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THE LATE ROMAN MAUSOLEUM OF SÁDABA (ZARAGOZA, SPAIN). NEW SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MONUMENT

Jerónimo SÁNCHEZ-VELASCO

Escuela de Arte “Dionisio Ortiz”, Córdoba, Spain
jeronimosanchez@eado.es

Leticia TOBALINA-PULIDO

Departamento de Ciencias Históricas,
Universidad de Cantabria, Spain
leticia.tobalina@unican.es

Abstract: The Roman monument known as “La Sinagoga” of Sádaba is one of the best-preserved late Roman examples in Aragón, although it has been scarcely studied since the pioneering works of García y Bellido over half a century ago. Between 2012 and 2013, a campaign was conducted to virtualize and document the building. In this article, based on a comprehensive comparative analysis with similar structures on the Iberian Peninsula and new data obtained, we present an architectural and historical reinterpretation of the monument that substantially differs from previous proposals. This article includes updated plans and establishes parallels that allow for a comprehensive understanding of its significance and functionality.

Keywords: *funerary monument, late Roman period, mausoleum, photogrammetry, Spain.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The monument known as “La Sinagoga” of Sádaba is one of the best-preserved Late Roman mausoleums on the Iberian Peninsula. Located near Sádaba (province of Zaragoza), within the region of Cinco Villas, it is situated next to the modern Las Bárdenas canal, which, as we will see, divides the archaeological site into two parts: on one side, a funerary monument linked to a Roman villa of still uncertain chronology, where only its baths and some rooms have been excavated; on the other, a possible Visigothic necropolis, although plundered and little studied. This villa, just 2 km from the Roman city of Los Bañales, can be classified as a suburban villa due to its proximity and probable functional relationship with the urban centre. The region of Cinco Villas, in the Aragonese Pre-Pyrenees, is marked by the presence of the Riguel River, which flows through lands characterized by small hills and extensive plains. Key locations in this landscape include Cabeza Ladrero, Campo Real, Fillera, and Tarraca, which were central to ancient settlement patterns. The region hosts a notable density of late Roman and late antique archaeological sites, particularly in Middle Navarra and the Cinco Villas area in Aragón. This is due to work carried out in Roman towns such as Santa Criz de Eslava and Andelo in Navarra, as well as the sites documented through surveys in projects like Los Bañales (since 2008) and Cabeza Ladrero (since 2015). These investigations have documented a significant number of Roman and Late Roman settlements, showcasing the richness and diversity of settlements in this area of the western Pre-Pyrenees. The Roman road network, with routes such as Andelo-Pompelo, Pompelo-Filleras I, and Filleras

I-Tarraca, also highlights the strategic connectivity of this region. This communication system reinforces the territorial importance and settlement density both in Roman times and in later periods, consolidating its archaeological relevance in the peninsular context.

Within this context, La Sinagoga evidences the continuity of rural Roman settlement during the last centuries of the Roman Empire, as well as the presence of elites in the early moments of Late Antiquity.

In this article, based on a comprehensive comparative analysis with similar structures on the Iberian Peninsula and new data obtained, we present an architectural and historical reinterpretation of the monument that substantially differs from previous proposals. This article includes updated plans and establishes parallels that allow for a comprehensive understanding of its significance and functionality.

2. A REPEATED AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE OVERSIGHT. (FEW) PREVIOUS STUDIES.

The first (and brief) known academic mention of the monument was made in 1944 in a publication by Galiay. In 1949, he gave it more attention,⁴⁰ even publishing a general photograph of the monument (Fig. 1). In the 1950s, we find two more publications,⁴¹ one of them includes what would be the first plan of the building, which, incomprehensibly, appears in a book dedicated to the heritage of the Jewish community in Spain.



Fig. 1. Photograph taken by Galiay in 1949 of the so-called Synagogue of Sádaba.

We had to wait until 1962 for A. García Bellido, along with architect José Menéndez Pidal, to visit the site, conducting (according to the information he provided) two archaeological campaigns, although it is not certain whether they excavated or merely cleaned the visible remains. These campaigns resulted in three brief publications focused on the funerary building: a report,⁴² a summary⁴³ and a brief note in a scientific journal⁴⁴ which hardly differ in the data provided. After severely criticizing the work of his predecessors, García y Bellido describes the mausoleum, providing measurements

⁴⁰ GALIAY SARAÑANA 1949.

⁴¹ CANTERA 1955, 267, with a schematic plan in figure 42; ABBAD 1957, 27, figs. 12–13.

⁴² GARCÍA BELLIDO 1962, 13 ss.

⁴³ GARCÍA BELLIDO 1963a.

⁴⁴ GARCÍA BELLIDO 1963b, 166–170.

of what he considers most relevant (parts of the building, windows, bricks, etc.). He focuses particularly on the construction system, which he claims is similar to that of aqueducts preserved in Mérida or the mosque of Córdoba (*sic*). He also believes that the mausoleum would have been covered by a barrel vault. It seems that during his work, he was able to recover what he defines as a ‘monolithic sarcophagus with very rough and shallow carving’. These characteristics did not allow him to date the sarcophagus. However, this does not prevent him from suggesting a date for the building in the mid-4th century AD, although no solid argumentation for this date is provided. However, the work provides detailed photos, plans, and, above all, a series of ideal reconstructions through drawings (Fig. 2): it would be a building with a Latin cross plan, vaulted, and with what he calls an ‘entrance narthex’. It is evident that he uses the Late Roman mausoleum of Galla Placidia⁴⁵ as a reference (if not a direct model). In 2003, due to its uniqueness, the monument was declared a Site of Cultural Interest by the Government of Aragón. Despite this legal status—and its concerning structural conservation state in several areas—the mausoleum had not been analyzed in detail again, nor had any consolidation or preservation activities been undertaken.

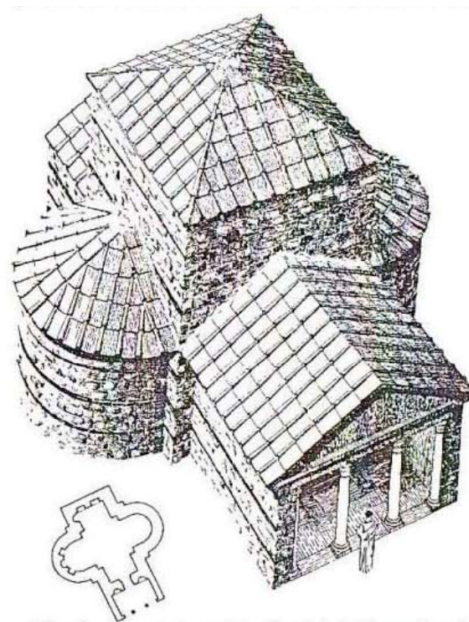


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the mausoleum according to GARCÍA BELLIDO, 1963b, p. 169, Fig. 7.

3. THE 2012 AND 2013 CAMPAIGNS. NON-INVASIVE STUDIES AND ANALYSES.

After years of neglect, preparations to study the mausoleum began in 2011. An ambitious scientific project was proposed, following modern and proven methodologies, divided into three campaigns: one for general cleaning, surveying, and sample collection for analysis, which took place in 2012; another for photogrammetry and geometric documentation of the building, which was to be carried out in 2013; and a

⁴⁵ MAUSKOPF DELIYANNIS 2010, 74–83. You can see a model recreated in 3D on the following website: <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/galla-placidia-2503f91fc241424b9e536787ed36b890>. Accessed 11 November 2024.

third for excavation, planned for 2014, but which never took place. This study was also related to obtaining scientific data on a late site and its territorial context that could provide reliable information for the doctoral thesis that the second author of this publication was beginning at that time.

The 2012 campaign focused on reviewing the abundant remains to detect and separate identifiable elements: voussoirs, decoration and roofing remnants, fragments of cladding, etc. All the undergrowth was manually removed. Finally, photographs of the entire building were taken, both general and detailed. Once cleared of all debris and undergrowth, an initial approach was made to analyze the mausoleum architecturally. It was conclusively verified that the entire building had been conceived as a single project and executed in a single construction phase (Fig. 3), which included not only the walls but also the interior and entrance niches. For the construction, the technique of *opus vittatum mixtum* was used on the exterior of solid walls that were filled with masonry and brick remnants, all bound with abundant lime mortar. Unfortunately, the use of this construction technique was clearly visible due to the large breaks in the eastern exedra, as well as the deterioration on the exterior of the northern exedra and in almost all the exedras on their inner parts. Part of what must have been the floor of the building, made of *opus signinum*, was preserved on the western wall of the entrance. This type of hydraulic mortar was also used in the cladding of the niches, although it is best preserved in



Fig. 3. Four photographs of the final results of the cleaning work carried out on the building in 2012.

the interior of the northern exedra, at its base.

It was evident that there were hardly any areas left with sufficient archaeological record to propose an archaeological intervention with guarantees of obtaining some diagnostic element that would allow for a relative dating of the monument. The original floors had been completely removed, likely to gain depth after the abandonment and collapse of the building, which, according to locals, had been used as a livestock pen for decades. For this reason, samples of bricks

and, above all, mortars were taken, which were conveniently preserved in isolated and sealed plastic containers, with the intention of conducting analyses to obtain an absolute dating.

The campaign was completed with two complementary actions. The first, a non-intensive survey around the monument, allowed us to confirm the abandonment and deep deterioration of the Roman villa to which the mausoleum belongs. In this survey, we also found that the site was more extensive than previously thought, as a plundered necropolis with a morphology that could be provisionally attributed to the Visigothic period was detected on the other side of the canal. The second action was to visit all the archaeological sites near Sádaba, where we confirmed something we had already suspected when documenting the heritage of the region: the local construction technique in Roman times (and later periods) is based on the massive use of ashlar. This detail is very important, as we will see, for the correct interpretation of the monument.

The following year, in 2013, it was decided to undertake a comprehensive geometric documentation, published in 2016⁴⁶ in detail by one of the authors along with the team from the Geometric Heritage Documentation Laboratory of the University of the Basque Country. During the geometric documentation, the construction history of the monument was reconstructed through the stratigraphic analysis of the walls. In this case, an autoptic analysis of the building was carried out, during which the initial stratigraphic data were recorded on SAV forms (forms specifically designed to quickly register information) complemented with some sketches. Subsequently, these data were transferred onto an orthophoto, performing an elevation reading by phases.

The initial data from the autoptic analysis and the reading of the building confirmed that the materials, construction techniques, and especially the mortars, are very homogeneous, which usually indicates that the building was constructed in a single phase. No successive modifications or reconstructions of the building or parts of it were recorded. However, the lack of large portions of the wall due to repeated looting actions is noticeable. It should be noted that this research methodology has limitations, as it does not provide chronological dating, neither absolute nor relative; it only provides the sequencing of the building's construction phases, which are related to each other.

After years of requesting funds, we finally obtained financial support in 2019 to send the samples obtained in the first campaign for analysis at the National Accelerator Centre (Seville), part of the Spanish National Research Council. Given the poor quality of the organic material found in the samples, we chose to experiment with a new dating methodology that was being initiated at this centre. The treatment applied is based on the extraction of the carbonate phase of the lime mortars.

⁴⁶ VALLE MELÓN *et alii* 2016.

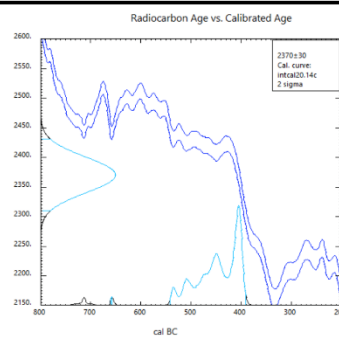
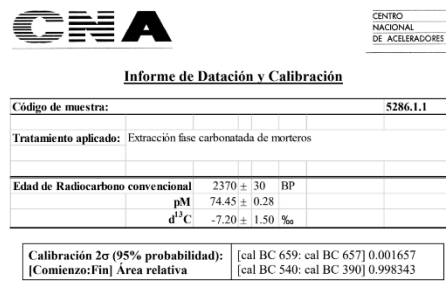
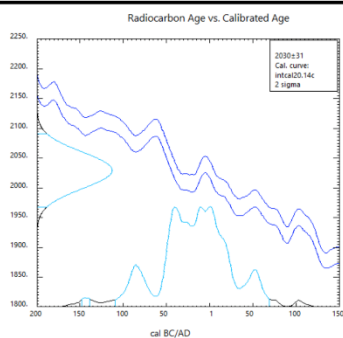
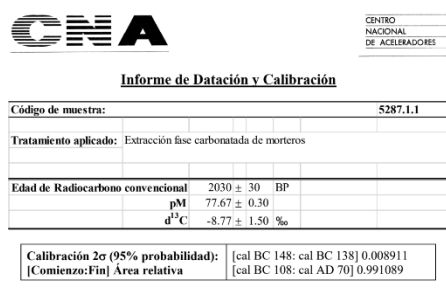


Fig. 4. Results of the dating and calibration reports for the mortar samples obtained from the mausoleum.

In other words, the dating was not of the organic material found in the mortar, but of when the mortar itself was made. We received the results in 2020, and they were very frustrating (Fig. 4), since the dating obtained after the calibration of the samples gave a date from the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. for the construction of the building, something that was evidently impossible. In scientific fields related to the Humanities, it is uncommon to talk about failures, but they are also useful and should be acknowledged and shared, because after all, this is also science. They provide crucial information when choosing which method to use and what type of samples can be worked with; they help to know what new methodologies are being implemented and what their objectives are, as there may be other teams attempting similar solutions (and perhaps having more success) for buildings where the stratigraphic sequence is almost impossible to obtain.

4. NEW DATA, NEW INTERPRETATIONS

With the new planimetric and structural data, and despite the lack of absolute dating, we believe it is possible to provide a new perspective on the monument and an archaeological and historical context more closely aligned with the material reality we have than previous interpretations.

To begin with, we are looking at a building with a Greek cross plan (Fig. 5), with its four equal arms, and not a Latin cross as proposed by García Bellido. The entity, thickness, and structural functionality of the walls that make up this cross (Fig. 6) are completely different from the entrance portico, which is consistent but has thinner walls. That is, the load that both types of walls can bear is different. For this reason, we consider that the entrance structure corresponds to an independent portico providing access to the building, with two parallel walls ending in pillars and connected by a continuous perpendicular foundation, which would serve to

support a pair of columns at this entrance. Possibly to frame the entrance, the pillars could have been decorated with attached pilasters.



Fig. 5. Aerial view of the monument. 2013 campaign.

This type of entrance structure is very similar to the portico surrounding the funerary church of Sant Miquel in the episcopal complex of Egara (Terrasa, Barcelona),⁴⁷ where we find the same scheme in the façade. In this building, dated to the 5th century A.D., like the entire episcopal complex,⁴⁸ this portico would have⁴⁹ a single-pitched roof. We believe that in the case of Sádaba, the roof of this entrance space would be resolved in the same way, attaching it to the main wall. The

⁴⁷ GARCÍA/MORO/TUSET 2009.

⁴⁸ GARCÍA/MORO/TUSET 2009.

⁴⁹ GARCÍA/MORO/TUSET 2009, 127–145, figs. 258–259.



Fig. 6. Aerial view of the monument. Detail of the differences between the thickness of the monument walls and its entrance portico. 2013 campaign.



Fig. 7. Entrance to the monument. Photograph taken from the interior. 2012 campaign.

main entrance would be resolved with a splayed opening, also topped with a semi-dome (Fig. 7) and with chamfered jambs.

In relation to the above, the question of how the building was covered should be reconsidered. We start from the premise that the enormous thickness of the walls indicates a structural need directly related to a considerable height of the building. The existence of four external buttresses attached to the junctions between exedras is another piece of evidence that would also support this hypothesis (Fig. 8).⁵⁰ The large number of small voussoirs found may make sense within this architectural structure, that is, they are an indication of how the building was covered, which must have been with domes or vaults.



Fig. 8. Detail of one of the best-preserved buttresses. 2012 campaign.

In this regard, let us continue with the comparison to the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, taken as a reference by García Bellido. In the central space of the mausoleum in Ravenna, four angles are formed by the intersection of the exedras. But despite the considerable height of this central body, the architects did not consider it necessary to reinforce the exterior intersections with buttresses. In the mausoleum of Sádaba, it was indeed considered necessary, which is undoubtedly related to the solidity of the walls, the great height that the central body must have had, and the skill of the architects in solving load problems. They saw that it was necessary to accumulate on the exterior the mass of wall removed from the interior angles, creating a solution that was both practical and aesthetic. Consequently, and based on the data we have, it is almost certain that the east and west exedras, the semicircular ones, were covered by a half-dome roof. We do not know for sure if the north and south exedras, the quadrangular ones, were covered by vaults or half-domes, although we lean towards the latter option.

⁵⁰ For some researchers (such as UTRERO 2006), the buttresses are typically early medieval elements and unrelated to late architecture and the Visigothic period, a statement that, as we see, is not supported.

This solution would give more solidity to the whole, making it more uniform aesthetically, especially considering the Greek cross plan. Therefore, a central space would be created, framed by four half-domes that would support a central dome.

The most abundant and closest examples of this type of mausoleum with a central Greek cross plan are found in Tarraco (Tarragona), in the sacred area around the Francolí River, especially linked to its southern basilica, whether attached, freestanding, or in the form of a crypt. This complex has been generically dated, like Egara, to the 5th century A.D.⁵¹

On the other hand, the entire building of La Sinagoga was constructed in a single phase, using the *opus vittatum mixtum* technique on the exterior of the walls, with a filling of masonry and large amounts of lime mortar (Fig. 9). The use of this very resistant technique, combined with what we mentioned earlier about the thickness of the walls, would confirm our hypothesis of a building project of considerable height, where it would be necessary to counteract the counterweights exerted by the roof of the large central space. The existence of mausoleums of these characteristics has also been documented in the 5th century A.D. Tarraco, thanks to archaeology and historical sources. This is the case of the central-plan mausoleum located between the two basilicas in the Francolí area, whose enormous height we can infer from engravings that depict the walls still preserved in the 19th century.

The use of *opus vittatum mixtum* is not very common in Hispania. The best examples are associated with imperial works, such as Cercadilla⁵² (Córdoba). The use of *opus vittatum mixtum* is not very common in Hispania. The best examples are associated with imperial works, such as Cercadilla.

The floors, as we have mentioned, have disappeared, but in certain areas, remains are preserved that allow us to confidently assume they were made in *opus signinum*. This technique was also used as a coating in the niches. The use of this technique in floors and coatings is typical of late funerary monuments in Hispania, from Tarraco in the northeast to Punta del Moral (Huelva)⁵³ in the southwest.

If we focus on the decorative details of the building, we find an interesting mix between typical High Imperial elements and innovations characteristic of the Late Roman world. Among the former, in the north exedra, we have the typical recesses made specifically to place what we believe are the relief portraits of the deceased. In Hispania, there are hardly any funerary monuments that have these recesses, which do seem to be very common in Italy.⁵⁴ If we consider the preserved reliefs (for example, in Mérida),⁵⁵ most of them are, in themselves, altars, and are not designed as reliefs to be embedded.

Other elements, on the other hand, are typical of the Late



Fig. 9. Detail of the interior construction system of the wall. 2012 campaign.

Roman world, such as splayed windows. The mausoleum of Sádaba has a magnificent example (albeit incomplete) in the same north exedra, which is practically identical to the windows of the same type preserved in Sant Miquel (Fig. 10) and in the apse of Sant Pere, both in ancient Egara (Terrasa) and dated to the 5th century A.D.⁵⁶

More puzzling (and problematic) is undoubtedly the niche in the west wall of the north exedra itself, located next to the recesses for reliefs. It is a very narrow and elongated niche (Fig. 11a). At its base, a strong base covered with *opus signinum* is still preserved, which seems to be designed to adequately support some heavy element. We believe that this clearly privileged space should house a prominent element, which in Hispania usually corresponds to a toga statue⁵⁷ (although we do not rule out other options, this is the most frequent). Toga statues are always associated with civic honors displayed in a forum, but the reality is that many commemorative funerary sculptures of the deceased are toga statues placed in funerary monuments located in the *fundi* of the *possessores*, which act as true 'private forums' of memory for the privileged classes.⁵⁸ The problem arises when we compare the usual dimensions of a toga statue with the size of the niche, where it would be impossible to place a standard statue of this type.

However, there is a possibility that must be considered. During the Late Roman and Late Antique periods, there was a general trend to stylize and elongate figures, in a clear transformation of the classical canon. Recently, a sculpture found in Zurbano (Álava) in 1915 (Fig. 11b), which had been considered a Romanesque sculpture since its discovery,⁵⁹ has

⁵¹ LÓPEZ VILAR 2006, 218.

⁵² Regarding the date, meaning and evolution of the Cercadilla complex, with all the problems that it has been dragging on for years, SÁNCHEZ VELASCO 2018, 113–119.

⁵³ SÁNCHEZ VELASCO 2018, 249–250; SÁNCHEZ VELASCO 2010, 130–131; DEL AMO 2003.

⁵⁴ As in the necropolises of Via Appia Antica, those in Pompeii or Ostia Antica, to give some well-known examples.

⁵⁵ EDMONDSON *et alii* 2001.

⁵⁶ GARCÍA/MORO/TUSET 2009.

⁵⁷ KOBUSCH 2014, no.cat. 64 and no.cat. 135.

⁵⁸ A magnificent work in this regard can be seen in MELCHOR GIL 2013.

⁵⁹ ENCISO VIANA 1975, 640–641; MUSEO 1968, 9, no. 1, with plate.



Fig. 10. a) Detail of the interior of the northern exedra, focusing on the rectangular niches that would have been decorated with family funerary reliefs. b) detail of the sash window of Sant Miquel de Egara (Terrasa, Barcelona), 5th century AD.

been catalogued as Late Roman⁶⁰ and included in the largest database of late sculpture in Europe.⁶¹ Perhaps, in Sádaba, we are facing what we might call ‘indirect evidence’ of this type of late sculptures. The western exedra, very deteriorated, has three small niches to which we cannot give a sure interpretation, although they may be there to place some type of temporary interior lighting element.

Like the vast majority of funerary monuments linked to the privileged classes and the great landowners of the Empire, there are no remains of burials in the ground because, simply, these elites were buried in sarcophagi.

A magnificent example of a 4th-century sarcophagus can be found in Castiliscar⁶² (Figs. 12a and 12b), a few kilometres northwest of Sádaba, but whose original location is unknown. In this regard, according to what was published by García Bellido, we know that remains of an undecorated sarcophagus were found in the ruins of the mausoleum. It is possible that it was an undecorated sarcophagus. But it is also possible that it was the back part of a decorated sarcophagus, which usually does not have reliefs, as is the case (nearby) with the sarcophagus of Castiliscar. We have been unable to locate this fragment, so we cannot advance any further hypotheses on the matter. The data presented here allow us to maintain as a working hypothesis an attribution of the Sádaba mausoleum to the 5th century AD, and not to the 4th, as traditionally maintained, which would place us in a rather late period.



Fig. 11. a) Detail of the niche in the western wall. 2012 campaign. b) Photograph of the so-called Togado de Zurbano, taken from the website <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/>, catalog number LSA-2436.

Pending new analyses and investigations, we maintain this dating as the most probable. Likewise, with the data we have handled, we have outlined a hypothesis for the reconstruction of the building (Fig.13), a new image more in line with the archaeological reality presented in this work.

⁶⁰ MARCKS 2009, 336–337, no. 208, pl. 64/2 (Roman, post-Severan *togatus*).

⁶¹ LSA-2436.

⁶² SCHLUNK 1947.

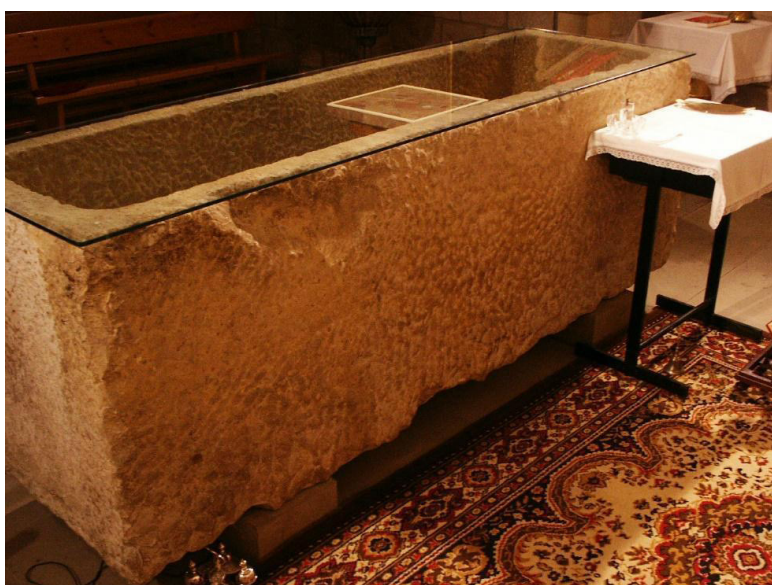
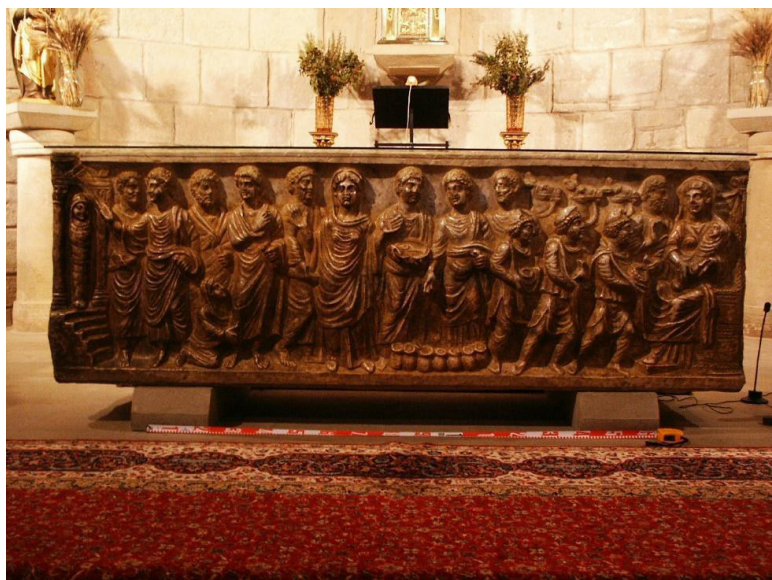


Fig. 12. Late Roman sarcophagus from Castiliscar. 2012 campaign.
a) Detail of the decorated front; b) unworked back side.

5. DISCUSSION

The presence of a mausoleum of such monumental entity in an area so close to Navarra, so different from the local architecture and so closely related in formal, constructive, and stylistic terms to the funerary monuments of Tarraco in the 5th century AD, leads us to consider the historical context of this building. It also makes us question whether there could have been any relationship between the two places during the tumultuous 5th century in Hispania. We believe that, beyond a mere stylistic coincidence or the taste of the powerful family that commissioned it, there is a historical explanation that closely links the area of Los Bañales and Sádaba with Tarraco.

After the penetration of several waves of external peoples into Hispania in 409 AD, Rome had almost completely lost control of the peninsula. The only significant stronghold really under the power of the Western Empire was *Tarraco* and part of *Tarraconensis*. In fact, *Tarraconensis* would be the base from which Emperor Honorius would try to recover



Fig. 13. Proposed reconstruction of the funerary monument, based on new research. Drawing by Setefilla Jiménez Velasco.

Hispania through a military agreement with the Visigoths,⁶³ who began a campaign in 415 AD. Subsequently, from 419 onwards, Rome's attempts to consolidate its dominance in the north of the peninsula and, from there, to recover the rest would not cease for much of the century,⁶⁴ at least until 470, always with intense military activity by imperial armies, either to try to subdue the barbarians or to quell the constant revolts of the Bagaudae. In fact, in 460, Emperor Majorian was in the area on his way to Cartagena.

Rome's interest in maintaining control over northeastern Hispania is not surprising, as Tarraco has been the military port par excellence connecting Italy and Hispania since the Second Punic War. But it is also the most important military base from which the border crossings of the Pyrenees that connect Italy and Gaul with the Peninsula can be controlled. And it is here that the strategic, logistical,

⁶³ COLLINS 2005, 20.

⁶⁴ Date on which the presence of the last great imperial authority in Tarraco, Doge Vicente, is dated. REMOLA/PÉREZ 2013, 176.

and political importance of the routes that connect *Tarraco* with *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza), *Pompelo* (Pamplona), and the Pyrenees becomes vital. Whether from the coast or from the Ebro River, the area of the Cinco Villas and, specifically, the surroundings of the Roman city of Los Bañales, is a mandatory passage to control the mountain passes of the western Pyrenees, supply armies, or communicate with Gaul and the Atlantic. The Ebro valley and the pre-Pyrenean area are sufficiently fertile lands to supply the necessary armies in a hypothetical Roman reconquest of Hispania. We can say that the strategic and logistical importance of the area was more than evident to the Empire long before this moment.

Both *Tarraco* and *Barcino* and their surrounding areas will see how the presence of the Roman state brought with it a period of feverish construction, with both civil and religious buildings. Thus, the latest research points to Centcelles as a praetorium for the Roman military authorities in *Tarraco*.⁶⁵ In the same city, a complete sacred area will be built around the Francolí River, with enormous Roman-style basilicas dedicated to the local martyr Fructuoso.⁶⁶ New bishoprics will even appear, such as *Egara*⁶⁷ (Terrasa), which will transform places that were practically undeveloped into episcopal complexes of an entity similar to the large cities on the coast.

Our working hypothesis includes Los Bañales and its suburban villa of Sádaba in this context of the remnants of Rome in Hispania, where its highest material expression would be the mausoleum we analyze in this publication. It is at this moment that the historical explanation for its construction makes more sense, directly linked to the building programs of the last bastion of the Empire on the Peninsula. In fact, such a building, so different from everything found in the area, must have been commissioned by architects related to *Tarraco*, which would be proof of the closeness of the family that commissioned it with the regional elites and the imperial officials residing there.

With the data we have, we can ensure that the entire area experienced significant development in the Late Roman and Late Antique periods. However, historical research on this period has been almost nonexistent, as it has excessively focused on studying the High Imperial period. Thus, in addition to the important road network in this area straddling Middle Navarra and the Cinco Villas of Aragón. This is demonstrated, for example, by the magnificent series of Late Empire milestones found in the Cinco Villas region, which inform us of the existence of important Roman roads⁶⁸ in the area and also of Rome's insistence on keeping them in good condition. A significant number of milestones (at least 35) dated between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD have been recorded, showing a provincial interest in maintaining the road system in this area at least until the early 4th century AD. The last milestones we documented in the area date from 337 AD and correspond to Emperor Constantine I.⁶⁹ This density of stone milestones attests to the construction and/or repair activity of certain road sections and also

shows the administrative interest in keeping this area active. Additionally, there may also be propagandistic purposes, as in the 4th century AD, but already from the 3rd century AD, these acquire an honorary value.⁷⁰ This has been emphasized by J. Velaza, who points out that the process of 'neutralizing the epigraphic functionality in favor of undoubtedly the honorary content'⁷¹ begins in the Neronian and Flavian periods; its intensity was progressive until it became general in the 4th century AD, a century in which the Constantinian milestones are its maximum expression.

On the other hand, in Los Bañales, the city closest to the site discussed in this article, the monumental area would be amortized before the second half of the 3rd century AD,⁷² with the population possibly relocating to the hill of El Pueyo, where a possible settlement occupied from the 4th century AD to at least the 8th century AD has been documented.⁷³ Additionally, the excavations carried out between 2012 and 2014 by A. Jordán's team in El Pueyo identified the possible Late Imperial wall, dated to the first half of the 4th century AD according to the associated ceramic typologies found.⁷⁴ Additionally, fragments of intermediate/late Hispanic Terra Sigillata pottery were documented in the area of the baths, although without further details about these productions.⁷⁵

There is also significant vitality observed in the rural area, with archaeological evidence of the presence of elites in the countryside,⁷⁶ as demonstrated by the sarcophagus of Castiliscar. Its discovery is unclear; it was rediscovered in the 19th century by the parish priest of the church of San Juan Evangelista, but it is unknown whether it comes from Sos del Rey Católico or Castiliscar. It is a sarcophagus with continuous frieze decoration depicting scenes of the Resurrection of Lazarus, the Hemorrhaging Woman, the Orant, the 'contaminated' scene of the multiplication of fish and the conversion of water into wine, and the Adoration of the Magi. It is dated to the 4th century AD, specifically between 315 and 350 AD.⁷⁷

Additionally, although the number of active sites decreases from the 5th century onwards,⁷⁸ it seems that their importance and monumentality increase. Thus, for example, in the area under *Tarraco*'s control, a process of reunification of settlements into large Late Antique estates occurs⁷⁹ as evidenced by the Synagogue of Sádaba itself, where the preserved mausoleum denotes the importance of the place, but also the maintenance of activity in the countryside. The Zaticón of Biota also shows a possible regrouping of the population, in this case around a possible hamlet or village.⁸⁰ Political events of the time, such as the Visigothic settlement in the 5th century AD, may have precipitated events, potentially accelerating the phenomenon of property

⁷⁰ VELAZA 2016.

⁷¹ VELAZA 2016, 215.

⁷² ANDREU PINTADO/DELAGE GONZÁLEZ 2017; ROMERO NOVELLA 2023, 45–47.

⁷³ JORDÁN LORENZO *et alii* 2016; TOBALINA-PULIDO/ALGUACIL-VILLANÚA 2024.

⁷⁴ JORDÁN LORENZO/BARRAGÁN CIDRIAIN 2017.

⁷⁵ PAZ PERALTA 1991; LASAOSA 2013.

⁷⁶ TOBALINA-PULIDO 2022.

⁷⁷ SHLUNK 1947.

⁷⁸ TOBALINA-PULIDO 2022.

⁷⁹ ARIÑO GIL/DÍAZ 2003.

⁸⁰ ANDREU PINTADO *et alii* 2010, 122, 137, 147–151.

⁶⁵ REMOLA/PÉREZ 2013; PÉREZ MARTÍNEZ 2012.

⁶⁶ LÓPEZ VILAR 2006.

⁶⁷ GARCÍA/MORO/TUSET 2009.

⁶⁸ CASTIELLA RODRÍGUEZ 2000; MAGALLÓN BOTAYA 1987.

⁶⁹ TOBALINA-PULIDO 2019, 825–828; TOBALINA-PULIDO/ALGUACIL-VILLANÚA 2024.

concentration around local powers. The sarcophagus of the church of San Juan de Castiliscar, the Late Imperial milestones, the amortization of the forum of Los Bañales by accumulations of earth and late-period walls, the concentration of the population in El Pueyo (the high area of the city); the suburban villa of Sádaba and its Late Roman mausoleum, the possible Visigothic necropolis of Sádaba, among others, are pieces of an interesting historical puzzle that is only now being studied and understood in its exact dimension.

CONCLUSIÓN

The Late Roman mausoleum of Sádaba represents one of the most significant examples of the architectural and cultural legacy of Late Roman Hispania. Its Greek cross plan design, decorative details, and construction technique reflect the influence of other contemporary monuments such as those of Tarraco. This building also evidences the cultural and political connections with other territories of the former Roman Empire during a period of cultural, political, and socioeconomic changes like the Late Roman period. Despite the difficulties presented by its study, mainly the challenges in obtaining absolute dating, this work, along with the research carried out in previous years (photogrammetry and wall analysis), has provided a more detailed and contextualized view of the mausoleum. The region of Cinco Villas, where the mausoleum is located, is notable for its strategic position and archaeological wealth. Its proximity to the Ebro Valley and the mountain passes of the Pyrenees made it a crucial hub for communication and supply during periods of intense military activity and political upheaval, such as the late empire. Thus, this monument not only highlights the continuity of rural settlement and the strategic relevance of the region in the 5th century AD but also serves as evidence of the presence of a local elite in late periods. It also reflects their economic power and the pursuit of a visible manifestation of their prestige in the rural environment. Additionally, the presence of a dense Roman road network, as well as the late Roman settlements documented in the area, demonstrates the importance of the mausoleum's surroundings as a space for transit and territorial control. In this context, the Sádaba mausoleum acquires an interesting significance, not only as a symbol of the power and influence of the local elites but also as material evidence of this region's connection with the architectural and cultural programmes promoted in Hispania at the end of the Roman Empire.

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