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*E S T R A T T O*

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# Domestic architecture of harbour areas: the Late Antique houses of the Port Suburb of Tarraco

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## Abstract

L'interesse dei ricercatori verso l'edilizia residenziale in territorio spagnolo è molto cresciuto negli ultimi anni. Sono stati pubblicati numerosi studi su dimore recentemente indagate ma anche su altre già conosciute, fornendo nuovi spunti sull'argomento. A Tarragona le molteplici indagini condotte in area urbana negli ultimi venti anni hanno portato alla scoperta di un ampio quartiere connesso con l'area portuale, il "suburbio del porto". Il presente contributo esamina le dimore ubicate in questo settore, focalizzandosi sulla loro architettura, sulle tecniche costruttive e sulle possibili funzioni degli ambienti. Basandosi sulle loro differenti caratteristiche e cronologie, gli esempi presentati si suddividono in due gruppi: le case tardo romane, che seguono nell'aspetto la tradizione romana; le case post-romane, che mostrano un aspetto più semplice e dimensioni minori. Il contributo, infine, mette a confronto i due gruppi per affrontare la questione dell'evoluzione dell'architettura domestica nella tarda antichità.

## Introduction

A few years ago J. Arce, A. Chavarría and G. Ripoll drew attention to the lack of studies about late antique housing in *Hispania*<sup>1</sup>. This circumstance has fortunately begun to be redressed, and much research on this issue has been developed since then<sup>2</sup>. However, a specific study on the late antique houses of *Tarraco* is still needed. This paper aims to contribute to this topic by analysing a number of unpublished houses<sup>3</sup> coming from the most recently excavated sector of the city, the harbour area.

As Rome's gateway to the Iberian Peninsula since early Roman times, and capital of the largest province in the western Mediterranean afterwards (*Hispania Tarraconensis*), *Tarraco* developed an extensive harbour area over the centuries. This zone was in a natural bay located to the south of a coastal hill and protected by two promontories, but rapidly expanded to the western plain next to the Francolí River (fig. 1). It thus reached an extension of ca. 8-10 ha<sup>4</sup>, which was approximately a tenth of the urbanised area of the Roman town.

For the late antique period, most archaeological remains come from the western sector of the harbour area, known as

the 'port suburb'. The suburb was discovered by urban excavations carried out between the 1990s and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. This finding widened the previous image of the suburban areas of *Tarraco* during Late Antiquity, which was mainly limited to the so-called 'Francolí early-Christian complex' discovered and first excavated in the 1930s<sup>6</sup>. New research on the late antique phase of the port suburb is indeed demonstrating its urban vitality as the economic hub of the city up until the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>7</sup>.

## Late Roman houses

As part of this urban vitality, particularly from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, several houses were newly built in the port suburb. In this section, we examine the earlier housing examples, which still followed the architectural designs of Roman tradition. However, their overall layout was determined by the urban setting and, to a great extent, adapted to the remains of previous structures.

At the north-eastern sector of the suburb – on the corner of the current Eivissa and Pere Martell streets – it has been located a house characterised by the presence of a large

<sup>1</sup> Arce, Chavarría, Ripoll 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The domestic architecture of *Emerita* is particularly well-known thanks to the publications of Alba (1999 and 2005) and more recently of Corrales (2012 and 2016). Studies on certain houses have been conducted at *Emporiae* (Nolla and Tremoleda 2014, 45-53), *Barcino* (Cortés 2011), *Carthago Nova* (Ramallo *et alii* 2013, 37-39) and *Hispalis* (Amores and González 2006; García 2012, 900-907). An overall analysis of late antique urban housing in *Hispania* can be found in Ramallo (2001) and Perich (2014). Furthermore, the domestic architecture of Visigothic and early medieval settlements has been studied at El Bolavar (Palol 1999; Fortuny, Macias and Tuset in this volume), El Tolmo de Minateda (Gutiérrez and Cañavete 2010) and the Madrid area (Vigil-Escalera 2015), among others. Likewise, Vizcaíno (2007, 387-403) offers a thorough approach to this issue at the Hispanic territories under Byzantine control.

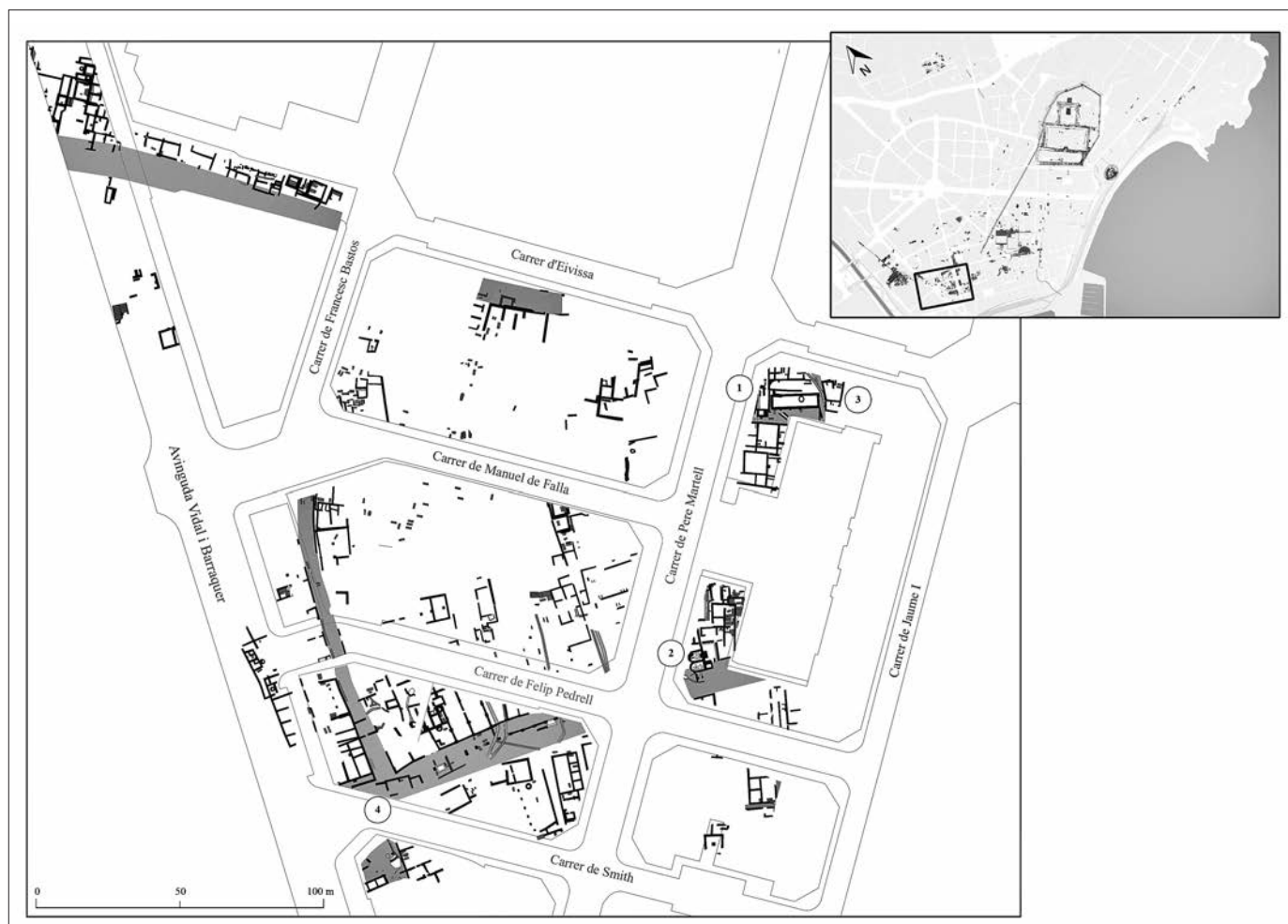
<sup>3</sup> A detailed stratigraphic analysis of these houses can be found in a recent PhD dissertation (Lasheras 2018), while a complete description of the excavations sites is provided by the corresponding archaeological reports (Pociña, Remolà and García 2001 and Pociña 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Macias *et alii* 2007, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Adserias, Pociña and Remolà 2000; Remolà and Sánchez 2010.

<sup>6</sup> The knowledge about the Francolí early-Christian complex has been broadened by recent excavations and studies. For the matter of this paper, it should be mentioned the existence of two *domus* within the complex (Serra 1935, 9ff; del Amo 1979, 31-32; López 2006, 67ff), which will not be included in the discussion due to space reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Lasheras and Terrado 2015; Díaz and Roig 2016; Rodríguez and Macias 2016; Lasheras 2017, 2018; Remolà and Lasheras 2018, 2019; Rodríguez and Macias in press.



1. - Location and archaeological plan of the 'port suburb' of Tarraco (after Macias *et alii* 2007 and Lasheras 2018): 1. Late Roman house on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets; 2. Late Roman house on the corner of Pere Martell and Felip Pedrell streets; 3. Post-Roman house on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets; 4. Post-Roman house at Smith street.

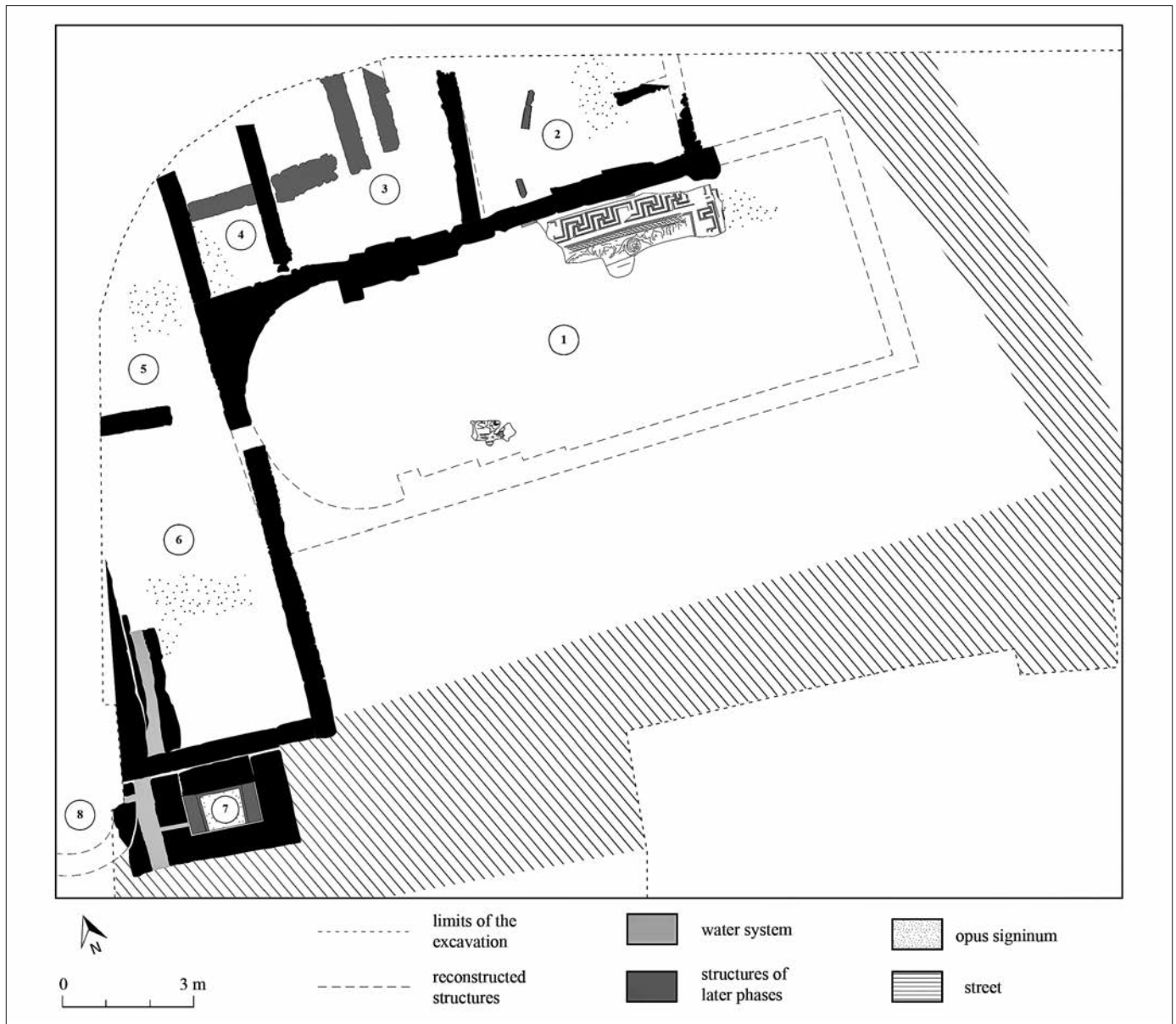
apsed room (fig. 1.1). This house was built in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century at the crossroads of two perpendicular streets, and it shows signs of continuous occupation until the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. Although the total surface area could not be excavated, the preserved remains measured over 190 m<sup>2</sup> and correspond to eight rooms, four of which have been identified as the domestic baths (fig. 2).

The most distinguished room of the house was the apsed one (no. 1), situated in proximity to both streets. The relevance of this room is attested not only by its size (the inner space was at least 13 m long and probably more than 5 m wide<sup>8</sup>) but also by its decoration, which consisted of a mosaic pavement and marble panels on the walls. The presence of an *opus signinum* floor next to the mosaic could either indicate the existence of another room to the east, or some kind of spatial distinction. Even though the entrances have not been preserved, the main access to this room was likely on the eastern side, opening into the north-south street. Likewise, we suggest the existence of a second door, presumably

connecting to the northern rooms (no. 2-4). The complete architectural layout of those rooms is unknown, but the stratigraphic analysis confirms that they were remodelled over time.

The baths were located at the western sector and partly encroached upon the east-west street, which continued in use at least until the late 6<sup>th</sup> century regardless of this. The main room (no. 6) had a rectangular plan (3,70 m per 7,30 m) and was probably accessed from the northern one (no. 5). Two more rooms were located on the southern side: a small quadrangular room (c. 1,6 m each side) to the east (no. 7), connected with the main space; and a possible apsed room to the west (no. 8), which has only been attested by a small wall

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the eastern and southern walls of this room were lost. Moreover, the southern wall would have been constructed over an early Roman fountain, which was disused and completely covered by this moment (Remolà and Pociña 2004). The stratigraphy at this sector is therefore rather complicated and it has been difficult to fully understand all the archaeological remains.



2. - Archaeological plan of the late Roman house located on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets (after Pociña, Remolà and García 2001 and Lasheras 2018).

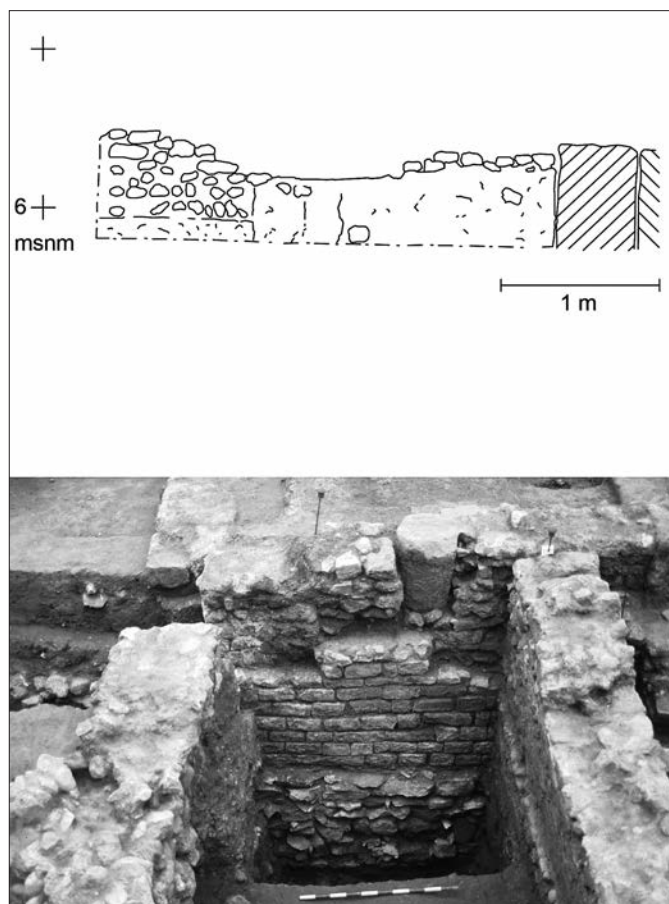
section. The sewage system consisted of a north-south conduit, which was linked to the southern rooms through lead pipes placed within the walls for evacuating wastewater.

Different building techniques have been identified in the various rooms of this house. The walls of rooms 1 to 4 were constructed with rubble stones and recycled materials bonded with lime mortar and had 0,4-0,5 m width. In contrast, the rooms corresponding to the baths showed thicker walls (0,5-0,7 m width) and were made of rubble stones and mortar in a larger quantity (*opus caementicium*) (fig. 3). The use of recycled materials at this sector of the house is indeed only attested for renovations and later walls. As for the floors, they were mainly made of *opus signinum* both at the baths and the eastern rooms.

Since this is a partially excavated building, it is difficult to define the function of each room. However, architectural layout, location and the finding of significant objects at some spaces have provided us with salient clues. The architectural and decorative features of room no. 1 are arguably those of a distinctive space, which could function as a reception room<sup>9</sup>. This proposal is supported by its proximity to both the streets and the domestic baths, another key feature of this

<sup>9</sup> A mortared half-rounded edge has been found at the joint between the mosaic and the marble panels, which may indicate some need for waterproofing. However, due to stratigraphic difficulties, it is unclear if this corresponds to later renovations and if the room may have changed its original function over time.





3. - Construction techniques of late Roman houses. Above: elevation depicting the use of mortar depending on the room function at the house on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets (after Pociña, Remolà and García 2001). Below: detail of a wall constructed over a previous building at the house on the corner of Pere Martell and Felip Pedrell streets (CODEX - Arqueologia i Patrimoni).

kind of rooms<sup>10</sup>. The northern rooms (no. 2-4) remain largely unknown, although the record of spindle whorls and bone pins, as well as glass vessels, and cooking and coarse wares suggest the development of domestic activities there. As regards to the baths, the distribution and plan of the rooms seem to indicate that no. 6 could function as an *apodyterium/frigidarium*, attached to a little pool of cold water (no. 7), while the apsis of room no. 8 may be evidence of the location of warmer rooms to the west.

Another house was newly built c. 100 m to the south – corresponding to the corner of Pere Martell and Felip Pedrell streets – by the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century or slightly after, while the final occupation phase can be dated to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> (fig. 1.2). As in the previous example, the total surface of this house exceeded the limits of the excavation. However, a total

of seven rooms have been identified, together measuring c. 200 m<sup>2</sup>. The best preserved area comprises the domestic baths, which were partly situated over one of the major streets of the suburb, known as the maritime or port road (fig. 4).

Despite the lack of archaeological remains, it seems possible that this house had an entrance on the southern side, connected to the main east-west road. The appearance of this space is completely unknown, but the layout of earlier structures<sup>11</sup> suggest that it could have had the form of a long corridor (no. 1), a design solution attested at the entrances of other urban houses such as the Domus del Protiro at Ostia<sup>12</sup> or the Late Roman Townhouse at Sardis<sup>13</sup>. This passage would have opened to another corridor (no. 2) surrounding a probable open-air space (no. 3), which had a small rectangular plan (2 m per 5 m). There is little evidence about the location of the doors in this area, but the shape of the remaining walls suggests the presence of one to the north and another to the west.

The baths were situated at the south-western sector and were probably also connected to the central corridor (no. 2), as the northern water conduit suggests. Similarly to the first house presented, they partly encroached upon the east-west road. Stratigraphy confirms, however, that several new pavements were laid even after this construction, attesting the continued use of this road until the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The baths were articulated around room no. 4, which was a big rectangular room (4,7 m per at least 8 m) characterised by the presence of two conduits for evacuating wastewater. From this main space both rooms no. 5 and 6 could be entered. The first (no. 5) was a small quadrangular room (c. 1,7 m each side) located to the south, while no. 6 was a bigger apsed room (3 m per 4,4 m) that gave access to an analogous space to the south (no. 7). Moreover, they were provided with a hypocaust heating system which communicated with the southern *prae-furnium*. The sewage system was also located at this southern point, consisting of a basin for collecting wastewater and an east-west conduit which is only partially preserved.

As regards the building techniques, differences between the baths and the northern sector have been attested as well, although in this case, the walls of the two areas showed an average width of 0,5 m. Rubble stones, recycled materials and lime mortar were employed for the construction of the northern rooms (no. 2-3). The floors at this sector were made of *opus signinum*, placed over a preparatory layer formed by pebbles and mortar. In this sense, the presence of such a base extending over the southern limit of the open-air

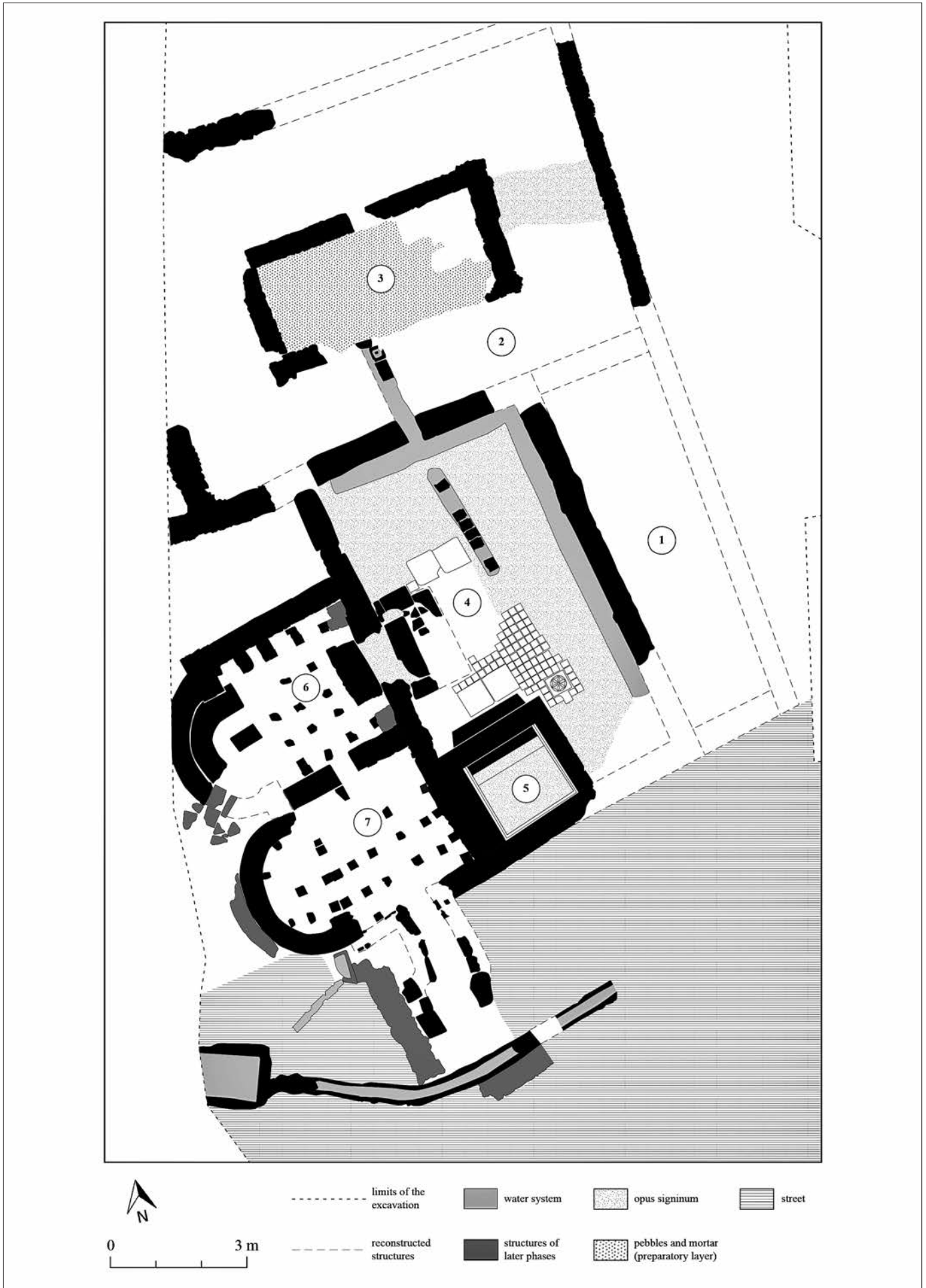
have been constructed on the top of the foundations of the previous building, as was the case of the eastern wall of room no. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Boersma *et alii* 1985, fig. 5; Saliou 1994, fig. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Rautman 1995; Özgenel 2007, fig. 4a.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis 1988, 569ff; Özgenel 2007, 252-9; Uytterhoeven 2007, 54.

<sup>11</sup> A great part of this house was built over an early Roman warehouse (see fig. 3). Thus, it seems likely that the entrance area would



4. - Archaeological plan of the late Roman house situated on the corner of Pere Martell and Felip Pedrell streets (after Pociña, Remolà and García 2001 and Lasheras 2018).

space no. 3 may correspond to a renovation of the water installations. Despite the limited archaeological evidence, it appears that this central space (no. 3) would have been a small water tank, delimited by low walls and pillars at the corners. Overflow water would have been drained through the north-south conduit that crossed the corridor (no. 2). In a later phase, the southern wall would have been demolished and presumably, a decorative water basin would have been placed there, which would have been connected to the same conduit.

The walls of the baths were constructed with rubble stones bonded with a great quantity of mortar (*opus caementicium*). This construction technique is also used for later walls, as those reinforcing room no. 7 and the *praefurnium*. The floors have been only attested at rooms no. 4 and 5. The southern one (no. 5) had an *opus signinum* pavement and its walls also preserved a waterproofing coat made of the same material. At room no. 4 three types of pavement have been identified, corresponding to successive renovations: the first pavement was made with large bricks (*bipedales*); the floor was afterwards renewed with bricks of smaller size (*bessalis*); and, finally, the space was paved with *opus signinum*. It seems likely that the conduit bordering the northern and eastern walls was built during this last phase, although stratigraphy confirms that the north-south conduit was in use until the latest occupation phase. There was indeed a distinctive element related to this canal, which consisted of a marble block (measuring 0,49 m each side) with an incised geometric flower that functioned as part of the drainage system.

The archaeological evidence just described and the overall architectural composition of this house are the available elements for analysing the function of the rooms. Thus, the plan layout of rooms no. 2 and 3 suggest that they formed a small courtyard. The water installations support this proposal since they were commonly placed at peristyle courtyards for embellishment and as a sign of status and luxury<sup>14</sup>. Water tanks and basins have been also attested at several late antique houses, such as the Maison aux Consoles at Apamea<sup>15</sup>, the Late Roman Townhouse at Sardis<sup>16</sup> or the Residence on the Lycian Acropolis at Xanthos<sup>17</sup>. A further display of wealth was the incorporation of private baths, which show a similar architectural layout to those of the first house presented. The main room (no. 4) would probably have functioned as an *apodyterium/frigidarium*, which opened to a small pool of cold water (no. 5). To the west, the main room was connected to the warmer rooms (no. 6-7), interpreted as *caldaria* or as a *tepidarium* and a *caldarium*<sup>18</sup>. Lastly, the

location of the *praefurnia* and wastewater infrastructures in the south-western sector indicates that this was the service area.

### Post-Roman houses

Further housing examples have been identified at the port suburb. They were built in post-Roman times – i.e. under Visigothic rule –, providing additional proof of the vitality of this sector throughout the late antique period. The architectural layout of the houses in this section, however, shows significant differences compared to those of the earlier period described above.

At the north-eastern sector of the suburb, only 4 m to the west of the first house presented, it has been located a house dating from the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century and abandoned in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century at the latest (fig. 1.3). It was placed next to the north-south street but there is no evidence of an entrance opening to this road, although it was in use until at least the late 6<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the main access may have been on the eastern side, probably reached through a secondary passage. The house itself had an inner area of 29,5 m<sup>2</sup> divided into two spaces forming an L-shape. These rooms were not communicated with each other but connected with an outdoor space where a pavement has been attested, suggesting that this space played a part in the household routine, as it has been often attested in other examples of the same period<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, on the northern side of room no. 1 there is evidence of a possible pavement base made of pebbles, which may indicate that the building would have extended northwards (fig. 5).

As for the constructive techniques, the walls were of rubble masonry bounded with poor lime and had an average width of 0,5 m. For the western wall were employed reused materials, as well as some big stone blocks placed at irregular distances and which probably came from previous buildings as well (fig. 6). Such big stone blocks were also used in the 1,20 m wide threshold of the southern space (no. 2). The entrance of room no. 1 has not been preserved, but it would probably have been located in the lost wall segment. The pavements were made of clay plaster at the indoor spaces and beaten earth at the open-air area. Regarding the roof, it is likely that it was made of organic material since the number of tile fragments recovered is scarce.

Use and function of the rooms can only be approached through the archaeological material found in each one. The most significant remains have been attested at room no. 2: a hearth made of tiles, a stone structure that may have served as a storage space and a stone block presumably used for

<sup>14</sup> Özgenel 2007, 248-249; Uytterhoeven 2014, 431-432.

<sup>15</sup> Balty 1984; Saliou 1994, 102-103.

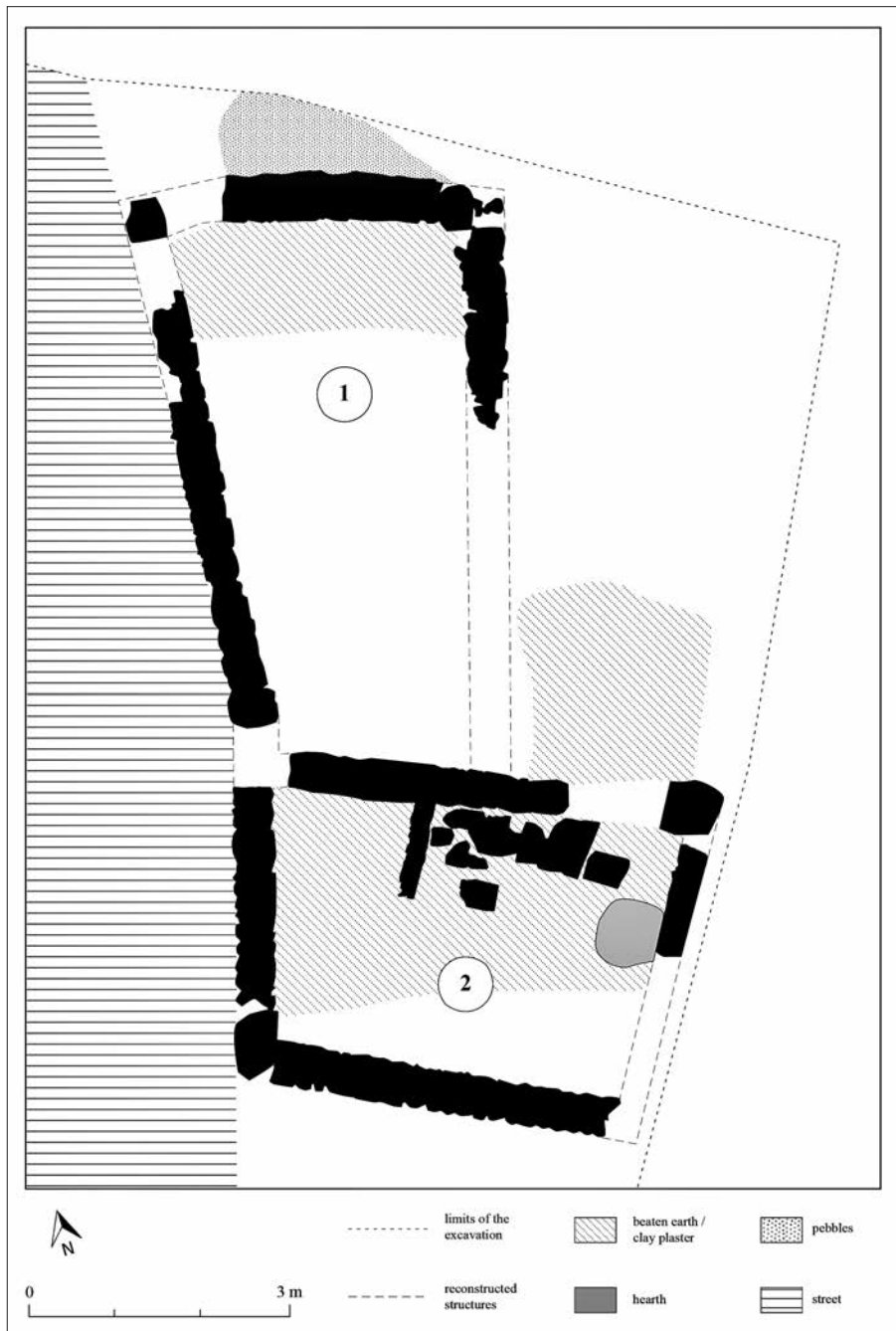
<sup>16</sup> Rautman 1995, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Manière-Lévêque 2007, 482-483.

<sup>18</sup> García-Entero 2005, 267-268.

<sup>19</sup> Gutiérrez 2012, 146.





5. - Archaeological plan of the post-Roman house found on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets (after Pociña, Remolà and García 2001 and Lasheras 2018).

supporting a table or working surface<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, a significant number of ceramics and glass tableware has been registered at the occupation layers. The evidence thus suggests that domestic activities would be held here. On the contrary, the lack of material remains in room no. 1 hinders the defi-

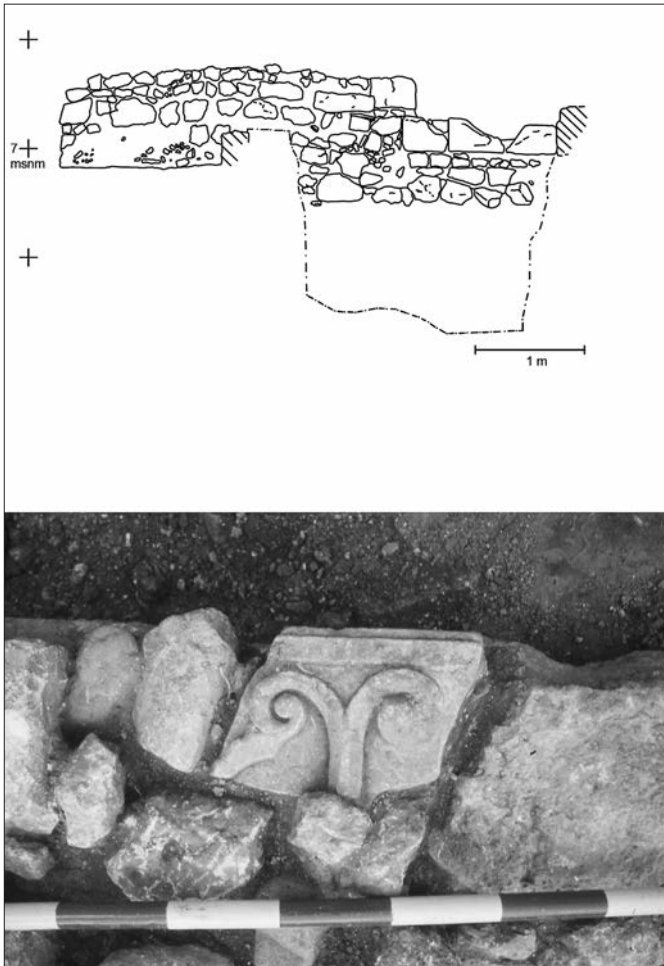
<sup>20</sup> Similar structures have been found in El Tolmo de Minateda (Gutiérrez 2000, 157) and El Bovalar (Fortuny, Macias and Tuset in this volume).

nition of its function, although it seems probable that it served as an additional space for storage or even productive activities.

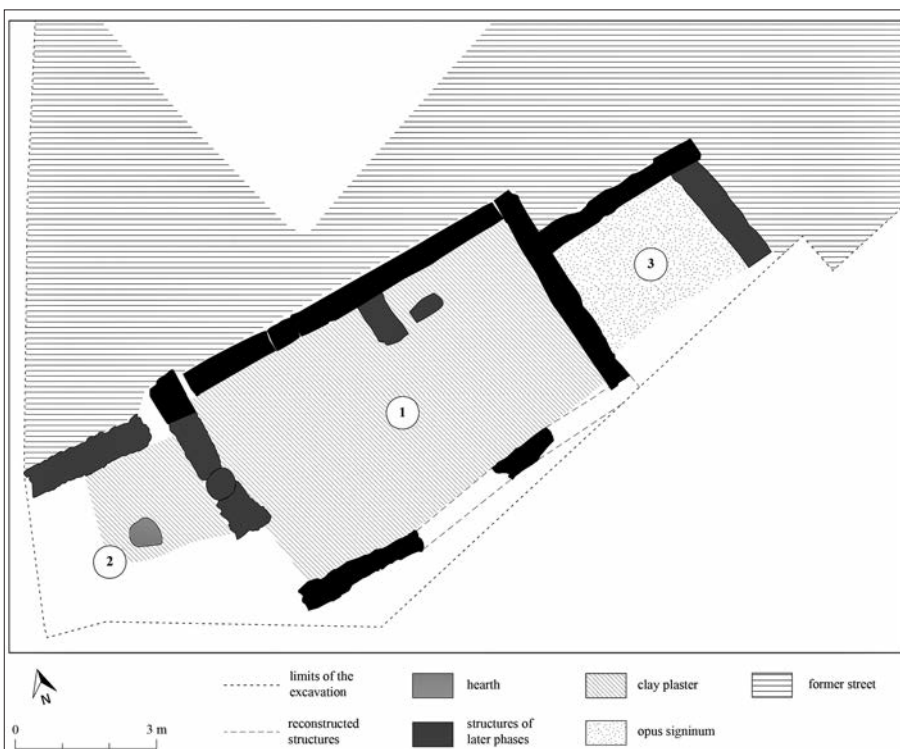
An example of a rather later date has been located at the south-western sector of the harbour area, currently corresponding to Smith street. This house was built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century over the maritime road, which seems to indicate that this street may have fallen in disuse by this time. The building consisted of three spaces arranged in a row and had an inner surface of 59 m<sup>2</sup>, but the central room (no. 1) was much bigger than the rest (measuring 44 m<sup>2</sup>). Despite the lack of evidence about the internal circulation as any of the accesses is preserved, it seems likely that the three spaces were connected directly with an unknown front area that exceeded the limits of the excavation, but it would probably have had a domestic use. However, the shape of the wall between rooms no. 1 and 2 may suggest that they could be directly connected (fig. 7).

The central and eastern rooms (no. 1 and 3) were built of masonry and lime mortar (measuring an average width of 0,5-0,6 m), but big blocks were also placed at the corners for reinforcement. The northern wall of room no. 3 did not follow the same axis as the central one because it was constructed on top of a previous structure. The floor of the central space (no. 1) was made of clay laid over a preparatory layer, while the eastern one (no. 3) had an *opus signinum* pavement. On the other hand, room no. 2 presents some constructive differences: the walls were thicker (0,65 m wide) and in contrast to the other rooms no mortar was used for their construction. They were made of rubble stones and clay, and reused materials were employed as well.

The pavement was just one layer of clay plaster, without preparation. These different features suggest that room no. 2 would have been attached to the central space (no. 1) during the second phase of construction. Room no. 1 was indeed remodelled in a later phase when a short north-south wall and an associated stone block were presumably added to divide the space. Some changes have been also attested at



6. - Construction techniques of post-Roman houses. Above: elevation depicting a wall of rubble masonry bounded with poor lime, and a threshold made of stone blocks at the house on the corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets (after Pociña, Remolà and García 2001). Below: detail of reused material in the masonry of the same house (CODEX - Arqueologia i Patrimoni).



7. - Archaeological plan of the post-Roman house located at Smith street (after Pociña 2009 and Lasheras 2018).

room no. 3, where the *opus signinum* pavement was replaced by a raised floor to match the circulation level of room no. 1. Likewise, it is very likely that the newer eastern wall of room no. 3 was built at this moment.

The western room (no. 2) is the one with the clearest domestic function, because of the presence of a hearth and the finding of tableware pottery and amphorae. The function of rooms no. 1 and 3 during its final occupation remains unknown due to the lack of archaeological remains. However, the recovery of a significant number of amphorae fragments and a large set of ceramics and glass tableware in the previous pavement of room no. 1 may indicate that it was used for storage. Likewise, the presence of an *opus signinum* floor at room no. 3 suggests the development of productive activities.

### Conclusions

The set of houses presented in this paper should only be regarded as a reflection on a small scale of the dynamics followed by the domestic architecture of the harbour area of Tarraco during Late Antiquity. The number of examples considered here is rather small for inferring any bold statement about the general evolution of late antique housing in the Mediterranean basin. However, it is interesting to note that several features observed in the cases studied coincide with the broad trends of the residential architecture of this period.

As part of the urban landscape of one of the most dynamic and densely occupied areas of Tarraco, the analysed houses had to adapt their overall layout to the existing urban setting, and most of them were indeed constructed over former buildings and infrastructures. But great differences have been attested in the way they accomplished that, becoming particularly evident when assessing the different degrees in which these houses interacted with and altered the street network. Despite the lack of preserved accesses, archaeological evidence suggests that late Roman houses had a direct connection with the main roads of this sector. Moreover, even when these buildings partially encroached upon them, stratigraphy confirms the continued use of these streets until the late 6<sup>th</sup> century and, in some cases, throughout much of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Concerning the post-Roman houses, the earlier example – located on the

corner of Eivissa and Pere Martell streets – coexisted and respected the street nearby, but it was not directly connected to it. On the contrary, the 7<sup>th</sup>-century house found at Smith street was built directly over and in the middle of the maritime road, indicating the outset of the dismantling of the early Imperial road system and urban setting<sup>21</sup>. It thus becomes clear that the transformation of the former urban fabric ran in parallel to the development of a new relation between private and public spheres, which was also reflected in the domestic architecture<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, this conceptual shift leads us to accordingly reconsider how the interaction between public areas and the private – or semi-private – open-air spaces linked to the domestic units worked.

Despite the space constrictions of the urban context, the late Roman houses of the port suburb of Tarraco managed to follow the architectural designs of Roman tradition. These showed a great diversity of spaces, which were generally arranged around singular rooms – for instance, the distinctive apsed room and the possible courtyard in the examples described – and had multiple accesses to connect them. The baths were also a significant part of these houses, denoting the importance of bathing tradition in the late antique society. Besides, the possession of private baths was not only a way in which the owner displayed his wealth, but also played a significant role within the social gatherings of the urban elites<sup>23</sup>. But ultimately the development of such complex architectural designs indicates the interest of the wealthy families of Tarraco to follow the Roman cultural symbols, which during the late antique period also implied “the absorption of a variety of public functions” into high-status housing<sup>24</sup>.

The overall layout of the post-Roman houses was much more simplified and the spaces showed reduced sizes and less variety in their shape. The rooms were mainly placed in a row, sharing walls but usually without connection between them, which means that circulation was done through an open-air space loosely defined. Daily life activities would have been conducted in this kind of courtyards, as has been proved by the presence of a pavement in this area at the 6<sup>th</sup>-century house. In this sense, the small number of rooms implies that different activities would have occurred in the same spaces. However, the latter example presented seems to have developed a greater degree of functional distinction since the features of one of the rooms indicate that it was probably used for productive activities. This may point to a tendency towards functional specialisation, which has been attested as a usual trend in many early medieval settlements of the Iberian Peninsula<sup>25</sup>.

Some differences have been also identified with regard to the construction techniques. Yet it is worth mentioning that the use of recycled materials was quite usual in both groups, which should not be surprising in an urban context with such a continuous and dense occupation. The major difference between the two groups is the use of lime mortar, being much more frequent in the earlier examples. However, the employment of this material cannot be only linked to chronology, but also to the function of the spaces. While in some spaces it was unnecessary to employ great quantities of mortar, there is no doubt about the convenience of this material in bathing structures. At the examples presented, it was used in the *opus caementicium* walls as well as for waterproofing coats. Instead, the mortar employed in the post-Roman houses was of poorer quality. Further differences can be also noticed in the pavements, as *opus signinum* floors were more common in the first group, while at the second they were mainly made of clay plaster or beaten earth. Finally, the disparity in construction resources is also denoted by the presence – or not – of water systems and decorative features. Thus, the overall evidence suggests that the building process of late Roman houses required skilled labour, while post-Roman houses seem to reflect a tendency towards self-sufficiency.

The late antique houses of the port suburb of Tarraco provide a study case of great value for analysing the development of domestic architecture within the Mediterranean urban contexts. The examples presented have allowed us to identify two main trends concerning architectural designs and building techniques. Housing in the late Roman period – mainly dated from the 5<sup>th</sup> century – was characterised by an evident continuity of the architectural features of Roman tradition, even when adapted to the previous urban structures. Post-Roman housing – dated between the late 5<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries – showed a profound simplification of the architectonic layout instead, which implied major differences in daily life activities. However, the slight coexistence in time of both groups raises questions about the social and cultural meaning of such changes in domestic spaces. Even if we are presumably dealing with social groups of different status, the reasons for the development of this new house type are yet to be fully understood. Answering those questions requires further and wider studies, since the trends in post-Roman domestic architecture illustrated by the examples presented spread throughout the Iberian Peninsula particularly from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. But the interest in the study case offered by the port suburb of Tarraco lies precisely in evidencing the coexistence of both building traditions at the turning point in which the Roman house was ending and the post-Roman house arose.

<sup>21</sup> Lasheras 2018, 664 and 681.

<sup>22</sup> Gutiérrez 2000, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Uytterhoeven 2007, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Ellis 1988, 569.

<sup>25</sup> Gutiérrez 2012, 148ff.



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# INDICE

## Introduzione

*di Isabella Baldini e Carla Sfameni*

## SIRIA

Vivere nelle dimore tardoantiche del Massiccio Calcareao siriano

*di Elia Essa Kas Hanna*

Neeha (Siria): da accampamento militare a villaggio bizantino

*di Giovanna Bucci*

## CIPRO

Garrison's Camp a Nea Paphos - Cipro. Dal grande santuario pagano del IV secolo a.C. agli edifici di culto cristiani e alle grandi *domus* tardo-antiche

*di Elvia Giudice, Filippo Giudice, Giada Giudice*

The House of Orpheus at Nea Paphos, Cyprus: the evolution of domestic space in a diachronic perspective

*by Monika Rekowski, Demetrios Michaelides, Patrizio Pensabene, Eleonora Gasparini*

## ASIA MINORE

Urban Vibes in Late Antique Houses: sampling from Asia Minor

*by Lale Özgenel*

A Triple Entrance with Arched Intervals and Central Columns. Doorways in the Urban Elite Houses of Late Antique Asia Minor

*by Inge Uytterhoeven*

Il *palatium* nei concili costantinopolitani del VII secolo

*di Silvia Donadei*

## GRECIA

*Tesserae thasiae*: Early Byzantine houses from the island of Thasos and their integration at a universal model

*by Platon Petridis*

Il Palazzo dei Giganti di Atene: un pretorio?

*di Isabella Baldini*

Note preliminari dalle nuove indagini nel Quartiere del Pretorio di Gortina (Creta)

*di Claudia Lamanna*

## DALMAZIA

Abitare in Dalmazia in età tardoantica

*di Carla Sfameni*

## AFRICA SETTENTRIONALE

Abitare in Africa tra l'età medioimperiale e la tarda antichità: la *domus* di *Iunius Restitutus Maximus a Thignica* (Aïn Tounga, Tunisia)

*di Alessandro Teatini*

*Convivia* nell'Egitto Tardoantico: la sala da banchetto della casa di *Serenos* ad Amheida (Oasi di Dakhla)

*di Stefania Alfarano*

## ITALIA

Il mosaico delle Bestie ferite (Aquileia, UD): aggiornamenti e nuovi studi

*di Monica Salvadori, Paolo Baronio, Luca Scalco, Alfonsina Esposito, Valentina Mantovani*

Palazzo Pignano (Cr). Novità dai recenti scavi nel sito del complesso residenziale tardoantico

*di Furio Sacchi, Marilena Casirani*

Piana S. Martino, Pianello V.T. (PC). La chiesa e la torre di S. Martino. Scavo 2018

*di Roberta Conversi, Cristina Mezzadri, Giovanni Rivaroli*

Testimonianze insediative di epoca tardoantica ed altomedievale da Trevozzo di Nibbiano (PC)

*di Elena Grossetti, Caterina Bertaccini*

A Roman and a Late Roman Farm at Montessoro (Genoa)

*di Paolo De Vingo*

Ravenna. Abitare nel settore orientale della città in epoca tardoantica

*di Giovanna Montevocchi*

Materiali lapidei, ceramici e pittorici da quartiere abitativo di via D'Azeglio a Ravenna. Risultati preliminari  
*di Ilaria Bandinelli, Nina A. Bizziochi, Giulia Marsili*

Lo scorrere del tempo e le sue modalità di rappresentazione nelle residenze aristocratiche tardoantiche  
*di Francesca Catellani, Maria Carmela Oliva*

Mosaici in villa. Nuovi dati sull'edilizia residenziale tardoantica dagli scavi della villa di Teoderico a Galeata  
*di Alessia Morigi, Riccardo Villicich*

Il fenomeno della villa nell'*ager Volaterranus* tra III e VI sec. d.C.: un quadro di sintesi  
*di Stefano Genovesi*

Luni tardoantica. Il quartiere presso Porta Marina: continuità e cambiamenti nel sistema insediativo  
*di Simonetta Menchelli, Stefano Genovesi, Rocco Marcheschi*

Le ricerche alla villa romana di Aiano (San Gimignano-Siena): dall'interpretazione stratigrafica alla rielaborazione 3D  
*di Marco Cavalieri, Sara Lenzi, Gloriana Pace, Daniele Ferdani, Emanuel Demetrescu*

Pesaro in Late Antiquity. New perspectives on the city's transformation between the 5th and the 6th centuries AD  
*di Daniele Sacco, Giacomo Cesaretti*

La *domus* del Mitreo di Tarquinia durante l'età tardoantica: strutture e contesti tra continuità di vita e abbandono  
*di Fiammetta Soriano, Vittoria Canciani*

Abitare in due *domus* tardoantiche ai margini del Foro Traiano  
*di Paola Baldassarri, Simona Faedda*

L'autorappresentazione gentilizia e l'eredità di una grande storia: l'arredo scultoreo della *domus* dei *Valerii* sul Celio in epoca tardoantica  
*di Flavia Campoli*

La *domus* delle Sette Sale a Roma: analisi morfologica e tipologica del complesso di triclinio, corte e ninfeo  
*di Flavia Benfante*

*Domus* aristocratiche sul Quirinale. La residenza dei *Nummii* e i ritrovamenti nell'area del Ministero della Difesa a Roma  
*di Fabiola Fraioli*

Roma, Tor de' Cenci. Una villa al IX miglio della via Laurentina  
*di Leonardo Schifi*

L'imitazione dell'*opus sectile* in pittura nelle residenze tardoantiche di Ostia: una rilettura del fenomeno a partire dalle testimonianze delle Case a Giardino  
*di Stella Falzone*

## SICILIA E SARDEGNA

Progettazione e metrologia nelle ville tardoantiche della Sicilia  
*di Paolo Barresi*

La cuspidale nord-orientale della Sicilia in epoca tardoantica: nuove indagini presso la villa romana di Patti Marina  
*di Gioacchino Francesco La Torre, Alessio Toscano Raffa*

Abitare il litorale e abitare l'entroterra in età tardoantica negli Iblei. Il complesso caso delle costruzioni *megalitiche*  
*di Annamaria Sammito, Saverio Scerra*

Esplorazioni archeologiche in località Casalgismondo (Aidone - EN)  
*di Carmela Bonanno*

Dinamiche del popolamento: il caso della Penisola del Sinis  
*di Barbara Panico*

## PENISOLA IBERICA

L'edificio ottagonale tardoantico della villa della Gran Via-Can Ferrerons (Premià de Mar - Barcelona)  
*di Marta Prevosti, Ramon Coll*

Domestic architecture of harbour areas: the Late Antique houses of the Port Suburb of Tarraco  
*by Ada Lasheras González, Karen Fortuny Mendo*

El asentamiento visigodo de El Bovalar (Seròs, Hispania): análisis arquitectónico y propuesta evolutiva  
*de Karen Fortuny Mendo, Francesc Tuset Bertran, Josep Maria Macias Solè*

Transformations in buildings and new economic models in the *Carthagenensis* Province in Late Antiquity. Initial results from studies carried out in the Roman *villa* of Noheda (Cuenca, Spain)  
*by Miguel Ángel Valero Tévar*

*Spolia*, reaprovechamiento y reciclaje de materiales en la villa romana de las Pizarras (Coca, Segovia)  
*de Olivia V. Reyes Hernando, Cesáreo Pérez González*

Después de la Villa. Ocupaciones y usos tardoantiguos en el yacimiento de Veranes (Gijón, España)  
*de Carmen Fernández Ochoa, Fernando Gil Sendino, Javier Salido Domínguez, Mar Zarzalejos Prieto*

La llegada del cristianismo a la *Gallaecia*: la documentación arqueológica de las *villae*  
*de Diego Piay Augusto*

Cercadilla, Split y la arquitectura palatina de época tetrárquica  
*de Rafael Hidalgo Prieto*

De *Augusta Emerita* a *Emerita*. La transición en la arquitectura doméstica de Mérida entre la romanidad y la tardoantigüedad  
*de Álvaro Corrales Álvarez*

Horta da Torre Roman villa (Fronteira) and the monumentalization in Lusitania's rural landscape  
*by André Carneiro*

#### SOCIABILITÀ, FORME E USI DEGLI SPAZI RESIDENZIALI

I quartieri degli ospiti nelle ville tardoantiche d'Italia. Fonti ed archeologia  
*di Cristina Corsi, Marie-Adeline Le Guennec*

Appartamenti conviviali con grande sala da pranzo tricora  
*di Marta Prevosti*

*Cupiditas aedificandi, formianae orae dulcedo e morbus fabricatorum*: gli interventi edilizi di Simmaco e del «nucleo di fronda storiografica»  
*di Beatrice Girotti*

Iscrizioni in ambito domestico nel Mediterraneo tardoantico (IV-VI sec. d.C.): note preliminari  
*di Lucia Orlandi*

Arredi lapidei con sigle di lavorazione da contesti residenziali: profili tecnici, sociali ed economici  
*di Giulia Marsili*

La *trapeza* nei monasteri del Vicino Oriente in epoca protobizantina  
*di Marina Pizzi*

Dalle ville aristocratiche all'aristocrazia delle ville  
*di Federico Cantini, Maria Turchiano*