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THE FIRST TWO SEASONS OF EXCAVATIONS AT ALCARIA LONGA: A CALIPHAL - TAIFAL PERIOD RURAL SETTLEMENT IN THE LOWER ALENTEJO OF PORTUGAL

JAMES L. BOONE (*)

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of the 1988-89 excavations at the site of Alcaria Longa, concelho of Mértola, Portugal. Investigations revealed a rural village site 4 to 5 hectares in size dating principally to the Caliphal and Taifal periods (10th and 11th centuries). The main part of the settlement was apparently abandoned during Almoravid times, with the exception of a small area at the top of the south hill, which may have remained through the 12th and early 13th centuries as a small fortification. A single house compound was nearly completely excavated, consisting of two long dry-stone masonry, tile-roofed structures built at right angles to each other, and enclosing a small interior patio.

INTRODUCTION

Archeological investigations at the site of Alcaria Longa in the concelho of Mértola were carried out in May-June of 1988 and 1989 by a team from the Anthropology Department, University of New México, USA, in collaboration with Campo Arqueológico de Mértola. This preliminary field work was designed to facilitate planning of a more extensive program of excavations at Alcaria Longa and focused on two principal activities:

1) production of a detailed map of surface features;

2) test excavations to determine the nature and degree of preservation of settlement remains present at the site. The results of this preliminary field work are presented below. A third field season was carried out in the summer of 1990, during which two additional house compounds and a small fortification structure at the top of the south hill were completely excavated. These will be described in a future issue of this journal.

PROBLEM ORIENTATION

The 1988-89 investigations at Alcaria Longa were designed to monitor social and economic responses of this rural community to periods of economic and demographic growth and decline associated with succeeding Muslim and Christian control of the region. A central issue

(*) Anthropology Department, University of New Mexico, USA



Fig. 1: Map of southern Portugal showing location of Alcaria Longa.

to be addressed in the investigation is the degree of continuity between rural settlement of the Islamic period and more recent historical settlement of the region. Current debate on this issue centers on the question of whether North African and Christian conquests during the mid-11th to the 13th centuries resulted in village abandonment and depopulation of the Lower Alentejo region (to be repopulated only later by settlers from the north), or whether medieval Islamic settlement in this region continued more or less uninterrupted into the modern period. The specific long-term objectives of the excavations and analyses at Alcaria Longa are:

- 1) to reveal the pattern of spatial organization of the settlement and compare it with existing settlement forms in the region;

- 2) to determine the chronology and the pace of settlement and abandonment of the village during the Islamic and post-Reconquista periods;

- 3) to elucidate patterns of economic integration of the community with nearby urban places such as Mértola and Beja and with the wider western Mediterranean economy.

The first two objectives are being achieved through an extensive program of excavation at



Alcaria Longa designed to reveal settlement layout and houseforms. Ceramic time markers, radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dating will be used together to determine occupation and abandonment dates of individual house structures. The third objective will be achieved through an intensive study of patterns of pottery production and distribution and use in the region. This part of the study will be undertaken in three stages:

- 1) the identification and quantification of broad technological classes of pottery excavated from Alcaria Longa;

- 2) the identification of the production sources of the ceramics using petrographic and neutron activation analysis; and

- 3) comparison of the kinds of ceramic industries present at Alcaria Longa with industries present in larger urban settlements.

THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Alcaria Longa is an abandoned village site located approximately 24 kilometers east of Mértola, in the Lower Alentejo region of Portugal (Figure 1). The name of the site, Alcaria Longa, is taken from an existing village located about a kilometer to the north-east. Many of the inhabitants of the present day Alcaria Longa believe that the site is the previous location of their own village and that the site was called «Via Longa».

The site of Alcaria Longa is spread over two low hills, covering the top and the

southern and western sides of one hill and the southern and western sides of the other (Figures 2 and 3). A smaller, separate area of occupation is found just to the northeast of the site, on the small valley floor. This valley is almost certainly the route of an ancient road that passed by the east side of the settlement from north to south, where it runs into a low-water crossing over the Ribeira de Carreiras. The present-day road and bridge that pass to the west of the site, connecting modern Alcaria Longa and São Miguel do Pinheiro, was not built until the late 1950s.

The southern-most hill has a commanding view of the valley formed by a sharp bend in the Ribeira de Carreiras, a tributary of the Guadiana River. Here, the valley widens into a small alluvial plain and the soil is deeper, moister, and less rocky. Today this area has orchards and gardens, and there are two water mills (now out of use) on the nearby creek bank (see Figure 2).

The main cultivation presently carried out on the hills themselves is of olive

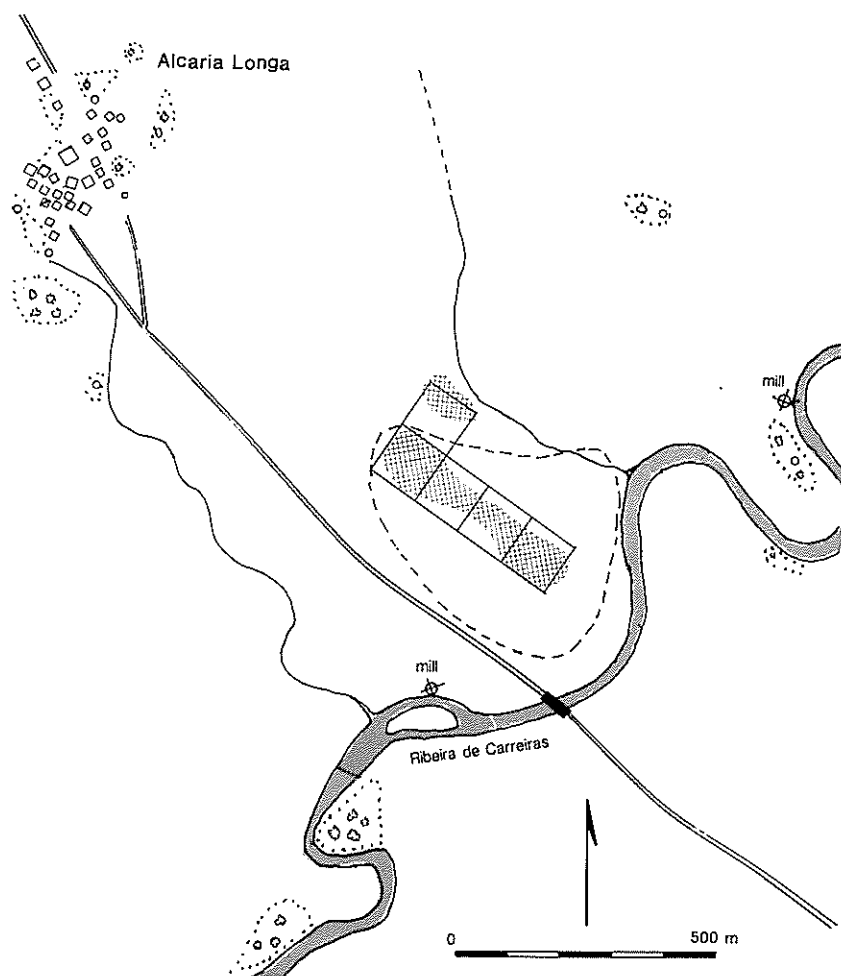


Fig. 2: Map showing location and extent of the site of Alcaria Longa. The hatched area indicates the area of most dense occupation. Dotted line shows extent of light surface remains, mainly roof tile and building stone.

trees, and these deserve special mention. Many of the trees appear to be quite old. Many are more than a meter in diameter, and one is nearly two meters in diameter. Unfortunately, all of the larger trees are hollow, so it is impossible to get a tree ring determination, but it is reasonable to suggest that the trees could be as old as 500 to 1000 years. It was initially thought that the trees might have been planted during the actual medieval occupation of the site and survived from that time. This interpretation was further based on the fact that virtually all the ancient olive groves in this area have abandoned medieval sites associated with them, as indicated by surface remains of roof tiles with zig-zig designs, building stone, and medieval pottery (however, not all medieval sites have associated olive groves). However, in excavation it was found that the trees in some cases were growing inside the remains of earlier structures. We now believe that the olive groves were planted later, after the abandonment of the site, perhaps in the 15th and 16th centuries. It furthermore seems likely that such abandoned sites were favored locations for olive tree plantings due to the deeper, looser, and more fertile soils there that are the direct result of earlier human occupation. One of the only ancient olive groves observed in the area that does not have a medieval site associated with it grows along the terraces of the Guadiana River southwest of Mértola. This would appear to be the exception that proves the rule, since the soils there are deeper, looser and more fertile due to natural alluvial deposition by the river.

Light surface remains cover a roughly rectangular area 600 meters long and 400 meters wide (Figure 2). However, as discussed above, the densest area of occupation, indicated by the presence of extensive piles of building stones and dense scatters of roof tile, was limited to the hilltop and the southern and western hillsides (cardinal direction) of the site, an area

approximately 400 meters long and 100 meters wide.

Initially it was thought that the rock piles might indicate the more or less precise location of individual structures. Our test trenches were designed in part to resolve this issue, and we found that while there were indeed structures beneath two of the rock piles we tested, there were also buried structures beneath areas where there were no rock piles. Thus, while concentrations of stone do indicate general areas where buildings once stood, there is not necessarily a one to one relationship between piles and structures.

EXCAVATIONS

The purpose of excavation in the first season was to determine the nature and degree of preservation of sub-surface archeological remains at the site. This objective was successfully carried out. Given the large scale of the kinds of features we were likely to uncover (house structures) and the fact that we knew very little initially about how houses might be distributed over the site, it was decided that excavation of long, narrow trenches would be the most cost-efficient way to learn about spatial distribution and preservation of features over large areas.

The placement of these trenches was aimed at two main objectives: 1) to get an idea of how house structures and related features were dispersed over different topographic areas of the site; and 2) to determine the differing degree of preservation of houses under different topographic conditions. Three 1 m wide trenches were placed in different topographic areas of the site (Figure 3). Trench 1 (28 m long) was placed on a hillside, oriented along grid north-south, and crossing one of the terrace-like features and a large rock pile (these surface features are discussed above). Trench 2 (28 m long) was placed grid east-west across a broad

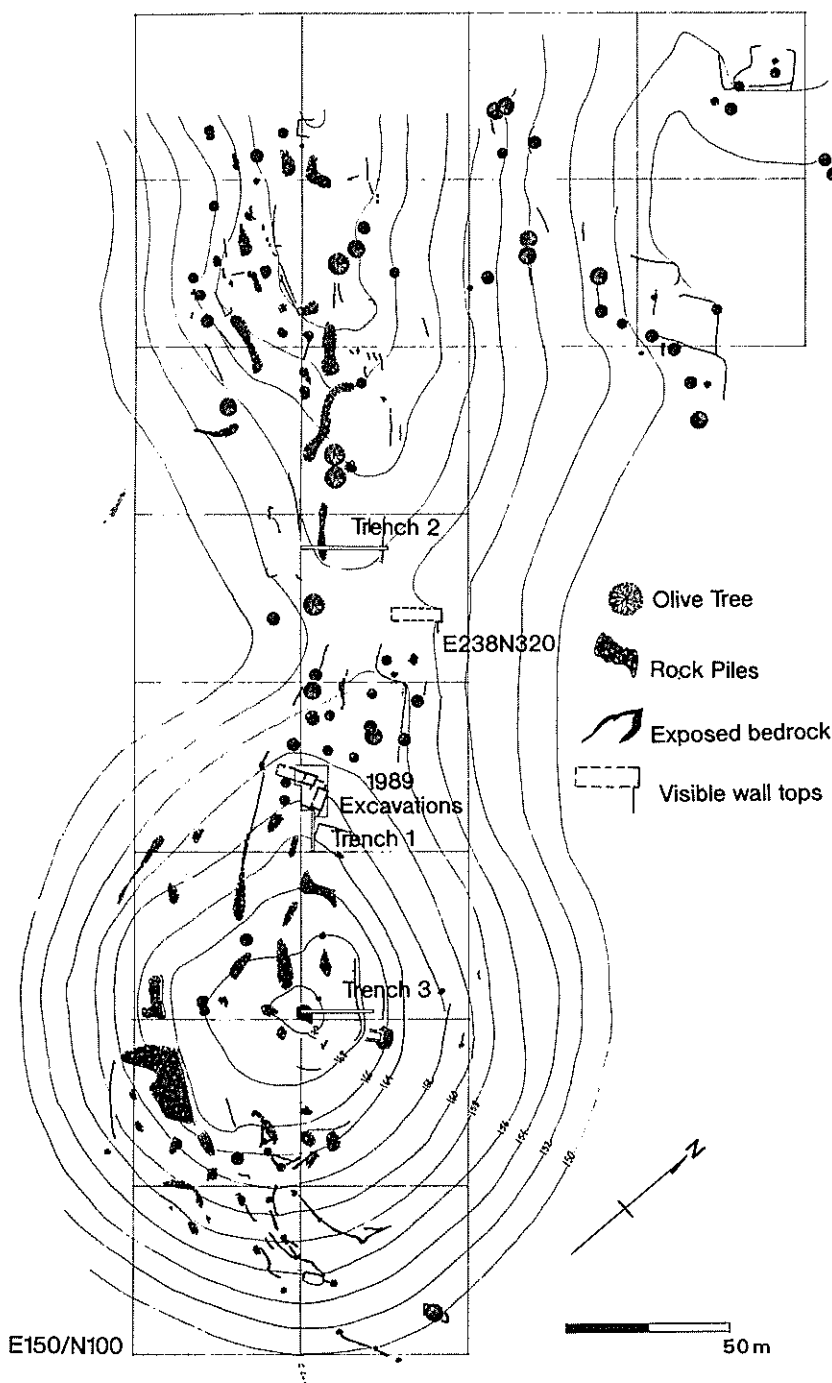


Fig. 3: Detailed map of the site of Alcaria Longa. Grid corresponds to grid indicated in Figure 2.

flat area of the site in the saddle between the two hills. Trench 3 (24 m long) was started at the top of the grid south hill and continued grid east-west downhill over another of the terrace-like features. All subsequent references to directions in this article (north, south, etc.) will refer to the grid orientation (oriented 56 degrees west of true north), not to true cardinal directions.

Trench 1. Trench 1 was placed on the north face of the south hill, crossing several topographic features we wished to study further, including a terrace, two rock piles, and the edge of what appeared to be the outline of a rectangular structure. Trench 1 answered several questions about the association between surface features and subsurface remains. The «terrace» like surface feature encountered here was formed by the walls of a structure built on the hillside. Rock piles were indeed associated with the walls of buried structures, but buried walls were also encountered in the absence of surface rock piles.

Open spaces are characterized by bedrock overlain only by very thin layers of gravelly, rocky topsoil. The areas of deepest soil and rock deposition are areas where buildings previously stood; wall foundations acted as traps for downhill movement of soil and rock. Overall, the test trenches revealed a relatively shallow, single occupation level at the site. The average depth of soil and archeological deposition was about 50 cm to bedrock. On hillsides, as in Trench 1 area, remains of structures were buried to a depth of up to 1.5 meters.

Trench 2. Trench 2 was placed across a narrow, flat area in the saddle between the two hills of the site (Figure 3). The trench completely crosses the area of occupation at this point. There is no evidence of structural remains at either end of the excavated trench, nor is there any surface indication of buried structures downhill of either end of the excavation. The purpose of this trench was to determine the extent of preservation of this flat area, which was considered to be a likely area for post-depositional disturbance due to plowing. As it turned out, parts of the area were indeed disturbed by cultivation, but the area still contained interpretable subsurface indications, and yielded useful information regarding the use of space in this area. The remains of a single structure (probably a house), a broad "street" area, a midden deposit, and the remains of a possible second structure were encountered.

Trench 3. Trench 3 started at the summit of the south hill and extended 24 meters to the east over the edge of a steep terrace on the hillside. This hilltop has a commanding view of the valley formed by the Ribeira de Carreiras, and it thought that the area might have been the site of a fortification (the presence of a fortification was confirmed during the 1990 field season). Additionally, our single secure piece of evidence for Roman occupation, the base sherd of a terra sigilata plate, was encountered here.

Trench 3 represents the most complex depositional situation encountered on the site. Recovery of the terra sigilata sherd indicates the possibility of a Roman occupation. However, it is likely that Medieval recycling of building stone may have caused considerable disturbance of the Roman occupation levels. The fact that the terra sigilata sherd was found in disturbed surface deposits with other sherds of Medieval and 19th or 20th century origin underscores this possibility. A dense midden deposit lying directly below the upper most terrace of the hill at the eastern end of Trench 3 almost certainly represents disposal of refuse from buildings above.

E238N320 Test Square. Two 2 X 2 meter squares were placed at E238 and

E240 N320 (Figure 3) in order to determine the nature of a long buried structure along the western boundary of the site, the outlines of which were clearly visible on the surface. It was first thought that the structure might be a defensive tower or bastion jutting out from what appeared to have been a wall around the site. Our excavations indicated that the structure was instead a long roofed building with a flagstone floor, similar to other house structures that were subsequently excavated. Undisturbed roof fall covered the interior surface of the the structure; the tiles had zig-zag finger impressions on the top surfaces, indicative of tiles of the preAlmohad period. Foundation walls were preserved to a height of about 30 cm. Schist flagstones which formed the floor of the structure appear to have been disturbed, possibly by the downhill slumping of the building. Light trenching around the entire perimeter of the structure revealed a long narrow structure identical to the other

east-west oriented structures later uncovered. This particular structure appears to have been fully 18 meters long and about 4 meters wide. Further investigation of what were thought to be traces of a defensive wall around the site indicated that these wall features are the sides or backs of house structures positioned along the sides of the hill. It is possible that houses were lined up along the perimeter of the site as a defensive measure, but it is unlikely that there was a defensive wall *per se* during the Islamic occupation of the site.

1989 EXCAVATIONS

The 1989 field season at Alcaria Longa took place between May 20 and July 27, 1989. Field work was devoted entirely to the excavation of a house compound discovered in Trench 1 during the 1988 season (discussed above). The purpose of this season's excavations was to

excavate a single house compound at the site in order to gain an idea of how individual households were organized spatially at the settlement. A second objective was to locate and excavate trash deposits associated with the house compound in order to gain an idea of what constitutes a typical ceramic assemblage of a household. Both these objectives were successfully completed.

A total of 128 square meters (including 14 square meters previously excavated in the 1989 season) were excavated in the Trench 1 area in order to uncover as completely as possible a group of house structures discovered in the Trench 1 sounding made during the 1988 season (Figure 4). These excavations revealed the remains of a single household compound consisting of two rectangular tile roofed structures and a small connecting room (probably for storage). The two house structures were organized around an unroofed patio area with a bedrock and flagstone surface.

Structure 1 was only partially uncovered, due to the presence of a large olive tree growing inside the extreme west end of the buried structure. However, by exposing the wall-tops of the structure in the unexcavated portion, we were able to ascertain that the entire structure was 11.2 m long and 2.8 m wide (interior dimensions). The structure was divided into three rooms by interior walls and doorway. The larger middle room (west end of excavated area) is 5.8 m long by 2.8 m wide and had a doorway leading to the patio area outside. A second room at the east end of the structure was smaller (2.5 m by 2.8 m) and had no direct exterior access. The third room of this long structure was revealed only by wall trenches, since there was a large olive tree growing there. The westernmost room of the structure was revealed only by wall trenches; it measured 1.8 by 2.8 m.

The floor area along the north wall of the east room of Structure 1 showed evidence of intense burning, with associated ash and charcoal deposits. Later excavation revealed the presence of two hearths lined with broken roof tile (denoted H1 and H2, Figure 4). The tile lining was covered by a thick (3 to 7 cm) layer of hard burned clay. The burned clay layer appears to be a functional part of the hearth. It is not completely certain at this point how the hearths were used. Fragments of Plainware Type I and II cooking pots are often found imbedded in the burned clay, so it is at least clear that cooking was done in the hearths. Also, animal bone fragments, some with cut marks, are often found mixed with associated ashes in these hearth features (animal bone analyses will be described in a future report). These alkaline ash deposits are in fact the only places where animal bones are recovered at the site. Elsewhere, the bones have disappeared due the very acidic soil conditions. There is no evidence of any kind of enclosure above the hearth surfaces that would have allowed them to be used as ovens. Nor were any domed ovens of the type commonly used in the area today found in the excavations, despite the fact that three complete house compounds have been excavated to date.

Two finger rings and a perforated silver Arabic coin (discussed in more detail below) were recovered directly on the floor of the northwest corner of this room, within the burned area. The interior floor of Structure 1 was covered with a thick

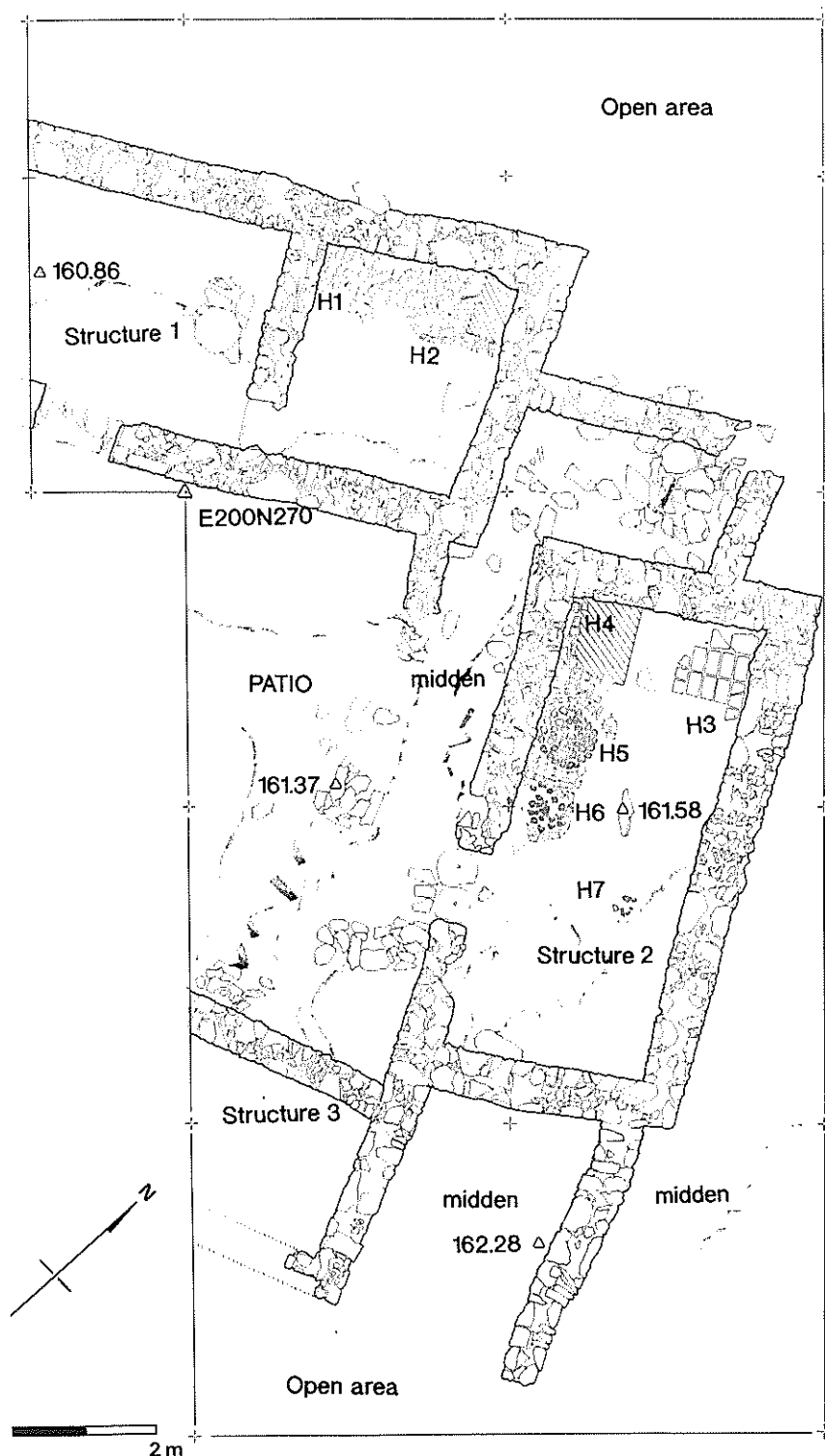


Figure 4: Plan of excavated house compound in Trench 1 area, excavated in 1989. H-numbers (H1, etc.) refer to hearths. Small hatched areas (as in H4) were burned areas left unexcavated for future sampling purposes. Elevations are in meters above sea level, based on benchmark (171 meters) located at summit of south hill.

layer of fallen roof tile. Four complete tiles recovered from this layer averaged 44 cm long, by 19 cm wide at the widest end and 13 cm wide at the narrowest end, and averaged about 3 kg in weight. Most of the tiles had zig-zag linear decorations on the top surface, made using the fingers while the tile was still wet. This type of tile is consistent with a time period spanning late Roman period through the beginning of the Almoravid period. Tile density by weight inside Structure 1 was 83 kg per square meter, suggesting that the structure decayed and collapsed with its roof still intact. This is in direct contrast to Structure 2, which had a tile density by weight of only 10.5 kg per square meter, indicating that the tiles from the roof of this structure were probably taken off and reused in another building after it was abandoned. Structure 2 is a smaller, single-room structure (interior dimensions 5.9 m by 2.4 m). This structure had a single door on the west side leading to the patio area, the threshold of which was built of two millstones.

Structure 2 appears to have been used for some kind of light manufacturing activity. There are five separate hearth areas located inside. Hearth 3 (H3, Figure 4) is lined with fired bricks. Hearth 4 appears to be another tile-lined hearth, covered with a thick layer of burned clay, identical to the two excavated in Structure 1. Next to it are two circular hearths (Hearths 5 and 6), side by side, lined with hand-sized quartz stones set in a circular pattern. These hearths are outlined by broken tiles. Hearth 7 is a smaller burned area set into the bedrock floor of the structure, again lined with quartz stones. The only artifact found associated with any of these features was a small bronze ring found in the ashes of Hearth 7. At this point, it is unclear what kind of activity was associated with these hearths. However, it looks as if the two buildings are associated with a single house compound, in which the larger, east - west oriented structure was used

for a living area, and the smaller north-south structure was used for some manufacturing activity. A nearly identical organizational pattern was revealed in two house compounds excavated in the 1990 season (to be described in a forthcoming publication). Charcoal, tile, brick and burned quartz samples were taken from all of the hearths for future thermoluminescence dating.

The floors of both structures were surfaced with a combination of packed clay, occasional flagstones, and the natural bedrock surface. The two larger structures are connected by a small rectangular structure (2.88 m by 1.48 m), which also had a tile roof, and was probably used for storage. Its only entrance was from the patio area.

In the southwest corner of the excavations, a small corner of a tile roofed structure (Structure 3, Figure 4) was uncovered (indicated by high density of roof tile found inside). This structure may, too, have opened onto the patio area, or it may pertain to a separate house compound with its own patio. Further excavations here in 1990 failed to clarify the structure's relationship to the other houses, due to the fact that it was very poorly preserved (being located on an incline in very shallow soil) and its proximity to a living olive tree.

CERAMICS

Pottery sherds recovered in excavation were given a preliminary ware classification based on paste and surface treatment to aid in the planning future research. All sherds were tallied by ware category and provenience unit (level-locus/square). The following is a descriptive list of the glazed and plainware types that were ultimately defined. A summary of ceramic ware counts by excavation unit is presented in Table 1.

Glazed wares. Eighty-five glazed sherds,

comprising 2.8% of the total sample of 3087 ceramic sherds, were recovered in excavation. The following glazed categories were distinguished in the preliminary analysis. These preliminary ware types will heretofore be referred to by a Roman numeral (e.g., Glazed Type I, Plain Type VI, etc.).

Glazed Type I. The two most common glazed types are the manganese-painted honey-colored wares (also called brown-on-gold, or melados). The brown-on-gold wares can further be roughly divided into two more or less distinct variants

	TRENCH 1		TRENCH 2	TRENCH3	E238N320	
WARE	1988	1989				
<u>Plainware</u>						
PLI	182	207	81	53	1	
PLII	11	11	10	17	5	
PLV	7	39	3	10	0	
PLVI	444	917	534	264	25	
PLVIA	0	0	1	123	2	
PLVIII	3	0	4	8	0	
PLXII	0	0	23	0	0	
PLXIII	0	0	15	1	0	
	647	1174	671	476	34	
<u>Glazed</u>						
GLI	19	12	10	7	0	
GLII	1	3	5	9	0	
GLIII	0	0	2	0	0	
GLIV	0	0	3	1	0	
GLVI	0	0	0	9	0	
GLVII	0	0	0	1	0	
GLVIII	0	0	0	2	0	
GLIX	0	0	0	1	0	
	20	15	20	30	0	
TOTALS	667	1189	691	506	34	3087

TABLE 1: 1988-89 ALCARIA LONGA CERAMIC WARE COUNTS BY EXCAVATION UNIT

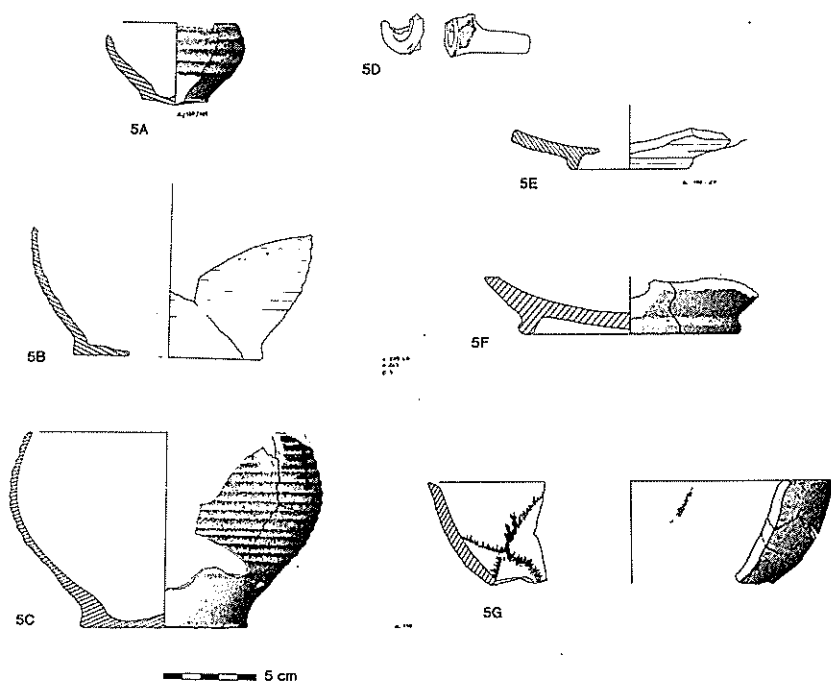


Fig. 5: Glazed wares recovered at Alcaria Longa. See text for details.

(Glazed Types I and II), which, from archeological evidence elsewhere, appear to be temporally distinct as well. Glazed Type I is the earliest and the most common variant in the excavated Alcaria Longa sample (48 pieces, comprising 56.5% of all glazed sherds). In Type I, the glaze usually pale greenish-gold in color, with a cream to light pink paste. The manganese painted designs are usually quite dark and have a runny appearance; however, the edges between the brown design and the gold background are usually quite distinct. The glaze is often quite thin; the coarse texture of the paste can be seen and felt under the glaze. Body sherds are often horizontally ribbed (Figure 5A-C), plates (5E-F). There are also small bowls in this form (5G) and a few conical serving bowls, consistent with Caliphal vessel forms. A partially glazed lamp of the Caliphal style (5D) was recovered in the Trench 1 area.

Glazed Type II. The second brown-on-gold variant, and the second most common glazed ware at Alcaria Longa, appears to be a later type, probably dating to the later Taifal, Almoravid, and probably Almohad periods. Eighteen sherds, or 21.1% of all glazed wares, were recovered at Alcaria Longa. The glaze is a darker and richer gold and the paste is usually a darker pink or rose color. Glaze is typically thicker and shinier, completely covering the sandy texture of the paste. On examples with manganese painted designs, the border between brown and gold is less distinct, due to the thicker glaze, which caused the design to blur during firing. Forms are more often bowls and plates; there are few, if any, jars.

Glazed Type III. White tin-glazed interior and exterior, on a light pink paste (2

joinable pieces, found in Trench 2). These were rim/shoulder sherds of a carinated conical serving bowl.

Glazed Type IV. Dark green shiny glaze, with bright orange sandy porous paste. Form: large jug with loop handles. This ware appears to date to the Modern period.

Glazed Type VI. Clear lead glaze on a relatively thin ware of red paste (9 pieces, all found in Trench 3). This kind of ware is found in contexts dating roughly from the 14th century and continues to be manufactured into the 20th century. In our excavations, lead glazed ware was found only in Trench 3, in mixed fill or surface contexts. For example, one sherd was found in the same surface level as the terra sigillata piece; another was found just below the level that contained two pieces of modern glass. It is likely these pieces were deposited after abandonment of the village, for example, during olive harvesting activities.

Glazed Type VII. Green glazed exterior, white tin glaze interior (1 piece, Trench 3). Rim sherd of carinated conical bowl.

Glazed Type VIII. Very shiny yellow-gold opaque glaze on orangered paste. Two sherds were recovered in a surface level in Trench 3, at the very top of the hill. They are most likely from the 18th or 19th century.

Glazed Type IX. Green glaze both sides, red paste (1 sherd from the rim of a pot lid, Trench 3).

Plainwares. Plainwares comprised 97.2% of the 3087 sherds recovered in excavation.

Plain Type I. A coarse, sandy ware of dark reddish brown color, often with a black core (524 sherds, or 17.5% of all plainwares). Many body sherds have horizontal ribbing. Forms are usually large jars (8A) or cooking pots or casuelas; they often show signs of burning on the exterior.

Petrographic analysis of samples of this ware (as well as Plainware Type II below) by Dr. Elizabeth Garrett indicate the presence of

hornblend grains that probably derive from the weathered diorites from the area around Beja. The general appearance of this ware is similar to that of wares produced in Beringel today.

Plain Type II. This category comprises Type I wares that have been burnished on the interior surface (54 sherds). Vessel forms are usually basins (alquidares; Figure 8E, 8D) and cooking pans (casuelas; 7F & J).

Plain Type V. Thin cream-colored to light pink wares (59 sherds). The cream color is often more pronounced on the weathered outer surface of the sherds; freshly broken interior surfaces are darker pink to orange. Forms are usually small jars or tankards (Figure 7I).

Plain Type VI. Porous orange plainware. This is the most common plain ware, comprising 72.7% of all plainwares (2184 sherds). Characteristically this ware has bright uniform orange color throughout and there is no core. Petrographic analysis indicates the presence of inclusions of low-grade metamorphic rock grains that possibly derive from the schist bedrock found in the region. Sherds are typically very weathered and powdery, and are difficult to wash without leaving brush scars. A small percentage of the common wares had white-matte painted designs. White painted designs were limited to large storage jars (Figure 9A & B) or small one or two-handled tankards that were probably drinking vessels (Figure 6A). The majority of the Type VI ware sherds were of large storage or water jars such as those represented in Figures 8B & C and Figures 9A-B, or of small thinwalled tankards (jarritas, Figures 7A-E, 7G-H). In addition, a few common-ware carinated serving plates and small bowls were recovered (Figure 6B-D).

Plain Type VIa. A «hard orange» ware that resembles Type VI in paste texture (i.e., with the coarse-sand inclusions) but is much harder and less friable, possibly because it was fired at a higher temperature. Where it occurs, it seems

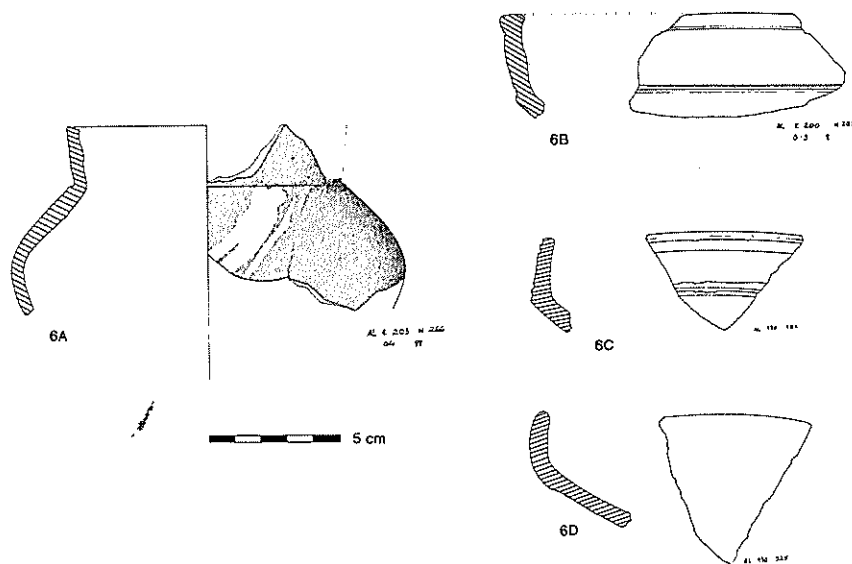


Fig. 6: White matte-painted tankard (jarrita) and plainware bowls and plates recovered at Alcaria Longa.

to replace the softer porous orange ware as the most common ceramic category. All but three sherds of this ware were recovered from Trench 3 (top of hill). Sherds were scattered across all units and levels, so it is unlikely that it is an isolated occurrence of one or two odd pots. Thus, it is potentially an important plainware category to study for possible chronological changes in manufacturing techniques.

Plain Type VIII. Hard, relatively high fired brownish gray ware (15 sherds). Most examples are jars with rounded bulging rims. **Plain Type XII.** Relatively thin, beige ware with larger inclusions. Twenty-three sherds, all from Trench 2, although in different units. Often with horizontal ribs. Exclusively jars.

Plain Type XIII. Bright reddish orange exterior with grey or beige interior (16 sherds). Fifteen of the sherds are from one midden deposit in Trench 2; one other sherd was recovered in Trench 3. Paste is sandy and soft, but very homogeneous and uniform in thickness.

Terra sigilata. One sherd of terra sigilata was recovered from the surface level of E206 N200, in Trench 3 (top of hill). The sherd is part of the base of a large plate. António Dias Diogo, a colleague who is a specialist in Roman pottery and has studied the Roman pottery recovered at Mértola, has tentatively identified the piece as having been manufactured in southern Gaul during the early part of the 1st century. This sherd indicates a Roman period occupation for at least the hilltop area of the site. It brings up the possibility that some of the plainware is from Roman period as well.

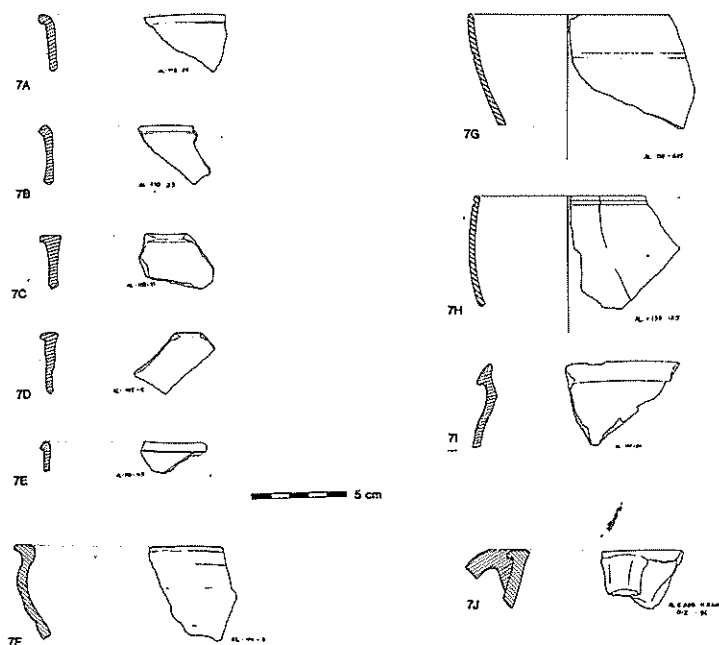


Fig. 7: Tankards and cooking vessels recovered at Alcaria Longa.

Areal Distribution of Ceramic Wares. The ceramics recovered from the Trench 1 area in 1988-89, considered as a separate group, differ in composition from the other areas of the site (refer to Table 1). First, and most importantly, only Glaze Type I and Glaze Type II sherds are found in this area, despite the fact that 35 of a total of 85 glazed sherds recovered overall (41.2%) were from this area (1856 of the 3087 sherds recovered were from this area). All of the other glaze types, which are all later types (that is, 12-13th through 20th century) were found in the Trench 3 excavations on top of the hill (except for the tin-glazed carinated bowl rim, found in Trench 2). Of the 35 Glaze I and II sherds found in the Trench 1 area, 31 are Glaze Type I, which is the glaze type associated with the Caliphal and early Taifal periods. Furthermore, nearly all of the least common plainware types (PLVIA through PLXIII) are found in either in Trench 2 or Trench 3, suggesting that they, too, are later types. The 1990 excavations in the Trench 1 area, which uncovered two additional house compounds and produced approximately 2000 additional sherds, did not change this overall picture; no glazed wares other than Type I and II were found there.

It is also important to note that nearly all of the sherds recovered from the Trench 1 excavations derive from distinct, buried, relatively undisturbed midden deposits. In contrast, ceramics recovered from Trenches 2 and 3 were often disturbed by plowing. For example, in Trench 3, terra sigillata was found in the same levels as modern glass and lead-glazed redware.

From this, we can conclude that the Trench 1 area of the site is a relatively

undisturbed area of the site that was in all probability occupied mainly during the Caliphal-Taifal period, and was abandoned before or during the Almoravid period, a conclusion that is consistent with the thermoluminescence dates (described below). Later ware types recovered at the site appear to be associated with the small fortification located on the summit of the south hill (Trench 3), or with even later, desultory depositional activities associated with sheepherding or olive harvesting.

OTHER ARTIFACTS

Glass. Four fragments of a single yellowish-green glass vessel were recovered in a midden-like deposit in unit E203 N264, Level 3, of Trench 1. The vessel is probably a small thin-walled bulbous bottle or jar. Although further comparative study is needed, the ware is consistent with glass wares of the Islamic period elsewhere. Two chips of modern decolorized glass were recovered from a surface level of Trench 2.

Metal. Fifty three pieces of iron were recovered in excavation. Of these, 46 pieces were found in Trench 1, in middeny deposits spread across 4 units. Most of the pieces were completely mineralized fragments, unrecognizable as to form (Figure 10A-C). The few recognizable forms were of nails or spikes (Figure 10D-F). Three nails were found near the foot of the mill stone threshold, and may have been part of the door way.

Bronze artifacts include a bronze spindle-whorl (Figure 10G) that was recovered in the midden to the south of Structure 2 and a ring shaped object recovered from Hearth 7 in Structure 2.

Perhaps the most interesting metal artifacts recovered were two finger rings and a silver Arabic coin that had been perforated to make a

button (Figure 11A & B and 10H (=11B). The rings are made of a silver-copper alloy and each is set with what appear to be glass stones, although positive identification awaits further analysis. The silver coin was unfortunately damaged to the extent that a positive identification of the ruler and the date has not yet been made, but stylistically, the coin is consistent with the Taifal or Almoravid periods. It certainly predates the Almohad period. A similarly perforated coin, probably minted in the Caliphal period, was recovered in a house compound just to the south of this area during the 1990 excavations.

These three objects were recovered together in a group on the floor of the smaller room of Structure 1, within the burned area. They appear to constitute part of a woman's jewelry, left inside the structure at the time of abandonment. This may be evidence of a rather hasty abandonment of the site, possible during a time of warfare, but we will need to excavate more houses to see if there is further evidence of such a situation. The perforated coin is similar to the kind of jewelry worn by Moroccan Berber women, who «wear» their dowry prior to marriage. This may be an indication that dynastic coinage was used here in different kind of economic context than it was originally intended, possibly indicating a relatively autonomous, tribal-like economy at this rural settlement.

Slag. Several pieces of iron-rich slag were recovered in excavation. The slag appears to be from iron smelting, and probably indicates some smelting was done on the site.

Thermoluminescence Dates. Three preliminary thermoluminescence dates were run at the Thermoluminescence Laboratories, University of Durham, England, under the direction of Dr. Ian Bailiff. These are low accuracy survey dates run primarily to determine whether the materials recovered at Alcaria Longa were suitable for further analysis. A series of between 10 and 20

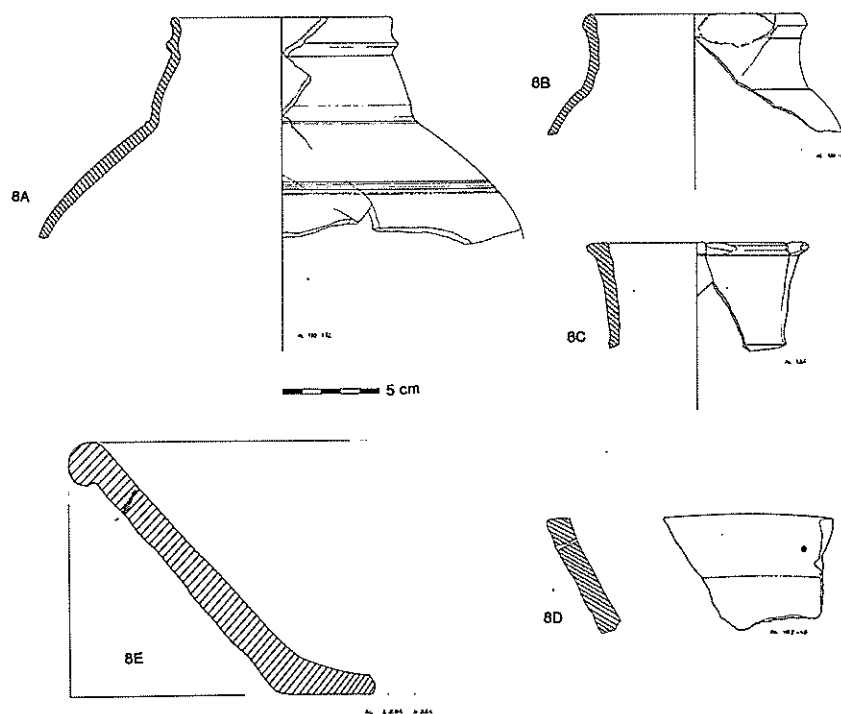


Fig. 8: Large jars and basins recovered at Alcaria Longa.

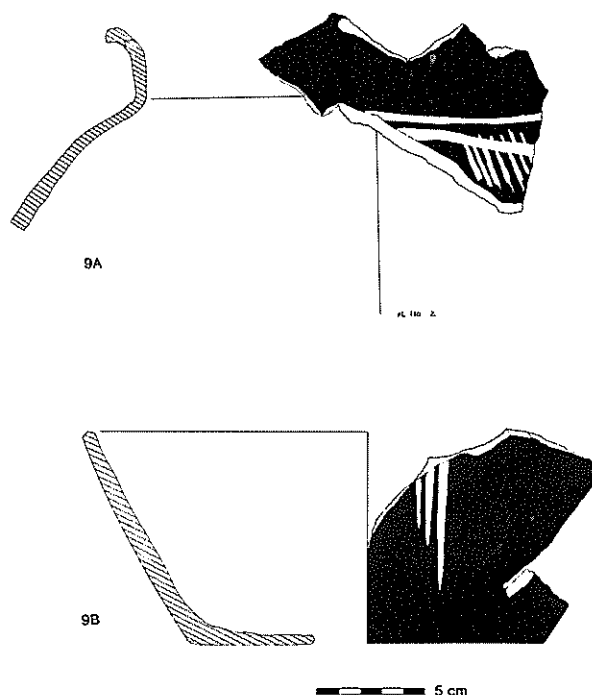


Fig. 9: White matte-painted plainware jars recovered at Alcaria Longa. The two pieces are not from the same vessel.

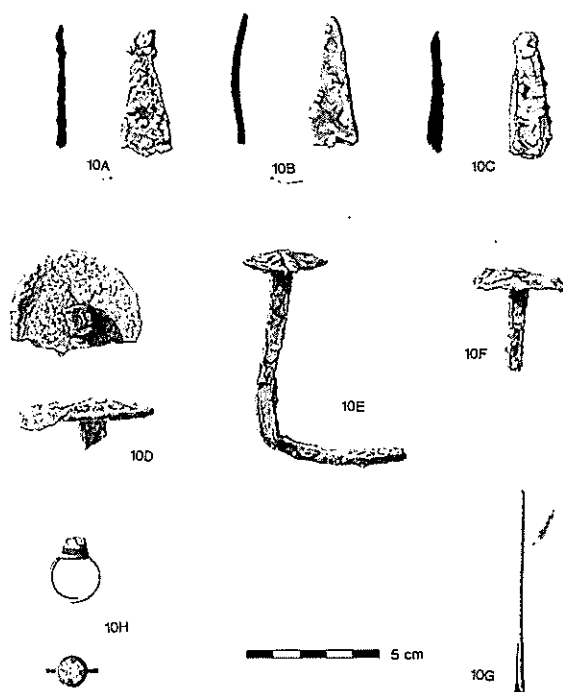


Fig. 10: Metal artifacts recovered at Alcaria Longa.

higher accuracy dates are currently being processed, and will be published at a later date.

The three preliminary dates are listed below:

The burned clay sample (TL-4) appears to have some properties that make it unsuitable for thermoluminescence dating; we are currently conducting further analyses to determine what the problem is. The 410 AD date is almost certainly

<u>Alcaria Longa Reference</u>	<u>Durham Reference</u>	<u>TL Date (years)</u>
TL-4 E202N272 2-3 Burned clay, Hearth 1, Structure 1	Dur90TL140-ASfg	410 AD +/-320
TL-6 E204N260 0-2 Base sherd of melado jar, midden south of Structure 2	Dur90TL140-BSfg	1080 AD +/-180
TL1a E200N262 0-1 Roof tile, Structure 3	Dur90TL140-ASfg	1060 AD +/-190

inaccurate, given what we know about the other time markers on the site. The roof tile and the melado sherd fall within the expected age of the occupation.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the excavations at Alcaria Longa reveal a rural settlement occupied during for relatively brief period spanning the Caliphal, Taifal, and possibly the early Almoravid periods (10th to the 12th centuries). Excavations on the top of the south hill suggest a fortification structure that may have been occupied into the early mid-13th century. There is no evidence of permanent occupation of the site after this time. A single terra sigillata sherd and several other possible Roman common ware sherds may indicate a light occupation during the Roman period, but there is no indication of occupation between the Roman and Caliphal periods. The household compound excavated in the Trench 1 area consisted of two long, dry-stone masonry, tile roofed structures built at right angles to each other, enclosing an open patio area. The east-west oriented long structure (12 meters by 3 meters) was apparently used for a living area. The smaller north-south oriented structure (6 by 2.6 meters) was apparently used for light manufacturing activities. Two other compounds adjacent to this one were excavated in 1990, and were organized exactly the same way (to be described in a forthcoming report).

Although analyses of ceramic production is still underway, preliminary results indicate that the majority of the plainware (Plainware Type VI) recovered at the site was made from clays that could have been obtained locally. A smaller proportion of the wares (Plainware Types I and II) are consistent with clays of volcanic origin found around Beja.

Acknowledgments: The 1988 and 1989 excavations were carried out in collaboration

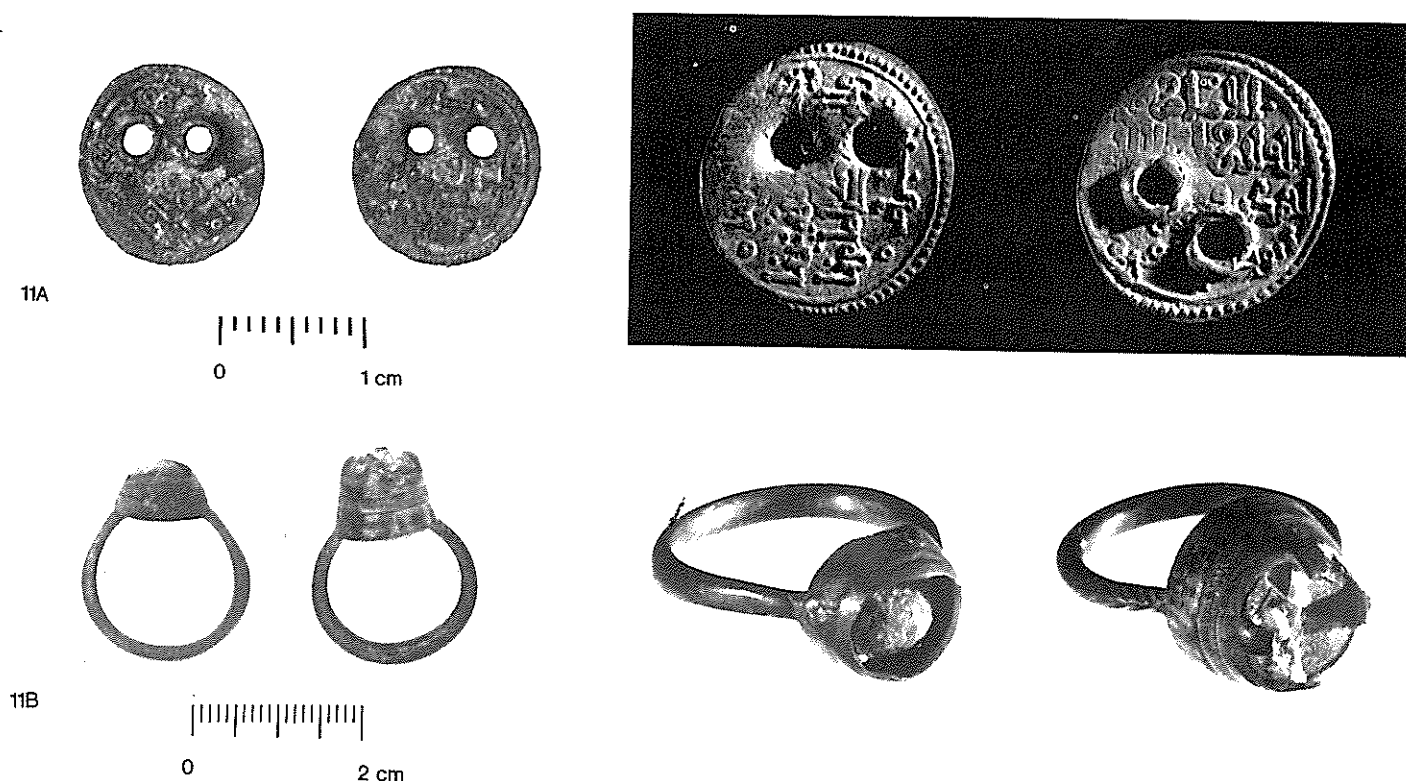


Fig. 11: Perforated silver Arabic coin and two finger rings recovered from Structure 1 at Alcaria Longa.

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