict. The new attitude was manifested in a change of policy with respect to the reconquered territories. In this way, if in the Baetica area the Arian Gothic authorities had proceeded without further ado to the distribution of the territories snatched from Imperial authority from among the neighbouring dioceses, in the Levantine area the Catholic Visigothic court opted directly for the supplanting of the Byzantine episcopal seats. To this effect, two new episcopal chairs were created, *Begastri* (Cehegín) and *Elo* (Elda), which from then on would be in charge of administering the territories of the seats of *Ilici* and Cartagena that had been snatched from the invaders.¹⁵⁶

For the see of Elotana, and unlike what seems to have happened with Begastri, where at least we have the epigraphic testimony of Bishops Acrisminus and Vitalis (although, unfortunately, lost and doubtful), there are no epigraphic references to confirm whether Elo had been an episcopal seat prior to 610, when the bishopric is documented for the first time.¹⁵⁷ Bearing this in mind, and the fact

¹⁵³ Hild. Tol. 6 (Codoñer 1972: 124 ff.); Barroso and Morín 2007: 118 f.; Barroso - Carrobes - Morín 2013c: 1095 ff.; Barroso 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Beltrán Torreira 1991: 499 f.

¹⁵⁵ Beltrán Torreira 1991: 500-502, who also analyses the threat posed by the archiepiscopal institution as the spearhead of Justinian *Kirchenpolitik* in the occupied territories. See Vallejo 1993: 406 f.; Vizcaíno 2007: 73-75.

¹⁵⁶ Vives 1959-60; 1961.

¹⁵⁷ Hübner, IHC Suppl. 406 and 407. Fernández-Guerra (1879: 23-25) also quotes an earlier bishop named Epenetus mentioned on a tombstone found near Mazarrón, a town on the coast c. 70 km from Cehegín. The testimonies of Begastri are, as we say, doubtful, and in this last case there is nothing that links it to the Bigastrine see (González Fernández 1984: 43 ff.). In any

mentioned above that there are also no allusions to bishops prior to Sanibilis, it is highly plausible that the bishopric was founded in the interval between the years 595 (the end of the diplomatic claim) and 610 (the *Constitutio Carthaginiensium sacerdotum*), if not in this last year, as many historians think, as a further consequence of the administrative reorganisation ordered by King Gundemar in the context of the prospective conquest of *Ilici*.¹⁵⁸ Around the same time, the episcopal dignity would be recognised to Begastri, a city conquered during Reccared's reign – or more probably that of Witteric.¹⁵⁹

In summary, this is the complex background in which the promulgation of the decree of 610 and the subsequent meeting of the synod of the bishops of the Carthaginiensis takes place. However, as mentioned a few lines previously, the authenticity of this very important document of Visigothic history has been questioned by some authors, particularly by A. González Blanco. In the opinion of these authors, it would be a forgery carried out in the environment around the chair of Toledo to legitimise the transfer of the provincial primacy to the Church of the *regia sedes*.¹⁶⁰ There have been three main objections put forward to defend this position:

1. The mention of a prelate named Munulus for Cartagena at the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675 CE), where he was represented by a deacon named Egila.
2. That the Decree of Gundemar appears as an annex to the Twelfth Council of Toledo (681 CE), that is a long time after its presumed drafting. This makes it suspicious of having been drafted *ad hoc* for this synod.
3. The suspicious absence of the signature of Aurasius of Toledo in the Decree of Gundemar, while, on the contrary, the subscriptions of the metropolitans of Merida and Seville do appear.

The rest of the objections should not really be seen as such, but are more or less well founded assumptions, and in some cases, such as the longevity of certain bishops, or the signature of two incumbents in the case of *Castulo*, somewhat subjective and of little value as evidence.¹⁶¹

We must begin by saying that while it is true that in the *Codex Emilianensis* Munulus is cited as bishop of Cartagena, the rest of the manuscripts (*Escorialensis* 13 and 20 and *Toletanus*) bring the

event, it is not impossible that the bishopric of Begastri dates to an early Christian tradition prior to the time of the Constantinian peace. Cf. González Blanco 1993: 139 ff. For the bishops of Begastri, see González Fernández 1984.

¹⁵⁸ Not many years before 610, as Sanabilis figures last among the bishops who signed the *Constitutio*. See Flórez, ES 7 (1766): 218; García Moreno 1989: 264 ff. We have reduced the generally accepted period by five years because the correspondence between Reccared and Gregory could not have been earlier than six years after the celebration of the Third Council of Toledo (see Vilella 1991a: 179).

¹⁵⁹ Isidore HG. 55 (Mommsen 1894: 290) narrates that Reccared had to confront the insolence of the Romans (*saepe etiam et lacertos contra Romanas insolentias*), an expression with which the chronicler undoubtedly wanted to indicate that the initiative corresponded to the Byzantines (Presedo 2003: 58ff.). The same conclusion seems to be deduced from the inscription of the Patrician Comentiolus (CIL II 3420; CLE 299; IHC 176; Vizcaíno 2007: 736-741), sent by the Emperor Maurice against the barbarian hosts. On Comentiolus, see Goubert 1944: 64 ff.; 1945: 129-139; Morossi 2013: 143-153).

¹⁶⁰ See González Blanco 1985: 72 f. Contra García Moreno 1974a: 132; Beltrán Torreira 1991: 509, n. 57.

¹⁶¹ As Peidro (2008: 314, n. 30) rightly notes.

reading 'Arcavicense' or its variant 'Archavicense', which seems to suggest that in this case we are simply facing an error of textual transmission.¹⁶²

As for the appearance of the Decree of Gundemar as an annex to the acts of the Twelfth Council of Toledo, it is necessary to go back to the rarefied context in which the celebration of this synod took place. As is known, the council met in 681 to address the embarrassing question of the deposition of King Wamba and the election of Erwig and when the problem raised by the creation of new episcopal seats was still current. At least two of these new bishoprics, that of *Aquis* and the Pretorian bishopric, clearly threatened the authority, prestige, and power of the see of Toledo. Within this complicated political context which directly affected the authority of the bishop of Toledo, the inclusion of the Decree of Gundemar and the *Constitutio* as annexes to the decisions of the council were totally pertinent and, moreover, opportune, since what was at stake was nothing other than reaffirming the prestige and dignity of the seat of Toledo; prestige and dignity threatened in this case not so much by Cartagena, but above all by the Pretorian bishopric created by Wamba in Toledo itself.

Moreover, the meeting of the synod of 610 is totally consistent with the historical situation during the reign of Gundemar (610-612). It is a moment when the episcopal seat of Cartagena still exists as such (although it is in the power of the Byzantines) and, therefore, constitutes a strong threat to the growing power of Toledo in case of a delivery of the city or a peaceful conquest. Faced with this hypothetical – but as it seemed at that moment – irreversible situation, the bishop of Toledo, with the king's consent, decides to shield the metropolitan status acquired over a century (actually, since the times of Montanus).

The process of the promotion of Toledo from a simple bishopric to a primatial seat of Spain is well known and was analysed many years ago by J.F. Rivera Recio. This process goes back to the first decades of the 6th century, with the privilege alluded to by Montanus in his epistle to Turibius. The second step took place at the end of that century, with the designation of Toledo as *ciuitas* or *urbs regia* (Third Council) and from there an unstoppable rise begins to the ecclesiastical primacy: the Fifth Council of Toledo (636 CE) recognises the character of metropolitan of the Carthaginensis province to Bishop Eugenius II; from the Eighth Council (653 CE) the designation of the bishop of Toledo as metropolitan of the royal city is produced, a title that evidences the royal support to the chair (the same one that Wamba would endanger). The Twelfth Council, in which the *Decree of Gundemar* and the *Constitutio* are inserted, sanctions the privilege of election of bishops of the whole kingdom regardless of the ecclesiastical province to which they belonged.¹⁶³ Within this process of exaltation of the see of Toledo, the reproach that the Decree of Gundemar makes to Bishop Euphemius for having subscribed the Acts of the Third Council with the title of 'bishop of the Carpetania' is quite logical. The decree was precisely aimed at defending the position of the seat of Toledo and for this it was necessary to make clear that there is only one province (Carthaginensis), and therefore the denominations used in 589, i.e. the Carpetana province of Euphemius or the Celtiberia of Petrus of Arcavica, could give rise to a fatal misunderstanding. That for this they made use – somewhat inconsistently in terms of the logic of reasoning – of the testimony of Montanus is no

¹⁶² Flórez, ES 7 (1766): 74s; García Moreno 1974a: 132. The appearance of the see of Cartagena has led some authors to think that this would have been one of those restored by Wamba and subsequently annulled by the Twelfth Council (González Blanco 1985: 72 f).

¹⁶³ Rivera Recio 1955.

impediment if we take into account what was at stake. Indeed, Montanus had declared the metropolitan privilege acquired by his seat within the province of Carpetana and Celtiberia (the inland Carthaginensis), but the Decree of Gundemar goes a step further and extends it to the entire province, because it is indivisible:

‘And because it is one and the same province we decree that just as the province of Baetica, Lusitania, or Tarraconensis, and the rest that belong to the jurisdiction of our kingdom, according to the ancient decrees of the Fathers, it is known that each one has its own metropolitan, so in the same way the Carthaginensis province will venerate as primate one and the same and only, the one pointed out by the ancient conciliar authority, who will have the highest honour among all the co-provincial bishops.’¹⁶⁴

Thus, the decision of the Synod of 610 came to confirm *de iure* and *de facto* the metropolitan dignity of Toledo within the province, even after a hypothetical conquest of Cartagena, which would take place just a decade after this conciliar meeting – but could have been advanced a few years earlier if religious scruples had not mediated. It could even have happened in the times of Gundemar himself, since Isidore of Seville confirms that this king carried out a campaign against the Imperial forces. This makes one think that it was not impossible that the synod in question was convened precisely as a complement to the military offensive.¹⁶⁵ In any event, the fact that the conquest of Cartagena was finally carried out by force, including the violent destruction of the city (perhaps to avoid a competitor to Toledo), very much paved the way for the royal seat’s recognition as a metropolitan see of the Carthaginensis.

Finally, we need to analyse the question that Aurasius, holder of the bishopric of Toledo at the time of the synod of Gundemar, does not appear among the bishops who signed the decree. In our opinion, this absence is perfectly comprehensible as the decision taken at the synod of 610 fully recognised the ambitions of the Bishop of Toledo. The appearance of Aurasius among the signatories would have been a gesture of partiality that would make him appear as judge and party to the dispute he maintained with Cartagena. In his situation, the most intelligent thing was undoubtedly to endorse the decision to the rest of the bishops of the Carthaginensis, and to the king himself, while the prelate of Toledo remained discreetly in the background. But let us not forget that the *Constitutio* was signed in Toledo under the presidency of Aurasius himself (*‘in Toletana urbe apud sanctissimum ejusdem ecclesiae antistitem’*).¹⁶⁶ It is evident that, despite not being among the episcopal signatories of the *Constitutio*, it was this prelate who pulled the strings of the synod, although very much behind the scenes. If we take this into account, it is not surprising that, although he was not a relevant writer – and therefore a priori not susceptible to inclusion among the cast of his *Illustrious Men* – Hildefonso

¹⁶⁴ Vives 1963: 405.

¹⁶⁵ Isid. Hisp. HG 59: *‘Gundemarus post Vittericum regnat annis II. hic Wascones una expeditione vastavit, alia militem Romanum obsedit...’* (Mommsen 1894: 291).

¹⁶⁶ Something already pointed out by Flórez, ES V (1859): 239.

gave him glowing praise, not least for his defence of authority and his willingness to resolve internal affairs, a more than veiled allusion to the performance of his predecessor in these areas.¹⁶⁷

But there is one more detail about this issue that seems to have been little considered, and yet one we consider of the greatest importance in terms of understanding the decision of King Gundemar. This has to do with indications that seem to suggest that the actions of the prelate of Toledo were not as innocent as his biographer proposes, and that he was directly involved in the events leading to the assassination of Witteric and the enthronement of Gundemar.

We know King Witteric acquired the throne through a *coup d'état* against Liuva II, the son of Reccared, and that he was ultimately assassinated as a result of a conspiracy hatched by a faction of the palatine nobility. Isidore does not provide details of how the events that led to the plot against Witteric happened and simply gives a moral explanation of the fact (*quia gladio operatus fuerat, gladio periit*), alluding to the way he had risen to the crown and to his previous participation in a conspiracy to dethrone Reccared shortly after the conversion. Apart from that moral judgment inspired by a well-known scriptural passage (Mt 52: 16: *...omnes enim qui acceperint gladium gladio peribunt*) and the despicable way the king's body was desecrated, Isidore goes without continuity to refer to the succession of Gundemar.¹⁶⁸ Although the Hispalensis does not mention it, it is very possible that the conspiracy resulting in Witteric's death was hatched by Gundemar, or at least had his approval. The chronicle simply says that he succeeded the king after his assassination, without going into further details, but it is significant that Gundemar seems to have held the position of *dux prouinciae* of the Septimania or *Gallia Gothica*. This is not a minor detail when we consider that this province was a heavily militarised duchy and that most of the conspiracies of the nobility in the 7th century had the decisive support of the army stationed in Septimania.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, the reign of Witteric (603-610) is usually considered as a phase of rupture with the policy of collaboration between the Church and the state initiated by Reccared. Logically, this stance earned him the enmity of an important faction of the Gothic nobility loyal to the dynasty of Leovigild and to the policy initiated by his son Reccared characterized by cooperation with the Hispano-Roman establishment.¹⁷⁰ One of the most well-known cases of this opposition to the monarch is that of Count Bulgar, whose writings allow us to reconstruct some details of the obscure reign of Witteric. Bulgar had held the title of count in Septimania and was very well connected with Gundemar, as is reflected in the epistolary relationship he maintained with the king and the familiarity in the treatment with him. As far as we know, Bulgar was removed from his office and persecuted rancorously by King Witteric. Despite having fallen into disgrace, Bulgar found support in the prelates Agapius (probably bishop of Cordoba) and Sergius of Narbonne, the metropolitan seat of Septimania. Later he would also

¹⁶⁷ Hild. Tol. Vir. Illustr. 4: '*Vir bonus, regiminis auctoritate praeclarus, domesticis rebus bene dispositus, aduersitatis infixis constanter erectur*' (Codoñer 1972: 122 f).

¹⁶⁸ Isid. Hisp. HG 58: '*hic in vita plurima inlicita fecit, in morte autem, quia gladio operatus fuerat, gladio periit. mors quippe innocentis inulta in illo non fuit: inter epulas enim prandii coniuratione quorundam est interfectus. corpus eius viliter est exportatum atque sepultum*' (Mommsen 1894: 291).

¹⁶⁹ In a letter addressed to King Gundemar, Count Bulgar states that 'the province remembered with gratitude the paternal care he had lavished on the good of the region and its inhabitants'. Orlandis 2011: 311. Cf. also Barroso - Carrobbles - Morín 2013b.

¹⁷⁰ An aspect already pointed out by Görres (1898: 102-105).

find the support of Bishop Elergius, who at first had shown himself contrary to Bulgar but later managed to extract a royal pardon for the count. Once Witteric was assassinated, Bulgar received from Gundemar the government of Septimania, a position of the highest trust, which again highlights the fidelity of the man to the new monarch.¹⁷¹

His noblemen were not alone in earning Witteric's animosity. We know that during his reign, Aurasius had difficulties with various authorities.¹⁷² Once again, we have to regret the lack of information from our source, in this case Hildefonsus, one of Aurasius' successors at the head of the Toledan chair. It seems clear that the news transmitted by Hildefonsus must be framed within a policy developed by Witteric that was excessively favourable to the Gothic element, a policy that



Fig. 19. King Sisebuto (612-621). Mariano de la Roca y Delgado. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

historiography portrays as a rupture of the alliance that the Gothic nobility and the Hispano-Roman intellectual elite had achieved in the reign of Reccared and that has sometimes been misinterpreted as a return to Arianism.

Witteric's new political guidelines, and his irregular ascent to the Visigothic throne, setting aside none other than the son of the revered Reccared, logically could not be to the liking of most of the ecclesiastical estate either. And, as Hildefonsus suggests, much less so of the holder of Toledo, who, by his condition as bishop of the royal seat, must have had more frequent contact with the king. From what can be deduced from the testimony of Hildefonsus, Aurasius also had problems with the count of Toledo Froga, a character who logically must have been well connected with Witteric. In addition, it seems, Aurasius had to also face an attempt at provincial schism by which some prelates of the Carthaginensis tried to introduce another metropolitan seat in the province. Given the context of the claim – within an

increasingly notorious split between interior and coastal Carthaginensis – that other seat could only be Cartagena. It is possible that this desire was fuelled by the vision of an imminent conquest of Cartagena, since Witteric campaigned against the Byzantines, and, as we have already commented, it must have been in his reign that the conquest of the important city of Begastris happened, as its

¹⁷¹ Orlandis 2011: 307-313. It is possible that the relationship between the new king and Bulgar was established during the time of Reccared, when the former was acting as *dux provinciae* and the latter as count of some important city in Septimania. This can be deduced at least from the context of the letters.

¹⁷² Hild. Tol. Vir. Illustr. 4: '*...adversitatibus infixis constanter erectus*' (Codoñer 1972: 122 ff.). García Moreno 2007: 245.

bishop, Vincent, was among the attendees at the *Constitutio Carthagensium sacerdotum* of 610.¹⁷³ If the dating of this conquest is accurate, and everything points to it being so, this would have brought the border with the Byzantines up to the course of the Sangonera River, less than 30 mi from the Byzantine capital. In this context, it is quite logical that the bishops of the coastal Carthaginensis foresaw the restoration soon of the status quo prior to Montanus, when there had already been a strong desire by the coastal bishoprics to disassociate themselves from the seat of Toledo and return to the fold of the mother seat. In our opinion, it is very likely that this threat of restoration of Cartagena as a metropolis was in reality the real trigger for the promulgation of the decree of 610 and the tragic dethronement of Witteric.

The situation indeed changed completely with the assassination of Witteric and Gundemar's enthronement. With this monarch there was a return to the political principles that Reccared had initiated, based on close collaboration with the Hispano-Roman establishment, i.e. with the Catholic hierarchy.¹⁷⁴ We have already hinted at dealings with the nobleman Gundiliuva, the probable *dux* of Bastetania, and the possibility that the new monarch was in some way related to the family of Reccared. True or not, what seems to be beyond doubt is the fact that Gundemar resumed the policy of collaboration with the Church that had been initiated at the Third Council of Toledo, as is implicitly evident in the epistolary relationship with the Count Bulgar, and demonstrates the conciliar meeting of 610. Perhaps it is worth remembering here that Aurasius, the same prelate who had had difficulties with Witteric, was the holder of the seat of Toledo during the Synod of 610 that sanctioned the metropolitan character of the royal city. If we, therefore, put in order all the data we have (opposition to Witteric, his death following conspiracy in Toledo, closeness of Bishop Aurasius to King Gundemar, and elevation of the chair of Toledo to metropolitan seat in 610) it is possible to feel that the prelate was in some way involved in the conspiracy that led to the assassination of Witteric and the subsequent enthronement of Gundemar.¹⁷⁵ Seen from this perspective, would it then be out of the question to suppose that the sanction of Toledo as a metropolitan seat of the Carthaginensis could have been the reward granted by Gundemar for the support provided by Aurasius to obtain the coveted crown? We do not believe so, considering that the metropolitan dignity was already being exercised *de facto* by the bishop of Toledo ever since the distant time of Montanus (and thus the decision did not compromise the king at all), and especially considering the opportunity afforded by the celebration of the Synod of 610, just when a new military offensive against the Byzantines is about to begin.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ 'Vicentius sanctae ecclesiae Bigastrensis episcopus subscripsi' (Tejada y Ramiro 1850: 487; Vives 1963: 409).

¹⁷⁴ Contrary to Codoñer's opinion (1972: 53), which defends a political continuity between Gundemar and Witteric. It is possible that the author based her argument on the fact that the new king continued Witteric's policy with respect to the Franks, but this had been carried out since the times of Athanagild and would continue later with his successor Sisebut, whom historiography rightly assumes was linked to the Reccared family. Furthermore, the way Gundemar acceded to the throne is in itself a revealing indication that we are facing abrupt political change. The meeting of the Synod of 610 is another argument for this change, especially taking into account Witteric's lukewarm attitude towards religious matters.

¹⁷⁵ It would not be the only case if we consider the episode of the deposition of Wamba, and the questionable role of Julian of Toledo in it, or the rebellion of Suniefred with the support of Metropolitan Sisbert, successor of St Julian (Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 83-86).

¹⁷⁶ Metropolitan Julian's support for Erwig would also result in the suppression of the new bishoprics created by Wamba, as well as a new prerogative in favour of the holder of the Toledo see – the privilege of electing bishops: XII Con.Tol. c. 6: '[...] licitum maneat deinceps Toletano pontifici quoscumque regalis postestas elegerit et jam dicti Toletani episcopi iudicium dignos esse probaverit, in quibuslibet provinciis in praecedentium sedium praeficere praesules, et decedentibus episcopis

The Conquest: Ilici and Cartagena

As we have seen, one of the reasons that might explain the disastrous fall of Witteric could have been the lack of success in his military ventures against the Byzantines. However, the king had managed to increase the Visigothic domains by the conquest of *Sagontia* and, perhaps, of *Begastri*, and thus the situation was very favourable in terms of the Visigothic plans for conquest. Soon these expectations of a definitive triumph would improve even more thanks to the complicated internal situation that the Empire was experiencing at that time.

Indeed, in the first decades of the 7th century a series of circumstances occurred that greatly benefited the Visigothic cause (the break of the truce with the Persians, attacks by the Avars, the rebellion of the exarch of Africa Heraclius, epidemics of plague, etc.). This delicate internal situation was skilfully exploited by the Visigothic kings in their pretensions to conquer the last peninsular strongholds remaining in the power of the Byzantines. Witteric had expelled the Greeks from a good part of the Strait, leaving the Imperial dominion restricted to a narrow coastal strip that depended entirely on the support of its fleet. Unfortunately for him, the king was not so fortunate on the Levantine front, where the support of the Greek navy seems to have been decisive in the success of the defence of the cities. However, as we have already advanced, it seems probable that in his reign, perhaps at the end of it, the conquest of the strategic city of *Begastri*, located in the interior of the current region of Murcia, took place. It is possible that this action was framed within a more ambitious campaign that had as its final destination the conquest of Cartagena, and which ended in failure. This would partly explain why Isidore evaded to list *Begastri* among Witteric's conquests, while explaining the line in his inscription about this king being 'a man vigorous in war, but without victories', as well as that 'although he often fought battles against the Roman soldiers, he did not obtain glory' (HG 58). In our opinion, this resounding failure would have alienated the Gothic nobility, precipitating the end of his reign. In reality, Witteric had been a king respected by the nobility due to his maturity and skill with weapon – in contrast to the deposed Liuva II, whose youth and inexperience cost him the throne. It must have been exactly this military failure against the Byzantines that precipitated his fate.

Fortunately for Visigothic interests, in the year 610, coinciding with the death of Witteric and the arrival on the throne of Gundemar, Emperor Phocas was forced to leave the eparchy of *Spania* to its fate, forced by the political instability that resulted from the threat of the Persians and Avars on the Eastern front. To make matters worse, the rebellion of Heraclius that same year deprived the Hispanic province of Byzantine naval support, since the exarch sailed for Constantinople using the fleet moored at Carthage. From the Visigothic side, the favourable military and political situation resulted in a series of victorious campaigns – led first by Gundemar (610-612), but especially by his successors, Sisebut and Suinthila. Certainly, the pious King Sisebut (612-621) could have definitively resolved the Byzantine question, following a series of victorious campaigns against them, but his moral and religious scruples – he was surely alarmed by the news that came from the East – led him to request a peace treaty from Emperor Heraclius (son of the exarch who had rebelled against Phocas).¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it was Sisebut who would lay the foundations for the final conquest by

eligere successores; [...] ita et de ceteris ecclesiarum rectoribus placuit observandam' (Tejada y Ramiro 1861: 464 f; Vives 1963: 393 f).

¹⁷⁷ Epist. II-V (Gil 1991: 6-14).

ordering the construction of a true Visigothic naval force. By deploying this new navy, and with the Byzantine fleet idle at Carthage, the siege closed on the Imperial positions in *Spania*, which could no longer expect help and reinforcements from the exarchate of Carthage.¹⁷⁸

With the deaths of Sisebut and his successor, the young Reccared II, it was Suinthila (621-631), who had distinguished himself as a military *dux* under Sisebut in his campaigns against the Ruccones and the Byzantines, who ultimately had the triumph of seeing the Visigothic kingdom extend throughout the peninsula, from one sea to the other; it was undoubtedly a moment of glory for the entire Visigothic kingdom of Toledo, realising a long-cherished desire of the Hispano-Gothic aristocracy. Finally, the old dream of Leovigild was fulfilled and the longed-for unification of all Spain under a single sovereignty was achieved. The memory of this great military success was to fill St Isidore with joy.¹⁷⁹



Fig. 20. Tremis of King Suinthila. Mint of Barbi (Antequera). (Wikipedia /Pliego).

On the military level, from the analysis of the literary sources it seems we may deduce that the attack on the Byzantine positions was carried out as a pincer movement on the two important strongholds still in Imperial power – *Ilici* and *Carthago Spartaria*. It seems likely that the action originated from the bases of *Valentia-Elota*, in the north, and *Basti-Begastri*, in the south, and that it would have counted on the support of the new royal navy. There is no full literary confirmation of this, but it is surely the most logical military option. It is also very possible that this double attack is implicitly referred to by Isidore of Seville when he states that Suinthila's standing increased as a result of his

¹⁷⁸ Isid. Hisp. HG 70. See n. 134 above.

¹⁷⁹ García Moreno 1998: 252; Vallejo 2012: 331-351, 360-365. Isid. Hisp. HG. 62: '*Aera DCLVIII, anno imperii Heraclii X gloriosissimus Suinthila gratia divina regni suscepit scepra. iste sub rege Sisebuto ducis nactus officium Romana castra perdomuit, Ruccones superavit. postquam vero apicem fastigii regalis conscendit, urbes residuas, quas in Hispaniis Romana manus agebat, proelio conserto obtinuit auctamque triumphii gloriam prae ceteris regibus felicitate mirabili reportavit, totius Spaniae intra oceani fretum monarchiam regni primus idem potitus, quod nulli retro principum est conlatum*' (Mommsen 1894: 292).

last campaign: ‘by having captured two patricians, winning one with his prudence and subjugating another with his valour’.¹⁸⁰ From the text of the Hispalensis chronicler it also seems to be inferred that one of the dukes in charge of the defence surrendered his stronghold without resistance – something reminiscent of Framidanco at *Asidona*¹⁸¹ – while the other Byzantine *dux* forced the military conquest of the city, resisting to the end. The first reference would probably allude to the taking of *Illici*, whose bishop continued peacefully in his seat for what remained of his life, until 630, when the consecration of Bishop Serpentinus, one of the prelates who subscribed to the Fifth Council of Toledo (636 CE), seems to have been agreed. The peaceful transition in the religious sphere seems to indicate the harmonious delivery of the city, which would have been effected via negotiations between the Gothic authorities and the defenders of the city. It is evident that whereas on the civil and military levels there must have been a transfer of power, the authority of the bishop of *Illici* was respected, at the same time as the subordination to him of the newly created bishopric of *Elota* was agreed.

The stronghold taken by force could then be interpreted as an allusion to Cartagena, a city destroyed after the Visigothic conquest and its walls razed. At least that is how Isidore expresses it:

‘The Africans who occupied the maritime zone of Hispania led by Hannibal built *Carthago Spartaria*, which would later be taken by the Romans and converted into a colony, giving its name to the entire province. Today, destroyed by the Goths, hardly any ruins remain.’¹⁸²

We know, on the other hand, that this second stronghold could not be *Malaca* because at that time the city had long been in the power of the Visigoths.¹⁸³ If this is correct, this difference in the way both cities were conquered would explain, at least in part – there are, as has been said, other possible motivations of political and ecclesiastical nature – the different treatment given to the two cities by the conquerors.¹⁸⁴ It is also possible that the tenacious defence shown by Cartagena was stimulated by the situation it faced after the synod of 610, which had stripped the city of its metropolitan character and foreshadowed a less friendly treatment by the Visigoths. Indeed, considered as a possible rival to the *regia urbs*, the hatred of the Goths towards what had been the capital of the Byzantine dominion would fuel in its inhabitants the fear of reprisals and fire the courage of the defenders. In any event, the archaeological record documents a phase of violent destruction of the city during those dates.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Isid. Hisp. HG 62: ‘*auxit eo proelio virtutis eius titulum duorum patriciorum obtentus, quorum alterum prudentia suum fecit, alterum virtute sibi subiecit*’ (Mommsen 1894: 292).

¹⁸¹ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 571.3 (Campos 1960: 81).

¹⁸² Isid. Hisp. Etym. 15 1 67: ‘*Afri sub Hannibale marítima Hispaniae ocupantes, Carthaginam Spartariam construxerunt, quae mox a Romanis capta et colonia facta, nomen etiam prouinciae dedit. Nunc autem a Gothis subversa atque in desolationem redacta est*’ (Oroz and Marcos 2004: 1056 ff.); Martínez Andreu 1985.

¹⁸³ In 619 it is recorded that its bishop, Theodulfus, attended the Second Council of Seville to claim the territories belonging to his see usurped by neighbouring dioceses during the war: Tejada y Ramiro 1850: 666 ff.; Vives 1963: 185. Cf. Vallejo Girvés 2012: 359. Note the Germanic name of the prelate.

¹⁸⁴ Lorenzo de San Román interprets it in the same way (2016a: 277 ff.; 2016b: 543, 553 ff.) Cf. García Moreno 1974a: 133.

¹⁸⁵ Ramallo 2000: 595 ff.; Vizcaíno 2007: 233-236.

Territorial organisation of the southeast in the 7th century

From the Duchy of Auriola to the qūra of Tudmīr

From the distant times of the Roman conquest, the political and territorial organisation of the Iberian Peninsula underwent multiple alterations. The first attempts divided the peninsula into two provinces: the *Citerior* (the eastern and northern parts of the Iberian Peninsula) and the *Ulerior* (the western and southern parts). Later, in 27 BCE, during the government of Octavian and practically all the peninsula already conquered, Hispania was divided into two Imperial provinces (Lusitania and Tarraconensis) and a third senatorial one (Baetica). With Caracalla (211-217 CE) there was a new attempt at provincial reorganisation of brief existence (until 238) that divided the Tarraconensis into two new entities: the Province Hispania Nova Citerior and Asturiae-Calleciae. During the Late Empire, the territorial and administrative division of Hispania underwent a new transformation that basically remained with hardly any alterations into the Visigothic era. The reform of Diocletian (298 CE) established the division of the peninsular territory into five provinces, splitting the *Ulerior* Tarraconensis into two (Tarraconensis and Carthaginensis) and creating a new territorial entity (Gallaecia). This reality is reflected for the beginning of the 4th century in the *Laterculus Veronensis*, although this text offers the subdivision of Hispania into five peninsular provinces (Tarraconensis, Carthaginensis, Baetica, Lusitania, Gallaecia) and a sixth transmarine province (Mauritania Tingitana) created to face the incursions of the Mauri. Each was under the presidency of a *praeses perfectissimus*. The ancient province of Hispania was then constituted as the *diocesis Hispaniarum*, which would be administered by a *uicarius Hispaniarum*. The later administrative reforms of Constantine (306-337) preserved the provinces and the vicars, although it introduced some modifications in the division of Diocletian. Apart from creating a new province, Balearica, Constantine placed the position of *comes Hispaniarum* (from 313) next to the *uicarius Hispaniarum* and subordinated both figures to the prefect of Gallia-Hispania-Britannia (336 CE).¹⁸⁶

The late Roman division is reproduced centuries later in the *Etymologies* of St Isidore.¹⁸⁷ With slight variations, this same description of Hispania is what we will find again in the post-Visigothic tradition in a Mozarabic codex of the 9th century (Biblioteca Nacional), in the Codex Conciliar, and in the Codex Ovetensis of 780.¹⁸⁸ The first two, which show the Arabic tradition, place Hispania in six *aqālim* or regions. According to the Mozarabic codex these regions would be:

‘The seats of Spain are six:

Tarragona-Cartagena-Baetica-Lusitania-Galicia-Tangier.’

¹⁸⁶ Blázquez 2003. The best study on Late Roman administration in Hispania to date remains Arce 1982.

¹⁸⁷ Isid. *Hisp. Etym.* XIV.4.29: ‘*Habet prouincias sex: Tarraconensem, Cartaginensem, Lusitaniam, Galliciam, Baeticam, et trans freta in regione Africae Tingitaniam*’ (Oroz and Marcos 2004: 1018).

¹⁸⁸ Simonet 1903: 808-812. On this subject we follow García Moreno (1974b: 133-149) and García Antón (1985).

For its part, the Conciliar Codex in the Biblioteca Nacional divides them into:

‘First division, region of Tarragona

Second division, region of Cartagena

Third division, region of Baetica, that is, from the origin of the Betis, river of Cordoba, to the Ocean Sea

Fourth division, Lusitania

Fifth division, region of Galicia

Sixth division, region of Tangier and its land.’

Following the late Imperial Roman administrative organisation, the Codex Ovetensis of 780 also divides Hispania into six provinces, the five peninsular ones and the sixth trans-Pyrenean one of Gaul Narbonensis or Septimania:

‘In provincia cartaginensis spartarie Toleto

\$ betica Spali Italica...

\$ lusitania Emerita...

\$ In gallecia Bracara...

\$ celtiberia Tarracona...

\$ In prouincia gallie narbona...’

This provincial distribution is repeated in all the early medieval ecclesiastical documentation. In the Chronicle of Albelda of 883, Hispania appears again divided into six provinces:

‘Habet prouincias VI cum sedibus episcoporum. Prima Carthago, quae est Carpentania (sic).

Toleto metropoli...

Secunda prouincia Baetica. Hispali metropoli...

Tertia prouincia Lusitania. Emerita metrópoli...

Quarta prouincia Galliciensi (sic). Bracara metrópoli...

Quinta prouincia Tarraconensis. Terracona (sic) metropoli...

Sexta prouincia est ultra mare Tingitania. Gallia non est de Prouincia Spanie, sed sub regimine Gothorum erat, ita Narbona metropolis (sic).’

The same division is also found in the *Divisio Wambae* (12th century) and in a manuscript in Gothic script of the cathedral of Oviedo of the same date.¹⁸⁹ All these documents reproduce, with hardly any variations, the Visigothic ecclesiastical geography, including the province of Gallia Narbonensis, which, after 711, had passed into the hands of the Franks.

More interesting for our study is the so-called Ravennate or Anonymous of Ravenna (*Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia*), a name by which we know the compilation made by a Christian cosmographer of the 7th century on previous works in which the itineraries of the classical Rome are described. This document already introduces significant changes in the territorial organisation of the peninsula. The fourth book of the *Cosmography* is dedicated to Hispania and the author affirms that he transmits what was said before by a 'philosopher' named Castorius. According to this source, Hispania was divided into 'eight most famous provinces', which he lists as:

<i>Galletia</i>	<i>Asturia</i>
<i>Austrigonia</i>	<i>Iberia</i>
<i>Lysitania</i>	<i>Betica</i>
<i>Hispalis</i>	<i>Aurariola</i> ¹⁹⁰

As can be seen quite readily, the divisions are essentially reduced to two versions. The first, which could be considered the traditional Roman one, has a political purpose and upon it the ecclesiastical structure will later be inserted. This tradition is the one that will last into Visigothic times, serving as the basis for the first administrative division of the kingdom of Toledo and also for the geography of the Spanish Church.

The second description, which is the one that interests us here, presents its own characteristics, among them the name of some of the circumscriptions and the number of them. García Antón, following the previous opinions of J. Amador de los Ríos and A. Fernández Guerra, assumes that this second tradition reproduces the division made by Leovigild, albeit with some variations, specifically the substitution of the name of Vasconia-Cantabria for that of Austrigonia, a choronym that recovers an old pre-Roman ethnonym, in line with what happens with other geographical realities of the Visigothic era (Celtiberia, Carpetania, etc.), and the change of the name of the old province of Orospeña, which now becomes Aurariola. This division seems to correspond to the new political organisation carried out by Leovigild after 585 (and not 579 as Fernández Guerra defended), in which military considerations determined by the campaigns against the Gothic kingdom's enemies (the Suevi and Rucconi in Gallaecia and Asturias; Basques and Aquitanians in Cantabria; and Byzantines in the Strait and the Levant) must have had a great influence.

Thus the Ravennate confirms that towards the last third of the 7th century the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo was divided into eight duchies, each under the authority of a duke who, at least since the

¹⁸⁹ Vázquez de Parga 1943: 29 f.

¹⁹⁰ *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia*, IV 42 (Pinder and Parthey 1860: 302). Roldán 1975: 118.

legislative reforms of Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth in the mid 7th century, gathered in his person attributions of a military and civil nature (both judicial and fiscal).¹⁹¹ A comparison between the different sources suggests that the province of Autrigonia of the Anonymous of Ravenna corresponds in reality to the old territory of Vasconia cited by John of Biclaro, a territory that other sources also call the Duchy of Cantabria.¹⁹² The province of Hispalis undoubtedly corresponds to the military duchy in charge of subduing and controlling the Byzantines settled in the Strait of Cadiz and the area of the Algarves, and its creation could have been originally in direct relation to the repression of the rebellion of Prince Hermenegild. On the other hand, as we have already advanced, Aurariola would correspond to the old province of Orospeña, i.e. the border duchy with the Byzantine territory around Cartagena, which roughly occupied the entire southeastern quadrant of the peninsula – the area that will focus our interest from now on.¹⁹³

Once the Visigothic kingdom was conquered by the Arabs, the duchy of Aurariola is mentioned again on the occasion of the pact established by Tudmīr b. Gandaris (according to al-‘Uḍrī) or b. Abdus (according to al-Dabbī) with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Mūsā in the year 713 (H. 94). References to this famous pact (or treaty) of Tudmīr of Orihuela have been preserved in various sources, both Christian and, especially, Arab, and they will serve to try and elucidate the controversial question of the limits of this duchy. Apart from this interest by the Arab chroniclers in the treaty, we also have valuable data related to the province of Aurariola and its conquest by Tariq, as related by al-Maqqarī.¹⁹⁴

In general terms, the treaty establishes an agreement of submission of the Christian nobleman Tudmīr (Theudemirus) in exchange for the recognition of freedom for him and his subjects, as well as respect for their religious beliefs and Christian religious places.¹⁹⁵ The pact affected seven cities whose names have been transmitted to us by the different Arab sources, although there is a real problem when trying to make an exact transcription of them. E.A. Llobregat, who studied the problem carefully, summarised the issue in his two listings: one that follows the narration of al-‘Uḍrī and the other based on al-Dabbī. According to the two versions preserved from the aforementioned pact, the cities that adhered to the treaty were:

AL-‘UḌRĪ	AL-DABBĪ
<i>Uriula</i>	<i>Uriwala</i>
<i>Mula</i>	<i>Blntla</i>
<i>Lurqa</i>	<i>Lqnt</i>
<i>Blntla</i>	<i>Mula</i>
<i>Lqnt</i>	<i>Bqsra</i>

¹⁹¹ The reference study continues to be that of García Moreno 1974b.

¹⁹² For Vasconia, see Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 581.3 (Mommsen 1894: 216). On Cantabria: Iohan. Bicl. Chron. 574.2 (Mommsen, 1894: 213); Iul. Tol. HWR 9 (Krusch and Levison 1910: 507); Fred. Chron. IV 33 (Krusch 1888: 133); Chron. Adef. Rot. 11 (Gil *et al.* 1985: 130); Eulog. Epist. ad Wiliesind. III 1 9-13 (Gil 1973: 497s). Cf. Barroso - Carrobbles - Morin 2013b.

¹⁹³ García Antón 1985: 375.

¹⁹⁴ Gayangos 1840; 1843.

¹⁹⁵ Dabbī in: Codera and Ribera 1885: 259. ‘Uḍrī in: Huici Miranda 1969: 86 ff. See also Simonet 1903: 52-58, 797-800; Llobregat 1973; Pocklington 2015; Franco Sánchez 2016.

Iyih
Ils

Iyyih
Lurqa

In the opinion of F. Franco Sánchez, the text of al-‘Uḍrī was the oldest, a product of a copy of the author on the original text of the 8th century (or at least a copy of it). Alternately, the transmission of al-Ḍabbī would be the result of a more recent elaboration and would have arisen after the writing down of an oral account.¹⁹⁶

Of the seven cities mentioned, there is an exact correspondence for six of them, although with the order changed, with only one varying (*Ils/Bqsra*), or two if the duplicity of *Iyyih/Iyih* is accepted and we take them as corresponding to two different places. Let us note in passing that neither of the lists include Cartagena, an important city of the *qūra* of Tudmīr, something that points to the antiquity and veracity of the pact, since its absence only seems to be explained as a consequence of the practical ruin in which the city was left after the Visigothic conquest. Before and after the Visigothic stage, Cartagena had been a notable and prosperous city thanks to its privileged maritime communication with the ports of North Africa.

The double division established by Llobregat coincides with the one made more recently by R. Pocklington. This author has separated the manuscript tradition into two different families. A first would include the versions of al-Ḍabbī, al-Garnatī, and al-Himyarī, coming from the *Iqtibas al-anwar* of al-Rusatī; the second family would be represented exclusively by the version offered by al-‘Uḍrī.¹⁹⁷

The identification of most of the cities cited in the pact does not pose a significant problem: *Mula*, *Lurqa*, *Uriula/Uriwala*, and *Lqnt* would correspond to the current towns of Mula, Lorca, Orihuela, and Alicante. However, the identification of the other three cities is more problematic. It seems to be accepted without too many reservations that *Bqsra* corresponds to the Visigothic episcopal seat of Begastri (Cehegín), a bishopric that inherited the diocese of Cartagena once the city was destroyed by the armies of Suinthila.

The other two cities (or three if we accept that *Iyih* and *Iyyih* are not the same) cited in the pact pose greater difficulties.¹⁹⁸ Even if only hypothetically, Llobregat was inclined to identify *Iyih* and *Iyyih* in the same city and reduce it to *Ello* (El Monastil, Elda), the ancient Visigothic episcopal seat of *Elota* later added to Elche.

For *Blnsla*, Llobregat collates opinions prior to his study, especially echoing M. Gaspar Remiro’s proposal and locating it in Villena (province of Alicante).¹⁹⁹ This opinion is also shared by other, later,

¹⁹⁶ Franco Sánchez 2016.

¹⁹⁷ Pocklington 2008; 2015.

¹⁹⁸ For a discussion on the identification of the covenant cities, see Llobregat 1973: 15-51; Pocklington 1987; 2008; 2015: 32-37.

¹⁹⁹ Gaspar 1905: 29-31.



Fig. 21. Valencia la Vella (Ribarroja de Turia, Valencia).

researchers as M. Sanchis Guarner and P. Guichard.²⁰⁰ However, Llobregat was cautious and expressed some doubts. He follows the argument that there was no Roman city in the vicinity of Villena, a view unchanged despite the years that have passed since the publication of his study. For the rest, the author completely discards the possible reduction of *Blnlta* to Valencia, based on the argument previously developed by R. Chabás that it would then be unimaginable that the cities of Denia (*Dianium*) and Játiva (*Saetabis*), both Visigothic episcopal seats, and Alcira, a town with enormous strategic potential (it served as a ford of the Jucar River), were not mentioned in the pact.²⁰¹

Other authors have provided diverse interpretations. García Antón identifies *Blnlta* with Totana (from a variant *Daytana*),²⁰² whereas R. Pocklington prefers to locate it in Elche. The latter's argument is based on the list offered by al-Dabbī, which he considers the most reliable of all, and on the identification of *Iyih* with Algezares, near Murcia. However, the same author is aware there are two serious drawbacks to identifying the *Balantala* of the pact with Elche. The first is that the Latin form *Illice* was Arabised in *Ils* (and from there to val. Elx and cast. Elche). The second difficulty is much more troublesome: in al-'Udrī's list *Ils* appears next to *Balantala*, which indicates that they are two different cities. Pocklington believes this can be explained because the two are different: *Ils* would refer to the ancient Roman city in the Alcudia, c. 1 mi from Elche, while *Balantala* would be the new location. The fact that *Ils* was mentioned in the pact would be explained by the character of the ancient episcopal seat that it possessed. Likewise, the fact that both cities, *Ils* and *Balantala*, appear in the same list would, in his opinion, reflect a conflict between the written list and popular memory.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Sanchis 1965: 201; Guichard 1969: 112.

²⁰¹ Llobregat 1973: 40-42.

²⁰² García Antón 1982: 371.

²⁰³ Pocklington 2008: 80 f; 2015: 32-34.

This explanation seems a bit far-fetched, considering that the reading of the name is clearly intelligible: *Balantala* or, better yet, *Balantula*. Once again, we think that the most logical thing here is to try and explain the toponym from one of the existing cities having the same or similar name. In his day, F.J. Simonet interpreted it this way in his correspondence with Julián Ribera. In particular, we have his letter of 18 December 1892, published a few years ago by M.J. Viguera, in which the author voices his disagreement with some of Eduardo Saavedra's readings: '...for I believe that the *Valentela* or *Valantula* ب ل ن ت لة of that moment is none other than the city of Valencia, called by a writer of the 11th century Valencia de Theudimer ت دم ير ب ل ن س ية.²⁰⁴

He repeated the same opinion a few years later in his famous study *Historia de los mozárabes de España*, even when it went against the judgement of A. Fernández-Guerra and, again, E. Saavedra, two of the leading scholars of his time:

'But we cannot agree with either critic regarding Valentila or Valentula, since the name in question can be read in all these ways since the Arabic codex lacks vowels. Several reasons lead us to this conclusion, above all a curious passage from the famous Arabic canonical codex of El Escorial, written in the year 1049 of our era; a text that has gone unnoticed by the aforementioned critics, and where the Episcopal Sees of *Valentia* and *Ilici* are given the names of Valencia Todmir, or Valencia of Theudemir, and Elche Todmir, that is, Elche of Theudemir.²⁰⁵

In this sense, the author of the Chronicle of 1344 – whose ultimate source goes back to the lost chronicle of al-Razī (887-955) – also translates the name of the city of the pact as *Valencia*.²⁰⁶

Actually, as V. Calatayud Cases has pointed out, the obstinacy in eschewing the reading *Balantala/Balantula* and its correspondence with Valentia is due to a simple error of historical perception, that is considering that the pact and *qūra* were contemporary, whereas the actuality is that the administrative division was made after 756, more than four decades after the treaty between Theudimer and 'Abd al-'Azīz was signed. This identification between the territory of the pact and the later *qūra* of Tūdmir is what has led most researchers to identify *Blntla* with some point in the region of Murcia or the Alicante area, as Valencia belonged to a different *qūra*. However, once the obstacle of synchrony between both events is eliminated, the main argument opposing the logical reading of *Blntla* as Valentia also disappears – i.e. that the city belonged to a different *qūra* and that the Balantala of the pact must be firmly located in the *qūra* of Tūdmir – as in 713 (the date of the pact between Theudimer and 'Abd al-'Azīz) it did not yet exist, nor had the *qūra* of Valencia been created. A similar conclusion had already been reached in the mid 1980s by M.J. Rubiera:

²⁰⁴ Viguera 2014: 294. Later on (p. 305) the author herself confirms Simonet's interpretation: 'I believe that Balantala is a relative problem, but progress will be made on the logical proposal that it be Valencia'. We will try to give a convincing answer to this here.

²⁰⁵ Simonet 1903: 56 f. (reproduced in Appendix II, 797 f.). This is the translation into Arabic of the signatures of the bishops who attended the Fourth Council of Toledo. Since the manuscript is dated 1049, when Valencia and Elche did not belong to the *qūra* of Tūdmir, it is clear that they refer to the Gothic nobleman (Simonet 1903: 56, n. 4).

²⁰⁶ Simonet 1903: 57 (reproduced in Appendix II, 799); Manzano 2014: 253. Cf. Ribera 2003: 242.

‘To this link is added a fact that has so far gone unnoticed: in the *Muqtabis* of Ibn Hayyan referred to the caliph al-Hakam II, the Syrian *ŷund* of al-Andalus are mentioned and it says: “the *ŷund* of Egypt, who are the people of Tudmīr and Valencia”. It is well known that the *ŷund* of Egypt settled in Tudmīr, so this region became a *cora muŷannada*, but there was no reference to its installation in Valencia. *The only plausible explanation is that in the 8th century Valencia belonged to Tudmīr and historians did not need to specify that it had been installed there, since it was included in the Tudmīr area* [our italics].²⁰⁷

However, we think that the authors who defend the reduction to Valencia have done so without taking into consideration a point we think of great importance and which, despite having been pointed out by M.J. Rubiera herself, has gone relatively unnoticed, i.e. that the Arabic term appears in a form derived from a Latin diminutive. A form that we know in other Arabic toponyms, but probably of Mozarabic origin, e.g. *Tulaytula* (< **Toletula*<*Toletum*), or *Aurariola* (< **Auraria*) itself.²⁰⁸ This assumption is as plausible, or more so, if the Arabic versions of the pact referred to a text originally written in Latin, as Franco Sánchez defends.²⁰⁹

This is, as we say, by no means a minor detail and would point to a location near Valencia, and which does not necessarily have to be identified with the city itself, contrary to what M.J. Rubiera thought from the parallel with Toledo. We think, on the contrary, that *Balantala*/*Balantula* should correspond to a place other than the Roman *Valentia*, as demonstrated by the fact that this city always appears in the Arabic sources as *Balansiyya*, which is not the case for Toledo, i.e. the city only recovered its classical name after its conquest by Alfonso VI.²¹⁰ If we are correct, then the most obvious option would be to identify the *Blntla* of the Tudmīr pact with the archaeological complex at the site of Valencia la Vella, in the nearby town of Ribarroja de Turia, c. 9 mi northwest of Valencia, and the ruins of Pla de Nadal, an important palatial complex dated end of the 7th, beginning of the 8th century.

Valencia la Vella is a fortified site (‘castro’) that has provided archaeological material dating from the middle of the 6th, to the middle of the 7th century. It is on a rocky spur at the confluence of the Pous ravine with the Turia River and covers a maximum extension of about 5 ha. The site presents a trapezoidal plan surrounded by a powerful walled belt equipped with square towers (3 x 3 m) that are perfectly set within the wall fabric. The technique used (double-facing walls with interior filling similar to the Greek *emplecton*), and the defensive scheme is similar to that documented by P. Palol in the Visigothic site of Puig Rom in Rosas (Gerona) and other sites of this period, as well as cities such as Reccopolis, Begastri, or the closest castle of El Punt del Cid (Almenara, Castellon), an important site related to the control of the Via Augusta. Other structures located in Valencia la Vella certify the existence of constructions with limestone walls bonded with lime mortar, in which the use of squared ashlar in vulnerable areas of the building (corners, jambs, etc.) is also certified. In recent

²⁰⁷ Rubiera 1985: 120.

²⁰⁸ Rubiera 1985: 120. This is also suggested by an assessment made by Ribera in a letter addressed to Codera, fol. 3r. See Viguera 2014: 298. In the southeastern peninsula, the formation of toponyms from diminutives in *-ol*, *-ola*, and *-olus* must have been a relatively frequent phenomenon (Pocklington 2008: 195-197).

²⁰⁹ Franco Sánchez 2014.

²¹⁰ Rubiera 1985: 120.

years, two public buildings have also been documented, one in the lower part of the site and another in the citadel, which provides an idea of its importance. The archaeological record has been able to verify the presence of late ceramic productions such as ARS (Hayes 91C, 91D, 103, 104, 105), Late African type amphorae (Keay LIII, LIV, LXI, LXXII), Oriental amphorae (Keay LIII, LIV), common ceramics with comb decoration, finger impressions, etc. In addition, two tremisses minted by Leovigild have been documented, providing a *post quem* date for the city.²¹¹

Regarding interpretations as to the functionality of the site, initially researchers were inclined to think that Valencia la Vella was a *castellum* or military enclave belonging to the *limes* built by the Visigoths in relation to the Byzantine occupation, although recently there is a tendency to amplify the importance of the site and see it as the management centre of a large territory endowed with administrative and fiscal functions, and which ultimately must have had a direct dependence on the central Visigothic power. Thus, it is interesting to note that, while the archaeological record shows a slowdown in building activity in Valencia throughout the 7th century, at that same time, on the contrary, we are witnessing an increase in construction activity in Valencia la Vella. According to this, it is very possible that at this time Valencia la Vella was constructed to represent the main centre of Toledo's political power in the region. We do not fully understand the reasons for this transfer of power. It is possible that the new city had displaced the old episcopal seat, taking advantage of the fact that it had fallen into Imperial hands or, perhaps more likely, because of its location inland it was relatively immune to coastal attacks by the Imperial navy. Byzantine development within Valencia seems to be supported by the archaeological data; specifically, their influence within the city of Turia is indicated by the construction, *c.* the middle of the 6th century, of a new residential neighbourhood around the old Roman circus – the excavations of which have provided abundant Byzantine material.²¹²

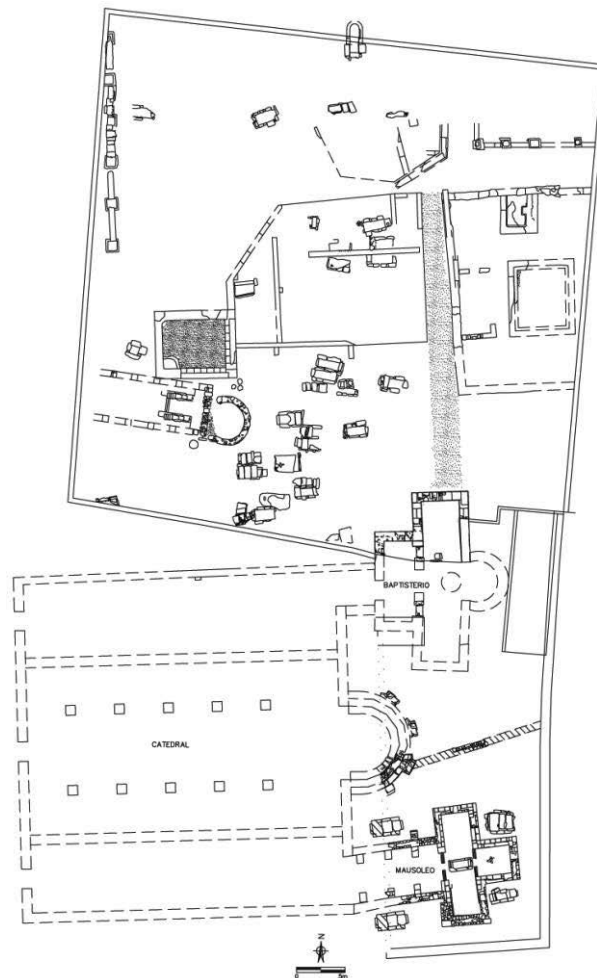


Fig. 22. Valencia. Episcopal group in the 6th century (Ribera et al. 2020).

²¹¹ Rosselló 1996; Juan and Rosselló 2003: 177-180; Macias *et al.* 2016.

²¹² Ribera *et al.* 2020: 69-76.

However, in our opinion, the excavations do not prove in themselves an effective Imperial control of the city. The appearance of quantities of Byzantine material can be explained by Valencia being at that time a relevant commercial port in the Western Mediterranean and it is logical that it maintained a good level of communication with other ports in the area with mutual consumer demand for goods. In any case, once Valentia passed back into Visigoth hands (which should have happened peacefully before 589), or due to its strategic location in relation to the territories controlled by Constantinople, we witnessed a revaluation of the group formed by Valentia, as an episcopal seat and port, and Valencia la Vella as a military centre. In fact, it seems as if, from the beginning of the 7th century, both cities acted in a complementary way. It is even possible that some of the historical events referring to Valencia – specifically the imprisonment of Prince Hermenegild and the presence of an Arian prelate – can be better understood in relation to Valencia la Vella.²¹³

In any case, the historical data provided by literary sources (the Arian bishop, elevation of Abbot Eutropius to the bishopric of Valentia, imprisonment of Hermenegild, military port, etc.) argue for considering *Valentia* as one of the main centres of the Visigothic political and military sphere in the Levant from the end of the 6th, beginning of the 7th century. Archaeological excavations further emphasise this military importance of the Valencia-Valencia la Vella nucleus previously pointed out.

Nevertheless, the problem that arises here is that the appellation Valencia la Vella cannot be traced back beyond 1374, where it appears in a document of the Consell de Valencia. The toponym would therefore be of popular origin and seems to be explained by its proximity to Valencia.²¹⁴ For this reason, the *castro* of Valencia la Vella still cannot be identified with any of the cities of ancient Spain. On the other hand, M. Rosselló does not accept that this settlement can refer to the ancient *Pallantia* cited to do with a confrontation between Sertorius and Pompeius (App. BC 1. 13. 112), which logically refers to a Celtiberian city. Actually, within the geographical framework we are dealing with, no city of that name appears in the classical sources. On the contrary, all references to a hypothetical city of *Pallantia* have their origin in an invention of Annius de Viterbo (1432-1502), author of some *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (1498), in which he mixes a series of authentic accounts with others that are fictional. This fabulation by de Viterbo was a huge success, being reproduced by numerous later chroniclers right up to the end of the 19th century.²¹⁵

As it happens, the basis for the invention of this Italian Dominican friar was a reference by Ptolemy (II. 6. 15; Oros. 5. 23. 6), who records a river *Pallantia* (Παλλαντία) in the area. The Greek geographer provides coordinates for the Palancia River: long. 14° 40' and lat. 38° 56', placing it north of the *Sucronis* (Σουκρωνός) and south of the *Turulis* (Τουρουλιός). Although today there is no such river, the result of orographic changes that have modified the Valencian coastal landscape over the centuries, the *Pallantia* of Ptolemy can be strongly identified with the Poyo ravine. Indeed, as Vicente Calatayud has suggested, this ravine must be associated with an old riverbed that flowed into the Albufera of Valencia and which, due to its position between the Turia and the Jucar rivers, must logically correspond to the *Pallantia* River cited by the Greek geographer. It should be borne in mind

²¹³ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2020: 99.

²¹⁴ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2020: 438.

²¹⁵ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2020: 436-438.

that the identification of Ptolemy's *Pallantia* with the river running through Segorbe and Sagunto is a product of P.A. Beuter and other chroniclers of the 16th century, who, finding no river between the Jucar and the Turia, promulgated Ptolemy's reading, placing it north of the latter.²¹⁶

V. Calatayud also agrees that the etymology of the hydronym points to the existence in the area of a city also called *Pallantia*. The toponym is clearly Indo-European and is documented as a place name in the Iberian Peninsula among the Arevaci and the Vaccaei. In fact, there were two *oppida* with this name in Hispania, one belonging to the Arevaci (in Palenzuela de Arlanza) and another in the domain of the Vaccaei (the current city of Palencia).²¹⁷ For the root *pal-*, referred to hydronyms, a meaning is proposed that relates, inter alia, to 'marsh', but its presence in other types of toponyms can also be explained deriving from 'rock', which we believe is more accurate in terms of Celtiberian *oppida*.²¹⁸ The suffix *-antia* also appears in numerous place names and hydronyms of the Indo-European peninsular area (Numantia, Palantia, Termantia, Pintia, Confluentia, etc.) and can be traced in the current toponymy in both populations and river courses of the peninsula, where it can evolve to *-nda*, as in Arganda, or, as is more usual, to *-nza*, as in Arlanza.²¹⁹ Thus, it does not seem impossible to us, even assuming de Viterbo's story to be pure invention, that there really existed in antiquity a city with the same name in the vicinity of the course of the *Pallantia* river cited by Ptolemy, as V. Calatayud defends with good arguments.

A different question is whether this *Pallantia* corresponds or not to the *castro* of Valencia la Vella. Taking into account the archaeological record to date, we have already seen that, to this day, it is impossible to take the chronology of this site beyond the end of the 6th century.²²⁰ But while this statement is true, it is no less true that it is possible that the pre-Roman city was located at some point still undocumented by archaeology, and that there was then a transfer of population motivated by the special circumstances experienced by the region. Similar examples are not lacking in the area, as seen in the paradigmatic case of *Edeta-Lauro*. It is not out of the question, therefore, that something similar happened with the pre-Roman and Roman *Pallantia*, perhaps in relation to the formation of the border between the Visigothic kingdom and the territories under Imperial control in the 6th century.

On the other hand, although, in relation to this topic, the discovery in the mid 1970s of the ruins of the palace of Pla de Nadal in Ribarroja de Turia, just 2.5 mi south of the *castro* of Valencia la Vella, sheds new light on the problem of the ancient pre-Roman *Pallantia* and the *Balantula* featured in the pact signed by Theudemir and the Arabs. Without a doubt, the happy discovery of Pla de Nadal radically changes our perception of the entire Levantine geography and also modifies our vision of

²¹⁶ Calatayud 2016. The overflow of this ravine is precisely what caused the great mortality and ruin of the floods of October 2024.

²¹⁷ App. BC 1. 13. 112; Iber. 9. 55; Ptol. Geog. 2. 6. 50; Plin. NH 3. 26; Strab. 3. 4. 13. It is also worth mentioning a Pelontion/Palantia among the Cismontan Astures, to which Hidatius of Chaves refers (Chron. 186) and which we have dealt with elsewhere: Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 52 ff.

²¹⁸ Calatayud 2016. For the toponyms *Pallantia* and the root *pal-*, see Barroso - Carrobes - Morín 2014: 48 ff.

²¹⁹ Untermann 2001: 189-192. We do not, however, share the idea that Levantine *Pallantia* has a non-Indo-European origin, since there is ample data supporting the presence of Indo-European elements in the Iberian area; see Curchin 2009: 70 and 73.

²²⁰ Recent studies attest to the Visigoth chronology of the site, see Ribera *et al.* 2020.

the archaeological problem. Although we will return later in more detail to the site of Pla de Nadal, we will advance here that the archaeological record suggests we are dealing with an urban site of some significance that can only be identified with the *castro* of Valencia la Vella and the enigmatic city of *Pallantia*.²²¹

It is convenient at this point to return to the aforementioned pact of Tudmīr and the elusive city of *Blntla*, as, as V. Calatayud rightly recalls, in the Arabic language there is no consonant *p*, transcribed in Latin as *b*. This means that if, as seems plausible, and has been defended by F. Franco-Sánchez, the Arabic versions of the treaty depended on a Latin original, the term used in it could be a transcription of the toponym *Palantala*.²²² But the use of the diminutive is not well understood. In our opinion, an hypothesis could be established for an early evolution by phonetic change from voiceless bilabial occlusive to sonorous (*p>b*), a frequent phenomenon in the Romance languages of the peninsula, which would go back to a primitive form *Pa(l)lantia>*Bal(l)antia*. But, since there was already a city with that name in its vicinity, of greater importance and size in Roman-Visigothic times (we are referring to Roman *Valentia*, an episcopal seat and residence of the civil authority in Visigothic times), it would be quite logical for it to be renamed *Balantula*, in the sense of ‘little Valencia’. In this case, the evolution of the toponym must have occurred before the Arab invasion. There are two reasons for this: (1) the pact of Tudmīr presents the form *Blntla*, i.e. in diminutive; and (2) we know that the city of Valencia had started its decline from the 7th century.

If we are correct, it would be possible to interpret the palace of Pla de Nadal as the residential/power centre linked to the city of *Balantala*, and not exactly as the city recorded in the pact.²²³ However, as we will have the opportunity to see later, there are well-founded reasons to think that, for historical reasons, Pla de Nadal never came to function as a power centre as such. Moreover, the premature abandonment of Pla de Nadal would for centuries challenge those historians who tried to pinpoint the *Blntla* referred to in the pact.

Of course, the development we defend here is mere hypothesis in the absence of archaeological confirmation, but it is important to note that it was precisely the memory of the existence of an ancient Valencia/*Balantala* in this place that led to the 14th-century municipal council, echoing an old popular tradition, referring to this place as Valencia la Vella (‘Old Valencia’). From the old toponym, and as a euhemeristic explanation, the legend would later run that this population founded the city of Valencia, whereas, in reality, there was no relationship of precedence – but they were two different cities bearing a similar name.²²⁴

²²¹ Calatayud 2016; Ribera *et al.* 2020: 79 f.

²²² Franco Sánchez 2014.

²²³ In this respect we depart from the opinion of V. Calatayud (2016), who considers that Pla de Nadal, or its immediate surroundings, would be the elusive city of Pallantia. However, taking into account the importance and chronology of the remains excavated at Valencia la Vella, it seems logical to place it here, regardless of whether or not it was the site of the pre-Roman *oppidum*.

²²⁴ Although with nuances, the case is reminiscent of that of Vitoria and *Victoriacum*; see Barroso - Carrobbles - Morín 2013b: 15 f.

Nevertheless, our interpretation leaves open the question why the cities of *Dianium* and *Saetabis* do not appear in the treaty of 713. It is true that the absence of both cities in the pact is somewhat disconcerting, especially if we consider that both were episcopal seats and, therefore, had a certain importance at the regional level as the heads of their respective territories/dioceses. In this sense, the absence of both cities is a weighty argument that has been used as an indication that the *Blntla* of the pact cannot be equated with Valencia and its surroundings.²²⁵ We believe, however, that the answer to this question must be explained in part by the rarefied historical context that led to the disastrous end of the kingdom of Toledo and also, in part, by the dynamics of conquest itself.

Indeed, we know that next to the ecclesiastical authority there must have been in each urban nucleus a position with civil and military responsibilities: the *comes ciuitatis* ('Count of the city'). This position was held by a member of the Gothic nobility who, as in other cases, was linked by personal bond (*sacramentum*) with the king. Like the *duces*, the counts were part of the monarch's personal entourage (*fideles regis*). The latter in turn distributed positions and favours among them as a reward for their loyalty, thus establishing a dense network of mutual loyalties. In this context, it is not at all unthinkable that, at the time of the Arab invasion, the counts of *Saitabis* and *Dianium* would have remained loyal to Wittiza's family and



Fig. 23. Cities covered by the pact between Theudemir and Abd al-Aziz in 713.

would not have responded to the call of the *dux provinciae*, whose loyalty leaned towards Roderic's faction. Actually, the desertion of their military obligations would reproduce what the same relatives of Wittiza had staged two years earlier at the Guadalete River with Roderic. Noticeably, this situation was not at all strange in the second half of the 7th century. In fact, that was precisely the reason of the promulgation of the famous military laws of Wamba (after the rebellion of Paulus) and Erwig.²²⁶ If,

²²⁵ Llobregat (1973: 41) is very blunt on this point.

²²⁶ LV IX 2 8 (Wamba): '*Qui debeat obseruari, si scandalum infra fines Spanie exsurrexerit. IX 2 9 (Erwigio): De his, qui in exercito constituto die, loco uel tempore definito non successerint aut refugerint; uel que pars seruorum uniuicuiusque in*

out of loyalty to the house of Wittiza, or for any other reason that escapes us (e.g. that the cities had been conquered by the Arabs), the hosts of the counts of *Saitabis* and *Dianium* did not attend (or could not attend) the campaign against the invading army, it would be logical that these cities did not appear later in the capitulations of Theudimer and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Obviously, the conditions agreed upon would only involve the cities that had responded to the call of the *dux* and those that had not been conquered by arms. The rest would be left out of the treaty.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the absence of Denia and Játiva in the pact of 713 is not in itself unusual, but what is strange is the presence in it of the city of *Balantala* if, as we defend here, this city effectively corresponds to Valencia la Vella/*Pallantia*. But this can be easily explained as Valencia la Vella was the seat of the governor of the duchy of the coastal Carthaginensis. Therefore, it was quite logical that, at first, Theudimer was interested in including it in the list of cities covered by the pact of 713; after all, it was where the *dux* resided and where he was building his magnificent palace (Pla de Nadal). Given the great distance that separates the old residence of the Visigothic governor and the territory assigned to him by the treaty (c. 90 mi), the duke must finally resign himself to hastily abandon his palace and stay in Aurariola, the new power centre, or in its surroundings (as was the case in Valencia la Vella and Pla de Nadal), around Murcia, a city that would henceforth be known as Tudmīr. Murcia, we must not forget, includes an important group of Late Roman sites (La Alberca-Algezares-Los Garres) and, therefore, the duke had at his disposal a wide range of luxury residences to choose from. This would not be at all unheard of, as demonstrated by what happened after 711 with the sons of Wittiza.

Apart from *Blntla*, the other city of the pact that poses problems of identification is *Iyih/Iyuh*. Llobregat recalls the traditional interpretation that suggested Ojós, in the Ricote valley, and the centre pointed out by Huici (from the fragments of al-‘Uḍri) that place it near Hellín (Albacete). Later, the author wonders if this city is the same *Ello* of Roman times and if it could be identified with the episcopal seat of Elota of Visigothic times. Llobregat, coming to the conclusion that we should distinguish between the *mansio Ello* of the *Itinerary* (which would be the Elotana seat of the Visigothic councils) and the *Iyih* destroyed by ‘Abd al-Rahmān II, which would be identifiable with Hellín. Similarly, he rejects the identifications of *Ello* with Monte Arabí, near Yecla, proposed by A. Fernández Guerra, or Verdolay, as M. Gómez Moreno wanted.²²⁷

Recently, R. Pocklington has pointed out the existence of two cities with that name in Islamic times. One would correspond to the site of El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete) and the other in the vicinity of Murcia, in the area comprised by the archaeological sites of La Alberca-Algezares-Los Garres-Verdolay.²²⁸ The question here is which of the two cities is referred to in the pact signed between Theudimer and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Minateda has in its favour the importance of its archaeological remains, as well as the fact that it would imply a great extension of the territory of Tudmir to the

eadem expeditione debeat proficisci (Zeumer 1902: 370-379). Beyond the obligations, the laws provided for a series of very harsh punishments against offenders, especially in the Wamba law: dispossession of property, banishment, loss of the right to testify, servitude. The penalties, however, would be mitigated in the Erwig law. As Calatayud observes, the distance of c. 90 mi practically coincides with that between Valencia and Orihuela, as well as between Valencia and the duchy of Casius (Calatayud 2016).

²²⁷ Llobregat 1973: 46-51. However, its identification is hypothetical (‘The doubt must remain in the air’).

²²⁸ Pocklington 1987; 2008: 83 ff.; 2015: 35-37.

interior. For its part, the area of Algezares has as to its favour its proximity to Murcia (barely 2.5 mi), some important archaeological discoveries made in the area, and the accounts in several Arab sources that *Iyih* was destroyed shortly before the foundation of Murcia (825 CE) and that it was close to the river of Lorca (the Guadalentín or Sangonera River). In addition, the Arab writers and some late Christian text that collects older testimonies speak of a city called Tudmīr, undoubtedly referring to the capital of the homonymous *qūra* and always in relation to Murcia. Another factor to take into account, according to Pocklington, would be the existence of a toponym *Ayello* that could be related to the name of *Iyih* through a diminutive.²²⁹

We do not dispute that there were several cities with the name *Iyih*: it seems that the toponym could go back to the word used in Iberian for ‘city’ (*ili-*, *ilu-*), common to a large group of Iberian place names (*Iltirta*, *Iliturgi*, *Iliberris*, *Ilurco*, *Illice*, etc.). The problem is, rather, to know which of the two *Iyih* proposed (Algezares or Minateda) should be identified with the city mentioned in the pact of Tudmīr. We have already seen that Algezares could be an important centre; at least it was from the point of view of religion, already in the late Imperial and Visigothic periods.²³⁰ Pocklington identifies it with the city of Tudmīr. But against this opinion stands the testimony of al-‘Udrī, who, when enumerating the different districts making up the *qūra* of Tudmīr, refers to one as the ‘district of Iyih of the Plain’. This *Iyih* ‘of the Plain’ can be none other, as Pocklington acknowledges, than Minateda, or, in any case, Hellín, even though this identification goes against the account of the foundation of Murcia.²³¹

Indeed, the testimony of al-‘Udrī is clear and worth reproducing in its entirety:

‘The agricultural districts of the *kūra* of *Tudmīr* are as follows: The *iqīm* of *Lūrqa*; the *iqīm* of *Mursiya*; the *iqīm* of *al-‘Askar*; the *iqīm* of *Šintiŷŷāla* [Chinchilla]; the *iqīm* of *Ilš* [Elche]; the *iqīm* of *Iyyu(h) al-Saḥl*; the *iqīm* of *Ŷabal Buqašra al-‘Aal’a*; the *iqīm* of *Ŷaybaliya* [Taibilla]; the *iqīm* of *Tūtiya*; the *iqīm* of *Ibn al-Ŷāy*’; the *iqīm* of *Buqašra* [Begastrī]; the *iqīm* of *Mawra* [Mora de Santa Quiteria]; the *iqīm* of *Bāliš* [Vélez], which includes the castles of *Rīna*, of *Qarāliš* and of [sic], whose capital [*qā’ida*] is *B-d-l-l-š* and the *iqīm* of *Bayra* [Vera] (...) The *iqīm* of *Ŷawṭāna* [Totana]; the *iqīm* of *Laqwar*, and the *iqīm* of *Farqaša* [apud Denia].²³²

Thus al-‘Udrī lists among the districts of Tudmīr the *iqīm* of *Mursiya* and that of *Iyyuh al-Saḥl*, namely the districts of Murcia and ‘*Iyih* of the Plain’. This description logically invalidates the reduction of *Iyih* to Algezares and supports its identification with Minateda, Hellín, or some outstanding point on the Albacete plain. The absence of Aurariola is striking; it is explained because it would have been absorbed by Denia.²³³ It is possible that this was the case, but in our opinion it is

²²⁹ The hypothesis of placing *Iyuh/Ello* in Algezares comes from Gómez Moreno, in a work published in 1962/63 to which we have not had access, which was refuted by A. Yelo Templado (1978-1979b: 20 ff).

²³⁰ Algezares: García and Vizcaíno 2008; 2013. La Alberca: Molina Gómez 2004.

²³¹ Pocklington 1987: 186-188. However, there are authors who deny that the founding of Murcia has necessarily to be related to the destruction of *Iyih* (e.g. Abad *et al.* 1993: 162; Gamo 1998: 30-34).

²³² Frey 2017: 26.

²³³ Vallvé 1972: 148; Frey 2017: 26.

much more likely that the absence of Aurariola was due precisely to the presence in the list of Murcia, already identified with Tudmīr. On the other hand, it must be repeated that the Arabic terms *saḥl* and *basīt* are practically synonymous (both meaning 'plain').²³⁴ This, of course, should not surprise us: we have already seen how the province, with Aurariola as its capital, was known in the times of Leovigild as Orospeđa, and that the term must be interpreted as coming from the Greek *oros* ('mountain') and *pediōn* ('plain'), which we might translate as 'plateau' or 'high plain' (its literal translation being 'high plateau'), in reference to the region of the Altos de Chinchilla, whose average altitude, which exceeds 700 m.a.s.l., contrasts with that presented by the coastal area. Actually, the region located between the towns of Hellín-Yecla-Almansa-Albacete forms a characteristic landscape of well-individualised high plateaus, especially for a Levantine observer, but also for anyone arriving from the west along the Via Toledo-Carthago Nova. It would be quite understandable, therefore, if this striking feature were to have given its name to the province. The duality of Arabic terms used to refer to the same landscape could be explained by the fact that the oldest of them (*saḥl*) was simply a faithful translation of the Greek word with which this province was known in Visigothic times. If *Ilunum*/Minateda was the ancient capital of Orospeđa, as it should have been at the beginning of the 7th century (when the construction of its main public buildings was undertaken), and an important base of the later military duchy throughout that century, it was logical that the Arabs might refer to it as *Iyih/Iyuh al-Saḥl* to distinguish it from the homonymous city near Murcia.

The historical continuity: La Mancha de Montearagón

All this geographical space of the Albacete plateau to which we have been referring in the preceding lines has been known since the Middle Ages as Mancha de Montearagón or Montaragón. This is undoubtedly of interest, as we will have the opportunity to see later, because it indicates a really striking historical continuity to which some ancient authors have already referred.

The first mention of a territory called Montearagón is found in a document of agreement between the orders of Santiago and San Juan of 1237, by which the Santiago friars granted compensation to the Hospitallers for the water they took from the Guadiana River. This implies that Montearagón extended at that time through the east of the current province of Ciudad Real, including the lagoons of Ruidera. As for the eastern limits of this territory, the problem is more complex. A. Merino Álvarez, and after him other authors linked to the region of Murcia, took the Mancha de Montearagón to the Levantine lands of the valleys of the Segura and Vinalopó and the marina that extends between Denia and the Almanzora.²³⁵ The idea starts from the *Primera Crónica General de España* which, when speaking of the mythical foundation of Cartagena by Dido, offers an explanation of the old name of the city as Carthagera Espartera, justifying it 'because all the land that is esparto, which they now call Montaragon, obeyed her'.²³⁶

In the 14th century, the *Crónica de los Reyes de Castilla* written by Pero López de Ayala goes even further in pointing out the identity between the Visigothic county of Esparteria and the Mancha de Montearagón:

²³⁴ Pocklington 2015: 36.

²³⁵ On this topic see, Pretel 1984.

²³⁶ PCG 7 (Menéndez Pidal 1906: 10).

[And] all this was lost by help, and counsel, and treason, and evil of Count Don Julian, who was Count of Espartaria, which means of the Mancha, which today they call Monte Aragon...'

The chancellor's opinion is glossed by the historian Jerónimo Zurita, generalising from then on:

'Don Pedro López had a true relationship with the name of Mancha, which means dry esparto land: and as that Region was so named in the time of the Goths calling it Espartaria, the Arabs in their language must have applied the same name...'²³⁷

Other later testimonies, such as the *Memorial de diversas hazañas* (15th century), written by mosén Diego de Valera, include within this Mancha de Montearagón the population of Belmonte.²³⁸ Later it extended even more to other localities of Cuenca, and even the province of Toledo. In any case, for the late medieval period, the identity between the Mancha de Montearagón and the lordship of the Manuel, first, and the marquisate of Villena, later, is indisputable. But these limits are, as we say, of the Late Middle Ages, and therefore have little benefit for our study. Opportunely, A. Pretel pointed out that the identification of the Mancha de Montearagón with the territory of the *qūra* of Tudmīr, as some authors have defended, would only be possible if it adjusted to the translation of the coronym 'mancha' from the Arabic *Manxa* ('dry land'), but not so much if, as seems more probable, it comes from the Arabic *Manya* ('high place', 'plateau'). This author rightly defends that at first the term of Montearagón would refer exclusively to the Manchegan part of the old kingdom of Murcia belonging to the lordship of Villena, a Castilian area always reluctant to submit to Aragonese dominion and the authority of the Adelantamiento of Murcia.²³⁹

It is evident that the Mancha de Montearagón cannot extend to the coastal area, which is neither dry nor presents a great relative elevation, nor can it extend to the north and west, which, as has been seen, is a confusion derived from the medieval and modern identification with the lordships of the Manuel and the marquisate of Villena. Really, the ancient descriptions undoubtedly oblige us to identify the primordial *solar* of the Mancha de Montearagón with the ancient Visigothic province of the Orospeđa and with the interior territory of the ancient *qūra* of Tudmīr. In fact, if we stick to the original extension of the Mancha de Montearagón, this region should be circumscribed exclusively to a very precise geographical space and well characterised from the point of view of landscape and vegetation: the area belonging to the current province of Albacete, east of the Campo de Montiel and west of Villena (the line marked approximately in the divide of the current provinces of Albacete with those of Valencia and Alicante). As we have seen, the etymology of the toponyms reinforces this relationship between Orospeđa and Mancha de Montearagón if we consider a derivation of the word Mancha from the Arabic 'high plain', as proposed in his day by Asín Palacios, that is the same meaning we have proposed before for the Greek name of Orospeđa.²⁴⁰ This definition fits well, due to the natural characteristics of the environment, with the nature of the region of the Altos de Chinchilla. Then, the confusion that has been dragging on since the *Crónica General* of Alfonso X

²³⁷ López de Ayala, Crón. Rey D. Pedro: Cap. XVIII, 58-60 (Zurita 1779: 59).

²³⁸ 'Su padre Diego Telles no tenía más que a Belmonte, en la Mancha de Aragón' ('His father Diego Telles only had Belmonte, in La Mancha de Aragón'), cited in Pretel 1984: 265, n. 11.

²³⁹ Pretel 1984: 264.

²⁴⁰ Asín Palacios 1944: 28 ('alta llanura') and 118 ('alta planicie').

could be explained because, once the Byzantine *Spania* was conquered by the kings of Toledo, the ancient province of Orospeđa was integrated within the newly created Visigothic duchy of Aurariola (the 'county of Espartaria' of the medieval chronicles), which was in turn the germ of the *qūra* of Tudmīr, extending to the coastal lands occupied by the Byzantines. The memory of this dependence, an idea that in the Late Middle Ages was reinforced by the existence of the Adelantamiento of Murcia, provoked the subsequent equivocation.

Theudimer of Aurariola

Interpretations of his character

Trying to sketch a portrait of the *dux* Theudimer is certainly a difficult task and not without risks considering the scarcity of documentary evidence around his figure and the ambiguity of some of the literary testimonies on which the research has been based. This is not to say that there have not been meritorious attempts at an approach to the figure of Theudimer, especially by authors linked to the Levantine lands, where the Gothic duke exercised his power. However, even though this is true, it is no less true that most researchers have done so mainly in relation to the famous pact with 'Abd al-'Azīz, the issues related to the Arab conquest of 711 and the intricate problem of the identification of the cities covered by the agreement, so it is not exaggerated to say that the figure of Theudimer has almost always been somewhat obscured under the shadow of the treaty. Of course, this does not prevent numerous hypotheses from having been raised about an important character in the history of Visigothic Spain and, especially, about the rank of the Gothic noble and his role within the Visigothic politics of the late 7th century and the beginnings of the following century. In this sense, the interpretation that has gained more strength in historiography, especially since A. Fernández-Guerra sketched it towards the end of the 19th century, is that Theudimer was the *dux provinciae* in charge of the southeastern border of the kingdom of Toledo.²⁴¹ At the beginning of the 20th century Gaspar Remiro already took this opinion for granted, although he does not expressly affirm it, since the author was more interested in describing the position of the count of the Christians that Theudimer had assumed by virtue of the capitulation with the Muslims than in investigating what could have been his role within the political structures of the ancient kingdom of Toledo.²⁴²

Practically, this was the common opinion until 1973, when E. Llobregat's study on Theudimer of Orihuela was published. Llobregat did not consider Theudimer as a personality belonging to the high palatine nobility (*uir inlustris* or *comes*), but rather as a simple member of the lower order of nobility, a *fidelis* or *gardingus* of King Egica, later becoming *comes* (count) of one of the cities mentioned in the covenant of 713, perhaps as a result of his marriage to a Hispano-Roman noblewoman, and later commander of a fleet based in *Portus Ilicitanus*.²⁴³

Undoubtedly, Llobregat's study, so often cited in these pages, marks a before and after in the knowledge of our protagonist and, in fact, continues to be the main and obligatory reference on the figure of Theudimer to this day. However, as is logical after the time elapsed since its publication, certain approaches defended by Llobregat, and especially the portrait he drew of the Gothic nobleman, have become obsolete after some of the sources used by the author have received new interpretations. This is particularly relevant regarding the conclusions he drew about the members of

²⁴¹ Fernández-Guerra 1879: 25-27 (Duke of Aurariola); Vallvé 1989: 139 (Count of Carthaginensis); Vallejo 1993: 331, n. 15 (*Dux provinciae*).

²⁴² Gaspar 1905: 11-25.

²⁴³ Llobregat 1973: 70-75.

the conspiracy against Egica cited in Canon 9 of the Sixteenth Council of Toledo, a passage that until Juan Gil's study had been interpreted in a diametrically opposite sense to that given barely five years earlier, i.e. to the one investigated by Llobregat.²⁴⁴

If the true rank of our character – Gothic aristocrat or simple *fidelis* of Egica – is one of the problems historiography has tried to elucidate without finding a unanimous solution, another even more controversial problem related to the figure of *Dux* Theudimer is his role in the events that followed the Arab invasion of 711. The question addressed here is whether Theudimer can be presented as the hero of the Gothic resistance to the invaders or, on the contrary, was one of the many accomplices the conquerors found among the Wittizan ranks. Or, in other words, whether we should consider the famous agreement with the Arabs of 713 as the just retribution for the nobleman's betrayal at the time of the invasion, or whether it was the gain forced by a military victory achieved over the enemies of the homeland. In this latter sense, even before the historical research of the 20th century made a first critical approach to the character, the figure of Theudimer had received some literary recognition from the writer Francisco Navarro Villoslada. Certainly, the noble Theudimer has a fleeting prominence in the memorable work of the Navarrese Carlist *Amaya o los vascos del siglo VIII*, an historical novel in the style of Sir Walter Scott, first published in 1877. It is obvious that the image of a great Visigothic nobleman fighting the Arabs in defence of Christianity, and in a land so far from the Christian north, necessarily stimulated the imagination of the Navarrese novelist, who did not hesitate to elevate the Gothic Theudimer of Orihuela to the heights of a Pelayo of Asturias or a García of Navarra.²⁴⁵

In stark contrast to the restorative and traditionalist thoughts of Navarro Villoslada are the dissenting voices of those historians who place Theudimer in the Wittizan camp that betrayed King Roderic on the banks of the Guadalete River. This view is somewhat justified by the fact that, although the pact granted broad autonomy regarding private civil and religious matters, it was ultimately another example of submission to the rising Islamic power. In this sense, the pact of Theudimer presents a powerful analogy with what happened in the Ebro valley between the Arab invaders and the Visigothic count Casius, although with some important nuances that differentiate both situations. In the case of Theudimer, moreover, this interpretation is old and has its roots in the account of the events made by the Chronicle of 1344, a romanticised version of the lost *Ajbār mulūk Al-Andalus* ('News of the Kings of al-Andalus') by al-Razī, or the *Chronicle of the Moor Rasis* (887-955). Gaspar Remiro argued against the testimony of the Chronicle of 1344 that, as Pascual de Gayangos had already warned, the account in question is full of translation errors and also openly contradicts what other Arab chroniclers who dealt with the conquest of Tūdmir reported. In such a case, we would be facing a problem of comprehension by the translator of the Chronicle of Rasis that would feed the subsequent misunderstanding.²⁴⁶

Given so much confusion around the figure of Theudimer, it is not surprising that recently R. Lorenzo San Román, after briefly reviewing the multiple approaches historians were taking regarding the character, has advocated avoiding both the tendency towards the hagiographic heroisation of the

²⁴⁴ Gil 1978a: 130-132.

²⁴⁵ Navarro Villoslada 1879: 374-377.

²⁴⁶ Crón. Rasis, 4; Gayangos 1850: 70 ff.; Gaspar 1905: 7-10.

character – visible in the traditionalist interpretation, as well as in much of the historiography linked to the Murcian region – and the vision of a perfidious traitor, as he appears portrayed in certain bibliographies that present him as an effective collaborator in the Islamic conquest.²⁴⁷ Following this author's advice, we will attempt to scrutinise everything known about Theudimer, trying to separate the grain of certainty from the chaff of mere hypothesis.

The lineage of Dux Theudimer and his political actions before 711

As mentioned, there are very few historical accounts that can be related to the figure of Theudimer, and even these are repetitive and sometimes contradictory.²⁴⁸ Most of the literary references are narratives revolving around the pact signed by the Gothic noble with the Muslim authorities in 713, along with some legendary accounts about the conquest of Orihuela, which we will return to later. We know very little about the character in question beyond his name and his actions during some notable moments of Egica's reign (687-702) and the joint reign of this king with his son Wittiza (700-702). However, we owe a brief portrait of the noble to the author of the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, which may seem interesting. The anonymous Mozarab describes him as a high-ranking and dignified person, versed in Scripture, eloquent in speech, fast to war, prudent, and respected by both Arabs and Christians. This is all that can be established about Theudimer according to the testimony of literary texts.²⁴⁹

From the analysis of the character's onomastics, we can also deduce as a clear fact that we are dealing with a noble of Gothic origin. Indeed, he bears a Germanic bitematic name with a first typically Gothic theme and a second of Suevic origin: *Theud*< Goth. **Þiuda* ('people'); *Mirus*< Wgm. **mēro* ('famous').²⁵⁰ This is a detail we consider significant, as elsewhere we have suggested the hypothesis that this type of onomastics dates back to the conquest of the Suevic kingdom of Gallaecia and the creation of a true Gothic-Suevic noble group that ultimately monopolised the power structures of the kingdom of Toledo throughout the 7th century and that, in a way, continued in the Asturian kingdom through the lineage of Pelayo.²⁵¹ In fact, in light of our previous study, the interpretation, so often coined in historiography, that the end of the Visigothic kingdom was a struggle between two distinct opposing families should be discarded and replaced by the idea of a dispute between members of the same family (in a broad sense, perhaps as a reminiscence of the Germanic *Sippe*) who contended for power among themselves – in a sort of Spanish version of *I, Claudius!* Something like the Orleans or the Burgundians in late medieval France.

As we say, in principle, the onomastics allows to suggest the hypothesis of a relationship of Theudimer with the family that held power in the kingdom of Toledo, which would in turn explain what the most controversial episode of our character's biography may be and which we will now

²⁴⁷ Lorenzo de San Román 2016: 590 f.

²⁴⁸ The various literary sources dealing with Theudemir were compiled by Llobregat (1973: 56-69). Despite the years that have passed, Llobregat's work continues to be the reference study for this character.

²⁴⁹ Chron. Muz. 47: *Fuit enim scripturarum amator, elo[n]quentia mirificus, in preliis expeditus, qui et apud Amir Almuninim prudentior inter ceteros inuentus hutiliter est honoratus* (Gil 1973: 34).

²⁵⁰ Schönfeld 1911: 168, 231 f; Köbler 2014: s.u. Theudemir.

²⁵¹ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015.

address, i.e. his participation in the conspiracy against the throne and his rehabilitation after Egica's death.

On the other hand, the Arab literary sources that have transmitted the pact of 713 provide some information about Theudimer's lineage. According to the versions of the pact, the patronymic of the Gothic noble appears transcribed with an original consonant group *Gbdws* or *Gndrs*. The transcription of the name gives two options: *ibn Gubdūš* (al-Dabbī, *ibn Jarrāṭ*, al-Ruṣatī), with the variant *ibn 'Abdūs* (al-Garnatī, al-Himyarī), or *ibn Gandarīs* (al-'Udrī). While the first option seems to lead to a dead end, the latter option, on the contrary, offers a perfectly viable result in Gothic: *Gandarīs* < *Gandarici* (nom. *Gandaricus*).²⁵² This obviously means that we would not be dealing with the name of Theudimer's father but with the patronymic: Theudimer son of *Gandaricus*. Since Arabic does not usually note vowel sounds, Theudimer's father's name could well have been *Gundericus*/*Gunthiricus* (Goth. *gunþi*, 'combat'; *harjis*, 'army').²⁵³ This patronymic has the same root as the name *Gundemar*, which seems to us another piece of data to consider and which, added to other similar indications, suggests an aristocratic origin for the character and a connection with the Visigothic royalty.



Fig. 24. Tremis of Egica-Witiza, Mint of Emerita. Mérida. Museo Nacional de Arte Romano. (Pliego, 2012).

Another indication of Theudimer's nobility is reflected precisely in the onomastics of his possible son *Athanagild* (*Athanaildus*). Like the previous ones, it is a Gothic bitematic name (*Athanagildus* < Goth. **aþana*, 'noble'; *gild*, 'value') that counts among its most illustrious bearers the Gothic king of the same name, first husband of *Goisuintha* and father of the famous queens *Galsuintha* and *Brunhild*. The same name is repeated in the ill-fated son of *Hermenegild* and *Ingundis*, great-grandson of *Athanagild* and *Goisuintha*, grandson of *Leovigild*, and nephew of *Reccared* (see below). As we have seen for Theudimer's patronymic, his son's name suggests a certain noble lineage and perhaps a

²⁵² Pocklington 2015: 15, 21 f.

²⁵³ Schönfeld 1911: 116, 119; Köbler 2014: s.u. *gunþi*, *harjis*.

connection with the Gothic royal family.²⁵⁴ In fact, despite E. Llobregat's contrary opinion, literary sources also reinforce the idea that we are dealing with a high-ranking character (*uir inlustris, seniores palatii*) linked to the highest echelons of the Visigothic kingdom, probably belonging at some point to the *Aula Regia*, and, of course, related to the Gothic royal lineage.

The first reference we can definitively attribute to *Dux* Theudimer appears in a report transmitted by the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, on the occasion of a resounding victory over a Byzantine fleet that intended to attack the Levantine coast. The event is dated during the joint reign of Egica and Wittiza (700-702/703). The Mozarabic chronicler's account reads:

'At the same time, in the *era* 782 (744 CE), the warlike Theudimer died, who, in various parts of Hispania, had caused not a few deaths to the Arabs and who, after persistently seeking peace, made the necessary pact with them. Already in the times of the Gothic kings Egica and Wittiza, he obtained the palm of victory over the Greeks, who, sailing, had penetrated his homeland by sea.'²⁵⁵

The interpretation of the episode raises some problems. The first is what type of confrontation occurred between the Greeks and the Hispano-Goths. Was it a naval battle, as the quote seems to suggest and has been defended until recently, or was it a land invasion attempt repelled by the Visigothic troops? A second problem is again the scenario of the combat. Precisely in relation to this news, it has been supposed that Theudimer was the commander of the Visigothic fleet deployed on the Levantine coast, probably in *Portus Ilicitanus* (Santa Pola, Alicante).²⁵⁶

Actually, both interpretations - naval combat or invasion attempt - do not have to be irreconcilable, although the scenario of the events proposed by E. Llobregat seems more debatable. We have already seen that Sisebut had created a Visigothic naval force and that it must have been anchored in the port of Valencia, as it was the only Levantine port in the power of the Visigoths in the first third of the 7th century. After the conquest of Byzantine *Spania* and the destruction of Cartagena, we do not believe there were objective reasons to advise relocating the fleet to *Portus Ilicitanus*, so it is assumed that the bulk of the navy would remain moored in Valencia, with a view to controlling the western Mediterranean and facing any assault from the Byzantine bases in Carthage or the Balearic Islands. In this context, it is not impossible that there was some type of naval combat between the Gothic navy and the Byzantine fleet, but a landing attempt on the Levantine coast repelled by the Visigothic army and navy in a joint action cannot be completely ruled out. Moreover, the news from the *Continuatio Hispana* coincides with other indications that place Theudimer in relation to the city of Valencia or its immediate surroundings.²⁵⁷ Additionally, we know that this moment also coincides with a brief

²⁵⁴ Schönfeld 1911: 34; Köbler 2014: s.u. *abana, gildus*.

²⁵⁵ Lorenzo de San Román 2016: 112. Chron. Muz. 47: '[***] nomine Theudimer, qui in Spanie partes non modicas Arabum intulerat neces, et diu exageratos pacem cum eis federat habiendus. Sed et iam sub Egicam et Uuittizam Gothorum regibus in Grecis, qui equorei nabalique descenderant sua in patria, de palmam uictorie triumphauerat' (Gil, 1973: 34). López Pereira (1980: 113, 115; 2009: 270, § 87.1) reconstructs the missing text: 'Per idem tempus in era DCCLXXXII uite terminus dedit uir belliger'. (See Appendix I.1).

²⁵⁶ Llobregat 1973: 73 f.

²⁵⁷ See above n. 254. For a correct translation of the anonymous Mozarabic account, see Lorenzo de San Román 2016: 577-579. This represents an understandable error in the manuscript transmission of *equorabiliter* (= *nauigando*) > *equorei*

period of coin minting in the cities of Saguntum and Valentia, a circumstance that must have had a direct relationship with some type of military action in that area.²⁵⁸

Alternatively, various explanations have been suggested for the Byzantine naval incursion. García Moreno initially thought it was the Byzantine fleet fleeing the Islamic conquest of Carthage in 698. However, today it is generally identified as a secondary event related to a failed Imperial expedition to reconquer Carthage from the Arabs. The event is framed during the reign of Emperor Leontius (660-706) and refers to the emperor sending a fleet under the command of John the Patrician to recover the capital of the Exarchate of Africa. Rejected by the Arabs, the Imperial fleet would have tried to take refuge on the Spanish coast, being defeated there by Theudimer. The new failure would force the Greek ships to set sail again for Crete, where they chose a new leader named Apsimaros instead of John the Patrician. After his election, Apsimaros directed his fleet towards Constantinople and overthrew Emperor Leontius. He occupied the Imperial throne, assuming the name Tiberius III (698-705).²⁵⁹



Fig. 25. Tremis of Suniefred. Mint of Toledo (Pliego, 2015).

A different issue, although connected to the previous one, is the context in which the news from the *Continuatio Hispana* should be included. A. del Castillo and J. Montenegro related it to the rebellion of Suniefred during the co-regency of Egica and Wittiza, dating the nobleman's rebellion *c.* 702. The usurpation would have coincided with the absence of Egica and Wittiza from the court, an absence probably motivated by an outbreak of plague in the city that occurred shortly before the king's death.

nabaliter. However, R. Grosse's translation (1947: 371) does not mention cavalry at any point, only 'a naval victory'. López Pereira's edition also omits any reference to cavalry (1980: 112).

²⁵⁸ Ribera 2005; Pliego 2009: 192. What is being postulated here is not a real invasion as occurred in 552, but rather an action of pillage and plunder in the style of what the Vikings and Berbers would do later. We will soon see how it is possible that the Arab invasion in the Strait of Gibraltar was accompanied by other small landings along the coast of Murcia.

²⁵⁹ García Moreno 1989: 186; Collins 2005: 110; Vallejo 2012, 432-436.

In the opinion of both authors, the Byzantine fleet would have been called by Suniefred as military support for the rebellion. In this, the rebel would have followed the same pattern previously developed by Athanagild and which had caused the Byzantine occupation in the mid 6th century.²⁶⁰

Nevertheless, we must raise some objections to this interpretation. Firstly, it has already been commented that it is very possible that, in the invasion of 552, the Byzantine troops were not called to aid the rebel Athanagild, but to support the legitimate king, Agila, and that only the subsequent development of events (Agila's defeat in Cordoba) produced a change in alliances. Evidently, this explanation is not an obstacle in itself to Castillo and Montenegro's hypothesis, but it does change our perception of how the Byzantine interventions occurred and should be considered in that sense. Moreover, Suniefred's usurpation does not seem to have been a genuine rebellion, at least not in the style of that experienced in Septimania during Suinthila's reign, or at the beginning of Wamba's rule, but – leaving aside the nuances – a palace conspiracy along the lines of that organised by Goisuinta and Uldila against Reccared a century earlier. This assumption is mainly based on three arguments: firstly, the only testimonies mentioning Suniefred's usurpation are limited exclusively to coinage minted in Toledo, suggesting that the rebellion had little impact outside the walls of the royal city; secondly, the presence of Liuvigoto, widow of King Erwig, among those involved in the plot, which seems to indicate a palace coup; and finally, the prominent role assumed by Bishop Sisbert, undoubtedly the most suitable person to sanctify the usurpation.

It is true that the last two arguments are only valid if Suniefred's rebellion and Sisbert's conspiracy are identified as the same event, but we will see that this explanation, already pointed out by Beltrán, is undoubtedly the most probable option.²⁶¹

On the other hand, the situation of the Empire at the beginning of the 8th century was very different from that during Justinian's time and his attempt at Imperial restoration. At that period, it is not clear what interest Constantinople could have had in meddling again in the peninsula and opening a new field of military operations when the Empire had just lost its main base of operations in North Africa. Opening a new war front so far from the centre of Imperial power and without rear bases that could house a reserve army seems absurd.

More importantly, as we have pointed out, is the objection regarding the possible date of Suniefred's usurpation. Elsewhere we have suggested that it must have occurred *c.* 691-693 and not in 702, which we believe corresponds to a possible rebellion of Theudedefred, Roderic's father, in Baetica. This Theudedefred must be the same *uir inluster Offici Palatini* who appears among the signatories of the

²⁶⁰ Castillo and Montenegro 2004: 412-415. The case of Hermenegild could also be cited, but here the political interests (stopping Leovigild's military campaigns) and religious motivations (the uprising was carried out under the banner of defending the Catholic faith) were mixed, which advised the Byzantines to support the usurper and not the legitimate king. Even so, it cannot be considered a true objection since Hermenegild only sought Byzantine support after he was attacked by Leovigild, not before, and there is no evidence of any help from them because, in any case, the king bought the neutrality of the Greeks. Cf. Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2021.

²⁶¹ Beltrán 1941: 103 ff. Given the development of events, and analysing the logic of other usurpations (Sisenand, Ilderic/Paulus), it seems obvious that Suniefred had to count on the support of the army quartered in Septimania. Egica's decision to remain in Zaragoza would have prevented the connection of this army with the Toledo rebels, thus frustrating the success of the coup d'état (see below).

Twelfth Council of Toledo (681) (see below).²⁶² Again, we must lament the scant information that the sources have transmitted about the uprising of *Dux* Suniefred. But, by analogy with the case of Froya in Reccesvinth's reign, the trigger for the uprising must undoubtedly have been Egica's desire to associate his son Wittiza with the crown, something that was theoretically contrary to the legality established in the Fourth Council (633). The reasons that would have pushed Egica to this measure must have been the king's attempt to impose Wittiza as heir before dying. This decision, however, entailed a break with Erwig's family, with whose daughter, Cixilo, he had married a few years earlier. This second marriage had been an attempt by the Gothic aristocracy to close the political crisis that began with Wamba's abdication and threatened to dismantle the entire institutional framework of the kingdom.²⁶³



Fig. 26. King Roderic and Tariq. Compendium of Kings (14th century). Madrid, National Library. MSS/7415.

It is interesting to make a digression here about the problem of succession to the throne in the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo as it allows a better understanding of the context in which Theudimer had to operate.

As is known, in the Visigothic kingdom the monarchy was theoretically elective. This had been sanctioned in Canon 75 of the Fourth Council of Toledo (633 CE) in response to the situation that arose after Sisenand's usurpation (631 CE) and the consequent deposition of King Suinthila.²⁶⁴ The canonical norm established by the fathers of the council – presided over, let us not forget, by a personality of the stature of St Isidore – was of utmost legal importance, to the point that the next synod ordered its reading at

the beginning of each conciliar meeting.²⁶⁵ In practice, however, the agreement of the Fourth Council was a dead letter. Despite the Church's attempts to consolidate this consensual system of royal election, the reality was that most kings ignored the legal system and imposed themselves by force of arms or by co-optation. Logically, when this happened, the system went into crisis, and uprisings

²⁶² Barroso - Carrobes - Morín 2011: 47, n. 130; Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 93 f.

²⁶³ Miles 1952: 37 f; Collins 2005: 107-109; Bronisch 2011; Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 82-87.

²⁶⁴ IV Con. Tol. c. 75: '*De commonitione plebis ne in principes delinquantur*' (Vives 1963: 217-221).

²⁶⁵ V Con. Tol. c. 7: '*Quod in celebritate cunctorum conciliorum synodus Toletana temporibus Sisenandi habita per pronuntiationem uocis clarae ob custodiam < sui > cunctis debeat innotescere*' (Vives 1963: 229).

among the aristocracy followed. This is, broadly speaking, what happened on several occasions, e.g. Suinthila (Sisenand's usurpation), with Chindasuinth's death and Reccesuinth's election (Froya's uprising); with Wamba's election in Gerticos, suspected of irregularity (Ilderic's rebellion in Septimania followed by the usurpation of Duke Paulus); and, of course, with Wittiza's ascension to the throne. Generally, the Church tried to avoid confrontation within the nobility, knowing what was at stake, and therefore promoted, in addition to the aforementioned election protocol, the sacralisation of the monarch through specific signs (royal anointing, religious condemnation and divine judgment (*anathema*)), and other honorary distinctions (*laudes regiae*, Christian titles: *religiosus*, *orthodoxus*, *religiosissimus*). Additionally, in certain moments of political crisis, the ecclesiastical estate tried to mediate between the opposing noble factions, promoting alliances between different families to smooth out enmities and consolidate dynastic and family ties. In this sense, it is very possible that the attempt at reconciliation between Erwig and Egica through the latter's marriage to Cixilo, Erwig's daughter, was supported by Julian of Toledo. In fact, the metropolitan of Toledo is the author of a work, the *Historia Wambae Regis*, which is considered a true *speculum principis* intended to serve not so much as an *exemplum* for Egica himself but as a manifestation of the theocratic theory of kingship that the bishop upheld.²⁶⁶ Of course, this general ideal was not shared by the entire ecclesiastical estate, but only by some luminaries (Isidore, Julian) who could analyse with some clarity what was at stake, i.e. the kingdom's fate; hence, throughout Visigothic history, there were those, like Bishop Sisbert, who openly supported the rebellion against the legitimate king.

In any case, regardless of the real reasons that led to Suniefred's usurpation, the rebel – undoubtedly the same noble who had signed the Acts of the Thirteenth Council (683) as *comes scanciarum et dux* – had managed to take control of Toledo, where, according to the Acts of the Sixteenth Council, he must have had significant support among the nobility, including Metropolitan Sisbert and Queen Dowager Liuvigoto. Also, of course, Theudimer, a character who undoubtedly must be identified with the protagonist of our story. We know with certainty that Suniefred controlled the royal city – thanks to a series of coins minted in his name at the mint of Toledo. It is very likely that the usurper's control of the royal city forced the convening of a national council in Zaragoza in 691. Following the Visigothic royal protocol, in the city of Toledo, Suniefred would receive the royal anointing at the hands of Metropolitan Sisbert.²⁶⁷

Suniefred's rebellion must have lasted for one or two years, during which time Egica organised the response to the coup. On one hand, the king must have secured the loyalty of the important army of Gallaecia, placing his son Wittiza at its head. A reference from the Chronicle of Albelda informs that Wittiza acted as co-regent in *Tude* (Tuy, Pontevedra) during his father's lifetime.²⁶⁸ The Chronicle of Alfonso III indicates that Egica wanted to distribute power in such a way that '*pater tenente regnum Gotorum et filii sueurom*' ([The father retained the kingdom of the Goths and the son that of the

²⁶⁶ García Herrero, 1998.

²⁶⁷ XVI Con. Tol. can. 9: '*De Sisberto episcopo*' (Vives 1963: 508-514). For the coins of Suniefred, see Beltrán 1941; Miles 1952: 405, pl. XXXIV.13; Castillo Lozano 2015 (but his objections to the identification of this Suniefred with the Sisbert candidate do not seem reasonable).

²⁶⁸ Chron. Alb. 32-33: '*Uuitizza rg. an. X. Iste in uita patris in Tudense hurbe Gallicie resedit.*' The passage in question does not appear in all the manuscripts and is immersed in the controversy about the origin of Pelayo: Gil *et al.* 1985: 243; Novo 1999-2000: 228 f.

Suevi').²⁶⁹ The *Chronica regum Visigothorum* certifies the association of Egica's son to the throne.²⁷⁰ This news is credible because it is confirmed by other independent sources after the fall of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo and even, as we will see, by epigraphy. The numismatics of the time also confirms the news from the Chronicle of Alfonso III, e.g. the mint of *Tude* issued coins with the joint image of Egica-Wittiza in the style of the co-reign of Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth, following a model previously minted in Byzantium.²⁷¹ These are types of coinages dedicated to dynastic propaganda with the legend IN DEI NOMINE EGICA REX (obverse) and WITIZZA REX-REGES (reverse), showing both kings holding a processional cross, a symbol of royal sovereignty in the Visigothic kingdom.²⁷² This type is exclusive to the co-reigns of the second half of the 7th century.²⁷³

With the important Duchy of Gallaecia under control of Wittiza, Egica organised a national council meeting in Zaragoza in 691. The choice of this city does not seem to have been accidental: it is very possible that the king sought to recover Toledo with the help of the army of Septimania or, failing that, to prevent it from joining the rebellion, an option that seems more likely to us given the mechanics of usurpations to the Visigothic throne in the 7th century. From subsequent events it is deduced that, with the usurper isolated in Toledo, Suniefred and Sisbert's rebellion failed.

Once the conspiracy was quelled, a new council meeting was held in 693, this time in the royal city, where the participants in the plot were accounted for: Liuvigoto, Frogellus, Theodomirus, Liuvilana, Tecla, and others. The council also sanctioned the deposition of Bishop Sisbert as metropolitan of Toledo, as well as the confiscation of his property and perpetual exile.²⁷⁴ The mention of several conspirators, but not the leader of the conspiracy, in the Acts of the Sixteenth Council of Toledo is explained by the fact that those mentioned must have been part of Erwig's royal family (remember that Liuvigoto, one of those mentioned, was Queen dowager)²⁷⁵ and, therefore, were protected by the anathemas issued in Canon 4 of the Thirteenth Council (683) for the protection of the royal family.²⁷⁶

²⁶⁹ Chron. Adef. 4 Rot.: 'quem rex in uita sua in regno participem fecit et eum in Tudensem ciuitatem auitare precepit, ut pater teneret regnum Gotorum et filiis sueuorum.' Seb: 'Filium suum Uuittizane in regno sibi socium fecit eumque in ciuitatem Tudensem prouincia Gallecie habitare precepit, ut pater teneret regnum Gotorum et filius Sueuorum' (Gil et al. 1985: 118 f).

²⁷⁰ Chron. reg. Visig. (Cod. E2. V2): 'Egiga cum filio suo Witizane reg. ann. XXIII. Achila reg. ann. III. Ardo reg. ann. VII. Et fuerunt reges Gotorum, qui regnaverunt, XL' (Zeumer 1902: 461).

²⁷¹ Specifically, on coins of Justin I, Heraclius and Constans II: Grierson 1999: 25 ff. On Visigothic coinage of co-regents, the reverse is occupied by the name of the city above a cruciform monogram: Heiss 1872: 12 f., 132-134; Mateu 1946: 22 f.; Miles 1952: 408, 413, 420-429.

²⁷² On the cross as a sovereign emblem in Visigothic Spain, see Barroso and Morín 2004a: 22-27; Barroso - Morín - Velázquez 2008: 498-501. We are aware that this interpretation, advanced in our previous study of 2015, undermines the idea that Wittiza was an adolescent (see Bronisch 2011: 61-63).

²⁷³ Miles 1952: 53, 348, 406; Mateu 1971: 147, 157 ff.; Pliego 2012: 91 ff. It corresponds to type VI of Heiss (1872), exclusive to the co-reign of Chindasuinth-Reccesuinth and Egica-Wittiza. Cf. Barroso - Morín - Velázquez 2008: 493, 498-501.

²⁷⁴ XVI Con. Tol. c.9: '[...]Sisbertus Toletanae sedis episcopus talibus machinationibus denotatus reppertus est pro eo quod serenissimum dominum nostrum Egicanem regem non tantum regno privare sed et morte cum Frogello, Theodomi, Liuvilane Leuivigotone quoque Tecla et ceteris interimere definivit atque genti eius vel patriae inferre conturbium et excidium cogitavit[...] honore simul et loco depulsus, omnibusque rebus exutus quibusque in potestate praedicti principis redactis perpetui exilii ergastulo maneat religatus [...]' (Vives 1963: 508).

²⁷⁵ XIII Con. Tol. c. 4; XV Con. Tol. c. 8. (Vives 1963: 420 f., 464 f.).

²⁷⁶ XIII Con. Tol. c. 4: 'De munitione prolis regiae' (Vives 1963: 419-421).

Thus Canon 9 would actually correspond to the ecclesiastical trial that undoubtedly accompanied another civil trial that would have been held before the synod and was mandatory according to the agreements in Canons 75 of the Fourth Council (633) and 2 of the Thirteenth Council of Toledo, as well as civil legislation.²⁷⁷ That the implicated had already been judged before the council meeting can be verified by the fact that, as Roger Collins pointed out, the Sixteenth Council was presided over by Bishop Felix, the successor of the deposed Sisbert in the see of Toledo. A year after the Sixteenth Council meeting, in 694/695, and with the kingdom eventually pacified, King Egica was finally able to associate his son as regent without major problems.²⁷⁸

Canon 9 of the Sixteenth Council is interesting for several reasons. One is that it allows us to glimpse a confrontation between the family and clients of Erwig and those of his successor Egica, an enmity that would have a significant impact on the events leading to the disaster of the Visigothic kingdom in 711. A second aspect, which interests us particularly, is that it allows us to know who supported Suniefred in his attempt to usurp the throne. At least two of them were undoubtedly illustrious personalities of the kingdom: the Metropolitan of Toledo, Sisbert, and the Queen Dowager Liuvigoto. There is also a third name, Theodomirus, which also seems suspiciously familiar. Indeed, his appearance in the list of conspirators is the reason we have devoted so much attention to this episode.

In fact, almost all authors agree in identifying Theodomirus of the Sixteenth Council with the Theudimer mentioned in the Mozarabic chronicle of 754 as the same person. It is logical that this is so, considering the coincidence of the onomastics, chronology, and rank of the character.²⁷⁹ However, while this is the general opinion, the identification of both presents a new problem: if the Theodomirus involved in the plot against Egica alongside Erwig's relatives and *fideles* is the same as the Theudimer of the pact, how is it explained that such a character came to occupy such a prominent and trusted position as *dux provinciae* during Wittiza's reign? The most logical thing is that the conspirator would have been punished and stripped of all honours and positions he held in the trial preceding the Sixteenth Council. Actually, it is very possible that Theudimer's appearance at the head of the Duchy of Aurariola in the final years of Egica and Wittiza's co-reign led Llobregat to consider valid the reading that turns the list of conspirators of the synod of 693 into that of nobles threatened by the plot. This interpretation, as mentioned, must be flatly rejected after the already

²⁷⁷ IV Con. Tol. c. 75: '*consensu publico cum rectoribus ex iudicio manifesto delinquentium culpa patescat*'; XIII Con. Tol. c. 2: '*...sed is qui accusatur gradum sui ordinis tenens et nicil ante de supradictorum capitulorum nocibilitate persentiens, in publica sacerdotum, seniorum atque etiam gardingorum discussione deductus...*' (Vives 1963: 217-221, 417). L.I. II 1 8 (Chind.): '*De his, qui contra principem uel gentem aut patriam refugi siue insulentes existunt*' (Zeumer 1902: 53-57). An example of such a trial has been preserved from the rebellion of Duke Paulus in Septimania: *Iudicium* (Brusch and Levison 1910: 529-535).

²⁷⁸ Collins 2005: 107-109. This interpretation of the facts may be contradicted by the report in the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, the closest to the events, which states that Egica did not share the throne with her son until 698. Chron. Muz. 37: '*Huius tempore, in era DCCXXXVI... Egika in consortio regni Wittizanem filium sibi heredem Gothorum regnum retemtant. Hic patris succedens in solio...*' (Gil 1973: 29). Other codices, such as the Soriensis codex of the *Laterculus Regum Wisigothorum* ('*Unctus est autem Vitiza in regno die, quod fuit XVII. kal. Dec., era DCCXXXVIII*' (Zeumer 1902: 461, no. 51)) push it back even further, to the year 700. However, there is evidence, such as an inscription found in the 17th century in Santa María de la Almudena in Madrid (Vives 1969: 129, ICERV no. 370) and a document on parchment in the Archivo Histórico Nacional, the so-called *preceptum Medemae* (Canellas 1979: 394, no. 192) that advance the date to the year 694/695. Montenegro and del Castillo 2002. On the succession of Egica: Frighetto 2005; 2011; Bronisch 2011.

²⁷⁹ Llobregat 1973: 56, 71-73; García Moreno 1974a: 80, no. 152.

cited work of J. Gil. Therefore, the explanation of why the conspirator Theudimer appears in such a prominent position must come from other directions.

It seems obvious that, having participated in the conspiracy against Egica, Theudimer must have been stripped of his positions and disgraced, as prescribed by the laws regarding cases of *lèse-majesté*. The nobleman would have fallen into disgrace – at least while Egica remained firm on the royal throne. But, once Egica died, Theudimer would have been rehabilitated by the new monarch. This, at first, may seem strange, but in reality the practice of amnestying those prosecuted for *lèse-majesté* was not at all new. It had already occurred previously with Reccesuinth in the Eighth Council of Toledo (653), in relation to the processes carried out by Chindasuinth, and with Erwig in the Thirteenth Council of Toledo (683), which lifted the penalties on those involved in the rebellion against Wamba and some nobles repressed by Chindasuinth who had not been pardoned by Reccesuinth's previous amnesty. What Wittiza would have done in Theudimer's case would not, therefore, be an anomalous decision in Visigothic history, but the continuation of a practice aimed at easing enmities within the noble group that monopolised the highest magistracies of the Visigothic kingdom with a view to ensuring the kingdom's stability.

Moreover, this kind of inverse parallelism between father and son is not uncommon in Gothic history: we have good examples in the cases of Leovigild and Reccared, Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth, and Egica and Wittiza.²⁸⁰ The mechanism seems to have almost always been the same: whenever an energetic king tried to place a descendant on the throne, a new attempt at usurpation would inevitably arise, supported by the sector of the nobility that felt aggrieved. If the usurpation succeeded, discontent would arise at the king's death or shortly before it, taking advantage of the king's weakness and the delicate political situation in which the heir found himself (Froya, Paulus, Suniefred). Once the rebellion was quelled, mediation between the parties would follow, leading to an amnesty for those involved, which would be more or less extensive depending on family ties and other political factors.²⁸¹

The anonymous author of the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 seems to confirm this by presenting father and son with very different profiles. While he refers to Egica as 'persecuting the Goths with bitter death', Wittiza, on the other hand, is depicted by the Mozarabic chronicler in much softer terms: bold and daring, but also very merciful.²⁸² Thus, Egica would have entered the select catalogue of kings considered harsh; a list composed of energetic monarchs such as Leovigild and Chindasuinth, the latter's reign described by the same chronicle as an exercise in eradicating the Goths. The Pseudo-Fredegard, echoing similar reports from Spain to the Frankish kingdom, presents Chindasuinth as seeking to tame the Goths.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ For Leovigild and Reccared, cf. Isid. HG 52 and 55 (Mommsen 1894: 288-290).

²⁸¹ For analysis of the situation, see Orlandis 1997b.

²⁸² Chron. muz. 34: '*Gothos acerva morte persequitur*, 37: *Egika in consortio regni Uuittizanem filium sibi heredem faciens Gothorum regnum retentant. Hic patris succedens in solio, quamquam petulanter clementissimus tamen quindecim per annos extat in regno*' (Gil 1973: 28 ff.); Orlandis 1997b: 1096 ff.; Bronisch 2011: 62 f.

²⁸³ Chron. muz. 19: '*Chindasuinthus per tyrannidem regnum Gothorum invasum Yberie triumphabiliter principat demoliens Gothos sexque per annos quos extra filium regnavit*' (Gil 1973: 22); PseudFred. IV 82: '*Tandem unus ex primatis nomini Chyntasindus, collectis plurimis senatorebus Gotorum citerumque populum, regnum Spaniae sublimatur. Tulganem*

Seen this way, there seems to be little doubt that the Theudemirus cited in the Sixteenth Council was the same Theudimer who fought the Greek fleet and made the pact with 'Abd al-'Azīz in 713. Theudimer's case could also have a parallel with another situation experienced during the end of Egica and Wittiza's reign. Actually, the simple analysis of the account of Roderic's appointment as Duke of Baetica presents very similar features to those already described for Theudimer, although in this case, the legendary narratives and political interests seem to have somewhat distorted the historical reality. It is worth dedicating a few lines to it again because it allows for a better understanding of Theudimer's life circumstances and the complex political environment of the time.

From what can be deduced from the literary sources, Count Theudefred, son of Reccesuinth, had two sons: Veremund, father of Pelayo, and Roderic. From what can be deduced from the texts, it is very possible that on the occasion of Wittiza's association with the crown (694/695) or shortly thereafter, as a consequence of the trial of Suniefred and his accomplices, Theudefred and his son Veremund rose against the king in Cordoba and Galicia. In any case, it is known that the rebellion was quelled and that both nobles were punished as befits a crime of *lèse-majesté*: Veremund with death, and Theudefred with blindness and exile to Cordoba. However, paradoxically, upon Wittiza's death, we find Roderic, son of Theudefred, occupying the important position of *dux provinciae* in the same Cordoba. It is in this city that he has himself crowned king once Wittiza has died, with the support of the local nobility (*senatus*). The reason why Roderic could be occupying such a politically relevant position despite these family antecedents can only be due to his marriage connection with King Egica's family.²⁸⁴

Indeed, the name of Roderic's wife, Egilo, suggests a kinship with King Egica. This also seems to be deduced from the accounts transmitted by the Arab stories of the conquest. We know that after the defeat at the Guadalete River and Roderic's death, Queen Egilo took 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsā as her husband. Whatever the truth contained in the Arab accounts about the son of the conqueror of Spain, what is indisputable is that with this marriage 'Abd al-'Azīz intended to establish a solid link with the Visigothic royalty to strengthen his personal dominion within the complex political landscape opened after the conquest. In fact, Muza's son's aspirations to occupy the Visigothic throne were the cause of his assassination.²⁸⁵ Finally, and although it may seem obvious, it is noteworthy that,

degradatum et ad onos clerecati tursorare fecit. Cumque omnem regnum Spaniae suae ditione firmasset, cognatus morbum Gotorum, quem de regebus degradandum habebant. unde sepius cum ipsis in consilio fuerat, quoscumque ex eis uius uiciae prumtum contra regibus, qui a regno expulsi fuerant, cognoverat fuisse noxias, totus sigillatim iubet interfici aliusque exilio condemnare; eorumque uxoris et filias suis fedelebus cum facultatebus tradit. Fertur, de primatis Gotorum hoc vicio repremendo ducentis fuisse interfectis; de mediogrebus quingentis interfecere iussit. Quoad usque hoc morbum Gotorum Chyntasindus cognovissit perdometum, non cessavit quos in suspicionem o habebat gladio trucidare. Goti a vero Chyntasindo perdomiti, nihil adversus eodem ausi sunt, ut de regebus consueverant inire consilium. Chyntasindus cum esset plenus diaerum, filium suum nomine Richysindum in omnem regnum Spaniae regem stabilivit. Chyntasindus paenitentiam agens, aelymosinam multa de rebus proprias faciens, plenus senectutae, fertur nonagenarius, moretur' (Krusch 1888: 163).

²⁸⁴ García Moreno (2003: 783; 2007c: 346; 2008b: 155) assumes that he was from the Wittiza family. It is possible to speculate a double link (Egica-Cixilo and Roderic-Egilo) that united both lineages: Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 96.

²⁸⁵ For an analysis of the importance of the figure of the Queen Dowager, see Orlandis 1957-1958: esp. 123 ff. On this subject, see also Valverde 2003; Isla 2004. Apart from the aura of legitimacy provided by the figure of the Queen Dowager, there was the question of the *fideles* and their military retinues, such as the one that helped raise Theudis to the throne. On this noble woman, see Barroso *et al.* 2015: 16-24.

according to al-Maqqarī, Roderic had a sumptuous palace in Cordoba, worthy of a king. This is something we will also see repeated in the case of Duke Theudimer and the palace of Pla de Nadal.²⁸⁶

On the other hand, it seems evident that, contrary to the Asturian scholarly tradition, well represented by the *ad Sebastianum* version, depicting him as deeply immoral, Wittiza is characterised in the Mozarabic tradition as a clement and magnanimous king: he not only welcomed those exiled by Egica but also recompensated them further for the properties his father had stripped them of. He also publicly burned the debt documents that Egica had extracted from his enemies. Furthermore, according to the anonymous Mozarabic chronicler, Wittiza restored the Palatine Office and allowed the nobility to recover the properties his father had assigned to the treasury.²⁸⁷ The allusion to a restoration of the Palatine Office by Wittiza can only be understood in this precise context as the king incorporating into it some of those harmed by Egica. And that was undoubtedly the case of Roderic and Theudimer, otherwise it is difficult to see how they could have found themselves at the head of their respective provinces.

All these data point to the fact that, with all certainty, Theudimer would have been a high-ranking official at the Visigothic court during the reigns of Erwig, Egica, and Wittiza, not a mere *gardingus* as Llobregat thought. Undoubtedly, he had family ties with King Erwig's family, hence his support for Suniefred's usurpation and his appearance alongside the Queen Dowager among those who deserved a religious trial and not just a civil process. Moreover, due to the frequent marital links between the different families of the Gothic aristocracy, it would not be strange if Theudimer also had blood ties with part of Egica's royal family, perhaps through Cixilo, Erwig's daughter, with whose widow he is associated in Suniefred's conspiracy. It is also possible that he shared some kind of kinship with Roderic, as his onomastics share the root with his father's name (*Thiud-*) and seem to indicate a Suevic-Gothic origin, the same as that of the last Gothic king.²⁸⁸

In any event, and just as with Roderic,²⁸⁹ the nobility of Theudimer's lineage and his contacts within the court of Toledo would have allowed him to regain Wittiza's favour in Egica's last years. Like Roderic, Theudimer was also pardoned surprisingly after supporting a sedition and reinstated in his dignities; and also, like the Duke of Baetica, the nobleman would be removed from the court and assigned to a province that initially did not present a high military risk once the threat of a Byzantine intervention had disappeared. What the king did not count on was that while the Empire was no

²⁸⁶ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 91-94. On Roderic, cf. Chron. Adef. III (Rot.) 6; Chron. Alb. XIV 33 (Gil *et al.* 1985: 120; 171); Chron. Muz. 43 (Gil 1973: 31). On Roderic's palace, cf. Lafuente Alcántara 1867: 176 f.

²⁸⁷ Chron. Muz. 37: '*...Qui non solum eos quos pater damnauerat ad gratiam recipit temtos in exilio, uerum etiam clientelus manet in restaurando. Nam quos ille graui oppresserat iugo, pristino iste reducebat in Gaudio et quos ille a proprio abdicaberat solo, iste pio reformans reparabat ex dono. Sicque conuocatis conctis postremo cautiones, quas parens more subtraxerat subdolo, iste in conspectu ómnium digne cremat incendio et no solum quia innoxios reddet, si uelle-n>t, ab insoluuili uinculo, uerum etiam rebus propriis redditis et olim iam fisco mancipatis palatino restaurat officio...*' (Gil 1973: 29 f).

²⁸⁸ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 91; García Moreno 2015: 19. As already hinted at a few lines above, we can think of a double link Egica-Cixilo and Roderic-Egilo that would strengthen the ties between the families of the high nobility that monopolised power.

²⁸⁹ There is little doubt about Rodrigo's noble lineage, even though the Arabic chroniclers, heeding the prevailing Mozarabic tradition, describe him as a character outside the royal lineage (cf. Ajbar Machmuâ; Lafuente 1867: 19, 21, 171).

longer a problem he had to consider, a greater and much more dangerous threat had arisen in North Africa. A threat that ultimately cost a kingdom.

The actions of Dux Theudimer after 711

In 711, a Visigothic army led by Roderic was defeated by the Arabs near the Guadalete River. According to the chronicles, Wittiza's supporters defected at the crucial moment of the battle, leaving the Gothic king at the mercy of his enemies. With Roderic dead and the Visigothic troops in disarray, Tāriq divided his army into three detachments: one, led by Moguits ar-Rumī, marched towards Cordoba; another headed towards Elvira (Granada), and a third moved towards Malaga. Tāriq must have marched with Moguits' detachment towards Cordoba to continue then towards Toledo. In this, the Arab texts are not unanimous, and some historians suppose that the conquest of Elvira, Rayya (Archidona), and Malaga was carried out by 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsā.²⁹⁰ It might have been like that because the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 records Mūsā's son as the protagonist of the pact, and practically no Arab chronicle places the episode of the pact after the campaign against Elvira and Malaga. The anonymous Mozarab also adds that 'Abd al-'Azīz governed Spain for three years.²⁹¹ Actually, both options can be compatible: there could have been a first campaign against Elvira, Rayya, and Malaga immediately after the battle at Guadalete led by Tāriq, and once the army was reunited after the surrender of those cities, a second expedition, already under Mūsā's son's command, would continue its advance through the Hoya de Baza towards *Acci* (Guadix) and *Basti* (Baza), which would be the action that conquered Tudmīr. This campaign would recall the one carried out by Leovigild over the Byzantine strongholds of Bastetania.

In the spring of 713, Theudimer had to face the Arab threat in his own fiefdom. The Gothic nobleman must have directed his army towards *Bastia* to cover the southwestern flank of his duchy. The decisive confrontation must have taken place on the banks of the Guadalentín River, near *Eliocroca* (Lorca) or, according to others, somewhat further north of this city, in the Sangonera River valley.²⁹² This last possibility becomes more convincing considering the events that followed the decisive battle. What we know is that Theudimer and his host suffered a serious defeat. Retreating with the remnants of the army to the city of *Aurariola* (Orihuela), he managed to secure a treaty from the conquerors that recognised freedom for him and his subjects and respect for their beliefs and Christian religious sites in exchange for an annual tribute.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Gaspar Remiro 1905: 1-10; Llobregat 1973: 80-85.

²⁹¹ The only author who does this is al-Udrī in a confusing copy full of gaps and al-Himyarī who follows him. See Lapiedra 2014: 362.

²⁹² Curiously, the *Primera Crónica General* places one of the possible scenarios for Roderic's defeat here: PCG 557, 32-34: 'but some say that this battle took place on the field of Sangonera, which is between Murcia and Lorca' (Menéndez Pidal 1906: 309). This quote served Joaquín Vallvé to postulate that Tariq's landing would have taken place in the Cartagena area and not in Gibraltar. See Vallvé 1967; 1972; 1986: 36-40; 1989: 105-118. *Pace* Sánchez Albornoz 1979. Addressing this issue would take us too far from our purpose, but it does not seem unfounded to think that the landing in Algeciras was followed by another, or others, in the Cartagena area, taking into account the good communications the city has with Qayrawān. Perhaps this explains the confusion in the chronicles of the conquest.

²⁹³ The description of the events follows that of the *Ajbar Ma'ymuā* and al-Maqqarī (Lafuente Alcántara 1867: 23-26, 180-183) and the *Crónica del moro Rasis*, 1-4 (Gayangos 1850: 68-71). However, Lafuente was mistaken in thinking that his source attributed the conquest of Tudmir to Moguits. In the narrative of the *Ajbar Ma'ymuā* the paragraph does not refer to the

At this point, and due to the discrepancies between the various narratives that have transmitted the episode, one may be wondering whether Theudemir was in the ranks of Roderic or Wittiza.²⁹⁴ The doubt is further fuelled by the ambiguity and contradiction of some historical texts that recounted the events following the defeat at Guadalete. Authors are divided when it comes to determining the duke's position regarding the kingdom's political division and the polarisation of the nobility into two opposing factions.²⁹⁵ Thus, according to various authors, Theudimer would have collaborated with the Arab invaders, facilitating the conquest of the Duchy of Aurariola. We have already seen that this opinion is partly due to a poor translation by the author of the Chronicle of 1344, who transcribed Rasis's *History of the Kings of al-Andalus*. Both the editor of Rasis's chronicle, Pascual de Gayangos and Gaspar Remiro, insist that it is a misinterpretation of the romanticised translation.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Llobregat, considering the ties that would link Theudimer with Egica and Wittiza, assumed that the duke must indeed have sided with the Wittizan faction. Even so, the author does not go so far as to defend that Theudimer was effectively a traitor (probably due to the weight of the traditionalist interpretation of the character) and asserts that, with the available data, it is impossible to know whether he responded to Roderic's call or not.²⁹⁷

In recent years a variant of this stance has found a new and effective advocate in L.A. García Moreno, who has wanted to see Theudimer as a powerful member of the Egica-Wittiza royal family, allied with Count Julian/Urban and also a military leader in Tāriq's service during his expedition to the region of Murcia.²⁹⁸ Again, we must reiterate that this interpretation is based on a misreading of Canon 9 of the Sixteenth Council of Toledo, which makes the conspirators victims of the conspiracy.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, the error is also due to a problem that Spanish historiography has been facing since the chronicles of the Oviedo cycle, with their attempt to blame Wittiza's family for the loss of Spain and thus absolve Pelayo, the restorer of the Gothic kingdom in Asturias, of any hint of responsibility for the disaster. Since then, the interpretation of a confrontation between the families of Chindasuinth and Wamba, prolonged until the times of Wittiza and Roderic, has become the vulgate of Spanish historiography, and this, in our opinion, has hindered a correct interpretation of the final episodes that led to the loss of Spain.

However, as we pointed out in a previous study, we believe the traditional theory of the fall of the Visigothic kingdom should be nuanced in the sense of not a confrontation between two different families, but of two factions opposed within the same family clan composed of aristocrats united by blood and marital ties.³⁰⁰ Therefore, it is logical to think that within the high spheres of the kingdom there were, to a greater or lesser extent, different personal ties that bound the main personalities of

latter, but to the detachment that had marched against Elvira and Raya. The passage is interpolated in the narrative of the conquest of Cordoba and hence the confusion. This is also shown by the version of al-Maqqarī. Both are reproduced in our Appendix III. For the itinerary followed by the armies, see Roldán 1975: 52 ff.

²⁹⁴ On the textual tradition of the conquest of Tudmīr, see Lapiedra 2014.

²⁹⁵ Llobregat 1973: 79.

²⁹⁶ Gayangos 1850: 70, n. 3; Gaspar Remiro 1905: 8 f.

²⁹⁷ Llobregat 1973: 79 f.

²⁹⁸ García Moreno 2012: 538-541.

²⁹⁹ García Moreno 1974: 80, n. 152; 2012: 540 f.

³⁰⁰ Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 104 f.

the court of Toledo. The problem, therefore, is not to know which family Theudimer belonged to, but in which direction his political preferences leaned: whether towards the branch headed by Egica or towards the faction led by Erwig. And in this sense, there are several elements that provide some indisputable clues as to his political position.

The first, and undoubtedly the one that offers the least doubt regarding Theudimer's political positioning in the Visigothic court, is obviously his alignment with Erwig's widow in support of Suniefred's coup that sought to overthrow Egica. As part of the family branch linked to King Erwig, and according to the news provided by the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, Theudimer must have been one of the main leaders of the conspiracy. His subsequent appointment as Duke of Aurariola should not be seen, then, as a positioning in favour of Wittiza, but as proof of the appeasement policy carried out by this monarch and the magnanimity of the king praised by the anonymous Mozarab.

A second indication of his opposition to Egica's faction is provided by the chronicles of the conquest. Practically all Arab texts, with the already explained exception of Rasis in the Chronicle of 1344, present Theudimer at the head of his army battling against the Arabs.³⁰¹ The Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 also assumes him in combat against the invaders until he secured the treaty from them (Chron. Muz. 47: '*non modicas Arabum intulerat neces et, diu exageratos, pacem cum eis federat habiendus*'). In this sense, Theudimer's stance differs notably from that adopted by Casius in the Ebro valley, which has led to the well-founded suspicion that he was indeed a supporter of Wittiza. The terms of the 713 capitulation between 'Abd al-'Azīz and Theudimer, allowing the exercise of Christian worship, also suggest that the treaty must have been produced under a certain position of strength on the Christian side, whether or not the legend woven around the conquest of Orihuela is true, which we will return to later.

The last indication, less clear but undoubtedly much more suggestive, is once again provided by onomastics. Theudimer, Theudfred (Roderic's father), and the usurper Suniefred present related onomastic components.³⁰² The first two also present the radical Teud- (Goth. *Thiud-*), just like Theudesuintha, probably a lady from the closest family circle of Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth who married Eterius, also an important figure at the Gothic court in the mid 7th century. We believe that this latter should certainly be identified with the *comes cubiculorum* of this name who signed the Acts of the Ninth Council of Toledo (655). The marriage is mentioned as patrons of a monastery dedicated to St Felix in Tutasanio (Totánés, Toledo), a name that seems to refer to a family *fundus* that would have originated from the Germanic anthroponym Toda, a name that can be related to the

³⁰¹ Al-Maqqarī, IV 2: 'But, continuing with our story, no sooner had Tariq set foot in al-Andalus than he was attacked by a Goth named Theudemir, whom Roderic had entrusted with the defence of that frontier. Theudemir, who is the same general who later gave his name to the province of al-Andalus called *Belad Tudmir* (the country of Tudmir), having tried, albeit in vain, to contain the impetuous campaign of Tariq's men, immediately sent a messenger to his lord, informing him how Tariq and his companions had landed in al-Andalus. He also wrote him a letter, with these words: "Our land has been invaded by a people whose name, homeland and origin are unknown to me. I do not know where they come from, or whether they have fallen from the sky or sprung from the earth".' (Gayangos 1840: 268, author's trans.).

³⁰² We also know of a *Suniemirus comes* who signed at the Fifteenth Council of Toledo (688) and who could be related to the three characters (Vives 1963: 474).

aforementioned Theudimer and Theudfred. The use of the radical *Thiud-* would not be casual in any case but a clear attempt to link -real or legendary - with the semi-sacred lineage of the Amali.³⁰³

In light of all these data, Theudimer's stance is not as clear as we initially supposed. Undoubtedly, as we have said, Theudimer was opposed to Egica and Wittiza, and in that sense it could be assumed that he sided with the faction in favour of Roderic. But his support for Roderic seems to have been more circumstantial. Certainly, both are prominent members of the faction opposed to Wittiza and his descendants, but in Theudimer's case, his reaction was more directed towards Egica's decision to name Wittiza as heir. Once the attempt failed and he was rehabilitated in his former position, the perspective must have changed radically, especially after Wittiza's death. In fact, if we carefully review the data we have pointed out throughout this study, everything seems to indicate that the king's death must have been seen by Theudimer as the last opportunity to wear the crown, especially if we consider that in Suniefred's plot, a decade before Wittiza ascended the throne, he must have already been a man of certain age. Let us note at this point that both the grandeur of the palace he



Fig. 27. Tremis of Rodericus. Mint of Toledo (Pliego, 2015).

ordered to be built at Pla de Nadal and the iconography displayed in the building's sculptural decoration are typical of a true king. And nothing would better describe that hidden desire to reign than the name he assigned to his heir: Athanagild. Indeed, this name is an anthroponym with clear royal resonances, because other prominent members of the Gothic royalty had borne that same name, including King Athanagild, who had given rise to a dynasty of Frankish kings, and the son of Hermenegild, grandson of Goisuintha, wife of the kings Athanagild and Leovigild. To close the circle, Hermenegild had also had a dramatic relationship with Valencia, the city that now constituted the centre of Theudimer's power and where the prince had been imprisoned before his martyrdom in Tarragona.

³⁰³ Eug. Tol. Carm. XII (Vollmer 1905: 242). On this lady and the monastery of Tutanesio, see Barroso - Carrobbles - Morín 2011: 46-48.

Whatever the situation, we see a constant in the main branch of the Gothic royal family: the repeated presence of certain onomastic components: *Thiud-* (Theodoric, Theudis, Theudigisel); *Recc-* (Reccared, Riccimir, Reccesuinth); *-Suinta* (Goisuintha, Galsuintha, Chindasuinth, Reccesuinth); *Hild-* (Athanagild, Brunhild, Leovigild, Hermenegild, Hildoara); *Liub-* (Liuva, Leovigild, Liuvigoto), etc.³⁰⁴ According to the Arab chronicles, Theudimer's father bore the name Gundericus, whose root we also see in the name of King Gundemar and Gundiliuva, a figure who held the important position of *dux* of Bastetania in Reccared's time and possibly – given the onomastics – with some family relation to the king, as we have seen a few lines above. It does not seem coincidental that the name of the bishop who replaced Felix in the metropolitan see of Toledo in Wittiza's time also bears the name Gundericus.³⁰⁵ From this perspective, and considering the number of onomastic elements related to royalty present in Theudimer's branch, there is no doubt that the line constituted by the Egica-Wittiza lineage must have been seen as an offshoot of the main trunk. In fact, it does not seem fortuitous that the name of the last known member of the dynasty was Athanagild, a name linked to a dynasty with deep roots in Baetica and Seville, as well as Cordoba: the city whose senate would proclaim Roderic king upon Wittiza's death.³⁰⁶ Obviously, Theudimer's support for Roderic would not have been *gratis et amore*, but he would have expected a reward in return, perhaps, as was customary, sanctioning the linkage of both families through a marital alliance between Athanagild and a daughter of the new king, or vice versa – between one of his daughters and Roderic himself. This is pure speculation, but that was the usual mechanism – in reality, it almost always has been within aristocratic circles – and that same mechanism would be employed, as we will see shortly, when the Arab invasion brings an unexpected turn to the kingdom's fate.

The end of the story is well known: unfortunately for Theudimer, the *dux* could not see his longed-for ambition to reign, or be the father of a king, fulfilled. In 711, Roderic's army was defeated at Guadalete, in the marshes of Cadiz: barely two years later, the Arab conquerors took possession of the Duchy of Aurariola through a pact with the locals.

As we mentioned earlier, the conquest chronicles offer two different versions of the expedition against Aurariola. One group presents the invasion as an immediate campaign following the victory over Roderic led by Tariq himself (al-Rāzī IVa, Ajbar Ma'âmūa, Ibn 'Idarī, Pseudoisidorian Chronicle). The other version reports that it was 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Mūsā who conquered Tūdmir (Ibn Habib, Al-Rāzī IVb, Ibn al-Jatib). Some authors, like al-Maqqarī, offer both versions, giving an idea of the confusion that reigned among the Arabs themselves about this issue. The Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 implicitly confirms the news that it was the son of the conqueror of Spain who subdued the territory of Aurariola.³⁰⁷

According to the Mozarabic Chronicle, Theudimer was one of the Visigothic nobles who accompanied the *wali* Mūsā ibn Nusayr in 714 on his journey to Damascus to account for his triumphs in the west. In the Syrian capital, he would be received by the Amir al Mu'minin (the caliph or 'Prince of the

³⁰⁴ For all this topic, see García Moreno 2008a.

³⁰⁵ Chron. Muz. 39: '*per idem tempus Gundericus urbis regie Toletane sedis metropolitanus episcopus...*' (Gil 1973: 30). García Moreno 1974a: 123, no. 254.

³⁰⁶ Regarding the Baetic roots of the Gothic monarchy, we refer to the study by García Moreno 2009.

³⁰⁷ Gaspar Remiro 1905: 1-10; Llobregat 1973: 80 f.



Fig. 28. Qusayr 'Amra (Jordan). Fresco of the Six Kings.

Believers') 'Abd al-Malik. According to the *Continuatio Hispana*, 'Abd al-Malik distinguished Theudimer above the rest of the captives and presented him with valuable gifts. The caliph also confirmed the pact reached between the duke and 'Abd al-'Azīz, granting it in perpetuity. The anonymous Mozarabic also refers to the great prestige achieved by Theudimer after the pact between the Eastern Christians, who, upon his arrival in Syria, honored him for his steadfastness in faith. Among the Gothic magnates who travelled to Damascus in 713/714 with Mūsā and Theudimer was also Count Casius – the founder of the famous *muladi* lineage of the Banu Qasi. However, Casius, unlike Theudimer, converted to Islam after his audience with Caliph al-Walid, hence, probably, the intentional allusion by the anonymous Mozarab to Theudimer's perseverance in the Christian faith.³⁰⁸ It does not seem far-fetched that the arrival of Mūsā and his exotic entourage of Visigothic nobles and servants in Syrian lands caused a great stir among the Syrians, as narrated by the Chronicle of 754, and that somehow this impact influenced the inclusion of King Roderic in the frescoes with which Walid ibn Yazid – the future Caliph Walid II – ordered the decoration of his palace of Qusayr 'Amra (723-743).³⁰⁹

Once the treaty was recognised by the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, Theudimer returned to his fief in Spain, where he must have died *c.* 743. The date of his death is fixed with the arrival in the peninsula of the

³⁰⁸ Chron. Muz. 47: 'Nam et multa ei dignitas et honos refertur necnon et a Xpianis Orientalis perquisitus tanta in eum inventa esse[t] vere fidei constantia, ut omnes Deo laudes referent non modicas. Fuit enim scripturarum amator, eloq[ui]ntia mirificus, in preliis expeditus, qui et apud Amir Almuminim prudentior inter ceteros inventus hutiliter est honoratus; et pactum, quem dudum ab Abdilaziz acceperat, firmiter ab eo reparatur. Sicque hactenus permanet stabilitus, ut nullatenus a successoribus Arabum tante uim proligationis solvatur, et sic ad Spaniam remeat gaudibundus' (Gil 1973: 34; López Pereira 1980: 114s). Gaspar Remiro 1905: 42; Llobregat 1973: 101 ff. Reproduced in Appendix I.1.

³⁰⁹ Cañada Juste 1980.

governor Abu-l-Jattar, charged with resolving the issue of the *ḡundīs* of Balḡ. According to al-Udrī, one of Theudimer's daughters married 'Abd al-Ŷabbar b. Jaṭṭāb, one of the Syrian nobles settled in Tudmīr. He was a descendant of a *mawla* (client) of the Caliph Marwan b. al-Hakam and a member of Balḡ's entourage. With this news, the reference to Theudimer's lineage is lost. However, already settled in Tudmīr, his namesake city, the family of the Gothic nobleman maintained its influence in the region for many years.³¹⁰

The legend of Theudimer

Despite the disparity in the narratives about the details of the conquest of Tudmīr, the story is, in general terms, basically the same among all authors: Theudimer goes out to meet the invading army, and a battle ensues in which the Arabs emerge victorious; Theudimer and his troops are then forced to flee and seek refuge within the walls of Orihuela (Arab versions) or in Murcia (Ps. Isidoriana, *Rebus Hispaniae*). These latter versions demonstrate a later redaction as they translate *madīna Tudmīr* as Murcia when in reality that was the name of Orihuela in the early Arab versions.³¹¹ Once safe in the city, and lacking men, Theudimer orders the women to bear arms and dress in warrior attire. He himself disguises as an emissary and, upon reaching the enemy camp, requests peace for the inhabitants of the city and then for himself. When the peace agreement is firm, Theudimer reveals himself to the Arabs and invites them to tour the city, where the Arabs realise the deception they have suffered. Despite feeling deceived, the Arabs keep their word and withdraw from the city, leaving only a small garrison.³¹²

According to Llobregat, the oldest version did not contain the legendary elements and could be summarised, i.e. the request of 'Abd al-'Azīz to his father Mūsā b. Nusair for troops and permission to fight against the Christians; the subsequent expedition to the lands of Tudmīr; the battle against the troops of the pact cities; the victory over them; and the conclusion of a 'letter of servitude'. The rest of the narrative would fall fully into the purely legendary.³¹³ The stratagem used by Theudimer in the siege of Orihuela seemed highly suspicious to R. Dozy, as it extraordinarily resembled another episode that occurred in 633 in Hadjr (Syria).³¹⁴ Gaspar Remiro, Huici, and Llobregat, following this author, consider it a fantastic episode, and Llobregat, like Saavedra before him, thought it was a legendary tale that sought to provide a reasonable explanation for something considered incomprehensible to later writers.³¹⁵

Before continuing with the topic, it should be noted that, contrary to what is usually assumed, Dozy did not think that the passage of the surrender of Orihuela was spurious, but only suspicious due to its similarity to what happened eighty years earlier in Hadjr between Jālid and the hanīfa. But the author then indicates that it could well have happened that Theudimer had the same idea as the

³¹⁰ Llobregat 1973: 102 f.

³¹¹ Lapidra (2014: 355 ff.) attributes this confusion to a political intention on the part of Ximenez de Rada.

³¹² Al-Maqqarī, IV 3 (Gayangos 1840: 281 f.). See Appendix III.

³¹³ Llobregat 1973: 81 f.

³¹⁴ Dozy 1860: 56.

³¹⁵ Gaspar Remiro 1905: 12; Llobregat 1973: 84 f.

defenders of Hadjr.³¹⁶ As we will see, this is an important point because in the episode of the treaty of Orihuela, reality and legend seem to merge.

The story of Theudimer's stratagem in Orihuela was the subject of a meticulous study by R. Menéndez Pidal. And the one in Hadjr is by no means the only parallel with which this astonishing event counts. In fact, Menéndez Pidal enumerates other analogous episodes drawn from Germanic epic and classical literature that can generally be related to the legend of Theudimer of Orihuela.³¹⁷

Firstly, the legend of the capture of Orihuela/Tudmīr presents a certain affinity with the myth of the origin of the name of the Lombards as told by Paul the Deacon. According to an old tradition, the Vandals presented themselves before Wotan to ask him to grant them victory over their enemies, the Vinili. The god responded that he would grant it to the first ones he saw at sunrise. Then Gambara (mother of the Vinili chieftains Ibor and Ayon) presented herself before Freya, Wotan's wife, with the same request. Freya advised Gambara that the Vinili women should let their hair down and put it in front of their faces as if it were a beard, and that they should stand with their husbands very early in the morning on the east side so that Wotan could see them at dawn. When the god saw that multitude, he asked, 'Who are those "long-beards?"' Then Freya suggested to Wotan that he grant victory to the Vinili.³¹⁸ Paul the Deacon places the narration of the origin of the Lombards in the legendary realm ('*antiquitas ridiculam fabulam... Haec risui digna sunt*') but it is undoubtedly a myth dear to the Germans, as it is found in several epic-tinged accounts that, in one way or another, present reminiscences of much earlier oral traditions.

A similar narrative with legendary overtones referring to Emperor Charlemagne is found in the *Kaiserchronik* (1132-1152). The chronicle shows a dejected and desolate emperor after his bitter defeat in Spain. Harassed by the Saracens, Charlemagne is miraculously liberated by an army of 53,066 maidens whom he has dressed in knightly attire. On their return journey to France, the young women camp in a green meadow and plant their spears in the ground. The next morning, the spears have blossomed, sprouting a magical flowering forest (Sceftewalt). To commemorate the event, Charlemagne orders the construction of a church in this place: *So haizet iz domini sanctitas*, that is,

³¹⁶ Dozy 1860: 56, n. 1: 'Je dois avouer que ce récit me paraît un peu suspect. Ce pourrait bien être une réminiscence du stratagème que les défenseurs de Hadjr avaient employé, environ quatre-vingts ans auparavant, lorsque leur forteresse était assiégée par Khâlid. Cette garnison avait aussi placé les femmes sur les remparts, afin de présenter à l'ennemi le simulacre d'une force imposante et d'obtenir une traite avantageuse (voyez Caussin de Perceval, *Essai etc.*, t. III, p. 375). Toutefois je n'insiste pas sur cette observation; Theodemir, j'en conviens, peut bien avoir eu la même idée que le commandant de Hadjr.'

³¹⁷ Menéndez Pidal 1992: 319-325.

³¹⁸ Paul. Diac. Hist. Lang. I 8: 'Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam: quod accedentes Wandali ad Godan victoriam de Winnilis postulaverint, illeque responderit, se illis victoriam daturum quos primum oriente sole conspexisset. Tunc accessisse Gambara ad Fream, uxorem Godan; et Winnilis victoriam postulasse, Freaque consilium dedisse, ut Winnilorum mulieres solutos crines erga faciem ad barbae similitudinem componerent maneque primo cum viris adessent seseque Godan videndas pariter regione, qua ille per fenestram orientem versus erat solitus aspicere, conlocarent. Atque ita factum fuisse. Quas cum Godan oriente sole conspiceret, dixisse: « Qui sunt isti longibarbi »? Tunc Frea subiunxisset, ut quibus nomen tribuerat victoriam condonaret. Sicque Winnilis Godan victoriam concessisset. Haec risui digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur' (Bethmann and Waitz 1878: 52). Cf. Orig. 1 (Waitz 1878: 2 f.); PseudFred. III 65 (Krusch 1878: 110). Freya's request is understood by the Germanic custom of granting a gift when imposing a new name (Herrera 2006: 66 ff., n. 25).

Saintes.³¹⁹ It is possible that in this case, two Germanic myths have merged into one narrative: the aforementioned one of the maidens dressed as warriors and that of the fabulous spears, perhaps a reminiscence of the myth of the coloured spears that also appears in Visigothic tradition.³²⁰

Menéndez Pidal also cites a similar episode from the *chanson de geste* of *Ogier the Dane*, although in this case, the hero resorts to wooden men, a variant that recalls other ancient narratives such as the siege of Sardis by Cyrus, an episode of the Dacian war with Decebalus as the protagonist, or the siege of Aquileia by Attila. In the *chanson*, the Danish hero, besieged in Castiel-Fort by Charlemagne's troops, endures a seven-year siege. Initially, Ogier has three hundred men for the defence, but after five years, only ten survive. Finally, only the hero remains, although the besiegers do not realise it because Ogier had devised a ruse: the hero had carved wooden men that appeared behind the battlements and wore beautiful beards taken from the tail of his horse Broiefort.³²¹

In the literature of medieval Castile, the legend appears in a form very similar to that of Ogier in the romance *Atal anda don García*. Here it is Count Don García who is besieged by the Moors within the walls of the castle of Urueña. Desperate about the situation, the count resorts to placing the corpses of the warriors who fell in combat supported on the battlements. He then throws the only crust of bread he has left at the feet of the Moorish king. The king, believing that they are throwing him the leftovers of their meal, lifts the siege on Urueña:

Cercáronmelo los moros/la mañana de Sant Juane:
siete años son pasados/el cerco no quieren quitare;
veo morir a los míos/no teniendo qué les dar,
póngolos por las almenas/armados como se están,
porque pensasen los moros/que podrían pelear.

[The Moors besieged me / on the morning of Saint John:
seven years have passed / they do not want to lift the siege;
I see my men dying / having nothing to give them,
I place them on the battlements / armed as they are,

³¹⁹ Kaiserchronik, 14877-15014 (Schröder 1895: 351 f.); Smyser 1937: 26, n. 1; Vázquez de Parga - Lacarra - Uría 1949: 79; Satrústegui 1969: 116-118. Such a precise number of maidens made L. Gautier exclaim 'quelle précision!' (1892: 284 f.).

³²⁰ Hydat. Chron. 243 (a. 467): '*Congregatis etiam quodam die concilii sui Gothis tela, quae habebant in manibus, a parte ferri vel acie alia viridi, alia roseo, alia croceo, alia nigro colore naturalem ferri speciem aliquamdiu non habuisse mutata*' (Mommsen 1894: 34); Isid. HG 35: '*Iste quodam die congregatis in conloquio Gothis tela, quae omnes habebant in manibus, a parte ferri vel acie alia viridi, alia roseo, alia croceo, alia nigro colore naturalem ferri speciem aliquamdiu non habuisse mutatam comperit*' (Mommsen 1894: 281).

³²¹ Ogier le Danois, VI 8385-8420 (Barrois 1842: 339 f.).

so that the Moors would think / that they could fight.]³²²

Perhaps the origin of the legend of the warrior-maidens of Aurariola was the result of an oral tradition of Germanic origin that was later recorded by Arab writers. In that case, the story of the capture of Orihuela would be a legendary episode and would enter more into the history of literature than into the historical narrative proper. In this sense, the numerous literary variants and parallels with other feats of arms that occurred in various parts (the aforementioned Hadjr and another mentioned by Menéndez Pidal as having happened in Guatemala), to which we have previously alluded, point. But we must not completely dismiss the idea that we are dealing with a real historical event, the result of a well-known and somewhat popular military stratagem. Some examples not too remote in time can be cited in this regard, although they may not be as politically correct as our times demand.

We refer specifically to a famous episode of the Rif War (1911-1927). In the context of the withdrawal ordered by General Primo de Rivera after the dramatic events of Annual, three military columns under the command of Lt. Col. Franco left Tetouan and Larache for Xauen. Once all the troops were gathered in the city, the staggered withdrawal of the same was ordered. When it came time to withdraw the rear-guard, on 15 November 1924, Franco ordered straw dummies dressed in military uniforms to be placed behind the walls of the city's citadel. The ruse had an effect on the Rifians and facilitated the withdrawal of the Spanish troops. It is said that the episode of Xauen later inspired the British writer P.C. Wren to write one of the most famous chapters of his novel *Beau Geste*, although, given the coincidence of dates, it is difficult for it to have been so.³²³ Franco's action in Xauen demonstrates, then, that such a singular feat of arms could well have occurred in antiquity and was later reflected in the chronicles with an aura of legend. This means that it is impossible to know what was real and what was mythical narration regarding Theudimer's actions in Orihuela. We can only point out that the treaty obtained by the Visigothic duke must have made a great impression at the time, at least enough to be recorded with legendary overtones among the Arab chroniclers who narrated the conquest of Spain.

After the Kingdom of Toledo. Athanagild, or the end of a Visigothic lineage

Upon the death of Theudimer, Athanagild succeeded him to the head of the principality. The anonymous Mozarab who wrote the chronicle of 754 presents him as *opulentissimus dominus*. Precisely because of his enormous wealth, he became a victim of the greed of the *wali* al-Husām. The *wali* (governor) fined him a formidable sum, no less than 27,000 gold coins, a sanction that was forgiven through the intercession of Abū al-Jattār. He had arrived in Tūdmir with the Syrian contingent of Balŷ b. Bisr al-Qušayrī and later became the *wali* of al-Andalus. Abū al-Jattār is credited with the distribution of the *ŷund* contingents into rural districts, assigning Tūdmir to the Egyptian contingent. However, the passage that reports Athanagild's fall from grace is confusing and seems to

³²² Pan-Hispanic Ballad Project, file no. 1547 (<https://depts.washington.edu/hisprom/optional/balladaction.php?igrh=0613>
Accessed 11.02.2025)

³²³ Suárez 1986: 29 f.

refer to a non-payment of tributes by the Christians, which was demanded by the *wali* in 744/745.³²⁴ Actually, the reference to Athanagild's wealth should not be understood solely as an indication of material wealth in its purely economic aspect, but also as a palpable demonstration of social prestige in accordance with his rank and the position he held within the Andalusian administration. In this sense, and very accurately, Lorenzo San Román saw in the term *pecuniae dispensator* used by the anonymous Mozarab to describe Theudimer's son the clear proof that Athanagild had inherited the administrative position his father had obtained for himself in the pact of 713. Like Theudemir, Athanagild must have been in charge of collecting the capitation taxes (*jizya*) that fell on the *dhimmi* inhabitants of the cities concerned by the treaty.³²⁵

A few years after this news, the situation of the principality of Aurariola underwent a sudden change that would lead to the full integration of this territory into the Emirate state. The end of the Christian principality of Tudmīr is closely related to the events that led to the founding of the independent Emirate of Cordoba by the Umayyad 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muawiya al-Dajil ('the Emigrant') and, notably, with the figure of 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Habib al-Siqlabī ('the Slav'). Initially, Al-Siqlabī had been the commander of the Syrian *ḡund* of Balḡ b. Bish al-Qushayrī, but in 741 he fell out with the Syrian. The cause of the rupture between the two men was the dismissal and subsequent execution of Al-Siqlabī's uncle 'Abd al-Malik ibn Qatan al-Fihri by Balḡ. After the rupture, Al-Siqlabī joined the Arab army that rose against Balḡ and the Syrian *ḡund*, but after the Arabs were defeated in the battle of Aqua Portora (742 CE), near Cordoba, he was forced to flee and seek refuge in the Maghreb. When, in 747, his father-in-law Yūsuf was appointed *wali* of al-Andalus, Al-Siqlabī saw the opportunity to return to the peninsula. However, a few years later, in 755, the last of the Umayyads, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muawiya, landed on the peninsula, and who, shortly after, raised an army of Syrians, Yemenis, and Berbers against Yūsuf. Barely a year after his landing, the Umayyad had defeated Yūsuf and taken control of Cordoba. In 756, once he had consolidated his power in the city, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muawiya proclaimed himself independent emir.

In these circumstances, and spurred on by the caliph Muhammad al-Mahdī, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Habib al-Siqlabī landed in Tudmīr in 777 at the head of a Berber army ready to overthrow the new emir and avenge his father-in-law. Once he crossed into al-Andalus, Al-Siqlabī tried to unite all the supporters of the Abbasids against the Umayyad emir. To this end, he initiated negotiations with one of Yūsuf's sons and even tried to establish alliances with the rebels of Zaragoza and Barcelona, as well as with Charlemagne, although none of these diplomatic manoeuvres succeeded. In 778-779, the Emir 'Abd al-Rahmān directed his armies towards Tudmīr and Valencia to confront the pro-Abbasid rebellion. The Umayyad army destroyed everything in its path and also destroyed Al-Siqlabī's fleet. The emir wanted to prevent reinforcements from arriving from North Africa that could join Al-Siqlabī's army.

³²⁴ Chron. Muz. 48: '*Athanaildus post mortem ipsius multi honoris et magnitudinis habetur. Erat enim omnium opulentissimus dominus et in ipsis nimium pecuniae dispensator, sed post modicum Aloozam rex Spaniam aggrediens nescio quo furore arreptus non modicas iniurias in eum intulit, et ter nobis milia solidorum damnabit. Quo auditu exercitus, qui cum duce Belgi advennerant, sub spatio fere trium dierum omnia pariant et citius ad Alozzam cognomento Abulcatar gratia reuocant diuersisque munificationibus remunerando sublimant*' (Gil 1973: 34; López Pereira 1980: 114 ff.; 2009: 270-273, § 87.2). Reproduced in Appendix I.2. Even though it is true that the Mozarabic chronicle of 754 does not state it explicitly, there are several arguments that suggest that this character was actually the son of Theudemir: the anthroponym itself (Gothic and linked to royalty), his appearance in the chronicle in the annex dedicated to Theudemir and his role in relation to the collection of tributes from Christians. That is, the same attribution that Count Ardabast had in Emirate Cordoba. In fact, Athanagild's story seems a carbon copy of that of Wittiza's son.

³²⁵ Lorenzo de San Román 2016: 605-608.

Although it is not certain, it is very likely that Al-Siqlabī's rebellion against the Umayyad government had the support of Athanagild. This support would constitute a clear violation of the pact of 713, hence, once triumphant, 'Abd al-Rahmān proceeded to revoke the old privileges enjoyed by the Mozarabs of the southeast and to distribute the lands of Tudmīr among his numerous supporters.³²⁶

Nevertheless, this was not the end of Theudimer's lineage. The geographer al-'Udrī reports that when Theudimer's daughter married the Egyptian 'Abd al-Ŷabbār Ibn Jattāb, he received as a dowry two farmsteads: *Tarsa*, located just three miles from *Ilš* (Elche), and Tall al-Jattāb, eight miles from *Urīula* (Orihuela).³²⁷ It is an important account as it allows us to see in the figure of Theudimer's daughter a much greater significance than initially emerges from her anonymity. In fact, this marriage represents the link between an old world that is disappearing and a new one that is forming after the invasion of 711. As the heir of the Gothic tradition, Theudimer's daughter was at the same time responsible for transmitting the family legacy to her descendants and ensuring that her lineage could come to dominate the region without upheavals for centuries. Precisely to the descendants of this marriage would be entrusted the peaceful governance of the territory of Tūdmir, because she combines the right of conquest of the invaders with the patrimonial right that legitimately belonged to Theudimer's lineage. Thus, the descendants of 'Abd al-Ŷabbār and also of Theudimer continued to be one of the most powerful families in Tūdmir until the end of Islamic domination.³²⁸

It may be interesting to note here the remarkable parallel between the fate of Theudimer's daughter and that of Queen Egilo, wife of Roderic, the last Gothic king. She, as is known, ended up marrying 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsā, the same individual who subdued Tūdmir.³²⁹ Egilo had good reasons to reach an agreement with the son of the conqueror of Spain once Roderic was dead, especially if we accept her belonging to the direct family of Egica and, therefore, that she should show a logical inclination towards the now victorious Wittizan faction.³³⁰ 'Abd al-'Azīz, for his part, also saw himself doubly benefited by this marriage. On the one hand, the *wali* secured the loyalty of the Gothic aristocratic nucleus linked to the widowed queen, which provided him with greater political and military power. On the other hand, it is quite possible that he obtained control of the royal treasury, the possession of which, in addition to its obvious economic value, also implied other symbolic aspects associated with royal legitimacy.³³¹ In this sense, the confusion regarding the real causes about the assassination of al-

³²⁶ Chalmeta 1990: 104; Navarro and Jiménez 2007: 49.

³²⁷ 'It has often been assumed that the person who married Theudimer's daughter was a son of 'Abd al-Jabbār named Khattāb, but although al-'Udrī's passage is not entirely clear, the word he uses, *sāhara*, has the basic meaning of "becoming someone's son-in-law or brother-in-law"; since al-'Udrī himself specifies that the marriage was with a daughter of Theudimer, it seems clear that the phrase must be understood in the sense that 'Abd al-Jabbār became Theudimer's son-in-law. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the word in question should be translated simply as "related by marriage to Theudimer", so that the person who married his daughter could have been Khattāb' (Molina Martínez 1992: 290, n. 6; authors' translation).

³²⁸ Molina Martínez 1992: 290; Lorenzo de San Román 2016: 600-602.

³²⁹ On this episode and the context in which it is set, see Orlandis 1957-1958: especially 122-124). On the role of the widowed queen, see also Valverde Castro 2003.

³³⁰ García Moreno 2003: 783; 2007: 340; Barroso - Morín - Sánchez 2015: 96 f.

³³¹ Valverde Castro 2003: 397; 2008: 23 f.

'Azīz in Santa Rufina of Seville and the different versions that circulated about the episode among Arab writers is well understood.³³²

Seen in this light, there is no doubt that the marriage of Theudimer's daughter must be understood within the complex network of power relations that were woven during the conquest period until the full consolidation of Islamic rule. Theudimer, belonging to the faction of Roderic, was on the losing side, the one that initially had fewer chances of emerging victorious after Guadalete. However, against all odds and thanks to his military prowess and statesmanship, the duke had managed to extract some concessions from the Arab conquerors and maintain a precarious principality within the Islamic state. However, the situation remained politically unstable, as the agreement was mainly based on the goodwill of the parties to respect what was agreed upon. And, after the fall of the Kingdom of Toledo, the Arabs were in an excellent position of strength. Thus, the delicate balance of power achieved with the pact of 713 could be broken at any moment. And this is precisely what the episode of Athanagild and al-Husām mentioned earlier reflects. In this context, the arrival of Balŷ's Syrian contingent must have been seen by the Visigothic duke as a magnificent opportunity to change the fate of his lineage. Perhaps, after all, it would only be necessary to sacrifice a daughter in exchange for maintaining the prestige and power of his lineage. This type of marital alliance falls within a phenomenon that must have been quite common during the early moments of the Arab conquest, namely the integration of Gothic aristocratic families into the great Arab lineages.³³³ Like the elderly Prince of Salina centuries later, the old Duke Theudimer must have understood that *'se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi'*.

³³² Chron. Muz. 51: *'Cui de morte Abdillazis ita dicitur, ut quasi consilio Egilonis regine coniugis quondam Ruderici regis, quam sibi sociauerunt, iugum Arabicum a sua ceruice conaret euertere et regnum inuasum Iberie sibimet retentare'* (Gil 1973: 35 f.). '...he is informed of Abdelaziz's death in the sense that on the advice of Queen Egilo, King Roderic's former wife, whom he had married, he was trying to remove the Arab yoke from his head and individually assume the conquered Iberian kingdom' (López Pereira 1980: 76-79 § 59; authors' translation). Abd al-Hakam: 'The tradition of Ostmen and others returns. After his father's departure, Abdo-l-Aziz ben Muça took as his wife a Christian woman, the daughter of a Spanish king, and some say the daughter of Roderic, king of Spain, whom Tarik killed, who brought him great riches. When she came to him, she said to him: "Why do the people of your kingdom not reverence you and bow down to you, as the people of my kingdom revered and bowed down to my father?" Abdo-l-Aziz did not know what to answer her, but he ordered a door to be opened in one of the sides of his castle, of very small dimensions. When he gave audience, the people had to enter through that door, bowing their heads, because of its low height. She, who was watching this from a certain place, said to Abdo-l-Aziz: "Now is when I believe that you are king of my people". It reached the people that he had ordered the door to be made for that purpose, and they believed that his wife had converted him to Christianity. Then Habib ben Abi Obaida al-Fihri, Ziyed ben An-Nabiga and others from different Arab tribes revolted against him, and resolved to kill Abdo-l-Aziz...' (Lafuente 1867: 215 f.; authors' translation).

³³³ Manzano 2013. In fact, it has always been that way, as exemplified by the marriage of Athaulf and Gala Placidia, and Theudis and a great Hispano-Roman lady.

Pla de Nadal: a palace for a king

Location of the site

The Pla de Nadal site is in the municipality of Ribarroja de Turia, *c.* 12.5 mi northwest of Valencia and 2.5 mi south of Valencia la Vella. As its name indicates, the place is situated in the floodplain of the ancient riverbed of the Palancia River, now the Poyo ravine. Archaeological interventions at the site have identified two different areas, separated by just a few meters, which seem to be part of the same complex, consisting of aulic and religious areas:

First, a palatial-type building (Pla de Nadal I) was identified in 1971 by members of the Servicio de Investigación Prehistórica (SIP) of the Diputación de Valencia during works to prepare land for orange cultivation. The works had practically destroyed half of the building, so the reconstruction of its layout is hypothetical and based on various architectural parallels from the Late Roman (Theodoric's palace in Ravenna) and Byzantine (Qasr ibn Wardan, near Homs) periods. Due to the special circumstances surrounding the discovery, only the southern part of the construction, which seems to correspond to the main facade of the building, is preserved. Archaeological excavations continued from 1981 to 1989 and were directed by Professor Empar Juan with the collaboration of the architect Ignacio Pastor.³³⁴

Around the same time, during the construction of the A-7 highway (Autovía del Mediterráneo), a second building (Pla de Nadal II) was discovered to the east of the previous complex. Unfortunately, this second building was completely destroyed during the road construction, so our knowledge of it is extremely incomplete. From this second complex, a reused Roman capital and several fragments of what is assumed to be an altar table were recovered, suggesting that it was the religious area that completed the palatial complex of Pla de Nadal I. Additionally, in recent years, two new structures have been identified between the two sites: the southwestern corner of what appears to be a parallel construction located east of the main building and a long masonry wall over 10 meters long from which other perpendicular walls seem to emerge. These constructions suggest that the entire complex was much more significant than initially thought.³³⁵

After the discovery of Pla de Nadal I, the building was cleaned, and all the archaeological material was documented and catalogued. A large amount of debris from the collapse of the structures was selected, as well as a good number of architectural elements that were part of the collapse of the upper floor of the building. The large number of architectural elements, many of them decorated, recovered during this excavation process is noteworthy, with more than 800 pieces catalogued. These are decorated elements, mostly belonging to the upper floor of the building, which is considered to have served as the representation space of the complex. It is important to note that the

³³⁴ Juan and Pastor 1989.

³³⁵ Ribera *et al.* 2015; Ribera *et al.* 2020: 93-95.

archaeological intervention made it clear that all the remains belonged to the same complex that did not continue beyond the Visigothic period. The end of the use of this building is marked by a fire recorded in the remains of charred beams and wood, as well as smoke marks on the walls. It is also interesting to note that the building appeared devoid of all its movable elements, initially interpreted as part of a systematic looting that occurred before the fire, an hypothesis later discarded – as we will see later.³³⁶ In fact, only a few metal objects embedded in the walls and some ceramic remains were documented, and which have been very useful in establishing the dating of the building's destruction phase to a period between the late 7th and early 8th centuries. Furthermore, the ceramics found at Pla de Nadal are similar to those documented in Valencia and its area of influence between the mid 6th and mid 7th centuries, as well as with the productions excavated at other sites in the Levantine area such as El Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete), with slightly later chronology.

The building complex and its archaeological environment

From an architectural point of view, the Pla de Nadal I building had a ground floor, with little decoration, intended for storage and circulation functions, and an upper floor, completely collapsed, which would correspond to the noble part of the complex. This upper floor was intended for residential and representative functions. The lower floor preserved at the time of its excavation the entire central nave of the southern façade, 17 m long and 5.3 m wide; the load-bearing walls are 0.60 m thick. The facade has different accesses to the various parts of the building. The main access is located on the south side and opens onto a portico that ran in front of the main facade. Attached to the facade is also a series of pilasters that undoubtedly served to break the monotony of the smooth wall. Four of them, arranged in pairs on each side of the door opening, also served to give certain magnificence to the main entrance. The north facade had three openings: two lateral ones intended for communication with the porticos on the southern side, and a central one that gave direct access to the central courtyard. Two other secondary accesses opened to the east and west sides, accessed through small vestibules or porticos that gave the complex a certain exterior homogeneity. The ground floor pavement was made of the same natural earth, compacted and hardened. This large space must have undoubtedly served as a utility area and for storage services, as well as a transit area between the various dependencies of the building.³³⁷

Above the ground floor was the elevated floor, corresponding to the *pars dominicata*. This upper floor had an *opus signinum* pavement, probably framed by ceramic bricks (22 cm x 22 cm x 5 cm). Most of the decorated pieces found at the site come from this upper floor. The building's roof was made of flat and curved tiles following the classical Roman tradition. Given the complexity of the building's layout, it is evident that the complex had roofs at different heights and with different gradients, which also suggests a complex water drainage system that could include the use of gargoyles. To the northwest of the excavated area, but very close to the building, the remains of an elongated structure were also documented. This structure is separated from the building and is difficult to interpret.³³⁸

³³⁶ Juan and Pastor 1989: 367.

³³⁷ Pascual - Ribera - Rosselló 2003.

³³⁸ Juan and Pastor 1989.

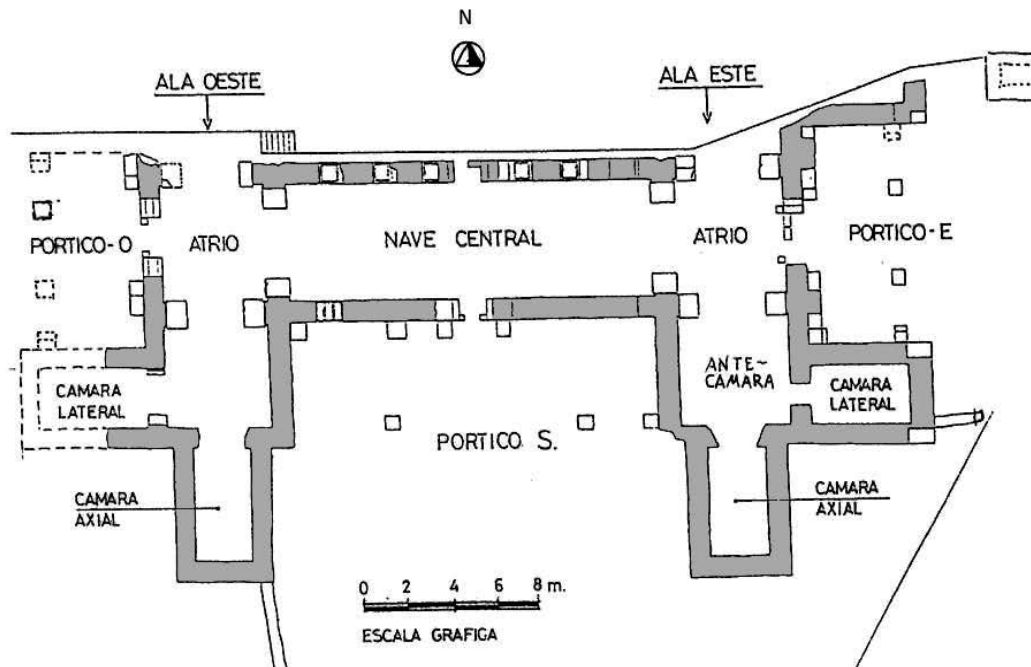


Fig. 29. Pla de Nadal I (Ribarroja de Turia, Valencia). Planimetry of the complex.

In general terms, Pla de Nadal I presents a compact structure, with corner towers that would give the construction a formidable exterior appearance of a palace-fortress. The complex shows certain similarity with the palace of the Byzantine governor of Qars, ibn Wardan (Homs, Syria). Like Pla de Nadal, Qars ibn Wardan was a complex consisting of a palace and a church to which other auxiliary dependencies would have been added.³³⁹ In a way, Pla de Nadal I can also be compared with the Visigothic complex of Los Hitos (Arisgotas, Toledo), keeping in mind that in this last case it is not the residence of a governor. In both cases, we are dealing with *uillulae* or residential complexes built by the great Visigothic magnates that can be considered successors of the ancient Roman villas, although with a notable reduction in size and simplification compared to the original model, which is reduced to spaces intended for residential and representative functions.³⁴⁰

As mentioned, *c.* 300 m east of Pla de Nadal, another building of similar chronology (Pla de Nadal II) was documented. Unfortunately, this second building was completely destroyed during the construction in 1989 of the corresponding section of the A-7 highway. From this second building, however, some decorative elements with characteristics similar to those of Pla de Nadal I could be recovered – generally friezes decorated with serial motifs or scrolls typical of 7th-century architectural decoration and some fragments corresponding to an altar table. It is possible that we are dealing with the religious area of the palatial complex, as also happens in the aforementioned examples of Qars ibn Wardan and Los Hitos.

³³⁹ Perich 2013.

³⁴⁰ Barroso *et al.* 2014.



Fig. 30. Qasr ibn Wardan (Hama, Syria). Palace of the stratelates Georgios (564/572 AD) (Wikipedia / Dumbarton Oaks).

Construction technique

In general terms, the building of Pla de Nadal I was in a good state of preservation despite having suffered a fire. The systematic looting it underwent, and the rapid abandonment of the site after the fire likely facilitated the swift oblivion of this grand construction. Walls nearly a meter thick are preserved, and in some parts, they reach heights of 2.35 m. This has enabled the identification of several window openings on the facade. On the other hand, the substantial thickness of the walls made the use of foundations unnecessary, so the building stands directly on the natural ground.

Among the construction materials, large blocks of reused Roman ashlar have been documented, which faced some sensitive parts of the structure, such as the corners of the large towers. Most of these large blocks are still embedded in the walls of the building, a circumstance that suggests a rapid oblivion of the site. Other remains were found scattered among the debris from the upper floor. Among this second type of remains are capitals, column shafts, pilasters, and decorated pieces, spolia that undoubtedly contributed to highlighting the magnificence of the construction. However, the reused pieces constitute a distinct minority within the archaeological material recovered at Pla de Nadal I. Most of the documented construction material at the site was made specifically for the building itself.

It should be noted that the reused material is carved from dolomite or blue stone, a very hard type of limestone from the Sierra Calderona, on the borders of the provinces of Castellon and Valencia. It is the same type of stone that had been used in the public architecture of the Roman cities of *Edeta*, *Saguntum*, and *Valentia*. In this regard, it is very likely that part of the reused material at Pla de Nadal comes from *Edeta*, a city *c.* 6 mi northwest of the site, which had been in a phase of decline and abandonment since the late 3rd century CE.³⁴¹ The rest of the walls were built with irregular masonry of local limestone. The same material was used to carve the voussoirs and the other decorative elements of the building. Excavations also showed that most of the walls must have been plastered with a layer of mortar. This would be normal for the majority of constructions of the time, as seen also in the baptistery of the episcopal see of Valencia.³⁴² This technique is a good way to disguise the precariousness of the materials used and, therefore, was very effective in covering the masonry walls,



Fig. 31. Pla de Nadal. Virtual reconstruction.

given the poor quality of the material. It is possible that the ashlar of the corners and other well-carved architectural elements were left visible, thus contributing to adding some monumentality to the building, as well as a false impression of solidity.

Excavations at Pla de Nadal also recorded an abundant presence of charred wood, which seems to correspond to the beams that made up the structure of the upper floor of the building. From this, we know that the floor was paved in *opus signinum* combined with ceramic tiles laid on a bed of lime

³⁴¹ Escrivà *et al.* 2005

³⁴² Ribera 2008c: 397-399.

mortar and small pebbles as *rudus*. The roof, on the other hand, was composed of a combination of *tegulae* and *imbrices*, with a gabled and more Roman-style roof. On the other hand, the large number of decorative elements that appeared scattered all over the floor of the lower room is surprising. From the way these remains were found, it is assumed that they had fallen from the upper floor. The enormous typological diversity of the remains is noteworthy, highlighting the carving of capitals specifically for the work, although, as already mentioned, the reuse of Roman-era capitals has also been documented. Also notable is the number of fragments of decorated friezes and other pieces intended either for decoration or to highlight certain parts of the architecture (keystones, gargoyles, crosses with bases, etc.). All these elements contributed to enhancing the grandeur of the site, which could undoubtedly pass for an authentic court.



Fig. 32. Oviedo. Santa María del Naranco. Palace of King Ramiro I (842-850).

Alongside the sculptural decoration, the use of stucco has also been documented. This type of decorative technique was used in other sites of Visigothic date (Melque, Los Hitos, Segobriga, etc.), and its use must have been more frequent on the peninsula than was supposed until a few years ago.³⁴³ In any event, the catalogue of Late Antique buildings with stucco decoration is increasingly numerous, including Saint-Denis (Paris), Tours, Bordeaux, Marseille, Geneva, Bovalar (Lérida), Disentis (Switzerland), Ravenna, Rome, and Poreč (Croatia). The stucco decoration of the Lombard

³⁴³ Barroso - Carrolles - Morín 2011: 60; Barroso 2019.

church of Santa Maria in Valle, in Cividale del Friuli (Italy), a building that is practically contemporary to Pla de Nadal, is also exceptional.³⁴⁴

Sculptural decoration and iconographic programme

One of the most interesting features of Pla de Nadal I is the large number of decorative remains found during the excavation of the site. As already mentioned, a set of more than 800 decorated pieces has been documented, most of which belonged to the ornamentation of the upper floor of the building. In fact, Pla de Nadal constitutes one of the most important decorative ensembles of western Late Antiquity. Within this ensemble, the great typological variety of the pieces stands out, as well as the use of a very specific iconography that can be related to palatial environments.

In general terms, the ensemble can be classified into two types. There are the reused Roman pieces, well-carved and of large dimensions – these mainly fulfilled an architectural and structural function, perhaps also symbolic, being used as spolia within a context of power display and manifestation of a privileged social status. The second type, the majority within the ensemble, consists of smaller remains. This group is composed of about 400 fragments belonging to decorative sculpture. As already mentioned, in most cases, they were part of the ornamentation of the upper room of the building corresponding to the residential environment. There are also other elements of constructive functionality, e.g. columns, voussoirs, bases, capitals, window jambs, etc. The presence of pierced pieces, especially crosses with bases for embedding, and triangular merlons, elements clearly inspired by Byzantine and Eastern Mediterranean architecture, which gave the palace-residence the appearance of a fortified citadel, is also noteworthy.³⁴⁵

As for the decorative theme, there is a constant repetition of certain iconographic motifs, i.e. scallops and trifolias, very often repeated in Visigothic art. To a lesser extent there are pieces with religious iconography, although reserved in the main for the crosses in lattices, which must have crowned the building. The absence of themes with an unequivocal Christian meaning is one of the arguments for rejecting the religious functionality of the site. As a general rule, despite the large number of pieces documented at Pla de Nadal I, the iconographic repertoire is not very varied.

This iconography can be summarised in a few combined motifs: scallops alternating with small trifolias (fleur-de-lis or three-petalled flowers), aligned acanthus, vegetal scrolls enclosing trifolias, acanthus, and clusters, etc. Compared to other Visigothic-period ensembles, i.e. San Pedro de la Nave and Quintanilla de las Viñas, the repetition of ornamental motifs presents certain monotony. But this characteristic is typical of the architectural decoration of the Iberian Peninsula in the 7th century, with the aforementioned examples being entirely exceptional. This is well observed in the material from Toledo and in ensembles that can somehow be related to 7th-century Toledo (the *uillula* of Los Hitos, the church of San Juan de Baños, etc.). In some way, the style and iconography of Pla de Nadal I reaffirm the idea of a close relationship of this ensemble with Toledan art and the courtly

³⁴⁴ Cantino Wataghin 2006: 124.

³⁴⁵ It can be compared to the images of Seville in the *Codex Aemilianensis* (f. 205v) (Fernández and Galván 2005) and Babylon (Beato cycle), and the pictorial representations of Saint Adrian of Tuñón (c. 891). And not only with representations, but with tangible examples, e.g. the carved merlons discovered in Segobriga: Barroso 2019: 76.

environments of the Visigothic kingdom. This relationship is evident, i.e., in the choice of themes (scallops, trifolias, acanthus); in the Roman-Eastern influence of certain elements (triangular merlons); in the very execution of the reliefs; and, especially, in the appearance of a circular medallion decorated with a cruciform monogram alluding to the possessor of the villa, a prominent piece that we will return to in more detail later. However, we must also say that this sense of monotony is largely due to the fact that the pieces have lost the pictorial coating with which they were decorated and which undoubtedly contributed to enlivening the ornamentation. The use of painted coatings also explains the apparent neglect in the carving observed in some of the sculptural remains, defects that would originally have been concealed under layers of paint. Again, this is a characteristic repeated in certain sites of the Toledan focus such as Los Hitos (Arisgotas).³⁴⁶

In addition, the sculptural group of Pla de Nadal has helped us reconstruct the working processes of the stonemasonry workshops that produced these pieces. The difference in the quality of the carving suggests that several workshops must have operated on-site. It is possible that the deficiencies in the execution of some of the carvings are due to certain urgency in the completion of the works. However, as mentioned, we believe it is more likely that what might be thought of as technical deficiency should be explained by the use of pictorial decoration that would camouflage the defects of the carving in the finished work. Most of the decorative sculpture was executed on local limestone extracted from quarries near the site. It is a type of rock easy to cut and work. Basically, the carving system consisted of cutting the rock and making a rough shape. On this preform, the decorative scheme was drawn with a brush dipped in red dye (sanguine), which is still visible on some of the pieces found at the site, and then traced with a punch or compass. Finally, the carving was done with a hand chisel, without using measuring instruments. It seems evident that there was a evident specialisation in the work, at least this seems to be deduced from the fact that the best pieces were carved on the hardest rocks. The carving of the stones was done on-site, so defective pieces were used for other purposes, i.e. filling the walls. The end of the process was marked by the work of the stuccoers and painters, who would give homogeneity to the entire work. Many of the documented pieces still retained traces of orange-brown paint from the



Fig. 33. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Merlon with scallop and trefoil decoration in a frame of vegetal scrolls.

entire work. Many of the documented pieces still retained traces of orange-brown paint from the

³⁴⁶ On Toledo sculpture of the Visigothic period, see Zamorano Herrera 1974; Balmaseda 2006; Barroso and Morín 2007.

time of their excavation. The abundant use of the stucco technique is one of the most singular characteristics of Pla de Nadal I.³⁴⁷

From a generic point of view, the artistic motifs documented in Pla de Nadal I reproduce the formulas coined by the Toledan art of Byzantine inspiration of the 7th century (Toledo, Guarrazar, Los Hitos, etc.), with few variations.³⁴⁸ Most of the pieces are friezes and constructive elements (voussoirs, capitals, small columns, etc.) set in relevant parts of the construction (windows, door jambs, etc.) and which, in conjunction with the corner ashlar, contributed to breaking the monotony of the plastered elevations. The friezes served to mark the transition of the different elements that made up the structure of the building. The decoration of the friezes presents a few variants and is generally resolved in aligned series of alternating motifs: series of clusters, leaves, and palmettes; repeated series of palmettes reminiscent of the decoration of column and pilaster capitals; series of alternating

varied motifs; continuous series of scallops separated by elongated trifolias; etc. The decorated voussoirs, for their part, present themes similar to the friezes.³⁴⁹



Fig. 34. Pla de Nadal I. Roman capital (reused piece).

One of the most striking aspects of the sculptural decoration of Pla de Nadal I is the great abundance of pieces carved in the shape of a scallop. As a decorative theme, the scallop or shell is repeated either as an isolated motif, something unusual outside Toledo, or as part of the decoration of other more complex elements (capitals, friezes, voussoirs, etc.). But in Pla de Nadal, what stands out is the appearance of a group of six free-standing scallops of *c.* 20-25 cm.³⁵⁰ It is possible that, in the style of the corbels of San Juan de Baños (Baños de Cerrato, Palencia), or the epigraphic

Creed of Toledo, these pieces served as brackets to frame some inscription or foundational epigraph that was not carved due to the sudden abandonment of the site. In any event the scallop/shell is a motif usually associated with both 'power' and 'sacred' architecture, always with the symbolic sense of emphasising the sacredness or dignity of the sheltered element. From an iconographic point of view, the scallop symbolises the celestial vault and, especially in Western art, is a motif related to the concepts of sacredness and royalty. The appearance of such a high number of scallops in Pla de Nadal, alongside other elements typical of power architecture, i.e. tondos and merlons, is a fact that

³⁴⁷ Juan and Pastor 1989a; 1989b; Ribera and Rosselló 2007.

³⁴⁸ Balmaseda 2006.

³⁴⁹ Juan and Pastor 1989a: 361 f.

³⁵⁰ Juan and Pastor 1989a: 363.

reaffirms the symbolic meaning of the building as a space of representation, while indicating that we are facing a large civil building, a true *palatium* intended to serve as a residence for a Visigothic magnate.

It is true that the scallop motif is not found exclusively in civil art and architecture. On the contrary, it is a beloved theme in the religious iconography of the time, with numerous examples (corbels of San Juan de Baños, epigraphic Creed of Toledo, relief of Las Tamujas, etc.). However, as we have previously mentioned, in the case of Pla de Nadal I, the absence of clearly religious elements at the site should also be considered, especially the complete absence of liturgical furniture and the lack of decorative motifs with a clear Christological meaning (crosses, Chi Rho, etc.). This absence would be strange if it were an ecclesiastical building, whether a monastic complex or a church. Nevertheless, since it is impossible to make a radical separation between the symbolic aspects inherent in the conception of political power and the religious principles that informed it during this period, there are some elements that we believe must have had a certain religious significance, i.e. the theme of the trifolias, widely used in Visigothic iconography, perhaps as an allusion to the Trinitarian mystery. But, even in these cases, it seems obvious that at Pla de Nadal I this religious sense was completely subordinated to a profane iconography aimed at the exaltation of the power and dignity of the *dominus*.³⁵¹ Thus, with a similar meaning to that noted for Pla de Nadal, the scallop appears in Toledan art of the 7th century in significant examples, e.g. the scalloped tondos reused as *spolia* by Abd al-Rahman III in the Gate of Alcántara of Toledo. The use of these pieces in the reform commissioned by the Umayyad caliph for the entrance gate to the *alcazaba* (Arab citadel) is highly significant as these tondos must have been part of the old Visigothic palace or *praetorium* located in the upper part of the city later occupied by the Arab *Alficen* ('belt', i.e. walls). In other words, these elements somehow sought to express the legitimacy of the caliph's power. Other similar examples can also be seen in the church of San Bartolomé de Toledo and perhaps come



Fig. 35. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Voussoirs with a scallop theme.

³⁵¹ The appearance of Christian iconography or epigraphy on all types of monuments was common in this period. Also, in the aforementioned palace of the *strateles* Georgios of Qasr ibn Wardan (564/572), it can be found religious motifs alongside symbols of power (lintel of the south door of the palace) and even epigraphy taken from the Scriptures (1 Cor 10: 31), something repeated in other Byzantine fortresses such as Stabl Antar, also on the Syrian limes: Felle 2015: 363.

from the palatial residences of the Gothic aristocracy of the *regia sedes*.³⁵² Furthermore, similar motifs have also been documented in other palatial complexes belonging to the territory of the Visigothic capital, such as the site of Los Hitos (Arisgotas). All these examples inevitably refer to the decorated tondos of Santa María del Naranco, the palatial complex ordered to be built by King Ramiro I (842-850) in the *suburbium* of Oviedo.³⁵³

Special mention should be made of the series of pieces intended to enhance the ensemble – the triangular merlons, the roof crowning pieces, the pierced lattices.³⁵⁴ The former, clearly inspired by Byzantine Eastern architecture, are decorated with the theme of scallop and elongated trifolia framed with a vegetal scroll of palmettes and trifolias similar to the series of friezes just described. The



Fig. 36. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Openwork cross with base for driving.

trifolias in the central scene must have alternated, sometimes pointing towards the scallop and other times sprouting from it, in an artistic play very much in the taste of the time. The motif of the three-petalled flower had a great diffusion in Visigothic art, especially, but not only, in religious artistic manifestations, probably due to the Trinitarian symbolism of the representation, which came to express the Nicene dogma in a simple way.

On the other hand, merlons similar to those of Pla de Nadal I have been documented in Segobriga as part of one of the city's entrances.³⁵⁵ However, the Segobriga merlons are Visigothic cancels reused as such in the post-Visigothic period, as can be seen from the fact that the decoration of the plaques appears to have been cut to echo the triangular shape. Unlike those of Pla de Nadal, the Segobriga pieces are completely triangular and lack a spike or base for embedding, a detail that also suggests that they are reused pieces in a remodelling of the access to the area occupied by the

³⁵² Barroso and Morín 2007; Barroso - Carrobles - Morín 2009; Barroso *et al.* 2007.

³⁵³ Barroso *et al.* 2015.

³⁵⁴ Barroso *et al.* 2015: 363 f.

³⁵⁵ Cebrián and Hortelano 2018: 118-121.

episcopal group during the final phase of the Visigothic period, or, more likely, during the Emirate period. Nevertheless, as we have noted for the representations of Santo Adriano de Tuñón or the Beatos, these merlons also have their roots in Byzantine architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁵⁶

As for the pierced elements, they are usually present at Pla de Nadal I as themes of rosettes or crosses. Similar pieces have been found in other Visigothic sites belonging to the focus of Toledo (Reccopolis, Toledo, Arcavica, etc.), and their function has been a subject of discussion. Actually, the functionality of these pieces is varied and can range from crowning buildings to windows, or terminal markers of sacred spaces.³⁵⁷ In the case of the pieces from Pla de Nadal I, it seems clear that they were elements that could serve both to crown the roof and as lattices for windows.

An element that combines constructive and decorative functions is the capital. Within the catalogue of Pla de Nadal I, up to four different types of capitals can be distinguished. Two correspond to the simplified but more or less recognisable Corinthian type. The first is composed of a group of Corinthian capitals carved in the style of the Toledan examples of the 7th century. These pieces still retain some of the classical Corinthian style scheme (rows of acanthus, *cauliculi*, and flower) and have abundant parallels in Visigothic art of the 7th century. In this first type, the carving presents greater volume, and the use of a drill is noticeable. The second type is characterised by presenting a single row of interlinked acanthus under a zigzag line frame, a resource widely used in the sculptural catalogue of Segobriga.³⁵⁸ This is an extreme simplification of the Corinthian type. This type is repeated in the capitals of the small columns. A third type, completely different from the previous two, is composed of a group of stepped profile capitals, perhaps intended to support horseshoe arches. Similar pieces are also found in the Puerta del Cambrón of Toledo and the Visigothic church of Santa María de Melque (San Martín de Montalbán, Toledo).³⁵⁹ The fourth type is composed of engaged capitals that would be embedded in the walls. In some cases, these engaged capitals are, like the previous ones, of stepped profile and hexagonal shape, but they usually have a prismatic morphology with one face embedded in the construction



Fig. 37. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Friezes with scroll decoration.

³⁵⁶ Barroso 2019: 76.

³⁵⁷ Caballero 1980; Menchón 1994; Caballero and Sáez 1999: 210-215. More recently, Gutiérrez and Sarabia 2006: 319-322; Barroso and Morín 2007: 735-742; Ribera *et al.* 2015; Barroso and Morín 2007; Barroso 2019.

³⁵⁸ Barroso 2019.

³⁵⁹ Barroso and Morín 2007.



Fig. 38. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal. Tondo with floral decoration.

that is not decorated and the other three decorated with a row of scallops. Although the functionality of the pieces is different, there is no doubt that the type, once embedded in the wall, would resemble the corbels that frame the inscription of Reccesuinth in the church of San Juan de Baños.³⁶⁰ In any case, these capitals would match the free-standing scallops we described earlier.

The shafts of columns and pilasters are generally circular in section and completely smooth, without fluting. However, although rare, there is also an example of an octagonal shaft. Generally, the columns had monolithic shafts and prismatic bases with stepped fillet decoration. In some cases, there is a double notch that has been interpreted as the slot for fitting a railing or balustrade.³⁶¹

Special mention should be made of the tondos or decorated discs. These are symbolic pieces related to the public manifestation of power and can be seen in other constructions linked to royalty or the high nobility such as Los Hitos or Santa María del Naranco. In Pla de Nadal I, there are two pieces of this type. The first is a disc decorated with a floral motif from which trifoliate flowers sprout, reminiscent, albeit in a more elaborate form, of one of the discs carved on a lintel of the palace of Qasr ibn Wardan (Homs, Syria), a Justinian-era complex. This build is dated by inscriptions between 561-572 and was composed of a palace, church, and military enclosures inspired by architectural models of the Imperial court.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ Barroso and Morín 1996b.

³⁶¹ Juan and Pastor 1989a: 362 ff.

³⁶² Maffei 1998; Perich 2013: fig. 19.



Fig. 39. Palace of Qasr ibn Wardan (Hama, Syria). Lintel decorated with Christological motifs, hexapetal, signature and cruciform monogram. (Wikipedia / Dumbarton Oaks).

The second example is much more interesting and is, in fact, one of the most notable elements of the entire Pla de Nadal ensemble – a medallion with a cruciform monogram surrounded by a band of opposing scrolls enclosing Byzantine palmettes. The monogram presents the following letters (read clockwise, starting with the ends): T-M-B-D. In the stipes or vertical bar: R-E. The vertical bar itself would denote the vowel I. The reading, as can be easily noticed, is quite coherent with the name THEUDIMER; the only discordant note is the B that tops the lower part of the vertical arm. It is possible, however, that it is not really a B but a lowercase H, a letter that in Visigothic paleography sometimes adopts a lobed form, in which case it could be read without problems as THEUDEMIRUS.³⁶³ Moreover, this reading is perfectly congruent with the Gothic anthroponym and with the usual tendency of the time to resolve (or confuse) the radical *Thiud-* (Gothic ‘people’) as *Theo(s)* (Greek ‘God’).

On the other hand, this type of cruciform monogram has its origin in Byzantine art, where it is found on all kinds of objects and monuments (architecture, numismatics, goldsmithing, weights, etc.). In the Iberian Peninsula, they first appear on small fractional coins from the reign of Leovigild, corresponding to the rebellion of Hermenegild (580-585), although the motif then disappears until the mid 7th century. From that moment on, it becomes a traditional motif of the numismatic issues corresponding to the co-reigns (Chindasuinth-Reccesuinth and Egica-Wittiza) to designate the name of the mints. This type, in fact, corresponds to the last monetary series of the *Valentia* mint. However, as in Byzantium, cruciform monograms also appear in many other artistic manifestations:

³⁶³ Marín Martínez and Ruiz Asencio 1978.

exterior friezes of Quintanilla de las Viñas, parade horse bits, or monetary rings made of bronze.³⁶⁴ Unlike the latter, both in the case of the Pla de Nadal monogram and the monograms of Quintanilla, the coins, or the damascened parade bits, it is evident that we are dealing with artistic manifestations that must be related to palatial and ostentatious environments. It is no coincidence that a cruciform monogram similar to this from Pla de Nadal also appears in the palace-fortress of Qasr ibn Wardan, in this case also associated with a tondo decorated with a six-petalled flower.³⁶⁵

As already mentioned, the use of stucco decorations has also been documented in Pla de Nadal I. These stuccoes, although very poorly preserved, seem to develop a theme analogous to the sculptural decoration. Some fragments show traces of polychromy, suggesting that the stucco decoration was also painted. Unfortunately, the preservation state of these paintings is quite poor. Also as mentioned, within the peninsula, the use of the stucco technique is recorded at sites such as Segobriga and Santa María de Melque, in the same province of Carthaginensis. Polychrome stucco decorations are also documented at Levantine sites, e.g. the episcopal group of Egara (Terrassa),



Fig. 40. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Fragment of stucco decoration.

suggesting a broader diffusion than was thought just a decade ago.³⁶⁶ Outside our borders, we have a notable example of the use of painted stucco in the church of Saint-Pierre de Vouneuil-sous-Biard, near Poitiers, dated *c.* 650.³⁶⁷ Obviously, the painted stucco decoration found at Pla de Nadal I represents another link in the chain that goes from classical Roman decorations to the paintings of Asturian pre-Romanesque art.

Finally, to conclude this section, a small batch of decorated pieces of similar typology and iconography to those described for the Pla de Nadal I ensemble is also preserved from the adjacent site of Pla de Nadal II. However, some of the

documented elements seem to indicate that in this case, it was the religious complex that complemented the residential complex. Specifically, we can talk about an altar table decorated with a row of three-leaf acanthus and a *loculus* that would be supported by a column. Apart from these pieces, the rest of the material presents the same decorative themes that we have already observed in Pla de Nadal I, reaffirming the idea that both buildings were part of the same complex composed of a residence and a religious complex, similar to what has been noted for Los Hitos in the Visigothic period or Naranco in the Asturian period.³⁶⁸ In a way, it is the same scheme that we see reproduced in

³⁶⁴ Barroso 2019.

³⁶⁵ Perich 2013: fig. 19. Let us not forget that we are dealing with a common artistic language of Byzantine origin.

³⁶⁶ García - Moro - Tuset 2009: 140-144.

³⁶⁷ Bourgeois 2004: 63-73.

³⁶⁸ Barroso *et al.* 2014.

the palace of Qasr ibn Wardan (Syria), the residence of a *dux* (high military commander who governed a province) of the Byzantine era, although here the constructions are part of the same complex.³⁶⁹

Interpretation of the ensemble

As expected in a building with the characteristics described here, different proposals for interpreting the Pla de Nadal ensemble have been made since the beginning of the research. Initially, due to a certain inertia, it was thought that the site was part of a religious complex (church or monastery), but this idea was soon discarded, and it was proposed to identify it as an aulic villa of a residential type inspired by Toledan and, ultimately, Byzantine models.³⁷⁰

Indeed, from an architectural point of view, the Pla de Nadal I ensemble seems to respond to the known model of late villas with galleries and corner towers, an upper floor, and a possible central courtyard. In this case, the plan of Pla de Nadal would present a fine analogy with the Qasr ibn Wardan complex. Actually, since no structures of the northern half of the complex are preserved, because they were destroyed when the terraces were conditioned for cultivation, it is difficult to confirm this point, and while it is possible to reconstruct the southern half with some degree of reliability, we do not have certain data proving that the northern half corresponded to a centralised courtyard structure as seen in the palace of Theodoric in Ravenna and in Qasr ibn Wardan itself.³⁷¹ At this point, we

must draw attention to a feature that clearly differentiates the Pla de Nadal ensemble from the Qasr ibn Wardan palace-fortress: in Pla de Nadal, the church is quite separate from the main complex and not part of it, as it happens in the Syrian palace. This suggests the possibility that we are actually looking at an example of a single pavilion with a linked religious building, similar to what we find in the Oviedo complex on Monte Naranco: a main rectangular pavilion developed in height. This type is also



Fig. 41. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Scallops. Finished piece and unfinished piece.

³⁶⁹ Perich 2013.

³⁷⁰ Juan and Pastor 1985; 1989a; 1989b; Juan and Centelles 1986.

³⁷¹ Juan and Lerma 2000.



Fig. 42. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Openwork cross with base for driving.

documented in Byzantine architecture, although certainly from very late dates, fully medieval. In fact, the first known example is the palace of Romanos Lekapenos in Constantinople, already from the 10th century CE. But it seems evident that the absence of Eastern parallels is mainly due to poor preservation of the monuments that could have served as models or to an interpretation problem of the archaeological record, as has happened for decades in Spain. In this sense, we cannot forget that Qasr ibn Wardan has been interpreted as the starting point of an evolution of Late Roman palatial architectural models towards fully early medieval formulas, in which some of the transformations that we will later see consolidated in constructions of later centuries are already present.³⁷²

A different issue are the prototypes of the Pla de Nadal complex. Everything seems to suggest that it is a reproduction of Byzantine models filtered through influences of the court of Toledo. Of course, we do not want to assert that this type of palatial residence originated in Visigothic Toledo, but rather that it was here where Byzantine influences were received and from where they were exported to other centres

of power on the peninsula. In this sense, and given the degree of destruction of the Pla de Nadal complex, it is impossible to know if we are looking at a model similar to Los Hitos, with a palatial complex and associated church and a dependent monastery (San Pedro de la Mata), but separated by a few kilometres from the complex. In any case, there is no doubt that the Pla de Nadal complex shows a closer affinity to the models of Toledan architecture of the 7th century, which is logical considering the possible patron of the work and the fact that, despite its Justinian chronology, Qasr ibn Wardan combines characteristics of Constantinian architecture (i.e. the alternation of stone ashlar with brick courses) with other specifically Justinian features such as ‘the elevation of one part of the building above the others, the disappearance of the peristyle courtyard system (of which Qasr ibn Wardan retains the small northern portico), or the displacement of representative spaces to the upper floors’.³⁷³

On the other hand, the issue of the chronology of Pla de Nadal arises, which logically affects the interpretation of the complex. In this case, although the archaeological record is conclusive, some

³⁷² Maffei 1998.

³⁷³ Perich 2013: 69-72. During the 6th and 7th centuries, the disappearance of the traditional alternation of ashlar and bricks, typical of Late Roman architecture, in much of Western architecture, is significant, as it was replaced by a construction technique that combined ashlar (often the product of reusing Roman materials) and rubble stone. The disappearance of laterite material was compensated for by the use of lime coatings, which served to conceal the poor quality of the materials used.

researchers have proposed a post-Visigothic chronology for Pla de Nadal, considering it a reflection of Umayyad artistic influence on Christian architecture.³⁷⁴ This opinion is based on an interpretative paradigm postulated decades ago by L. Caballero Zoreda, who advocates a chronology *c.* the 9th century CE for most constructions traditionally considered Visigothic.³⁷⁵



Fig. 43. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Corinthian capital.

This is not the time to delve into this debate again – something we have already addressed in previous studies as *vox clamantis in deserto*. Suffice it to say once more that this stance, which can be considered predominant in research linked to academic sectors, can no longer be sustained. Firstly, because the supposed Umayyad influence should be reflected first in the Islamic constructions of the time, something that does not occur at all, especially not in the Iberian Peninsula, not even in its most emblematic constructions (the mosque of Cordoba of Abd al-Rahman I). Secondly, and setting aside other underlying issues, e.g. related to figurative decoration or the difficulty of inserting this theory within historical facts,³⁷⁶ because the artistic and architectural models of these constructions are clearly inspired by the canons of classical and Roman-Eastern tradition. Not to mention that in some cases (e.g. San Juan de Baños) the epigraphy itself makes a late chronology impossible. The example of Pla de Nadal would be, in this sense, paradigmatic of what we have been defending for many years: it is an architectural complex that follows models already consolidated in Visigothic art and architecture of Roman-Byzantine tradition. Moreover, the epigraphy and sculptural decoration of the complex refer to typical examples of Visigothic and Byzantine arts of the second half of the 7th century. Besides this, it is evident that the builders and the patron were Christians and used Latin as their language of expression, which is not at all strange given what has been mentioned before, but would be at least astonishing in the case of a supposed Islamic construction. If all these indications were not enough, the archaeological record confirms the chronology of the late 7th and early 8th centuries for the Pla de Nadal complex.

³⁷⁴ Caballero and Utrero 2013: 129-130.

³⁷⁵ Caballero 1994.

³⁷⁶ We hope to dedicate a future work to answering this theory point by point, a true ‘transcendental-archäologische Wende’. For now, we only want to point out that some examples, such as San Pedro de la Nave, would show a sculptural decoration with a quality and iconographic complexity far superior to that found in the works built in the court of Oviedo itself, which would be surprising to say the least, since, if we accept the late chronology proposed by Caballero *et al.*, the church would be in the middle of no man’s land, outside the territory dominated by the Asturian kings and exposed to attack by the Arabs. A similar case would be that of Quintanilla, which, in addition to a singular iconography, shows cruciform monograms carved in one of the exterior friezes with parallels on Visigoth coins. See Barroso and Morín 1997; Barroso - Morín - Arbeiter 2001.

Actually, the imitation of Toledan aulic models in the decoration of Pla de Nadal I forces us to consider the political intention underlying the construction of this magnificent architectural complex. In this sense, perhaps the main question we must address is the role and function that should be assigned to the Pla de Nadal site within the territorial organisation of the Visigothic state and, more specifically, within the territory of the province of Carthaginiensis. Certainly, Pla de Nadal constitutes a wonderful example of what researchers call a *Central Place* or 'centre of power', i.e. understood as a place of habitation that transcends the mere residential function of the complex and encompasses broader uses, which may include economic-fiscal and/or socio-political functions and even topographical reference within the territory. This includes, of course, monumental residential structures (*palatium, castellum*), a centralised location (*Central Place*) within the territory that would allow them to be recognised as a topographical and symbolic landmark, and a good situation in



Fig. 44. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal I. Piece decorated with trefoils.

relation to the road network of the region. Additionally, the centre of power should also have a series of complementary annexed constructions (*ecclesia, balnea, etc.*), which, apart from fulfilling their intended functions, would also serve to fix in the minds of its inhabitants the sense of symbolic reference of the place in a given territory.³⁷⁷

It is undeniable that Pla de Nadal meets all the previously described requirements to be considered a true centre of power: a monumental complex located in a relatively central place within coastal Carthaginiensis, well situated concerning the communication routes that traverse the territory from north to south and towards the west, in the direction of Toledo, with an excellent position regarding

³⁷⁷ Cf. Pálsson 2018.

the transhumance networks, and with complementary dependencies (a church or a monastic establishment) that contributed to making the site a topographical and symbolic reference of the surrounding territory. The connection of some of these religious complexes with former aristocratic environments of the *uillula/curtis* type would explain why monuments like Santa María de Melque (San Martín de Montalbán, Toledo), undoubtedly a monastery at the time of the invasion of 711, are designated by Arab texts with the term *balat* ('palace') and not *al-munastir* ('monastery'). This type of complex composed of a *palatium* and a religious centre (*ecclesia, monasterium*) already points towards a fully medieval territorial structuring model, very much in line with the proto-feudal situation experienced by the Visigothic kingdom in the final moments of the 7th century.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the artistic influence of Toledo is clearly perceptible throughout the building, both in the architectural design and principally in the iconography and decoration. In this sense, it seems obvious that the Pla de Nadal complex was conceived as an authentic court that can be compared with other palatial architectural manifestations undoubtedly arising from the imitation of the aulic models present in 7th-century Toledo, whose reflection we can see in examples such as the palatial complex of Los Hitos (6th-7th centuries) or the complex of Monte Naranco built by King Ramiro I (842-850).³⁷⁸

As we say, the iconography also shows it as a magnificent example of power architecture from the end of the Visigothic period. The abundance of decorated friezes relates the building to the churches of the 7th century (San Pedro de la Nave, San Juan de Baños, Quintanilla de las Viñas, etc.). The decorative elements of the friezes, mainly *fleur-de-lis* or interlinked acanthus, scrolls with clusters, small leaves, and orientalising palmettes, as well as the scallops, form a very elaborate and complex iconographic programme in which elements of religious and civil symbolism are intermingled. The abundance of scallops in Pla de Nadal and the scarcity of motifs of a clearly religious nature – especially Christological – should be understood as part of an iconography linked to power architecture and the manifestation of political authority. This scheme was not unusual in the architecture of the Visigothic period, especially in those realisations related to environments of royalty or the high aristocracy of the kingdom. In recent years, archaeological investigations in the territory of the *sedes regia* are uncovering some of these examples, perhaps the best known being the site excavated in Arisgotas (Toledo). This site would be formed by the monastic complex of San Pedro de la Mata and the aristocratic *uillula* of Los Hitos. The villa comprises a significant number of prestigious buildings, such as a *palatium* and a church that at one point acted as a funerary pantheon.³⁷⁹ Likewise, and as we have already mentioned, this model will appear reproduced a century later in some aulic complexes of Oviedo, i.e. the one built by Ramiro I on Monte Naranco, which presents a *palatium* (later converted into the church of Santa María) and the church of San Miguel de Lillo.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Bango 2001; Barroso and Morín 2007.

³⁷⁹ Barroso - Carrobbles - Morín 2011; Barroso *et al.* 2014.

³⁸⁰ Bango 2001; Barroso *et al.* 2014. It should be noted here that the transformation of a civil building into a religious one was possible due to the existence of a shared iconographic language. Otherwise, such an adaptation would be almost impossible.



Fig. 45. MVPLA. Pla de Nadal II. Altar table.

Other examples of this aulic-type, residential architecture can still be found in some palaces built in Constantinople during the 10th-12th centuries. These are a series of palatial complexes with a central residential body, rectangular in plan and articulated on two levels, equipped with side porches and towers, as well as a representation hall illuminated by windows decorated with pierced latticework with cruciform motifs, exactly as has also been supposed for Pla de Nadal.³⁸¹ The persistence of the formulas of late 7th-century palatial architecture into the full Middle Ages is also documented in Italy and, of course, in Spain, as we have pointed out elsewhere regarding Toledo and Oviedo.³⁸²

In summary, the characteristics of the Pla de Nadal site are exceptional within the Levantine archaeological panorama and suggest an intense connection of the complex with the palatial art of the court of Toledo, not without Byzantine influences. From an architectural point of view, the development of the residential plan and the placement of the representation rooms on the upper floor of the building bring the Pla de Nadal I complex closer to some outstanding examples of Byzantine architecture (Qasr ibn Wardan), but also to other peninsular complexes linked to aristocratic environments (Los Hitos) or strictly palatial (Naranco). The typology and richness of the decorative elements documented at the site also point to formulas and iconographic themes developed in 7th-century Toledo (Toledo, Los Hitos, Mata, Guarrazar, etc.). All these characteristics point to Pla de Nadal as an aristocratic *uillula* model similar to what we have been able to document in recent years in Los Hitos-San Pedro de la Mata, although certainly more evolved and open to the influences of Eastern Mediterranean art and architecture, in line with the late chronology of the complex and its location on the border with territories that once formed part of Byzantine province of *Spania*.

The end of Pla de Nadal

For years, it was assumed that the civil complex of Pla de Nadal had been destroyed a few decades after its construction, still in the 8th century, due to the attack on Valencia in 778-779 by Emir Abd al-Rahman.³⁸³ Within this hypothesis, it was also assumed that before its destruction the building had been looted of all its movable materials. However, the reasons for this abandonment were not entirely clear, mainly due to the lack of archaeological materials and the destruction of a

³⁸¹ Perich 2013: 69-72.

³⁸² Barroso - Carrobes - Morín 2011.

³⁸³ Torró 2009: 159.

considerable part of the site at the time of its discovery. Nevertheless, some details provided by the archaeological excavation – especially the scarcity of ceramic material and the total absence of movable materials – suggest that the Pla de Nadal complex was never completed. It is very likely that the complex was under construction when Theudimer’s campaign against the Arabs took place in 713, and for this reason, the works at Pla de Nadal were halted. The defeat of the Visigothic army and the fact that the core of the territory referred to in the pact with the Arabs was concentrated around *Aurariola* (Orihuela) would have necessitated the abandonment of the old ducal seat in favour of this city.

Thus, the *bilad Tudmīr* or country of Theudimer was established not in Pla de Nadal, as was undoubtedly the intention of the *dux*, but around *Aurariola*, and over time the memory of the duke would be linked to this latter city. Years later, once the *qūra of Tudmīr* was established, the political centre of the region would be moved again, this time to nearby Murcia, which would henceforth be called [the city of] *Tudmīr*.

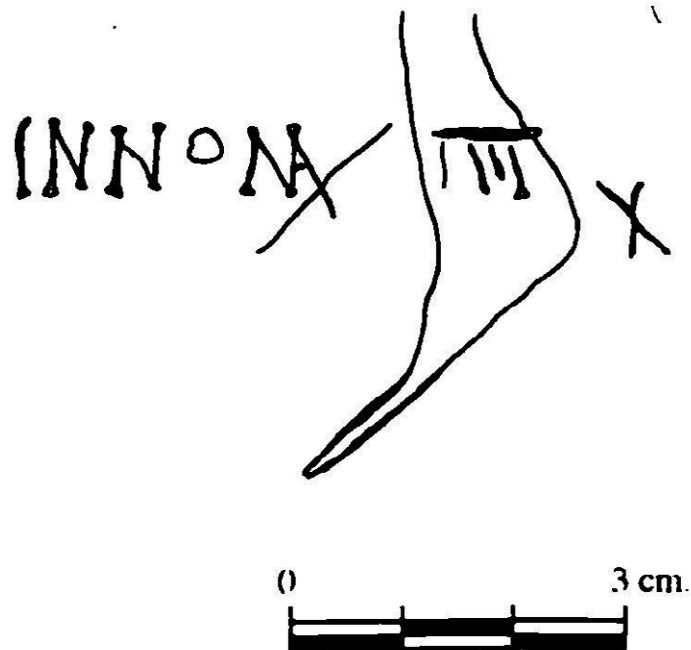


Fig. 46. Pla de Nadal. Engraving with chronological indication (Algarra, 1993).

A different problem, which we have alluded to earlier, is the relationship that might have existed between Pla de Nadal and the site of Valencia la Vella. The archaeological record seems to dismiss any kind of synchronicity between the two sites. Valencia la Vella, indeed, has only provided materials dated between the mid 6th and mid 7th centuries. It appears that the city was gradually abandoned from the 8th century onwards, and its role as the centre of the region was likely inherited by Pla de Nadal, although this transfer of power seems to have been thwarted by the Arab invasion, as mentioned a few lines above.³⁸⁴ The chronology provided by the archaeological findings has led to the assumption that Valencia la Vella was one of the strongholds that formed part of the network of fortifications integrating the Visigothic *limes* with the Byzantine domains, probably the centre of power in the coastal *Carthaginensis*. It is also possible that this *castellum* was related to the accounts of an Arian bishopric in Valencia and the captivity of Prince Hermenegild in this same city. Actually, it is still not entirely clear what the function of this new urban entity was: whether it was a *castellum* intended for the defence of Valentia or whether, on the contrary, we are dealing with a phenomenon of urban duplication in which Valencia la Vella acted as an assault position on Valentia, similar to

³⁸⁴ Pascual - Ribera - Rosselló 2003; Rosselló 2005; Ribera *et al.* 2020.



Fig. 47. Pla de Nadal I. Medallion with cruciform monogram in a frame of scrolls.

what happened with *Elo* and *Begastri* concerning *Ilici* and Cartagena. It should be noted that Valencia was occupied by Roman *militēs* until the reign of Leovigild.³⁸⁵

In any event, regarding our question, we would like to mention that the archaeological knowledge of the *castro* of Valencia la Vella remains, to this day, frankly insufficient. Really, research on the site has barely advanced since the classic study by Rosselló, and everything that can be said about it refers to that work, with very few further advances.³⁸⁶ Thus, the chronology defended for the site of Valencia la Vella is mainly fixed by the appearance of imported ceramic productions, important in themselves as they allow the dating of the archaeological complexes

with some certainty, but there are also drawbacks. Logically, the conquest of the last Byzantine domains in the peninsula implied a drastic reduction in the volume of Eastern imports in the Levantine sites, and consequently, this lack of imported products poses an additional problem for archaeologists when it comes to fixing the chronological line that marks the transition between the Visigothic and Islamic phases. Despite the absence of elements that allow establishing a chronological connection between Valencia la Vella and Pla de Nadal, most authors are convinced that there must have been some kind of relationship between the two sites. Already at the time, E. Juan and I. Pastor suggested this possibility based on some Visigothic chronology findings found near Valencia la Vella, which predict a broader chronological framework for this site than had been defended until then.³⁸⁷ It is possible that the new archaeological excavations being carried out at the site since 2016 will bring surprises in this regard and allow for a more precise clarification of its chronology, while also specifying more accurately the relationship that undoubtedly must have existed between Valencia la Vella and Pla de Nadal.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Rosselló 1996; Ribera *et al.* 2020: 73-76, 83.

³⁸⁶ The latest paper on the site is a preliminary advance of future research and its contextualisation within the border between Visigoths and Greeks, but with few new contributions from the archaeological point of view: Ribera *et al.* 2020.

³⁸⁷ Juan and Pastor 1989a: 368.

³⁸⁸ Macías *et al.* 2016; Ribera *et al.* 2020: 93.

Apart from Valencia la Vella, Pla de Nadal must have also maintained a close relationship with the city of Valencia. This is logical considering that Pla de Nadal is very close to that city and well connected to it. Archaeology has revealed the progressive rise of Valencia since the first third of the 6th century. A significant building activity can be related to the urban development promoted in the city by Bishop Justinian (530-550). From that date and throughout the first decades of the 7th century, the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of the city encouraged an ambitious construction programme that completely renewed the urban physiognomy of Valencia and endowed it with a magnificent episcopal and martyrial complex.³⁸⁹ On the other hand, it has already been mentioned that since the first third of the 7th century, and as a consequence of the confrontation between Visigoths and Romans, *Valentia* had become the main base of the Visigothic navy north of *Ilici*. As inferred from the reading of the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, the Visigothic fleet must have been under the direct command of Duke Theudimer; otherwise,



Fig. 48. Graffito with legend TEVDINIR / R(ex?).

it would not be explained why the chronicler credits him with the victory against the Greek fleet.³⁹⁰ The presence of an Arian bishop and the subsequent captivity of Prince Hermenegild attest to the existence of an important military garrison in the city or its surroundings (in the case that both reports refer to Valencia la Vella and not to Valencia itself). In fact, we think that, due to their characteristics, it is very possible that from the first third of the 7th century, a complementary relationship developed between the two cities, so that one of them (*Valentia*) would have become the main Visigothic naval base in the Mediterranean, while the other (Valencia la Vella) would have acted as the centre of the army stationed in the duchy.

Pla de Nadal and Duke Theudimer

The appearance of a monumental cruciform monogram with the name TEBDEMIR(US) (or perhaps THEUDEMIRUS) on a profusely decorated disc, as well as a graffito with the same name inscribed on the scallop that decorated one of the capitals (in the form TEVDINIR) confirming the reading of the monogram, has raised the question of the relationship that must have existed between the palace of

³⁸⁹ Ribera 2008.

³⁹⁰ Chron. Muz. 47 (reproduced in n. 139). See Appendix I.1.

Pla de Nadal and the figure of Duke Theudimer of Aurariola.³⁹¹ A third graffito with the reading IN NONA(S) III/X provides a brief chronological indication.³⁹²

It is obvious that the iconography and richness of the sculptural and architectural elements seem to point to their relationship with a character belonging to the civil elite of Visigothic kingdom. The obvious reading of the epigraphic findings supports the identification of this character with the famous Theudimer. In the case of the large medallion, this interpretation also seems coherent with the character and his historical context. Although there are precedents in small coins from the time of the civil war between Leovigild and Hermenegild, cruciform monograms are a characteristic motif of the second half of the 7th century. They generally appear associated with pieces or monuments related to the high aristocracy of the kingdom of Toledo (co-regent coins, parade bits, friezes of Quintanilla de las Viñas, signet rings, etc.). It is evident that the monogram of Pla de Nadal was intended to publicly display the name of the magnate residing in the palace and, in this sense, it is an element that can be compared to the monograms carved on one of the upper friezes of the church of Quintanilla de las Viñas or those carved on other Byzantine monuments, i.e. the walls of Constantinople and the lintel of Qasr ibn Wardan.

On the other hand, although it is true that the engraving on the scallop cannot be compared to the monogram, this does not invalidate the fact that it alludes to the owner of the complex to which the piece was destined.³⁹³ Obviously, the correspondence between the two indicates that it was a workshop mark informing the transporter to which construction the pieces were destined (a work funded by a certain TEUDINIR, a vulgar form of Theudimer) and, in this sense, it is comparable to those marking pieces from Imperial workshops.³⁹⁴ This analogy would be more evident because under this engraving another R has been carved with a different and more subtle stroke, perhaps of REX (?), and because the graffito with the reading IN NONA(S) III/X could be a chronological indication similar to the inscriptions documented in Imperial marble quarries.

The identification of the *dominus* of Pla de Nadal with Duke Theudimer seems to be reaffirmed by the chronology of the complex, which must be fixed *c.* the end of the 7th and beginning of the 8th century, both in terms of the construction phase and the abandonment of the building. The chronology confirms that the *dominus* of the palace must have been the same character mentioned in the *Chronica Muzarabica* of 754, who, in the time of kings Egica and Wittiza, had repelled the Byzantine naval attack and who would later sign the treaty of 713 with the Arabs. Therefore, it must be rejected that the various references in Latin and Arabic texts to a Theudimer-Theudimerus-Tudmir in such a short chronological span correspond to several characters bearing the same

³⁹¹ Juan and Rosselló 2003: 181-183; Ribera and Rosselló 2009: 202; Ribera *et al.* 2015.

³⁹² Algarra 1993.

³⁹³ Contrary to what Gutiérrez Lloret (2013: 255, n. 83) defends.

³⁹⁴ Padilla 1999: 501; cf. Canto 2000: 299 f.

name.³⁹⁵ On the contrary, it is evident that all these mentions refer to the same character and that this can be none other, in our opinion, than the *dux* of *Aurariola*.

Archaeological excavations record the hasty abandonment of the complex without it being used in the early 8th century, which is consistent with the defeat of the duke in 713 by the Arabs. The archaeological record also shows that at a certain point in the late 8th century, a fire destroyed what was still standing of the complex. The archaeological sequence seems to agree with what we know about the historical development of the area. Thus, it has been supposed that the end of Pla de Nadal must be related to the raid carried out on Valencia by the army of Emir ‘Abd al-Rahmān I in 778-779 to quell a Berber revolt.³⁹⁶

We have already seen how the refinement, elaborate iconography, and symbolism displayed in the decoration of the complex fit well with what the sources convey about Theudimer. It is obvious that the patron of such a large-scale work must have been a magnate with ample economic resources and great social prestige in the region, characteristics that perfectly match what we know about the *dux* Theudimer. The anonymous Mozarab, who wrote the Chronicle of 754, details that Duke Theudimer was a person ‘lover of the Scriptures, of admirable eloquence, and skilled in combat’ (*scripturarum amator, elonquentia mirificus, in preliis expeditus*), a description that well captures the essence of the education of the nobility at this time, in its triple religious, literary, and military aspects. Theudimer is, in this sense, a conspicuous representative of what the Gothic aristocracy of the 7th century must have been: an aristocracy that liked to build luxurious representation spaces in their residential villas, where the use of decorative sculpture accentuated the magnificence of the construction and the prestige and power of the magnate. This decoration displays an iconography of typically Roman-Christian tradition, with very close parallels in the Toledan art of the 7th century, although with origins in Roman-Eastern palatial iconography. For all the reasons stated, we believe there are no objective arguments (archaeological, iconographic, architectural) that would allow including the Pla de Nadal complex within a post-Visigothic chronology.³⁹⁷

Really, the figure of Theudimer exemplifies well the gradual rise of the nobility over the centralised power of the monarchy that characterises the last phase of the life of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo. Since the reign of Chindasuinth, when the *duces prouinciae* added civil prerogatives to military jurisdiction, a process of fragmentation of political power developed, which would eventually disintegrate the king’s sovereignty into small regional powers. A process that Sánchez Albornoz called proto-feudal but which, in truth, is closer to medieval feudalism than to the classical political ideal. And, although the classical notion of the State did not disappear completely in Spain – as it did in other parts of the West – the historical development of the Visigoth kingdom also gave way to a regime of generalisation of personal ties that prefigured the feudal regime of the Middle Ages. This process accelerated especially from the mid-seventh century when the kings of Toledo increasingly used war and the confiscation of rebel properties to reward their *fideles*. This process of

³⁹⁵ As Gutiérrez Lloret argues (2013: 255) and, more recently and hypercritically, Gutiérrez and Juan, 2024. A hypercriticism that contrasts incredibly with the staunch defence she makes of the Minateda=Elota equation, for which she has no more arguments than a more than questionable phonetic evolution, with no epigraphic or numismatic testimony.

³⁹⁶ Azuar 1988: 166.

³⁹⁷ Against, Caballero 1994.

generalised clientelism was not alien to the administration either. From the mid 7th century, the main positions of the kingdom were distributed among nobles united to the king by personal loyalty, and probably also through family ties.³⁹⁸

As the head of one of the duchies of the kingdom, Theudimer undoubtedly belonged to the highest aristocracy of the kingdom and, as already mentioned, must have had family ties with the Visigothic royal family. An intelligent politician and effective military leader, Theudimer managed to survive Egica's purges successfully. The death of Roderic at Guadalete and the absence of a suitable candidate among Wittiza's sons may have tempted him to seize the crown. Other nobles like him did so, taking advantage of the chaos generated by Wittiza's death. Not far away, in Septimania, a certain Agila II had himself crowned king.³⁹⁹ If so, Theudimer's attempt to reign was unsuccessful, or only succeeded for a very brief period and in a very localised geographical area, because barely two years after Guadalete he himself would suffer a severe defeat by the Arabs. Having reached an agreement with 'Abd al-'Azīz, later ratified by the Caliph of Damascus, Theudimer had to settle for governing a small domain subject to the new conquerors; a domain that hardly constituted the southern half of his former duchy. Here he tried to establish a principality similar to the one Duke Casius had established in the Ebro valley, with a certain autonomy that could be the first step towards a future kingdom. However, the special circumstances in which the pact between the Arab authorities and Theudimer materialised meant that Pla de Nadal was not the centre of power of the Gothic *dux*, but Orihuela itself. As so often throughout history, it was a circumstantial event, the defeat of the Gothic magnate near this city, which caused the ruin and abandonment of Pla de Nadal and the future flourishing of a new urban centre – Murcia.

Theudimer, indeed, must have been one of those Visigothic magnates whom the *Prophetic Chronicle* labels as *De Gothis qui remanserint ciuitates Ispanienses* ('On the Goths who remained in Spain') and who, after a period of struggle with the Saracens, ended up inhabiting the forts and villages (*castris et uicis*) in exchange for collecting tributes (*pacta regis*) for the invaders.⁴⁰⁰ Death prevented his ambition from going further. However, he still had enough power to ensure that his heir Athanagild inherited the principality, but unlike the Banū Qasī, the establishment of the Umayyad emirate in Cordoba and the centralisation of power carried out by 'Abd al-Rahmān I made the autonomous survival of the principality impossible. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties, Theudimer's lineage survived until the conquest of the kingdom of Murcia by Infante Alfonso, son of Fernando III and future king of Castile, in 1265, but it did not do so through his son Athanagild, but thanks to the marriage of one of his daughters to a Syrian nobleman who arrived on the peninsula with Balý's contingent. As in other famous cases – Egilona, the Banū Qasī, or Sara la Goda – the marriage of Theudimer's daughter to the Syrian nobleman represents a good example of the gradual insertion of the old Visigothic nobility into the structures of Islamic power. But, just as happened before with the Goth Theudis and his Hispano-Roman wife or with Goisuintha and Leovigild, this marriage also perfectly illustrates the importance of women as transmitters of legitimacy of origin within the new political order.

³⁹⁸ García Moreno 1974b.

³⁹⁹ Lat. Reg. Visig. Continuatio Cod. Parisini 4667: '*Egiga cum filio suo Witizane reg. ann. XXIII. Achila reg. ann. III. Ardo reg. ann. VII. et fuerunt reges Gotorum qui regnaverunt, XL*' (Zeumer 1902: 461).

⁴⁰⁰ Chron. Albeld. Ed. Gil *et al.* 1985: 183; Manzano 2014: 246.

DOCUMENTARY APPENDIX

I. Reports from the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 (López Ferreira 1980: 112-115).

I.1. *Theudimer*

At the same time, in the year 782, the bellicose Theudimer died, who in various parts of Spain had caused considerable massacres of Arabs and, after persistently asking for peace, had made the pact he should. Already in the times of the Gothic kings Egica and Wittiza, he had achieved victory over the Byzantines, who, as good sailors, had reached his homeland by sea.

There is also talk of his great dignity and honesty. And even when questioned by the Eastern Christians, such security in the true faith was found in him that all gave great praise to God.

He was a lover of the Scriptures, astonishing in eloquence, skilled in battles, and considering him Amir Almuminin [Commander of the Faithful] more prudent than the others, he praised him favourably and confirmed the pact he had previously established with Abdelaziz. Thus, it is corroborated in such a way that the strength of such a firm bond could no longer be annulled by the Arab successors, and after this, he returned to Spain elated.

I.2. *Athanagild*

After the death of Theudimer, Athanagild was considered a man of great dignity and nobility, as he was the richest lord of all and the most generous in distributing his money among them. But shortly after, when King Alhozan [Abū l-Jaṭṭār al-Husam] arrived in Spain, driven by some madness, he launched great insults against him and condemned him to 27,000 gold *solidi*. Upon learning of this, the army that had come with General Balch [Balch ibn Bishr al-Qushairi] paid it all in almost three days, and immediately reconciled him with Alhozan, also called Abulcatar, and, rewarding him with various gifts, restored him to power.

II. Versions of Theudimer's Pact

II.1. *Version of al-'Udrī (11th century), Al-Masālik ila ḡamī'a al-Mamālik ('Book of routes and kingdoms')* (Huici Miranda 1969: 86 ff.):

In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate: this is the writing of 'Abd al-'Azīz ben Musà for Tudmir ben Gandaris; since he has submitted to peace, he shall have the pact of

Allah and his confirmation, and his news and envoys shall not be delayed, and he has the protection of Allah and his prophet, that no one shall be imposed over him, nor shall any of his companions be harmed, they shall not be taken captive, and they shall not be separated from their women and children; their churches shall not be burned, and they shall not be forced in their religion, and his peace is over seven cities: *Uriula* [Orihuela], *Mula*, *Lurqa* [Lorca], *Blntla*, *Lqnt* [Alicante], *Iyih* and *ils* [Elche], and he shall not fail to fulfil what was agreed, and he shall not undo what was agreed, and he shall fulfil what we have imposed and obliged him to fulfil; he shall not hide any news he knows from us, and he and his companions shall have the tax of the *parias*, which are: for the free man one dinar, four *almudes* of wheat, four of barley, four measures of vinegar, one measure of honey, and one of oil; and for all the slaves, half of this.

(The witnesses to this were: 'Utman ben 'Ubayda al-Qurasi, Habib ben Abi Ubayda al-Qurasi, Sadun ben 'Abd Allah al-Rabi, Sulayman ben Qais al-Tuyibi, Yahya ben Yamar al-Sahmi, Bisr ben Qays al-Lajmi, Yiguis ben 'Abd Allah al-Azdi, and Abu Asim al-Hadli. It was written in Rajab of the year 94.)

II.2. Version of al-'Udrī (trans. Molina López 1972: 59 ff., from *Al-Ahwānī* 1965):

In the name of God, Clement and Merciful. This is the writing that 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsā directs to Theudimer b. Gandarīs, by virtue of which the state of peace [*sullh*] is agreed under promise and oath before God, his prophets, and envoys, that he will obtain the protection [*dimmā*] of God – praised and exalted be He – and the protection of his prophet Muhammad – may God grant him peace – that no one will be imposed on him, nor will any of his possessions be taken from him with malice; they will not be reduced to slavery, they will not be separated from their women or children; their lives will be respected, they will not be killed, and their churches will not be burned, nor will they be prohibited from practicing their religion. They will be granted peace through the delivery of seven cities, namely: *Uryūla*, *Mūla*, *Lūrqa*, *Balantala*, *Laqant*, *Iyyu[h]*, and *Ilš*, as long as what was agreed is not broken or violated. Anyone who knows of this treaty must comply with it, as its validity requires prior knowledge, without hiding any news they know from us. Theudimer and his people will bear a capitation tax, which they must pay; if they are free: one dinar, four *almudes* [*amdā*] of wheat, four *almudes* of barley, four *qist* of vinegar, two of honey, and one of oil; every slave must pay half of all this.

(The witnesses to the treaty were: 'Utmān b. Ubayda al-Qurašī, Habib ibn 'Abī 'Ubayda al-Qurašī, Sa'dūn ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Rabī', Sulaymān ibn Qays al-Tu'yībī, Yahyā ibn Ya'mar al-Sahmī, Bišr ibn Qays al-Lahmī, Ya'īš ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Azdī, and Abū 'Asīm al-Hadlī. It was written in Rajab of the year 94/April 713.)

II.3. Version of al-Dabbī (12th century), *Bugyat al-Mutamīs fī-l-tarij ahl al-Andalus* '(Wish fulfilled for those who research the history of the men of al-Andalus') (Simonet 1903: 797 ff.).

Fragment from The Biographical Dictionary of Al-Dabbī containing the Pact Concluded between Abdelaziz, Son of Müza, And the Gothic Prince Theudimer, Year 94 of the Hegira, 713 CE (Cod. Arab. Escur., num. 1676 current and 1671 of the Bibl. Arab. Escur. of D. Miguel Casiri Codera, Bibl. Arab, hisp., t III, 259):

In the name of God, Clement and Merciful. Writing [granted] by Abdelaziz ben Musa ben Nossair to Theudemir ben Gobdux. That he agrees or submits to capitulate, accepting the patronage and clientele of God and the clientele of his Prophet (with whom Allah be auspicious and propitious) on the condition that no dominion will be imposed on him or any of his people; that he will not be taken or stripped of his lordship; that they will not be killed, nor taken captive, nor separated from each other, nor from their children, nor from their women, nor forced in their religion, nor their churches burned; that he will not be stripped of his lordship as long as he is faithful and sincere, and fulfils what we have stipulated with him; that his capitulation extends to seven cities, which are: Orihuela, Valentila, Alicante, Mula, Bigastro, Eyyo, and Lorca; that he will not give asylum to deserters or enemies; that he will not intimidate those who live under our protection, nor hide any news of enemies he knows. That he and his people will pay each year one dinar, and four *modios* of wheat, and four of barley, and four pitchers of syrup, and four of vinegar, and two of honey, and two of oil; but the servant will only pay half.

(This was signed as witnesses by Otzman ben abi Abda the Quraishite and Habib ben abi Obaida (the Fihrite) and Abdala ben Maisara the Fahmite and Abul Casim the Odzailite. It was written on the fourth of Rajab of the year 94 of the Hegira/5 April 713 CE.)

II.4. *Version of al-Himyari (13th century), Kitāb al-rawd al-mi'tār fī habar al-aqtār ('Book of the scented garden about the news of the countries')* (Levi-Provençal 1988, from Mazzoli-Guintard 2015: 410 ff.):

Tudmīr: Circle of al-Andalus, which took the name of its former king, Theudemir [Tudmīr]. Here is the text of the peace treaty granted to him by 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mýsā b. Nusayr: In the name of Allah, the Clement, the Merciful! Written by 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mýsā b. Nusayr to Tudmīr b. 'Abdýš. The latter obtains peace and receives the commitment, under the guarantee of Allah and that of his Prophet, that nothing will be changed in his situation or that of his people; that his right to sovereignty will not be contested; that his subjects will not be killed, nor reduced to captivity, nor separated from their children and their wives; that they will not be disturbed in the practice of their religion; that their churches will not be burned, nor stripped of the objects of worship found there; and this, as long as he satisfies the charges we impose on him. Peace is granted to him in exchange for the delivery of the following seven cities: Orihuela, Baltana [*B.l.t.n.l.a*], Alicante, Mula, Villena [*Balāna*], Lorca, and Ello [*Alluh, Annahu*]. Furthermore, he must not give asylum to anyone who has fled from us or who is our enemy, nor harm anyone who has benefited from our *amān*, nor keep secret any information about the enemy that comes to his knowledge. He and his subjects must pay an annual personal tribute consisting of one *dīnār* in cash, four bushels [*mudd*] of wheat and four of barley, four measures [*qīst*] of must, four of vinegar, two of honey, and two of oil. This rate will be halved for slaves.

(Written in Rajab of the year 94 of the Hegira/April 713.)

II.5. Version of al-Garnāṭī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Šarīf (14th century), Kitāb Raf'al-huġūb al-mastūra fī mahāsīn al-Maqṣūra ('Lifting the veils concealed about the excellences of the Maqṣūra') by Abūl-Qāsim Muhammad al-Garnāṭī, vol. II (Cairo 1925: 167):

Writing granted by 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Mūsà ibn Nusayr to (li) Tudmīr (Theudemir) b. 'Abdūs [recognizing] that he has surrendered through capitulation (*nazala 'alà s-sulh*) and adheres to the Pact instituted by God (*la-hu 'ahd Allāh*) and the protection of His Prophet, may He bless and save him, guaranteeing that his status or position will not change nor that of any of his people (*as hābi-hi*), nor will he be deprived of his dominion, and that they will not be killed, nor reduced to slavery, nor separated from their children or their wives, nor forced to abandon their religion, nor will their churches be burned. [He will not be stripped of his dominion as long as] he is loyal and respects the conditions we have imposed on him. He capitulates in the name of [wa-annahū sālaha 'alà] seven cities, which are Uryūta (Orihuela), B.n.t î-la, [*Laqant*], Mūla, Bn îra or B.nayra, [ly Ah] and Lūrqa [Lorca]. He must not give shelter to anyone who flees from us, nor to any of our adversaries; he will not attack anyone who has our amān or safeguard; he will not hide any news about the enemy that comes to his knowledge. He and his people are obliged to deliver each year one dinar, four almudes of wheat, four of barley, four measures of must, four of vinegar, two measures of honey, and two of oil; the servants must pay half of the aforementioned amounts.

(Witnesses to the document were: 'Utmān b. Abī 'Abda al-Qurašī, Habb b. Abī 'Abda al-Qurašī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Hudalī, and 'Abdallāh b. Maysara at-Tamīmī. It was written in the month of Rajab of the year 94 of the Hegira.)

II.6. *Version of the Chronicle of 1344, in turn taken from the History of al-Rāzī. ('Chronicle of the Moor Rasis', from the edition by Pascual de Gayangos, Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia, VIII: 79) (Simonet 1903: 799).*

And Abelagin [1. Abdelaziz] took from those people that his father commanded him and went as quickly as he could, and fought with the people of Orihuela, and of Orta and Valencia, and of Alicante and Denia; and God willed that he defeated them, and the towns surrendered by agreement, and they made him the letter of servitude in this manner: that he would defend them, and protect them, and not separate the children from the parents, nor the parents from the children, except by their own will, and that they would have their inheritances as they had them, and each man who lived in the towns would give one and four *almudes* of wheat, and four of barley, and four of vinegar, and one almod of honey, and another of oil. And they swore to Abelacin that he would not insult them, nor their faith, nor burn their churches, and that he would let them keep their law. And when this letter was made, the era of the Moors was ninety-four years.

And Abelançin fought with the people of Orihuela and Lorca and Valencia and Alicante, and God willed that he defeated them. And they gave him the towns by agreement, and made him

letters of servitude in which Abelancin would defend and protect them, and not separate the children from the parents, nor the parents from the children except by their own will; and that they would have their possessions as they had them both in the countryside and in the towns, and that each one of those who lived in them would give him half of the tenth part that their estate was worth each year, and also four almudes of wheat and four of barley, and honey and oil as they gathered a designated part; and Abelancin swore that he would not insult them nor their faith, nor burn their churches, and that he would let them keep their law. And he promised and granted them all this and made his oaths not to break it. And when these letters were thus made, the era of the Moors was ninety-four years.

III. Legend of Theudimer

III.1. *Version from the Pseudo-Isidorian Chronicle (González Muñoz 2000: 188-190):*

Once Cordoba was taken, Táríc sent Mugit to King Theudimer. Mugit arrived with the soldiers that the sovereign Moisés [Musa] had sent to Taric. At that time, Theudimer, king of Orihuela, confronted him, and a hard and fierce battle ensued between them. Theudimer retreated and in his flight entered Murcia after a huge massacre among his ranks. He shaved the women he found there, and dressing them in male attire, he exposed them armed on the wall.

The next day Theudimer went out against Taric and said: 'Taric, grant me peace and freedom for all my people, and I will give you the land entirely.' 'I will,' he replied. After they entered Murcia and saw that there were only women there, they regretted not having held out a little longer until they had won by force. But they still kept what they had agreed upon, as between kings and nobles, the truth must always be firmly upheld.

III.2. *Version from the Ajbar Maʿmua: Ajbār maʿmūʿa fī fatḥ al-Andalus wa dīkr umarāʿi-hā (raḥīma-hum Allāh) wa l-ḥurūb al-wāqīʿa bi-hā bayna-hum ('Collection of historical news about the conquest of al-Andalus and mention of its emirs - God have mercy on them - and the wars that faced them in that region') (Lafuente 1867: 26):*

Afterwards [the troops of the detachment of Raya and Elvira] went to Todmir, whose real name was Orihuela, and it was called Todmir after its lord [Theudimer], who went out to meet the Muslims with a large army, which fought weakly, being defeated in an open field, where the Muslims made such a massacre that they almost exterminated them. The few who could escape fled to Orihuela, where they had no armed people or means of defence; but their chief Todmir, who was an expert and very ingenious man, seeing that resistance was not possible with the few troops he had, ordered the women to let their hair down, gave them reeds, and placed them on the wall in such a way that they looked like an army, until he could negotiate peace. He then went out as a parliamentarian, asking for peace, and it was granted to him; and he did not cease to insinuate himself into the mind of the Muslim army chief until he obtained a capitulation for himself and his subjects, by virtue of which the entire territory of Todmir was peacefully handed over, without having to conquer much or little, and they were left with the dominion of their goods. Having achieved this, he revealed his name; and made

the Muslims enter the city, who found no armed people there, for which they regretted what they had done; but they fulfilled what had already been stipulated, and after informing Tárík of the conquests achieved, and leaving some troops with the inhabitants, the bulk of the detachment marched towards Toledo to join Tárík.

III.3. *Version from Al-Maqqarī, IV 3 (Gayangos 1840: 281):*

After the subjection of these two cities [Malaga and Granada], the army proceeded on to Tudmir, a country so called after its king [Theodomir], and the citadel of which was Ouriwwélah [Orihuela], a place renowned for its strength. This King Tudmir [Theodomir] was a man of great experience and judgment, who for a length of time defended his states valiantly. But at last, having ventured a battle in the open country, he was completely defeated, and most of his men slain, himself and a few followers only succeeding in gaining Orihuela. When safe inside the town, he ordered the women to let their hair loose, to arm themselves with bows, and to appear on the walls as if they were so many warriors prepared for battle, he himself, with his scanty followers, standing in front, with a view to deceive the Moslems with regard to the real strength of the garrison. In this stratagem he succeeded, for the Moslems, overrating his forces by the numbers they saw on the walls, offered him peace, and Theodomir, feigning to accept of it, repaired in disguise to the camp of the Moslems; and there, as if he were a deputy from his own people, he first treated for the security of the inhabitants, and afterwards for his own. When he had brought the Moslems to grant him the terms which he wished for, he made himself known to them, giving as an excuse for his stratagem the great love he had for his subjects, and his ardent wish of obtaining for them a favourable capitulation. He then guided them into the town, according to the treaty agreed upon, but when the Moslems saw that there were in it only women and children, they were very much ashamed of themselves, and mortified at having been deceived. They, however, observed faithfully the terms of the treaty, as it was their custom to do on every occasion; so that the district of Tudmir, by the artifice of its king, was freed from the invasions of the Moslems, and the whole of its towns and villages were comprised in the same capitulation. The Moslems wrote to Tarik, apprising him of the surrender of that district, and a small portion of the army remaining in the capital of the country, the rest proceed to Toledo to join in the siege of that city.

III.4. *Version from the 'General Chronicle of Spain' of 1344 (Llobregat 1973: 64 f.):*

4. And the cavalry that went over Raya, besieged Malaga, and took it, that all the Christians fled and took refuge in the mountains, and the host that went to Elvira, besieged Granada, and took it. And the host that they sent with Tudenir, who was a Christian, that they sent over Orihuela, before they reached it, the people of Orihuela came out, and they came to meet them on a plain and fought with the people of Tudemir. And God willed that Tudemir won, and none of the people of Orihuela remained except those who fled and took refuge in the town. And since Tudemir won, he went to besiege Orihuela. And when the people of Orihuela saw this, they were in great distress. And they made all the women in the town come, without veils, and made them go up on the wall, as if they were men. And the lord of the town called those men who were there and told them what they would do. And they saw that they had no

power to hold out in the town; but they thought it best to give it up for the best terms they could; before their enemies knew their weakness. And the lord of the town went out, and immediately sent his messenger, and had a truce, and promised to give them the town on the condition that they would not kill any man or woman, and that they would let them take as much as they could safely carry, except for the weapons. And after this was signed with good letters, he told them all that he was the lord of the town, and made him known to all, and handed over the town to them. And when the Moors entered the town and saw no men there, they regretted what they had done, but they kept what they had agreed with them. And Tudemir took some of his people and left them in the town, and ordered them how to act and how to guard themselves. And then he took his way, the most direct he knew, to Toledo, where Tarif [ibn Malik] was.

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