

The Archaeology of 'Underdog Sites' in the Douro Valley

From Prehistory to the Modern Age

Edited by

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Foreword from the meeting at Ávila

Javier Jiménez Gadea¹

Hosting a scientific meeting is always an occasion both for satisfaction and for reflection. Satisfaction for contributing towards its organisation, and therefore towards the expression of ideas and knowledge and their debate, and reflection because it enables an assessment of their reach and the state of the question. When the host feels part of the meeting, of the expression of ideas and debate, these two actions redouble their intensity.

Ávila Museum is a historical museum with a provincial range. Its view of History is broad and integrating as its focus of attention is material culture, as an agent and consequence of history, formed by all kinds of objects, among which those susceptible to being studied with archaeological methodology make up a large part of its collection and *raison d'être*. The 'provincial' facet is no more than an administrative constraint, which is ridiculous and absurd in the case of describing, studying and conserving objects from cultures and periods that emerged out of different political and social realities to the present ones. Therefore, the 'provincial' aspect only affects the museum as regards the entry of objects, but not in its goal of attention, research and discussion.

Consequently hosting the VIII Meeting of the Archaeology of the Douro Valley has not only been an act of courtesy but also an obligation, as the museum shares the interests and objectives of its organisers: Ávila Museum feels and forms part of the archaeological community in the Douro Valley.

However, at the same time, it was also an occasion to vindicate the important role that museums play in research, how they support and act as agents of it. The definition of museums established by ICOM is well known, although indeed it is now in the process of being changed, with certain risk of paradoxically losing definition. It considers that museums are institutions that "acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit" the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity. This has been the basis of all the definitions of museums included in Spanish and international legislation.

Despite this, apart from a declaration of principles, the fact is that both museums and their staff often encounter difficulties in obtaining grants for research or the direction and participation in R+D projects, because a declaration and express recognition of museums as research centres is still lacking.

The current Spanish Law 14/2001 of 1st June, on Science, Technology and Innovation has partly palliated this situation because it establishes that all museums belonging to and managed by the state are "agents of the execution" of the Law (and therefore research centres). Yet, what about the others? Does this mean they are not research centres simply because they are not managed by the state, even though they have the same functions? Are different regulations necessary? Again another administrative constraint, in this case of legal competences, hinders one of a museum's most important functions.

Thus, hosting these or other scientific meetings in museums also acquires a connotation of vindication.

Many of the researchers who took part in this VIII Meeting have often visited our exhibitions, consulted our library and studied our collections to create knowledge and do science. They have also contributed to the enlargement of our collections by depositing remains from archaeological excavations carried out under their direction, and which in turn have been or will be studied either by the museum or by

¹ Director of Museo def Ávila. Co-organiser of the 'VIII Jornadas de Arqueología del Valle del Duero' (Ávila, 22-24 November 2018).

other researchers, thereby building a chain of research in which all the links: generation of data, conservation of the remains, analysis, display, etc. must necessarily be interlocked.

During the three days of the Meeting, the archaeological heritage of the Douro Valley was addressed in its totality, the parts in both Castilla y León and Portugal. It showed that those administrative constraints mentioned before lack meaning in scientific research. Through lectures and posters, it covered from the most remote prehistory to the contemporary age, demonstrating that archaeology also reaches the most recent manifestations of our culture, connecting with that broad and integrating gaze of the Museum over material culture.

The guided visit to the Ávila Museum's Open Storage, which took place as an evening continuation of one of the sessions, complemented the thematic content of this scientific meeting, as it focused on one of the most singular aspects of medieval archaeology in Ávila and therefore in the Douro valley: Islamic funerary steles and Arabic inscriptions, dated between the 12th and 15th centuries. In this way, the Meeting also included the archaeology of minorities in the Douro Valley.

Foreword from the meeting at Astorga

Javier Fernández-Lozano²

The 'IX Jornadas de Arqueología en el Valle del Duero' took place in the city of Astorga on 28th, 29th and 30th November 2019. It brought together researchers who focus their scientific work on the study of archaeological sites in Castilla y León, and Portugal. The conferences included 25 oral communications and 5 posters divided into several sessions ranging from Prehistory to the Contemporaneous history of a wide variety of sites in the Douro Basin and surroundings. The conferences were interspersed with different intraconference activities programmed to provide an overview of the city's historical and archaeological heritage and a visit to the Roman gold mines of the Duerna Valley.

The conference shed light on past problems and present questions in the Douro Valley's archaeological research, contributing to the development of future knowledge of different sites, whose study has raised scientific and social interest. The meeting allowed researchers from Spain and Portugal to establish a dialogue forum and knowledge exchange through debate and promotion, providing a more precise overview of the archaeology of the Douro Valley. Besides, the meeting contributed to the sharing of new methodologies and cutting-edge research techniques that facilitate the approach to unresolved archaeological problems.

The past two decades have given archaeology a vital boost in the knowledge, preservation, and dissemination of movable and immovable archaeological heritage. The possibility of digitising complete sites at resolutions never achieved (scales ranging from mm to cm) has revolutionised the musealization of environments that, due to Augmented Reality (AR), provides whole interaction worldwide. Access to technological tools such as *terrestrial laser scanning* (TLS) and *airborne laser scanning* (ALS) or *LiDAR* makes it possible to obtain precise measurements and carry out morphometric analyses. Moreover, its use in landscape archaeology has been allowing in recent years for the discovery and reconstruction of spaces of occupation, such as hillforts and other settlements that stand out over the territory of the Douro Valley. Likewise, incorporating more advanced photogrammetric techniques, such as *Structure from Motion* (SfM), has facilitated the reconstruction of 3D spaces from terrestrial and aerial photography. *Unmanned Aerial Vehicles* (UAVs), also known as drones, have played an essential role in this progress. Their use for the generation of orthomosaics and high-resolution digital models improves the study and recognition of archaeological sites.

The analysis obtained from Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was emphasised during the conference. These applications, widely used in the past, have updated their techniques, improved their results, and are now used regularly in archaeological research. Besides, GIS allow the data collected during surveying and excavation campaigns for being illustrated and treated statistically. This facilitates the analysis and evaluation of the obtained results and enables the information to be disseminated in a quick and orderly way, which contributes to the correct cataloguing and geopositioning of the archaeological findings and sites. Thanks to these systems, recently integrated into mobile devices, surveying work has been simplified, facilitating the geolocation of features and structures by using high-resolution aerial images and the possibility of combining this information with sophisticated remote sensing and image processing techniques. It is important to emphasise that the scale of resolution offered by these technologies also makes them useful for the morphometric analysis

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of objects such as material culture-lithic and bone industry, ceramics, epigraphy and numismatic assemblages, rock-art, etc. All in all, this means a step forward towards the digital future and the musealisation of all these elements of heritage, which in the past ended up sleeping in boxes at the museum basements and research centres, which today can be displayed through digital tools and websites, contributing to the democratisation of archaeological knowledge.

All these techniques have been included in one way or another in the presented communications at the conference, which were divided into different periods: From the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age (9 communications); Romanisation and Late Antiquity (9 communications); another session dedicated to the Middle Ages, Modern and Contemporary Periods (4 communications), and a new section devoted to Mining Archaeology (3 communications). The latter was due to the importance of ancient mining in this western sector of the Douro Basin, mainly derived from the extraction of gold in Roman times.

The implementation of analysis techniques linked to Geology and Earth Sciences has facilitated the study of the territory and promoted new practices in analysing landscape archaeology based on geomorphological knowledge. These data provided suggestive information in the archaeomining field and especially in the study of Roman gold mining in the Douro Basin. Promoting multidisciplinary research offers new areas of knowledge and outstanding results in archaeological research, as it has been pointed out throughout the conference.

During the scheduled intra-conference visits carried out in collaboration with the Roman Museum and Astorga City Council, participants had the opportunity to visit the remains of Roman occupation, such as the Roman baths, the ancient city walls promoting the different resources offered for scientific tourism in the city. But there were also visits to contemporary architecture, such as the Gaudí Palace, a neo-Gothic building designed by the modernist architect Antonio Gaudí and built at the end of the 19th century. The commitment made by the municipalities in the valleys surrounding Astorga to enhance the value of the extensive Roman heritage is helping to revitalise rural areas. However, much remains to be done, and the revaluation of the cultural heritage involves developing sustainable tourism that promotes the use of local resources, such as the Roman gold mining infrastructure, as stated during the field trip conducted by researchers from the University of Salamanca and the School of Mines (University of León).

In light of all stated above, the main objectives of the 'IX Jornadas' were to provide visibility to historical and archaeological heritage from the Douro area. The current economic crisis and Covid-19 pandemic situation, far from being an impediment, are a unique opportunity to promote access to cultural heritage. The virtualisation tools are now within everyone's reach and can help to enhance the value of archaeological sites. Investment in archaeology is a fundamental element in modern society, which demands knowledge through scientific tourism. The so-called scientific tourism has become fashionable in recent years through guided tours, QR codes, and mobile applications that enable public access to sites any time and anywhere from a smartphone application, thanks to the implementation of virtual tours. Now it is the time to commit to this type of heritage revaluation, contributing to democratising historical and archaeological knowledge, improving the scientific experience, and making culture accessible to everyone, in a moment when the rural environment needs new tools that contribute to fixing its population, due to the demographic loss occurred in the past years, and already known as the 'Empty Spain'. It is, therefore, an excellent opportunity to provide rural economies with new tools based on the implementation and structuring of resources as a focus for sustainable rural development based on quality tourism that demands scientific information.

Ten years of giving voice to research in the Douro Valley

Sonia Díaz-Navarro³ and Santiago Sánchez de la Parra-Pérez⁴

The Douro Valley is located in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula and forms a large sedimentary basin drained by the River Douro and its tributaries. This territory is clearly delimited by some of the main mountain ranges in the peninsula: to the south by the Central System, to the east by part of the Iberian System and to the north by the Cantabrian Mountains and the Mountains of León (Figure 1). These 'natural frontiers' differ from the current administrative boundaries: in Spain the region of Castilla y León formed by the provinces of León, Palencia, Burgos, Valladolid, Zamora, Soria, Salamanca, Ávila and Segovia; and in Portugal the districts of Porto, Aveiro, Viseu, Guarda, Vila Real and Bragança. This vast terrain means that it is very heterogeneous, with a great wealth of natural resources because of the climate diversity of its geographic zones: valley, hills, moors and mountains, forming different ecosystems. A result of this has been its unbroken occupation from prehistory to the present.

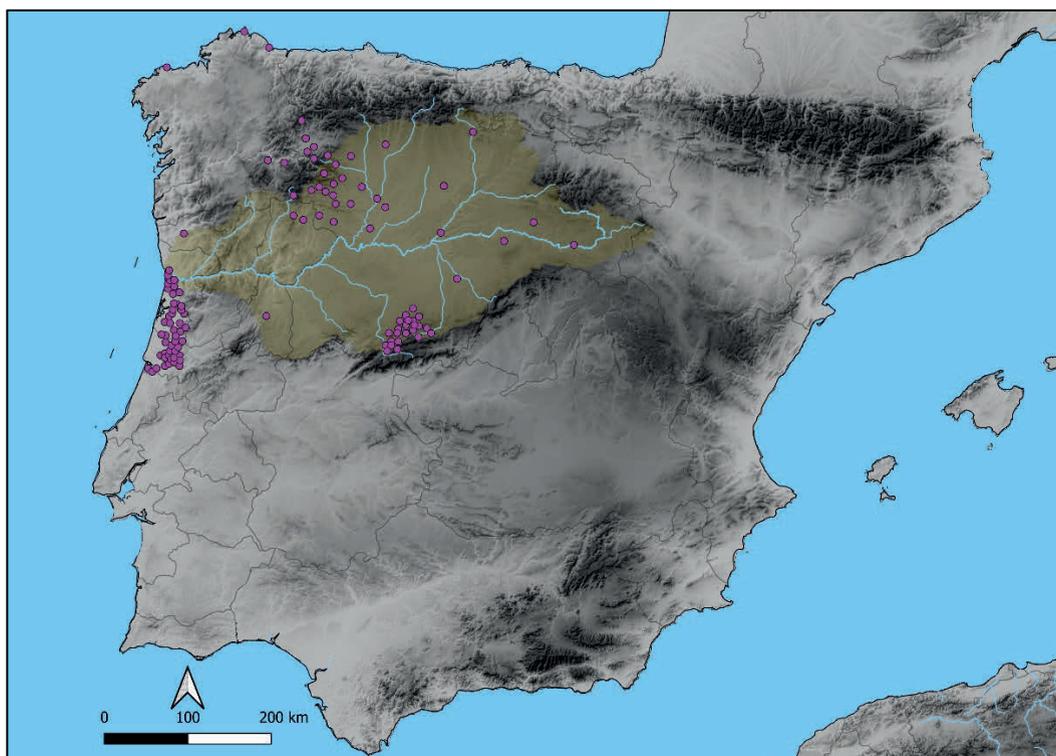


Figure 1: Map of the Iberian peninsula with the Douro valley highlighted in yellow and the sites studied in this monograph marked in pink.

These geographic, geological and climate variations have led to different types of settlements and multiple forms of exploiting the territory throughout history. The Douro Valley in this way is an area

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of great interest for archaeological studies comparing coetaneous sites in different areas or the diachronic analysis of the occupation of a single area.

The Douro Valley has been one of the main areas of scientific interest since the very beginnings of the discipline of archaeology in the late 19th century. Numerous archaeological projects are still providing data about its anthropisation over the course of history through multiple methodological approaches.

For ten years, the *ZamoraProtohistórica* Scientific-Cultural Association has aimed to create spaces for debate and discussion, and each year it holds the Meetings of the Archaeology of the Douro Valley, in which different research teams explain their work and offer different perspectives of study. In this way, archaeological projects with more modest funding and which generally receive less attention in the mass media are able to find the ideal setting for the dissemination of their results. Thanks to the collaboration of over 50 associated members, *ZamoraProtohistórica* carries out intense scientific activity, through the organisation of such events as Monographic International Conferences, and outreach by means of archaeological film festivals, educational workshops, competitions, exhibitions and tourist routes.

The present monograph brings together the best presentations in two of those meetings, the VIII and IX Meetings of Archaeology of the Douro Valley, held in Ávila and Astorga, respectively in 2018 and 2019. However, instead of a simple collection of articles, the aim of this publication is to show the importance of projects that have been left in the background despite obtaining interesting archaeological data about the occupation of this valley and its evolution. Moreover, we must take into account that many of these projects support new activity in a rural territory that is increasingly neglected politically and economically. For this reason, the title of this monograph includes the term ‘underdog’, defined in dictionaries as a person or group of people with less power or money than the rest of society.

Over all, this volume provides a general and inter-disciplinary view of the different types of occupation in the territory of the Douro Valley. The chapters are divided into four sections, three of them chronological: Prehistory and Protohistory; Antiquity and Late Antiquity; and the medieval and modern ages. The last section is thematic: *Varia*, and includes diachronic studies, museology, and archaeology of mining. Across these pages, multiple lines of research are applied to different disciplines at over 200 sites (Figure 1). The reader will find new results from recent excavations and the study of specific remains in material culture: pottery, numismatics, epigraphic studies, osteoarchaeology, lithic research, etc. New technologies are also included in the methodology used in some of the studies, supporting their arguments and conclusions, and optimising the research process. Thus lasers, LiDAR, aerial photography, geographical information systems and 3D documentation by digital photogrammetry are all used.

Therefore, in addition to being a medium to showcase the latest research carried out in this important territory, we believe that ‘The Archaeology of “Underdog Sites” in the Douro Valley: from Prehistory to the Modern Age’ contributes to knowledge of the history of this region, updating the archaeological state of the art in the valley and presenting results that may be used in the most diverse types of comparative studies.