



The Buildings of the Visigothic Elite: Function and Material Culture in Spaces of Power¹

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ABSTRACT

In this work, we analyze the elements of power of the Visigothic elites through their representative buildings, as a symbol of the power of these groups, along with the objects they contained or were used in those spaces. In particular, we will focus on the episcopal complex of El Tolmo de Minateda built at the end of the sixth century or beginning of the seventh century, possibly as a political decision taken by the ecclesiastical authority in the capital of the Visigothic Kingdom (Toledo), as a way to counteract the Byzantine influence in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula and exercised from Cartagena.

The episcopal complex of El Tolmo is composed of three buildings, which are in turn the three main buildings of this type of religious facility: church, baptistery and bishop's palace, the last one being the most authoritative ecclesiastical space for audiences and those in residence. With the comprehensive study of the whole complex (construction

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cycles, furniture, decoration and the location of spaces), we can interpret the function of each space in the basilica and the *domus episcopi*, the routes of liturgical and general movement, the existence of some hierarchical environments, and specify the chronological development of the buildings.

Complementing this work, we will analyze other types of objects that are in themselves indicators of prestige and economic power, such as imported ceramics, metal objects or coins documented in the contexts of the use of these spaces. The objects analyzed within these spaces of power and their location in relation to them will help us to expand our vision of Visigothic elites and the symbolism both of their architecture and of the objects that represented them.

ESSAY

The Site

El Tolmo de Minateda is a plateau on a hill located near the city of Hellín, in the Spanish province of Albacete, that looks out over the natural route connecting the inland of the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean coast. The historical site is protected by an organized research and heritage preservation project that is approved and funded by the Directorate-General for Education, Science and Culture in Castilla-La Mancha. Scientific management of the site is provided by the University of Alicante and the Museum of Albacete.³

³ Directed by Lorenzo Abad Casal, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, Blanca Gamo Parras and Pablo Cánovas Guillén. El Tolmo de Minateda is the Archaeological Park in the Province of Albacete and belongs to the network of Archaeological Parks in Castilla-La Mancha.

The site was occupied over several complementing and distinct historical periods, but it is the urban remains of the Visigothic period, built over a semi-abandoned Roman city, which stand out. Thanks to historical toponymy and material sources, this area has been identified as the *Eiotana* or *Elotana* episcopal see, built by the Visigoths between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century. The city remained inhabited after the Muslim conquest of AD 711 – now named Madfnat Iyyuh and part of a governmental subdivision in southeastern al-Andalus known as the *Cora of Tudmir* (the Arabic name of the Visigothic *Dux Teodomir*, who surrendered in 713) – until its abandonment at the beginning of the tenth century.

The Buildings of the Visigoths Elites

In Tolmo de Minateda two architectural groups mark the representation of the Visigothic elites: the wall at the entrance to the city and the Episcopal complex located in the upper part of the city (Fig.1.1).

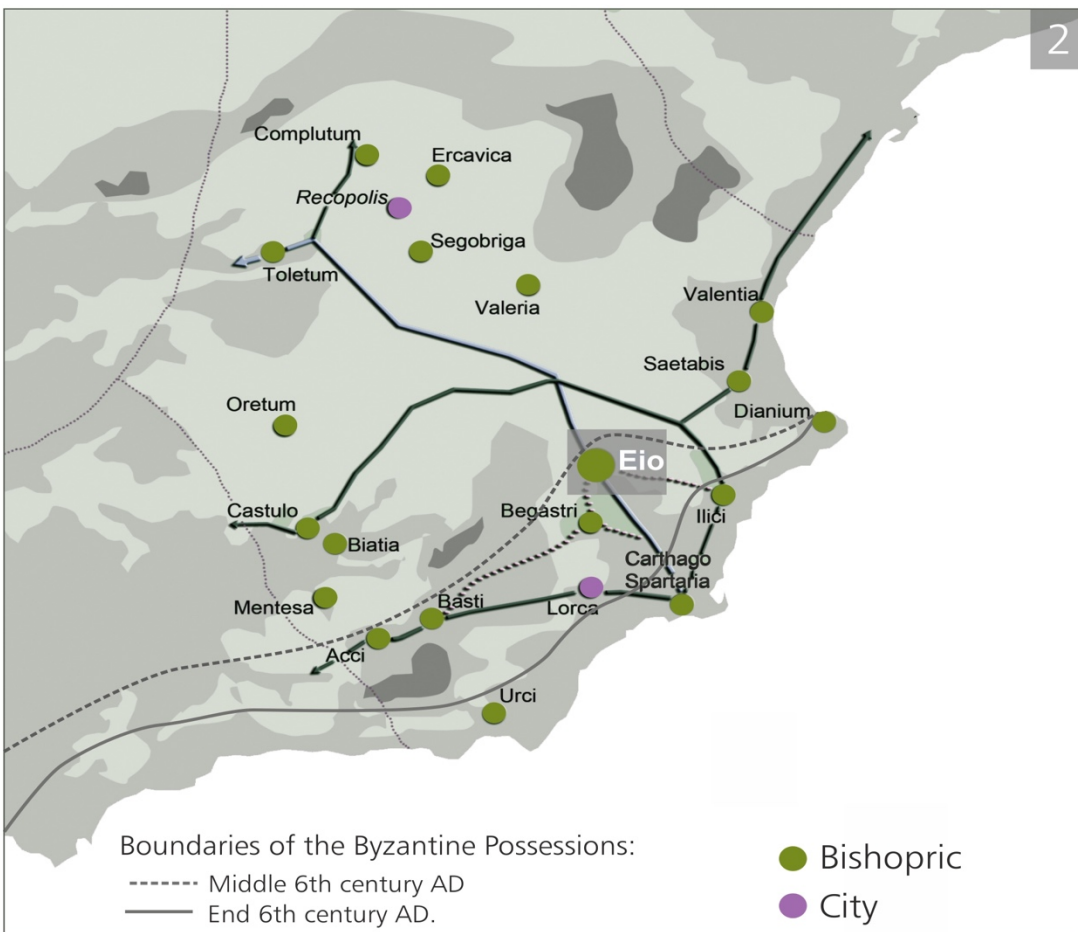


Fig. 1. 1- El Tolmo de Minateda. 2- Boundaries of the Byzantine possessions around the second half of the sixth century.

The Wall at the Entrance of the City

In the middle of the sixth century, in the context of Justinian's (r. 527-565) *Renouatio Imperii*, the Byzantine Empire occupied a large part of the southeastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Meanwhile, the imperial rival in the peninsula, the Visigoth Kingdom of Toledo, became entrenched in the area as it fought to conquer these lands. Visigothic pressure increasingly shrunk the zone of Byzantine control.⁴

It was within these circumstances that the former semi-inhabited Roman town of El Tolmo underwent a major transformation, provided with a unitary and extensive urban design of almost *ex-novo* character that affected the entire surface of the hill. The revitalization of the city is understandable thanks to its strategic position. The city was located on the border of the territory known as Oróspeda and along the road that connected Carthago Noua (Cartagena), the capital of the Byzantine province of *Spania*, with Complutum (Alcala de Henares) and the Visigothic capital, Toletum (Toledo) (see Fig. 1.2 below).⁵

Also within this situation and around this time, some uncertain point of the second half of the sixth century, the fortification of the entrance of the city was rebuilt. The builders took advantage of the external cladding of ashlar of the old high-imperial wall, from which the line of the new defensive system was advanced. It was constituted by a solid bulwark in the form of an 'L', with a door in a corridor flanked by two towers accessed through a new path carved into the rock, which is still visible on the way to the entrance

⁴ Lorenzo Abad Casal, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, Blanca Gamo Parras and Pablo Cánovas Guillén, "Una ciudad en el camino: pasado y futuro de El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete)," *Zona Arqueológica* 9 (2008): 323.

⁵ Lorenzo Abad Casal, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret and Blanca Gamo Parras, "La ciudad visigoda del Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete) y la sede episcopal de Eio," in *Los orígenes del cristianismo en Valencia y su entorno. Grandes temas arqueológicos II* (Valencia, 2000), 103-04.

of the city.⁶ It is possible too that while the entrance of the city was strengthened, the area of the Acropolis was reinforced with a wall. The construction that crosses from the west to the southern spur of the high part of the hill was meant to isolate this area if necessary. This would be the space that Isidore of Seville calls *Arx* in his *Etymologies*, and which responds to the highest and protected area of a city, where cisterns, stables, barns, etc. are housed.⁷

The erection of these defensive constructions can be understood if we place El Tolmo in one of the strategic zones of the moment and if it is inscribed within a changing reality conditioned by the Visigothic advance towards Carthago Spartaria. Written testimonies seem to indicate that at the end of the sixth century or at the beginning of the seventh century the territory of Oróspeda was controlled by the Visigoths, demonstrated by two new episcopal dioceses that were created to manage the area.⁸

The Episcopal Complex

Traditionally it has been accepted that the need to organize religiously the territories won by the Visigoths, and which were dependent on the bishoprics of Carthago Spartaria (Cartagena) and Ilici (La Alcudia, Elche), both still in Byzantine hands, was what motivated the creation of two new episcopal sees to replace the previous ones.⁹

⁶ Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret and Lorenzo Abad Casal, "Fortificaciones urbanas altomedievales del Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, España): el baluarte occidental," in *Mil anos de fortificações na Península Ibérica e no Magreb (500-1500): actas do Simpósio Internacional sobre Castelos (Palmela, 2000)* (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, Câmara Municipal de Palmela, 2002), 136.

⁷ Blanca Gamero Parras, "Fortificaciones del reino de Toledo en el sureste de la Ibérica. El ejemplo del Tolmo de Minateda," in *Congreso Internacional de las fortificaciones en la Tardoantigüedad, élites y articulación del territorio (Siglos V-VIII d.C.)*, Zamora, noviembre 2012, ed. R. Catalán, P. Fuentes and J. C. Sastre (Madrid, 2014), 86 and Jaime Vizcaino Sánchez, *La presencia bizantina en Hispania (siglos VI-VII). La documentación arqueológica*. Antigüedad y cristianismo. XXIV (Murcia, 2007), 423.

⁸ Abad Casal, et al., "Una ciudad en el camino," 324.

⁹ See José Vives, "Nuevas diócesis visigodas ante la invasión Bizantina," *Spanische Forschungen* 17 (1961): 1-9.

This thesis presupposes that the new bishoprics had to be adjacent to and relatively close to the old ones, since later, after the Byzantines had been defeated, the see of *Eiotana* was united to that of *Ilici*,¹⁰ whereas that of Begastri remained autonomous, taking the place of Cartagena.¹¹ Therefore, the decision to create both sees was to respond not only to a religious but also to a geopolitical logic that contributed to rationalizing the administration of an extensive territory, while controlling important routes of communication that favored penetration into the territory of Cartagena: namely, the road to Cartagena from eastern Andalusia and the one that connected the coast with the center of the Iberian Peninsula.¹²

The two new episcopal sees, those of Begastri and Eio (or Elo, according to the different versions of the conciliar signatures), are named for the first time in the *Constitutio Carthaginiensium Sacerdotum* – a council of the Carthaginian province held in Toledo on October 23, 610 – allegedly endorsing the *Decretum* of King Gundemar (r. 610-612) and confirming the metropolitan rights of the see of Toledo over the Carthaginian province. The see of Eio is mentioned again during the seventh century on the occasion of at least two councils, VII Toledo (646) and XI Toledo (675), to which may be added XV Toledo (688), although the bishopric of *Ilici* appears in all of them.¹³

¹⁰ See Roberto Lorenzo de San Román, “*Ecclesiae Ilicitanae, qui et eiotanae, episcopus*. Sobre la extensión y dualidad de la sede episcopal de Ilici en la Antigüedad Tardía,” *Lucentum* 35 (2016): 265-305.

¹¹ Abad Casal, et al., “Una ciudad en el camino,” 325.

¹² Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, Lorenzo Abad Casal and Blanca Gamo Parras, “Eio, Iyyuh y el Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete): de sede episcopal a madīna islámica,” in *Les ciutats tarδοantigues d’Hispania: cristianització i topografia*, Institut d’Estudis Catalans. VI Reunió d’Arqueologia Cristiana Hispànica (Barcelona, 2005), 363.

¹³ *Concilios visigóticos e Hispano-romanos*, ed. José Vives, with T. Marín Martínez and G. Martínez Díez (Barcelona-Madrid, 1963), 257, 368 and 472; and, Abad Casal, et al., “Una ciudad en el camino,” 324-25.

One of the most significant datum supporting the thesis that El Tolmo de Minateda is the Eio or Elo of the Visigothic councils is the representative religious area discovered on the upper platform of the site, composed of a church with an attached baptistery, a cemetery around the head and feet of the religious building and an annexed building, which has been identified as a space of representation, administration and residence linked to the basilica, not only from a topographical perspective but also chronological and functional.¹⁴

The essential establishments that define, as a rule, the episcopal groups are the *ecclesia episcopalis* (*ecclesia Mater* or *cathedralis*), the *baptisterium* and the *episcopium*. In these spaces ecclesiastical authority could develop all the liturgical and secular functions attributed to it (the proclamation of the Divine Word, the Eucharist, Baptism, territorial administration, residence and reception). In the most complex episcopal centers may appear numerous buildings, both religious and civil in function, sometimes complete with arcaded streets, monumental entrances or squares.¹⁵ The texts of the period tell us about oratories, rooms for the clergy, archives, offices, *balnea*, spaces for welfare activities (*xenodochia*), monasteries, cemeteries, warehouses, barns, etc.¹⁶

In the case of El Tolmo de Minateda, the three fundamental buildings of the episcopal triad that characterize this type of ecclesiastical group have been observed: church, baptistery and *episcopio*, the latter being the space of representation and residence of

¹⁴ Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret and Pablo Cánovas Guillén, “Construyendo el siglo VII: arquitecturas y sistemas constructivos en el Tolmo de Minateda,” in *El siglo VII frente al siglo VII. Arquitectura*, Anejos de Archivo Español de Arqueología (AEspA) XLVIII, ed. Luis Caballero, Pedro Mateos and María de los Ángeles Utrero (Madrid, 2009), 92.

¹⁵ See Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Sauro Gelichi, *La città nell’alto medioevo italiano. Archeologia e storia* (Roma-Bari, 1998) and Gian Pietro Brogiolo, “Le origini della città medievale,” *PCA Studies I* (Mantua, 2011): 109-27.

¹⁶ Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia Bautista, “The episcopal complex of Eio-El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, Spain),” 269.

the highest ecclesiastical dignity. The monumental complex is structured around an open space, presided over by a portico, and is flanked by a restricted funerary area and *ad sanctos* around the head and feet of the religious building (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. 1- The episcopal complex of El Tolmo de Minateda. 2- Functional interpretation of episcopal complex (@ Parque Arqueológico del Tolmo de Minateda).

The organic layout of the complex, in a privileged urban space, shows the desire to build a stage that dignifies and marks the important place of the city, where all the powers are combined, enhanced by the access portico that organizes the spaces and the internal circulation between the cathedral and the *domus episcopi*. The archaeological study of the architectural complex shows that it is a unitary construction program, executed according to the local technical environment.¹⁷ The architectural features of the basilica and the baptistery, its decorative program and the liturgical furniture have made it possible to discover liturgical elements of great interest, while the episcopal palace provides important data on the economic, fiscal, social and representative structure of the religious Visigothic elites.¹⁸

The liturgical and administrative life of the bishopric is reflected archaeologically and architecturally by the episcopal complex, which had to maintain its original function until the eighth century, when a process of desacralization began, culminating in the disappearance of the buildings of the former church and *domus episcopi* at the beginning of the ninth century. The historical context that provokes the urban transformation of the Visigoth *ciuitas* of *Eio* in *Madīnat Iyyuh* is the arrival of the Arab and Berber army in 711 to the Iberian Peninsula, and, in particular, the Covenant of Teodomiro / Tudmir in 713, which marked the agreed surrender of the southeast of the Peninsula to the Arab and Berber troops.

¹⁷ See Gutiérrez and Cánovas, “Construyendo el siglo VII.”

¹⁸ Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia Bautista, “The episcopal complex of Eio-El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, Spain),” 293-94.

Material Culture and the Buildings of the Visigothic Elites

Decorative Sculpture

The excavation of the episcopal complex has given us a wide corpus of architectural material, which indicates the important investment that was made for its construction. Although the re-use of Roman elements was a key factor in the construction of the buildings, many of its elements were sculpted *ex profeso* and decorated under the stylistic rules of the moment. Among the documented elements are columns and capitals, external columns, pilasters, chancel screens, decorative plates, assembly elements, crosses of laurea or with wheel, mullioned window, stucco and wall treatments.¹⁹

The study of these architectural elements indicates that many of them were made following decorative patterns, which can also be found in other religious centers in the area, which leads to the possible existence of one or more ‘workshops’, responsible for the diffusion of certain types of decorative programs in the southeast of Hispania during the Visigothic period (Fig. 3).

¹⁹ The detailed study of these elements is published in Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret and Julia Sarabia Bautista, “El problema de la escultura decorativa visigoda en el sudeste a la luz del Tolmo de Minateda: distribución, tipologías funcionales y talleres,” in *Escultura decorativa tardorromana y altomedieval en la Península ibérica*, Anejos de Archivo Español de Arqueología (AEspA) XLI, ed. Luis Caballero and Pedro Mateos (Madrid, 2007), 301-44.



Fig. 3. 1- Examples of decorated architectural elements documented in El Tolmo (without scale). 2- Decoration on plaster and reconstruction of an arch in plaster.

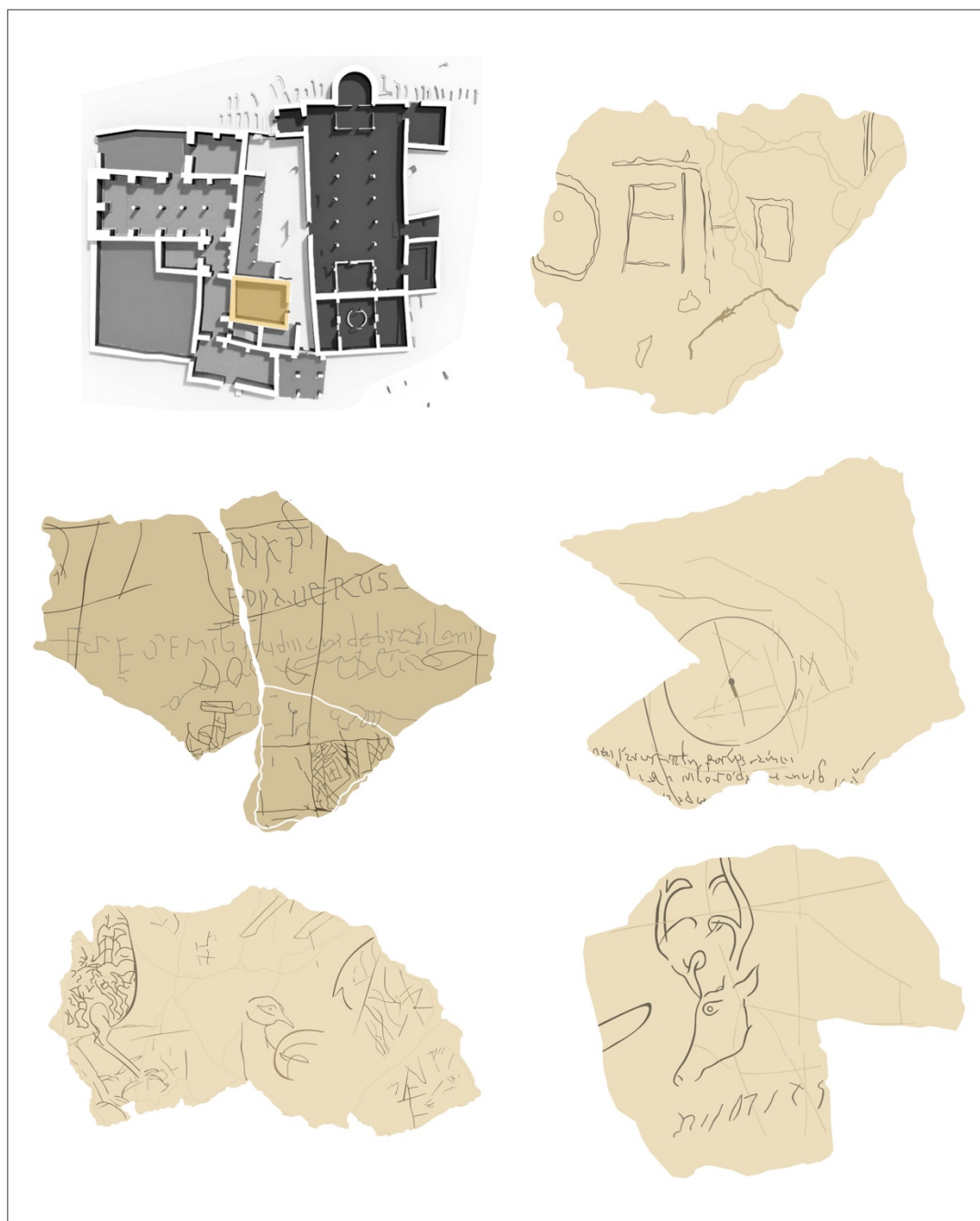


Fig. 4. 1- Plaster fragments with graffiti and the room of the church where they were found (in yellow).

These pieces are notable for having forms and decorative motifs that could be understood by the congregation, who would be able to interpret their meaning and location in the liturgical path around the churches and baptisteries. The close relation to Christian rituals suggest that they were usually sculpted *ex profeso* in the

chronological context of the work, therefore valuably defining the stylistic guidelines and technical skills of the artisan workshops at the time.²⁰

On the other hand, many fragments of parietal plasterwork with diverse graffiti were found in the destruction level of one of the rooms of the episcopal complex: geometric and zoomorphic (birds and cervids) motifs, and Visigothic cursive script (Fig.4). It seems therefore that the walls in this area were used as a canvas for spontaneous writing during the time it was used. Though we do not know the specific purpose, the fact that it was concentrated in this room is meaningful and reinforces the use suggested. The study of the epigraphic graffiti that is being done by Isabel Velázquez will shed light on this issue, but many of them may have been done during the administrative and accounting activities that the ecclesiastical authority carried out in the palace. All these details suggest a storage area, maybe storing products such as oil or wine, though it cannot be proven due to the absence of any archaeological materials belonging to the early use of this room.²¹

Pottery

On the other hand, the pottery, in the context of the seventh century, indicates that in the Visigothic city of *Eio* there existed a social group with enough economic power to demand various merchandise of diverse origin. The economic power of these groups is made visible mainly by imports that have been documented.

The imported ceramics from the end of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century indicate the existence of a regional trade network of ceramics produced around

²⁰ Gutiérrez and Sarabia, “Eio-El Tolmo de Minateda,” 277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

Cartagena and the territory of the present province of Murcia. This fact, together with the documentation of imports of African origin, the eastern Mediterranean and Mediterranean cooking wares, which necessarily reached the peninsula by sea, could indicate a close link between the Visigothic city of *Eio* and Byzantine *Spania*. At the same time, the presence of other fine tableware is documented, such as *Terra Sigillata Hispánica Tardía Meridional* (TSHTM) of clear peninsular origin and therefore from Visigothic territory.²²

The documentation of ceramics from such assorted origins indicates, above all, the privileged geo-strategic position of El Tolmo, located between various communication routes and centers of power at the time. But it also seems to corroborate the idea that certain economic elements, such as commercial traffic, were independent of political boundaries²³ and that, at least in the case of the conflict between the Visigoths and the Byzantines, politics and commerce followed different paths.²⁴

²² See Victoria Amorós Ruiz, “Revisión de los materiales del basurero extramuros del Tolmo de minateda,” in *Actas de la I Reunión Científica de Arqueología de Albacete*, ed. Blanca Gamo Parras and Rubí Sanz Gamo (Albacete, 2016): 745-60.

²³ Gutiérrez Lloret and Abad Casal, “Fortificaciones urbanas altomedievales del Tolmo de Minateda,” 141.

²⁴ Vizcaino Sánchez, *La presencia bizantina en Hispania*, 601.

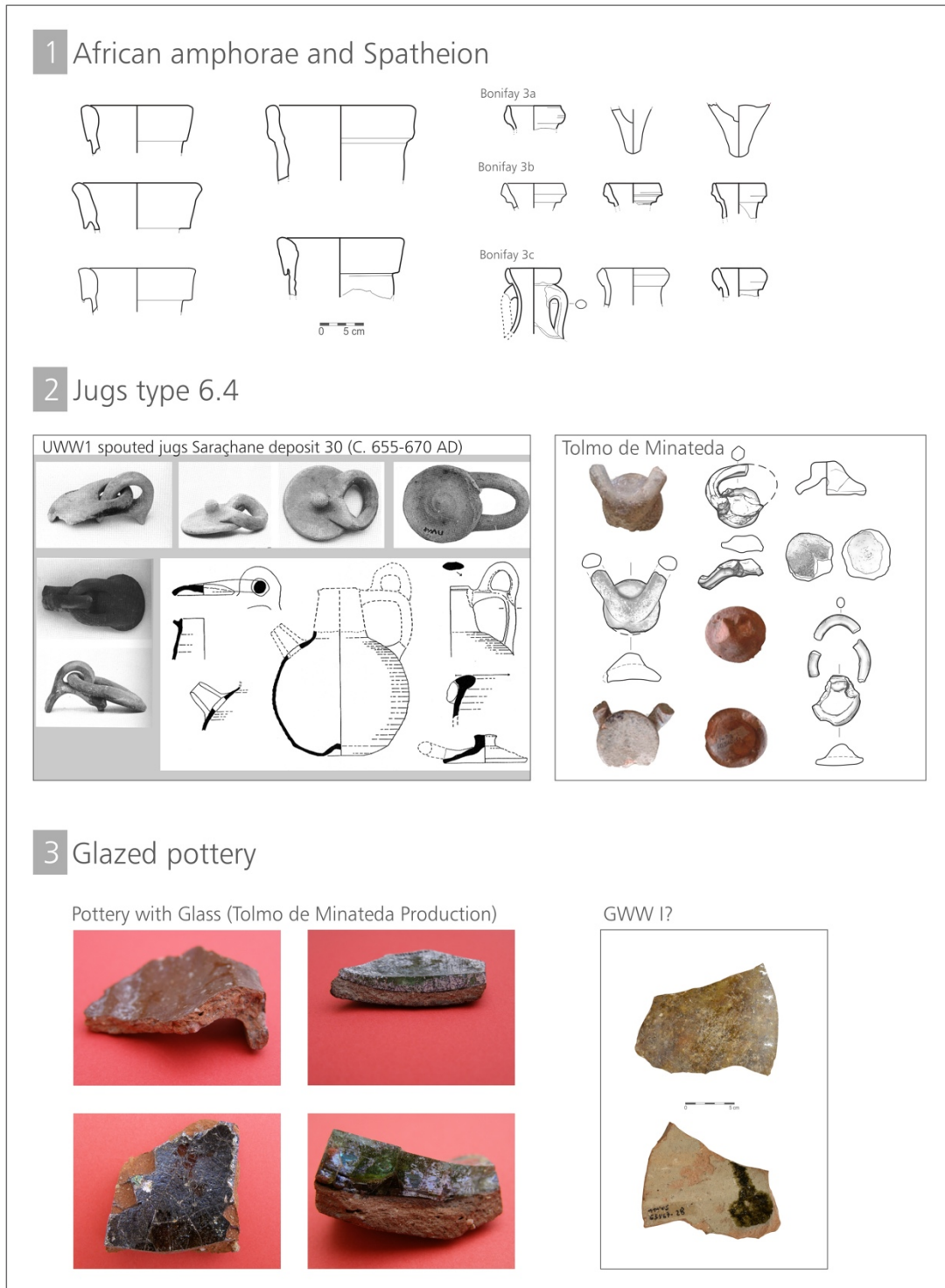


Fig. 5. 1- Amphorae importations. 2- Jugs of type 6.4 from El Tolmo and UWW1 spouted jugs from Constantinople. 3- Pottery with glass from El Tolmo and a fragment of a possible GWW1.

At this moment, El Tolmo was within the Mediterranean commercial networks and received large African amphoras like the Key 61 / Bonifay 49 A and B and smaller

containers such as the type Spatheion. We also find large amphoras of oriental origin next to others of which we cannot say for the moment, with total certainty, if they are of Eastern origin or are imitations of peninsular origin.²⁵

However, the economic power of the Visigothic elites of El Tolmo is much more evident in the second half of the seventh century, when trade with the eastern world becomes much more visible, while relations with the north of Africa are stagnant. It is also now when the productions with glass of El Tolmo are documented clearly, which indicates the existence of important glass workshops where craftsmen could have tried to produce glazed ceramics.²⁶ The importation of products from North Africa were reduced during the second half of the seventh century, but we still have large amphoras like some Keay 61 / Bonifay 49a and Bonifay 52 / ‘orlo a fascia’, as well as the smaller versions of Spatheia-type Bonifay 33. Products of Tunisian fine tableware, such as Hayes 105b and Hayes 99 D / Bonifay type 55, also arrived. At the same time trade with the eastern world is sustained and besides some amphora LRA 4 we find other objects with oriental origins, such as the jugs with attached lids (Fig. 4.2). In our site, these objects have been systematized as the type 6.4. They are potentially imitating metallic forms and can be found in different parts of the Mediterranean in the second half of the seventh century, as well as the first half of the eighth century. This kind of jug was documented and defined as ‘UWW1 spouted jugs’ by John W. Hayes in Constantinople in deposit 30 of the excavation of Saraçhane, which is given a chronology of *circa* 655 – 670.²⁷

²⁵ Amorós Ruiz, “Revisión de los materiales del basurero extramuros del Tolmo de minateda,” 750.

²⁶ Victoria Amorós Ruiz, *Contextos cerámicos altomedievales de El Tolmo de Minateda. Caracterización morfológica, cronotipológica y porcentual desde la perspectiva estratigráfica* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alicante, 2017), 374.

²⁷ John W. Hayes, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, Vol. 2, The Pottery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 38-41, 100-105, 160, fig. 39.

In the Iberian Peninsula, in addition to El Tolmo, this type of lid has only been documented at such seventh-century levels in Reccopolis and then again at the beginning of the eighth century in the Toledan provincial site of Vega Baja.²⁸ These jugs, with the product they contain, must have reached El Tolmo between the second half of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century according to the stratigraphic evidence.²⁹

Also documented in the excavation of the portico of the *domus episcopi* was a small fragment of glazed pottery belonging to a closed form (Fig. 4.3), which could possibly be a fragment of the production known as Glazed White Ware I (GWW I). This kind of glazed production is, in the opinion of some authors, that which marks the transition between the Late Roman period and the High Medieval age in the Byzantine zone of the Mediterranean.³⁰ The oldest types correspond to pieces of functional character without decoration, like jugs and pots, and were recorded by Hayes also in deposit 30 of the excavation of Saraçhane:

A broad distinction may be drawn between the earlier (mostly 7th century) and later (8th century +) products. The earlier ones, exemplified by those from deposit 30, are mostly or closed or semi

²⁸ See Michael Bonifay and Dario Bernal, "Recópolis, paradigma de las importaciones africanas en el Visigothorum Regnum. Un primer balance," *Recópolis y la ciudad en época visigoda*, *Zona arqueológica* 9 (2008): 99-115 and Yolanda Peña Cervantes, Virginia García-Entero and J. Gómez Rojo, "Aportaciones al conocimiento de la evolución histórica de la Vega Baja de Toledo. Estudio preliminar de la excavación de la parcela R-3," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie I, Nueva época, *Prehistoria y Arqueología* 2 (2009): 157-75.

²⁹ See Victoria Amorós Ruiz, Victor Cañavate Castejón, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, "Tapaderas articuladas tipo K de El Tolmo De Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, España): un ejemplo del comercio en el Altomedievo mediterráneo," *Archeologia Medievale* 41 (2014): 369-86.

³⁰ Juanita Vroom, "From one coast to another: early medieval ceramics in the southern Adriatic region," in *From One Sea to Another: Trading Places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages*, Proceedings of the International Conference, Comacchio, 27th-29th March 2009, SCISAM 3, ed. Sauro Gelichi and Richard Hodges (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 355.

closed forms and undecorated, while in a later phase (deposits 32-35)

dishes come to predominate, and close shapes are generally rare.³¹

Metal Objects

Different metallic objects that are still being studied were discovered within the contexts of the abandonment and robbery of the episcopal complex, especially in the room next to the baptistery. These objects were part of the liturgical equipment and decoration of the cathedral. Among them are iron load-bearing elements (nails and hooks), suspension chains and bronze lamps, as well as fragments of liturgical recipients, a teaspoon and crosses or votive-crown pendants that seem to come from other areas. The lamps, presented in this study,³² are without any doubt one of the most peculiar elements, since there are enough preserved to reconstruct two round hanging lamps of the type *lustre abras* of Maria Xanthopoulou's research.³³ The first one belongs to a typology common in the early Christian era, with Coptic and Byzantine elements, that continues into the Islamic period.³⁴ This type usually has a cylindrical body, which has not been preserved, and has attached articulated arms ready to fit the glass lamps. The arm found in El Tolmo is simple and is clearly similar to some North

³¹ Hayes, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul*, 15.

³² The group is studied by Sonia Gutiérrez and Blanca Gamó in *Ministeria altaris. Orfebrería y ajuar litúrgico de la sede episcopal Eiotana (El Tolmo de Minateda, Hellín)*. Some pieces were first presented at the exhibition, *Hispania Gothorum. San Ildefonso y el reino visigodo de Toledo* (Museo de Santa Cruz, Toledo, 2007), 392 and 557-58.

³³ The *lustres*, *polycandela* or round hanging lamps are essential for lighting churches and are always part of the *ornamenta ecclesiae et liturgicae*, as a *servitium luminium* of those. See Maria Xanthopoulou, *Les lampes en bronze a l'époque paléochrétienne*, *Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive* 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 46; Gisella Ripoll, "Ornamentae ecclesiae. Propuesta de vocabulario," in *Art i Litúrgia al'occident medieval, 8th Colloqui Internacional* (Barcelona, 2008), 17-27; Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier médiéval*. Tome 1 (Paris: Editions Heimdal, 2010); and, Juan Zozaya, "Aeraria de transición: objetos con base de cobre de los siglos VII al IX en al-Andalus," *Arqueología Medieval* 11 (2010): 11-24.

³⁴ Manuel Gómez Moreno, *Iglesias mozárabes. Arte español de los siglos IX a XI* (Madrid, 1919), 393, fig. 218.

African examples, especially the *polycandelon* of Leptis Magna.³⁵ The second type is represented by three decorated arms crowned with the lamp or candle receptacle that would be attached to a main body. These belong to at least two different lamps, though we only reproduce here one of them. The shape, like other pieces, seems to draw inspiration from older prototypes, such as the example from Aquilea, but is still closer to a Palestinian piece that was discovered later.³⁶ It is not our aim to enlarge on an area object of another study, but we want to highlight the fact that the existence of such pieces, possibly coming from distant workshops, reinforces the status of the complex and its sponsors.³⁷

Currency

The studies of the currencies within their stratigraphic context present us with a scenario where, throughout the Visigothic period in the city located in El Tolmo, coins of the Roman period of the third and fourth centuries were circulated as usual.³⁸ But we also have, in different contexts, the presence of gold coins minted by the Visigothic state as a symbol of its power. If the presence of Visigothic golden coins in *castra* and *ciuitates* is considered evidence of the involvement of the elite (*potentes*) in the collection of taxes,³⁹ the discoveries in El Tolmo reinforce the role of the bishop in the

³⁵ See G. Caputo, "Sulle chiese de Leptis Magna e sul corredo sacro dell'assimilazione cristiana delta basilica Severiana," *Atti delta Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Rendiconti* 57 (1986): 203-32.

³⁶ Xanthopoulou, *Les lampes en bronze a l'époque paléochrétienne*, 46.

³⁷ Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia Bautista, "The episcopal complex of Eio-El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, Spain)," 283.

³⁸ Carolina Doménech Belda, José Antonio Mellado Rivera and Víctor Cañavate Castejón, "Estratos y monedas: el pórtico del complejo episcopal de El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete)," in *Actas de la I Reunión Científica de Arqueología de Albacete*, ed. Blanca Gamó Parras and Rubí Sanz Gamó (Albacete, 2016), 699.

³⁹ See Iñaki Martín Viso, "Tremisses y potentes en el nordeste de Lusitania (siglos VI- VII)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 38-1 (2008): 75-200.

tax organization and the active participation of the ecclesiastical hierarchies in tax collection.⁴⁰

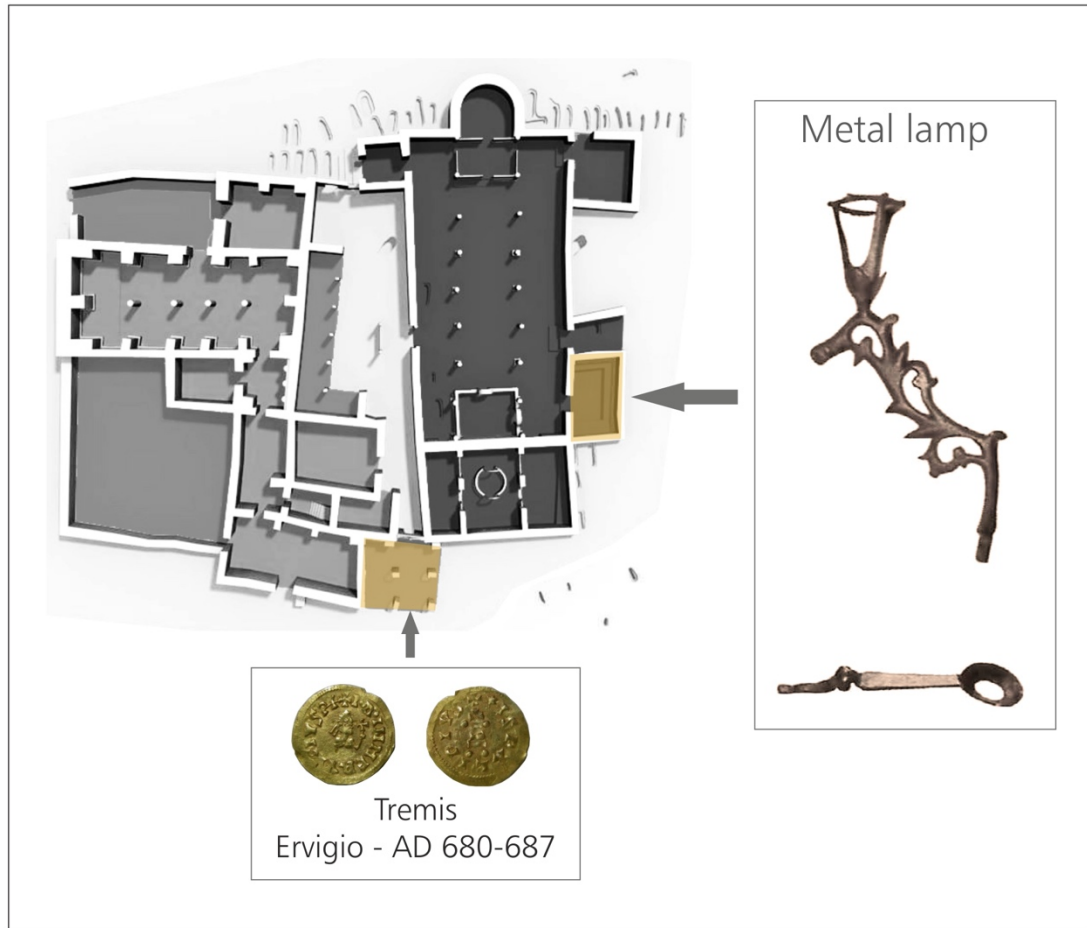


Fig. 6 Metal Lamp and Visigothic gold coin in the spaces of the episcopal complex in which they were found (in yellow).

Conclusion

The very reorganization of the city at the end of the sixth century and at the beginning of the seventh century is, in itself, a sign of the power of a political and religious elite that decided to control a wide area, routes of communication and the resources that this

⁴⁰ Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia Bautista, “The episcopal complex of Eio-El Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete, Spain),” 282.

territory generated. Likewise, the place chosen to build the episcopal complex in the upper part of the city and visible from the nearest areas was also a form of control and visualization of the power that these elites represented.

Through the various archaeological materials documented in El Tolmo, it becomes possible to understand that the groups which administered the spaces of power of this city also had control of economic production. This elite was responsible for the collection of taxes and the organization of workshops and craftsmen, activities increased the former's authority and provided them with sufficient purchasing power to bring into that small city, located between the interior of the Iberian Peninsula and the coast, products of the eastern Mediterranean which were also distributed to the royal-associated Visigothic city of Reccopolis.

This elite urban consumption of high-priced products reflects El Tolmo's role as the economic head that managed an independent region and gathered surplus (money or in-kind) collected through taxes. The economic control of the diocese over the region guaranteed not only the elite's lavish consumption, but also the reinvestment of part of that profit in private (residences for the civil and ecclesiastical authorities) or public (churches) construction.⁴¹

These same elites managed the religious life of the community and, with that power, led beliefs and ideologies that justified their power. In the church and the baptistery, we find out forms and decorative motifs that could be understood by the congregation, who would be able to interpret their meaning and location in the liturgical path. But the

⁴¹ Brogiolo, "Le origini della città medievale," 147.

management of ideological resources is also shown through the control of knowledge and writing, unequivocal symbols of power in any era, which in El Tolmo are presented through the traces left on the walls of one room of the episcopal palace.

The combination of these elements represents a sample of the prestige and power across different areas and shows us that Visigothic elites exerted control over production processes, economic resources and ideological symbols. This exercise of multi-dimensional authority worked to consolidate the power of Visigothic elites, which is a phenomenon made evident by the objects of El Tolmo de Minateda.

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