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*El Tolmo de Minateda en la Alta Edad Media. Cerámica y Contexto*, by Victoria Amorós Ruiz. Publications de la Universitat d'Alacant, 2018. 418pp., 326 figures. Pb. 25.00 €. ISBN: 9788497176354.

Reviewed by Elena Salinas, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. esalinascordoba@gmail.com

El Tolmo de Minateda is an archaeological site located in the Southeast of present-day Spain, showing inhabitation from the fifth to the tenth centuries CE. This urban settlement has been identified by their researchers as a bishop's see, Eio, during Late Antiquity (Visigothic period, fifth to eighth centuries CE), and Madīnat Iyyuh, an Islamic city, for the Andalusī period (eighth to tenth centuries CE).

Several previous works have covered the research results related to the archaeological excavations and the material culture of El Tolmo (Gutiérrez 1996; Amorós 2012). The contribution of this book (the outcome of the author's thesis) is the presentation of the pottery in context, including not only the stratigraphic sequence, but also the connectivity with other regions that the pottery reveals. The monograph is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction where the history of El Tolmo de Minateda is summarised. The research methodology is clearly explained in Chapter 2. The third chapter explains in detail the five stratigraphic contexts selected, including colour maps, sections, summaries and stratigraphy tables.

The core chapter is the fourth (pp. 117–252), where fifteen ceramic groups with subtypes are described and accompanied by figures and tables inserted in the text, which is very helpful to understand the formal characteristics of each ceramic group.

Chapter 5 offers a broad perspective of the connections of El Tolmo with the Mediterranean region. The author distinguishes between three functional categories: transport containers (Hispanic, African and Oriental amphorae), cooking ware and tableware (*Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía Meridional*, or TSHTM, an Iberian type of red-slipped ware; and African Red Slip D, coming from North Africa). The information is complemented with drawings, charts with percentages and diagrams showing the development in time of tableware consumption. The author provides an interesting reflection about the difference in date of production of some ceramics and their documentation in well-dated contexts, which seems to reveal that they were used (or re-used) long after they were made. However, she overlooks certain causes that might explain this phenomenon, such as alternative interpretations on their function, the consumers' approach to them and the effects of macro-scale distribution.

Chapter 6 considers glazed ceramics. A point of interest is the identification of one shard as a fragment of Glazed White Ware I, a Byzantine product. This is risky suggestion for a single fragment, but it is justified by the fact that it was discovered in a context of the first half of the seventh century, a time when there was no known glaze products made in the Iberian Peninsula (see below). The second part sheds more light on a question that has been discussed by the scientific community for some time: was there a Visigothic glaze production? Those who support the existence of the Visigothic glaze base their arguments on the finds of some

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pre-Islamic ceramics with what was interpreted to be glaze, but has been proved to be remains of glass. That is, what was interpreted as glazed ceramics were actually crucibles, made by clay, and used to produce or recycle glass, a common practice in the Iberian Peninsula during the Visigothic period (De Juan *et al.* 2019). The author's interpretation of El Tolmo and other peninsular examples, in addition to those of Volubilis (Morocco), previously studied by her as well (Amorós and Fili 2018), has correctly pointed to glass crucibles. As we wait for further archaeometric analyses that contribute to solve the meaning of these finds, this work tells us about a time when primary glass was not produced or did not arrive in sufficient quantities and recycling was more frequent. Finally, the third glaze group comprises the first peninsular glazed ceramics, dated in the Islamic Emiral period (ninth to early tenth centuries CE). The small amount of glaze wares in El Tolmo allows to discard the possibility that they were produced locally, and therefore this type of glaze has to be considered as another indicator of connectivity of the site. Therefore, this category of ceramics provides valuable information on the diffusion that these luxury goods had in early al-Andalus.

Chapter 7 is devoted to production methods through a chronological sequence of six phases, where the central Phases (3-5) are subdivided into several sub-phases. Moreover, a specific area (Section 60) has been selected, in order to analyse the complete evolution of handmade/wheel made ceramics in each space in Phases 1-6. Maps, tables and diagrams provide useful insights into the data, which are in some occasions surprising, as the rise of handmade pottery in the ninth century. We see, for example, how wheel-throwing pottery is always predominant, but it goes from 94% in Phase 1 to 56% in Phase 6. This chapter also includes comparative case studies from three regions: Iberia (11), Maghrib (4) and the Near East (3). The author explains well the parallel and divergent transformations in contemporary sites in the context of social and cultural complexity, with changes in production systems and ceramic uses. She also recognises that a deeper interpretation is still to be done. In this sense, it is worth criticising the fact that she still clings to a dichotomy between handmade and wheel made pottery, which is long recognised as oversimplified in the context of al-Andalus.

The last chapter explains the six phases of the chronological sequence of El Tolmo, and links its ceramics to their historical and archaeological context, which includes the struggle between the Byzantine Empire and the Visigothic kingdom in the Eastern region of Iberia, the Islamization of the area and the definitive abandonment of the site in the early tenth century. It highlights the Mediterranean trade of ceramics (Phase 3, late seventh to mid-eighth centuries), the apparition of painted ceramics and other Islamic markers (Phase 4, eighth century), and the technological change in the ninth century (Phase 5), as it has been also documented in other sites of al-Andalus. This explanation shows how important the strategic location of El Tolmo is in relation to the Mediterranean commercial circuits, as well as to the centre and south of the Iberian Peninsula.

This volume, which ends with an extensive bibliography, is an excellent work to understand the transformations of a western Mediterranean settlement from Late Antiquity to the early Islamic period, taking into account its cultural and economic complexity and the changes in the production and consumption of ceramics.

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