

***Lucentum*: the Decline of the City Through Its Domestic Architecture**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the population's movements after the decline of the city of Lucentum through its domestic architecture. We will present several private examples (*Domus del Peristilo*, *Domus de la Puerta Oriental*, *Domus del Mosaico*) that confirm the early abandonment of the city. In order to understand the processes of abandonment, we will analyse the domestic decoration systems, the different phases of the houses (construction, remodelling and abandonment) and the state of the urban facilities related to them. On the other hand, we will study the interaction between the urban center and its ager, showing the complete symbiosis between them. Finally, we will examine the evolution of the neighbouring city of Ilici and the Portus Ilicitanus that seem to grow after the Lucentum's collapse.

Introduction

The Roman domestic spaces, understood as microcosms, were a reflection of the social transformations and changes that took place in ancient cities. Therefore, they are valuable instruments to analyse the phenomenon of cities qualified as „shooting stars“. The various phases of a house, from its construction, reforms and abandonment (sudden or premeditated), could be connected with the state of their cities.

For this reason, our purpose in this paper is to study the phenomenon of the oppida labentia through the domestic spaces of the Roman city of *Lucentum*. Its private spaces show, through its construction techniques and its ornamental systems, a total symbiosis with the future of the city.

The Roman City of *Lucentum*

The ancient city of *Lucentum* (3ha), was located on a hill at 38 m above sea level, just 3.5 km NE of the current historic center of Alicante, and stands out as one of the few Valencian Roman cities that has not suffered a destruction and plundering by later constructions.

It was born in the 3rd century BC, fruit of Carthaginian intervention. This first foundation was destroyed around the 209 BC, when Scipio conquered the Iberian capital. Subsequently, there was a hiatus in the city, without signs of a habitat in the 2nd

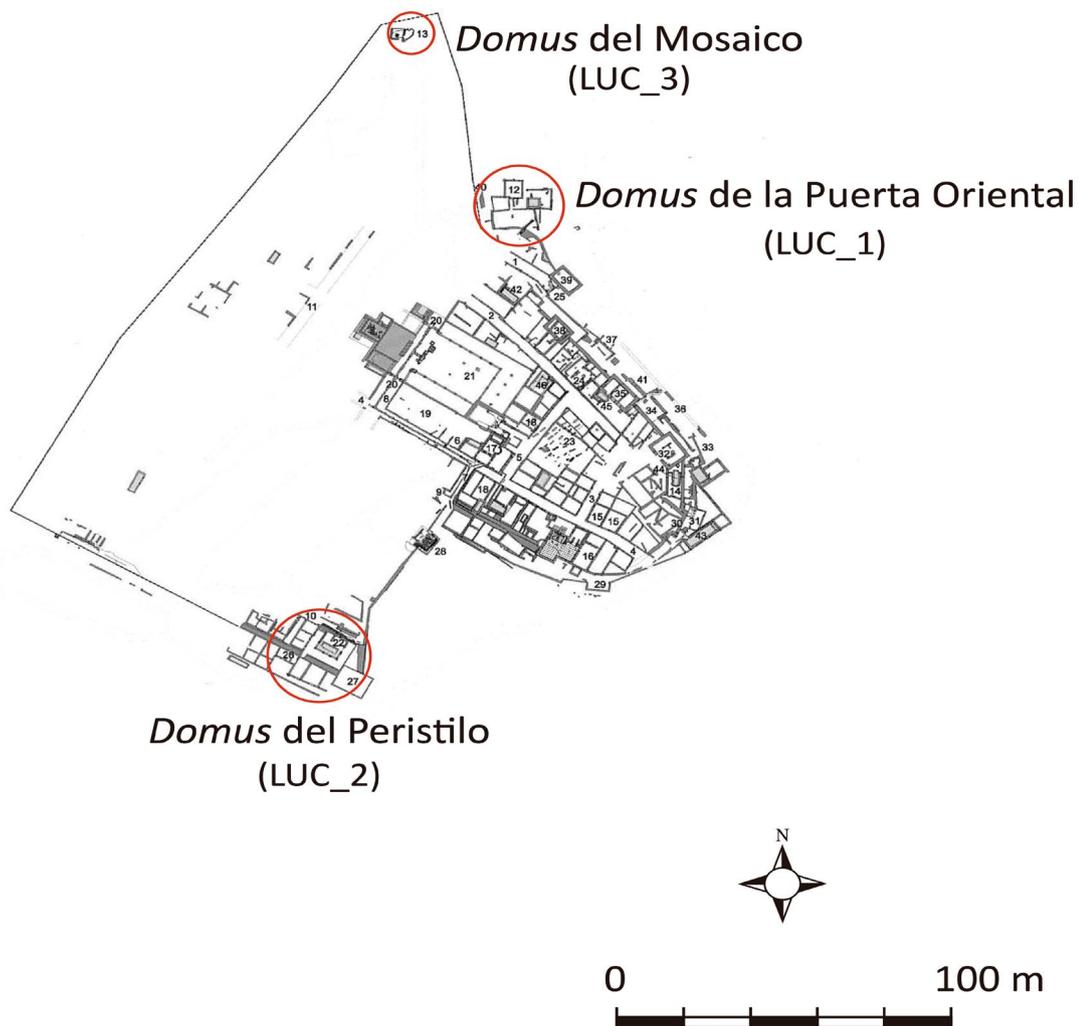


Fig. 1: The city of *Lucentum*.

century BC. In the first quarter of 1st century BC took place the first Roman architectural intervention, with the construction of a new military wall stimulated by the war crisis of the end of the Republic.

Its strategic position between *Ebusus*, *Dianium* and *Carthago Nova*, was decisive in the reoccupation of *Lucentum*, becoming an important settlement in the navigation routes.¹ The granting of the legal status has been proposed towards the 26–25 BC, coinciding with the second trip of Augustus to Hispania and the second colonial deductio of the neighbouring *Ilici*. Thus, it was with Augustus and the Julius-Claudian dynasty, when the city achieved the maximum splendor and with Tiberius it became a fully established civitas.

During this period, the two thermal facilities were erected; the military elements of the Eastern Gate were eliminated, turned into a symbol of urban prestige; the sanitation and water supply networks were remodeled and the urbanism was reordered. The new city did not surpass the previous walls, consequently it was not possible to design an orthogonal plan. The layout of two of the main streets, the street of Popilio and the street of the forum, possible *cardo* and *decumanus maximus*, would be fixing a first forum, which will determine the position of the later high-imperial forum (fig. 1).² Regarding the residential buildings, it seems that the houses were established in the Era change. As in the case of Ilici, it seems that private buildings were located in the limits of the city's pomerium.

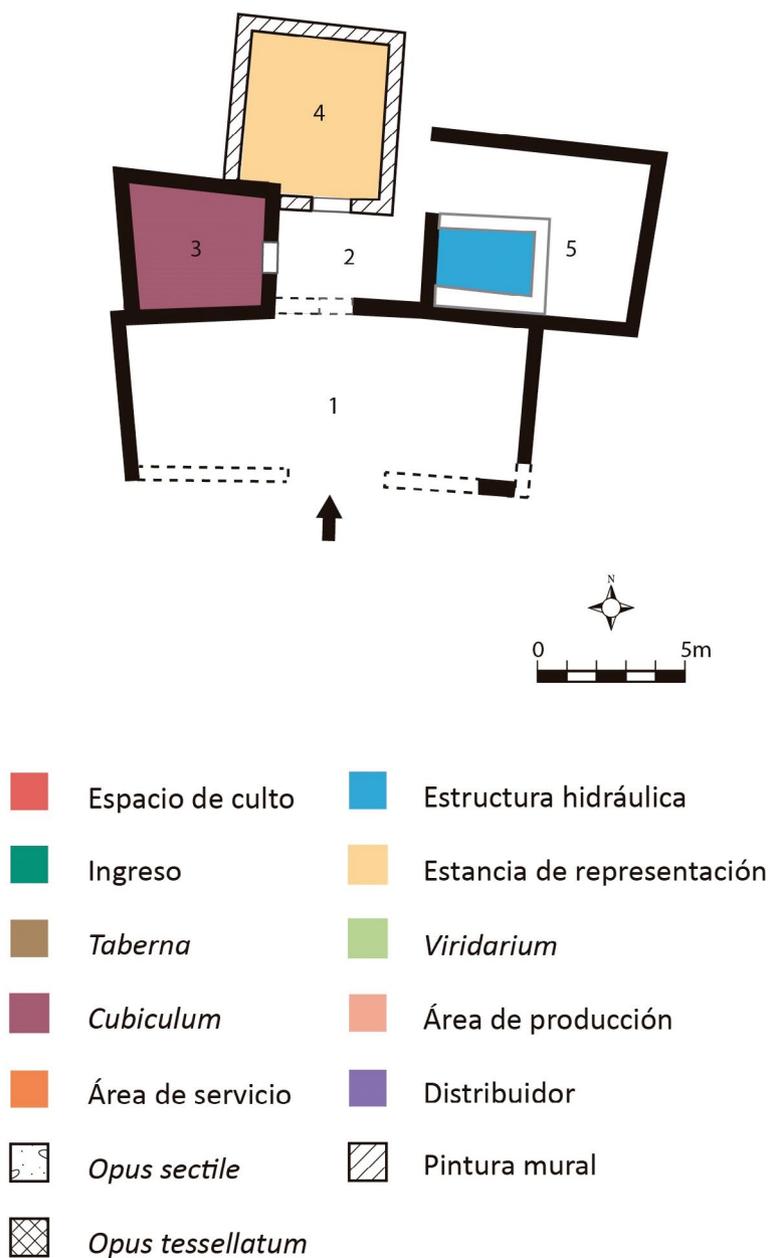
The decline of the city began just after its period of splendor, in the 1st century AD. One sign of this decadence was the silting of the Popilio Street's sewer, which would disable the thermal baths, proof of the lack of maintenance of the public infrastructures. In the middle of 2nd century AD, the plundering, the silting of cisterns, the change of spaces' functionality and the blurring of the high-imperial urban fabric became generalized.³

One of the problems that limit our study is that *Lucentum* was excavated at the beginning of the last century, and the material culture from the *domus* were not exhaustively treated and published, so we cannot work with this evidence to provide absolute dating of the moment of the *domus*' abandonment. For this reason, we have chosen alternative factors in order to assign a date to the useful life of the *domus*, although we are aware that the presence of material culture would bring much light to these processes. We will focus our analysis on three cases of study: the *Domus de la Puerta Oriental*, the *Domus del Peristilo* y the *Domus del Mosaico*.

Domus de la Puerta Oriental

The *Domus de la Puerta Oriental* was excavated by M. Tarradell and E. Llobregat, from 1965 to 1967, in unknown circumstances was partly destroyed by a backhoe in the late 70's. In the 1980's of the last century, were documented some of the panels discovered by the restorer M. MonraVal Sapiña. In the 1990's, A. Fernández carried out new technical and stylistic analysis.⁴ This *domus* had two phases, the first one at the beginning of the 1st century AD, when the sewer under the wall was destroyed, and the second one, at the end of the first century AD/beginning of the 2nd century, when the five rooms of the house were built (fig. 2).⁵

The room 4 is undoubtedly the space of representation, located on the axial axis with the main entrance and decorated with mural paintings. In this case, we can date the abandonment of the house through the study of the mural paintings carried out by A. Fernández. The pictorial decoration was divided, horizontally, into three parts: a plinth with marble imitations; a central part that alternates wide

Fig. 2: *Domus* de la Puerta Oriental.

and narrow panels, the wide ones decorated with flat inks in red, yellow and green, and the narrow ones with vegetable chandeliers; and, finally, the upper zone was decorated with a moulding cornice of 15 cm in height. The ceiling stands out for its decoration with a network decoration in which vegetable elements, such as fleurons or garlands, and figurative elements, such as lunar masks and birds, appeared inside circles (medallions) (fig. 3).⁶



Fig. 3: Decorative motives from the room 4 (*Domus de la Puerta Oriental*).

We would like to emphasize the close relationship between the plinths from *Lucentum* and *Ilici*, specifically those of *Domus* 5F and 10D, dated from the middle of the 1st century AD until the middle of the 3rd century A.D. The great similarity contributes to the hypothesis of a possible itinerant workshop in the area.⁷ The stylistic study of the different decorative motifs shows that, although the double bichromes fillets used to frame the panels were typical of the third style (first half of 1st century AD), they reappeared again in the 2nd century. These motifs were associated with the double knots (painted in the corners) of the Fourth Style, so we can establish the 2nd century, as *terminus post quem*. The panels' frames of blue bands were typical of the Adrian period, with several parallels in Cartagena, Mérida and Valencia. The roof system, used since the 1st century AD (Fourth Style) was hereditary of the "casetón" ceilings that reappears in the provincial painting between the end of 2nd century AD and

the beginnings of 3rd century. The example of *Lucentum*, as well as that from Cartagena (*Domus* de la calle del Duque 29), both from the beginning of the 2nd century, show the early imitations of this area in comparison with the rest of western provinces.⁸

Therefore, the evidences indicate that the splendor of this *domus* took place in the second century. However, these paintings were not repaired, as happened in the paintings of *Ilici*, where ornamental programs allow us to distinguish various periods in the lives of these houses.

In the *domus* 5F from *Ilici*, the parietal decoration had two phases: from the 50 to the 150 AD, contemporary to *Lucentum*, and from the 275 to the 350 AD. The first phase corresponded to the construction of the house and the second one was related to remodeling and repainting works. They were developed following the imperial style, with tripartite schemes in horizontal and vertical, figurative decorations and the use of tempera and fresco techniques.

Thus, although both cities share a contemporary origin, confirm through the existence of common workshops in charge of decorating the most luxurious private spaces, the absence of restorations in the *domus* from *Lucentum* contrasts with the *Ilici*'s dynamism, that point out that both cities had a diverse historical evolution. After its excavation by J. Lafuente in 1931, the *Domus* del Peristilo, has been subjected to pillaging, alterations and inappropriate reconstructions that have favored the previous city walls.⁹ The *Domus* del Peristilo was dated around the change of the era by indirect dating thanks to related constructions.

Even though the dating difficulties, we know that its construction would be after 20–15 BC, because it was related to the urbanization processes in the eastern part of the city and the repaving of the forum. In addition, there was not an urbanization process before the Augustan period. The house was built over the previous city wall, same processes were carried out in the eastern side of the site. It is important to note that the construction of the sewers would also take place on those dates, which would require raising the level of the streets, causing uncomfortable adaptations in the houses' accesses. The access to the *Domus* del Peristilo was made through stairs that descend into the interior; consequently, the construction of the *domus* should be before the repaving processes.

The peristyle's drain and the street sewer collapsed at the beginning of the second quarter of the 1st century AD. The structures were fully in use at that time, but they should decline at that moment, since sanitation was no longer maintained.¹⁰

***Domus* del Mosaico**

This house has preserved two rooms, communicated through an opening of 70 cm wide. The state of conservation does not allow us to confirm its domestic character. However, the characteristics of the mosaic and its numerous parallels in private environments, reinforce the hypothesis that it was a *domus*.

The main room preserves a pavement of *opus signinum tessellatum*, whose design formed a reticulated central rosette, framed by a square of meanders (fig. 4).¹¹

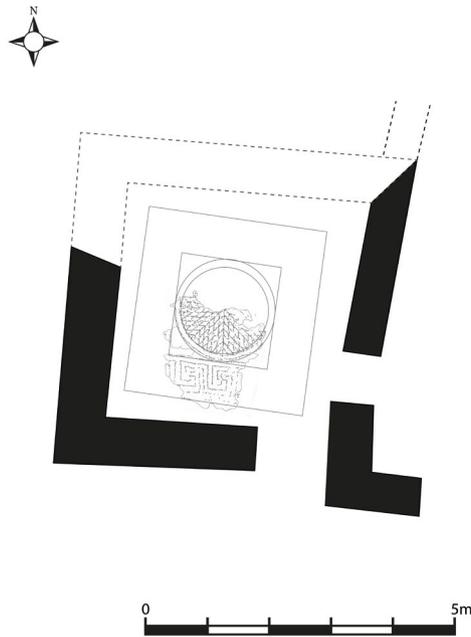


Fig. 4: *Domus del Mosaico*.

One of the particularities is the off-centre position of the mosaic with respect to the walls of the room. The adjacent room also had a pavement of *opus signinum tessellatum*. The continuity observed between both pavements and the decentralized position of the emblem with respect to the walls of the room are the reasons why, despite what has been indicated in previous publications, we propose two construction phases. The first phase should be when the *opus signinum* mosaic was built, simultaneously to the municipalization of Lucentum; it should pave a wider room, where the mosaic currently conserved, would be the central emblem of a much larger design. In a second phase, the construction of new walls would divide the space in two rooms. That would be the reason why the mosaic appears decentralized with respect to the walls that frame it. This hypothesis would correspond better with all the parallels. In addition, the last phase walls showed mouldings, typical from hydraulic pavements; so, these spaces could be open, after they lost its public character, as a decline symbol.¹²

This type of mosaic, with a large medallion filled with a grid of rhombus, converging towards the central point, and framed by a meander of swastikas and squares, was developed between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD, in areas of early Spanish Romanization.¹³ Based on the stylistic criteria, L. Abad dated it between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD.¹⁴ The existence of a pavement in *opus signinum*, whose technical and morphological characteristics were in use during the late Republica and High Empire, confirms the insertion of the Valencian territory in Romanization circuits and assumption of italic fashions, similar to those found in the Catalan area, the Ebro valley and Murcia.

The mosaic in Roman Hispania was an early event, with some parallels in other provinces of the Empire, and with a little time lag between the first Roman pavements in Hispania and its Roman-Campan prototypes. As we have already indicated, this decorative scheme was very frequent in the Roman world, since it has been found in *Glanum*, in the Maison du Capricorne; in *Herculanum* in the *tablinum* of the Samnitic House, dated around 30–20 BC;¹⁵ in the Villa Grotta Rossa's mosaic (2nd century BC); and in the *tablinum* of the House VII. 6.28.¹⁶ Also in Hispania, have been found parallels in the Casa de Likine in La Caridad de Caminreal; in the central emblem of the Arcedianato of Pamplona (1st century BC); in *Segeda II*;¹⁷ in the *opus signinum* of room 7 from the Casa agrícola of *Contrebia Belaisca*;¹⁸ in the Roman house n°1 of Ampurias, built at the end of the 2nd century BC.¹⁹ And the mosaics of the Catedral Vieja, the Ruices, or the House of the Dolphins, all of them in Cartagena.²⁰

The parallels show that the motif was widely spread in the areas neighboring the Valencian territory, indicating a specific chronology associated with the Roman conquest. The arrival of the Romans also affects the early introduction of italic decorative patterns in Lucentum, likewise the commercialization of models and materials for their execution.²¹ Likewise, these parallels confirm our hypothesis about the possible existence of an original wide room, since it is strange to find the emblem isolated when usually it is part of wider geometric compositions. In addition, this kind of compositions was related to main rooms as *triclinia* or *atria*.²²

Thus, the domestic spaces and its decorations were dated around the change of era and the 1st century AD. However, there are no signs of maintenance or restoration beyond the 2nd century, as we could appreciate in the *Domus* de la Puerta Oriental. In some cases, clear deceleration symptoms are preserved, such as the clogging of the sewer detected in the *Domus* del Peristilo or the construction of walls over sumptuous mosaics, like in the *Domus* del Mosaico. These phenomena confirm the early abandonment of the city of *Lucentum*. These data coincide with the material culture: the imports ceased around the 200 AD, likewise the last numismatic emissions registered were those of Trajan and Adriano.

The ager

Another interesting approach regarding the abandonment of the *civitas* is the study of the flows of population, once *Lucentum* was abandoned. We can analyze the parallel construction's processes of the urban *domus* and the founding of large villas, in the 1st century (fig. 5). The occupation of the surroundings of the city took place from its constitution as a Roman municipality, establishing an indissoluble binomial between *urbs/territorium*. At this time, villas such as El Molino or Parque de las Naciones were founded, as well as the new phase of the Villa Romulo.²³

Likewise, when the urban decadence arrived, it had an effect on the suburban and rural villae, that were abandoned in the 3rd century AD, some of them not even reached the dawn of this century. Among the few that surpassed these years are the Casa Ferrer I, the

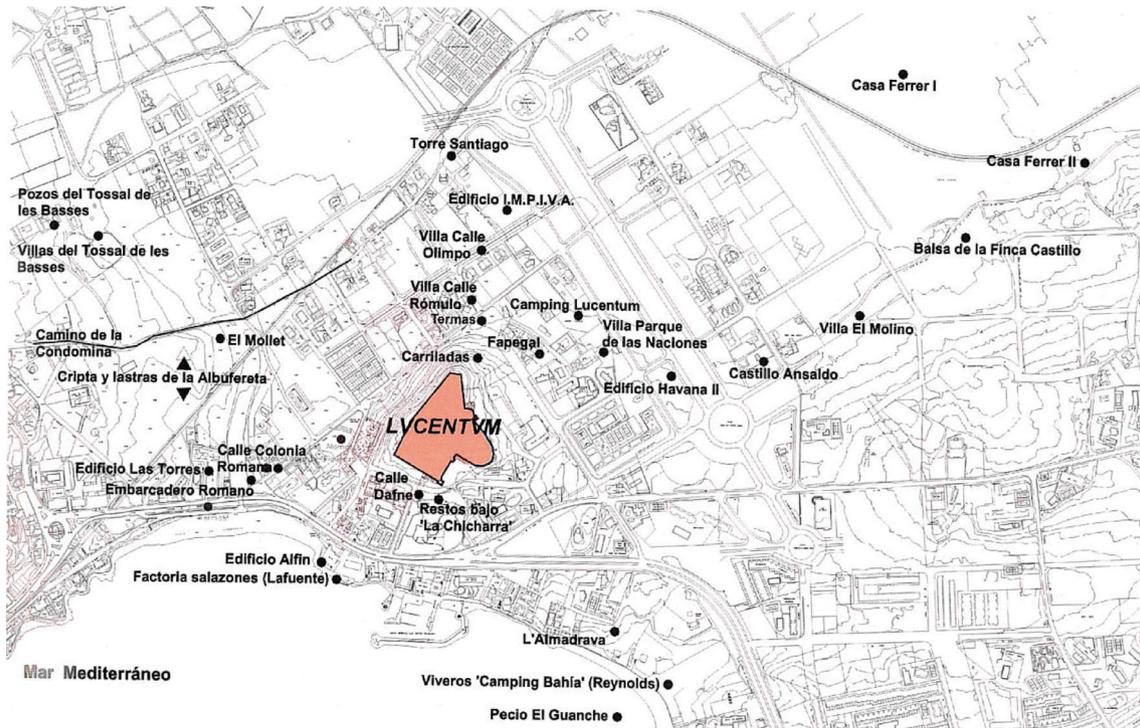


Fig. 5: *Lucentum* and its *villae*.

Parque de las Naciones (although the *pars urbana* belonged to the first phase, from the first to the second century AD). The Edificio Havana II and the Tossal de les Bases reduced their surfaces, losing their *pars urbana*. There are no signs of economic recovery in any of the Lucentum *ager villae* beyond the 3rd century AD; contrary to what happens in villas belonging to neighboring cities, such as Xauxelles (*Allon*), Banyes de la Reina (*Dianium*) or Algorós from the *ilicitani's ager*.

***Ilici* and the *Portus Ilicitanus* as Recipients**

Finally, the decline of *Lucentum* (at the end of the 2nd century AD) was simultaneously relative splendor of *Ilici* and *Portus Ilicitanus*, where was found one of the most luxurious late-antique domestic spaces of the Valencian territory.

In *Ilici* there was no crisis in the third century, the first symptoms of decline occurred between the end of 4th century and the beginning of the 5th. It has been verified the maintenance of the sewage system, the repaving of the streets, the management of the urban waste or the massive arrival of ceramic productions of the 4th century AD. It is in the first decades of the 5th century, when plunderings were recorded in order to recover building materials from large areas, including dismantling some public buildings such as the *Termas Occidentales*.²⁴

Conclusions

To conclude, the useful life and the abandonment of domestic, urban and rural, spaces belonging to *Lucentum* is a valuable reflection of the processes of growth, splendor and decadence of the city. On the other hand, the study of the surrounding territory, as well as of nearby cities such *Ilici*, can shed light on the movement patterns of the population that used to inhabit *Lucentum*, after its abandonment.

Notes

- ¹ Olcina et al. 2015, 255–257.
- ² Olcina 2009, 45–53; Sarabia 2014, 171.
- ³ Olcina 2009, 56.
- ⁴ Olcina 2009, 108 f.
- ⁵ Fernández Díaz 2000–2001, 215 f.; Olcina – Pérez 2003, 100.
- ⁶ Fernández Díaz 2000–2001, 215–236; Sarabia 2014, 185; Olcina 2009, 108 f.
- ⁷ Fernández Díaz 2000–2001, 218–220.
- ⁸ Fernández Díaz 2000–2001, 215–236; Sarabia 2014, 185.
- ⁹ Olcina et al. 2015, 258.
- ¹⁰ Olcina et al. 2015, 258.
- ¹¹ Olcina 2009, 110–113.
- ¹² Olcina 2009, 110–113; Peñalver 2018, 570–572.
- ¹³ Abad 1989, 161 f.; Olcina 2009, 110–112.
- ¹⁴ Abad 1989, 162; Ramallo 2001, 179 f.
- ¹⁵ Clarke 1991, 92 f.
- ¹⁶ Joyce 1979, 254; Ramallo 1979–1980, 290–292; Ramallo 2001, 179 f.
- ¹⁷ Uribe 2009, 157–160; Uribe 2015, 357–365.
- ¹⁸ Uribe 2015, 394–296.
- ¹⁹ Fernández Díaz 2003, 220–225.
- ²⁰ Ramallo 1991–1992, 204; Ramallo 2001, 179 f.; Uribe 2009, 157–160; Madrid 2004, 49 f.; Ramallo et al. 2007, 592.
- ²¹ Ramallo et al. 2007, 596.
- ²² Peñalver 2018, 141.
- ²³ Olcina – Pérez 2003, 91–108.
- ²⁴ Tendero – Ronda 2014, 241 f.

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Fig. 1: based on Olcina 2009. – Fig. 2: Peñalver 2018. – Fig. 3: Peñalver 2018. – Fig. 4: based on Olcina 2009. – Fig. 5: Olcina – Pérez 2003.

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