

## **Archaeology (*per se*) and archaeological tourism as a new opportunity for development in Alcarria, Cuenca.**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the science of archaeology is to help society learn about the history and prehistory of a place, a goal which can be achieved through different educational and pedagogical content, as well as through the tourist industry. But it is increasingly the case that archaeological resources provide support to the local economy in the areas where they are located.

One example of this new cultural, tourist and, above all, social reality is the Roman villa of Noheda. This article sets out the multiple ways in which archaeology can become a resource that acts as a stimulus for the region, with a particular emphasis on the development of a social function. Since the start of the research process the site has been, to the extent possible, a driving force in the local area, generating jobs directly linked to archaeology (*per se*), as well providing other indirect benefits to the region.

Furthermore, a line of work has been implemented relating to the scientific culture of information outreach, targeted primarily at the rural area in which the site is located; an initiative which has generated positive synergies. A number of activities relating to dissemination, education and communication have been carried out, seeking not only interaction with the local and regional communities, but also their active involvement in the development of the work.

**Keywords:** archaeology, sustainable development, archaeological tourism, cultural heritage.

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## **Resumen**

El objetivo de la ciencia de la arqueología es ayudar a la sociedad a conocer la historia y la prehistoria de un lugar, un objetivo que se puede lograr a través de diferentes contenidos educativos y pedagógicos, así como a través de la industria turística. Pero cada vez es más el caso de que los recursos arqueológicos brinden apoyo a la economía local en las zonas donde se encuentran.

Un ejemplo de esta nueva realidad cultural, turística y, sobre todo, social es la villa romana de Noheda. Este artículo expone las múltiples formas en que la arqueología puede convertirse en un recurso que actúa como un estímulo para la región, con un énfasis particular en el desarrollo de una función social. Desde el inicio del proceso de investigación el sitio ha sido, en la medida de lo posible, una fuerza motriz en el área local, generando puestos de trabajo directamente vinculados a la arqueología (*per se*), de esta forma tres beneficios indirectos a la región.

Además, se ha implementado una línea de trabajo relacionada con la cultura científica de divulgación de la información, dirigida principalmente a la zona rural en la que se encuentra el yacimiento; una iniciativa que ha generado sinergias positivas. Se han llevado a cabo una serie de actividades relacionadas con la difusión, la educación y la comunicación, buscando no sólo la interacción con las comunidades locales y regionales, sino también su participación activa en el desarrollo de la labor.

**Palabras clave:** arqueología, desarrollo sostenible, turismo arqueológico, patrimonio cultural.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A simple yet accurate description of archaeology could state something along the following lines: it is the science of analysing societies of the past through the study of material remains. Archaeological evidence is understood as the entirety of the recovered archaeological record, which can range from artefacts to structures (simple or complex), including biofacts and organic and environmental remains derived from human activity (Renfrew and Bahn, 1993).

The definition provided above implies that there is room for further nuance since, just like other sciences, archaeology is a discipline undergoing constant evolution; its methods are expanding and improving, and becoming ever more cross-sectional.

One such cross-sectional element is archaeology's commitment to society, since this scientific discipline is not limited to research, conservation, analysis and the formulation of scientific hypotheses, but also includes social engagement and the dissemination of its results, both from a scientific angle as well as in terms of information outreach. It is in the latter sphere that tourism can play a fundamental role as an educational tool for visitors (Moreno and Sariago, 2017). However, regarding the former, archaeology can also contribute to the sustainable development of an area, generating wealth through direct or indirect job creation.

Indeed, an emerging trend is the novel perception of cultural heritage in general, and archaeological heritage in particular, shaped by the recognition of its direct economic potential and status as an essential resource of cultural tourism.

Thus, on the one hand, efforts to ensure the profitability of cultural heritage are becoming increasingly common; in fact, these days it constitutes one of the essential pillars of planning policies aimed at achieving the balanced and sustainable development of societies (Azkarate *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, although traditionally there has always been tourism linked to archaeological, architectural and artistic heritage, cultural tourism was not recognized as a distinct sector of leisure tourism until the 1980s (Azkarate *et al.*, 2009). For example, recent surveys reveal that 42.8% of Spanish citizens visited archaeological sites in 2018 (Ministry of Culture, 2018). The reasons behind this are directly related to the rise in societies' level of cultural appreciation, new attitudes, active ageing (Bodoque, Valero and Zapata, 2011) and women playing a more central role in the economy, with recent studies showing that women are greater consumers of cultural activities than men (Huete, 2018).

Indeed, this trend has grown exponentially in recent years. Today's society visits archaeological sites and engages in cultural activities related to heritage (Monsalve *et al.*, 2014; Rosas, 2016). We have come a long way from the days when archaeology was a hobby of the few. It is therefore clear that archaeology can help support the development of its local society in at least in two ways. On the one hand, it can be a tourism resource; for example, areas where remains of ancient cultures have been discovered have become very attractive destinations for all kinds of visitors (Moreno and Sariago, 2017). On the other hand, the archaeological excavations in progress are increasingly becoming a stimulus for the territory where the archaeological site is located.

The review of the literature suggests that places with great heritage and cultural wealth become a key focus for this type of tourism, providing an alternative to the traditional sun-and-sand tourism that has witnessed ever greater overcrowding in recent years. Thus, archaeology *per se*, coupled with tourism, could be considered an important tool for local and regional development. It can help tap into resources that are currently underused, and at times almost unknown, forgotten, abandoned or even marginalized in terms of tourism (Toselli, 2006). This neglect may happen due to a number of circumstances, including geographically dispersed locations, difficult access, lack of signage, and even because local residents of the area are unaware of the resource. A cultural transformation should be promoted and above all a shift in people's mentality, especially those who live in the vicinity of the site; they should appreciate it as an element of great value, which can support the sustainable development of the area (López and Curiel, 2010).

All of this leads administrations to take a particular interest in promoting these resources, starting with their conservation and moving on to their value for tourism. Such efforts allow these spaces, which have not previously been a focus of tourist activity, to be transformed into tourist destinations.

## **2. AREA OF DEVELOPMENT: THE ROMAN VILLA OF NOHEDA, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE IN THE ALCARRIA, CUENCA.**

The area under study is the part of the Alcarria, region located in the northwest corner of the province of Cuenca.

This territory has been chosen for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is a stagnant, depressed region that needs a social and economic boost due to the severe depopulation it has undergone in recent years. This phenomenon has been caused by the lack of jobs, which has led to high levels of migration away from the area, with only the most elderly population remaining in the villages.

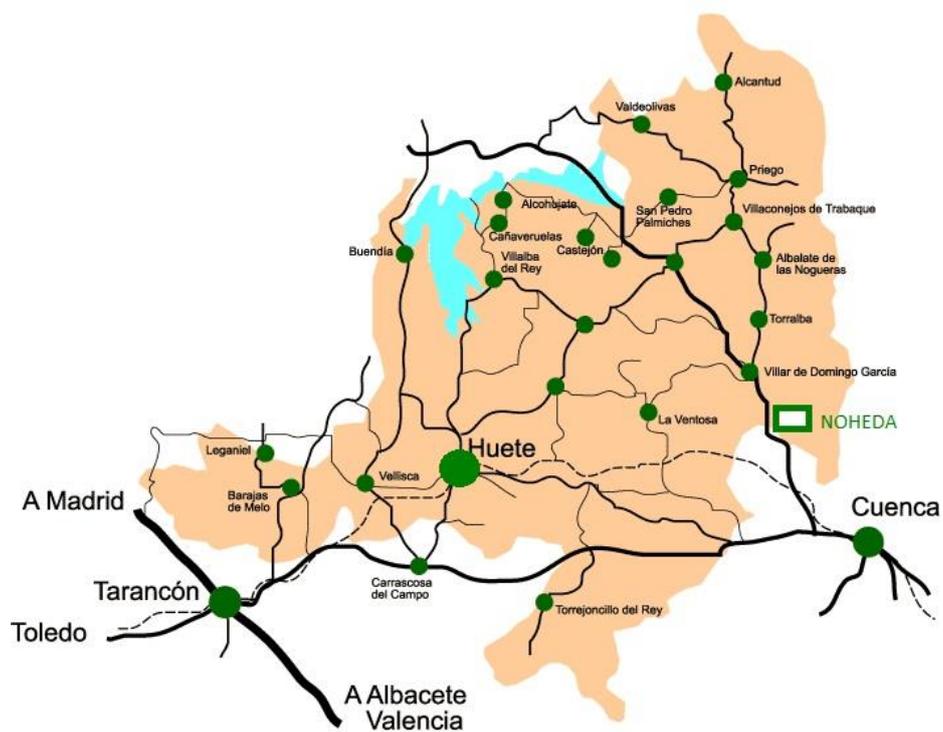
Faced with this situation, it is worth trying any possible means to promote the development of the area. One such option is archaeology, as every scientific discipline should pay society back for the investment it receives, through social development, sustainable tourism, publication, dissemination, and an appealing presentation of the results (Zurinaga, 2011). Failure to do so would mean breaking the ethical commitment that this profession established with society at the outset (Álvarez, 2011).

For this reason, the efforts made by archaeology to ensure the growth and improvement of the region have developed along two fundamental lines of work. The first is the generation of wealth through activities that are directly related to archaeology: archaeological excavation, restoration of archaeological sites, implementation of the infrastructure needed to display the sites, etc. The second is linked to cultural tourism, specifically archaeological tourism, as one of the region's economic resources, thereby attempting to contribute to the socioeconomic development of the area.

The specific context chosen to present the initial results of the programme is the Roman villa of Noheda. This site is located in the central part of the Iberian Peninsula,

17km to the north of the city of Cuenca. It lies just 500m to the northwest of the village from which it takes its name, which in turn belongs to the municipality of Villar de Domingo García. This area is at the heart of the natural region called the Alcarria Conquense, which has recently been dubbed "Spanish Lapland"(Carretero, 2017), due to its low population density per km<sup>2</sup> and the constant decline in the effective population due to migration to the big cities, condemning the villages to eventual disappearance.

**Figure 1.** Location of the Noheda villa in the Alcarria, Cuenca



Source: CEDER Alcarria, Cuenca

The discovery for the scientific world and society in general of what is known as the Noheda mosaic has generated constant requests for information that have been regularly met through the publication of various scientific works (Valero, 2011; 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2016; 2017, 2018a; 2018c); however, the social and communication aspect has not been overlooked.

**Figure 2.** Image of one of the figurative panels found in the mosaic of the *triclinium* at Noheda



Source: Authors

The mosaic flooring is located in the *triclinium* of the villa and is absolutely exceptional. The combination of its particular features makes it a unique specimen of Roman Empire mosaic art. Interesting details can be found in the analysis of its technical and stylistic characteristics, its meticulous execution and artistic quality. But without doubt it is the iconographic richness and complex composition that, together with its size and good state of conservation, make it so remarkable. The combination of themes, with its mythological allegories, representations of various *ludi* and allusions to literary and theatrical genres, underscores its originality (Valero, 2015a).

Thanks to the importance of the mosaic and the rest of the elements that make up the site, this archaeological complex was declared a Place of Cultural Interest in 2012.

Given the negative demographic circumstances mentioned above, the appearance of the Noheda villa and particularly its exceptional mosaics has provided a boost to this area, allowing it to commit to the development of cultural tourism with special focus on archaeological tourism (Huete, Martínez and López, 2018; Huete *et al.*, 2018). In this way, the Roman rural complex will follow the lead of other nearby sites that have already been converted into museums, such as the Roman cities of Ercávica, Valeria and Segobriga (Valero, 2018c), and which already receive a good number of visitors (Cebrian, 2003). Alongside these Roman sites, there are many other heritage elements (*Lapis specularis* mines, Visigothic hermitages, castles, etc.), which make this area a region of outstanding beauty and provide great potential for the development of inland cultural tourism.

In light of all of the above, the local society has heightened expectations of the mosaic. They hope it will deliver synergies that help slow down the depopulation process, through the implementation of various actions primarily related to sustainable tourism to the site, but also incorporating other initiatives of an educational nature or relating to employment, from which local residents can benefit.

### **3. A PROPOSAL FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ALCARRIA CONQUENSE: THE ROMAN VILLA OF NOHEDA**

#### **3.1. Social participation in Noheda: the site as a source of social cohesion and driver of development**

Bringing society into contact with the site can be achieved through a direct relationship with the local population, beginning with those living closest to it. In this regard, two lines of action have been implemented. The first centres on the generation of wealth and economic growth for the local population thanks to the site; that is, it is based on archaeology *per se*. The second entails a series of dissemination and information outreach programmes with the active participation of the community at different scales. The archaeological site has been deemed a "social entity" (Alonso and Aparicio, 2011), closely related to the territory to which it belongs.

##### *3.1.1. Archaeology per se*

Ever since the start of the investigations, different types of procedure have been implemented at the site, primarily aimed at making progress in the excavation.

Thus, since the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha took on responsibility for and the funding of the site in 2006, a total of 5 four-month excavation campaigns have been carried out. Furthermore, thanks to the collaboration between the regional entity and the Provincial Council of Cuenca, six employment workshops have been held, each one lasting between 6 and 12 months.

Carrying out all these programmes has meant hiring more than 200 employees in total, most of whom are from the area where the site is located. However, the offer had to be extended to neighbouring municipalities as the supply of jobs exceeded demand in Villar de Domingo García, due to its small population.

Furthermore, the scientific management of the site has secured several competitively-selected R&D&i research projects in various fields. The execution of said projects meant paying for accommodation, living expenses and other services, and efforts were made to source those needs from the nearby villages, thereby fostering the development of the area surrounding the site.

All of this has helped boost local society's confidence in the site. In addition, however, the scientific team always believed that it was essential to seek the involvement of local citizens. Thus, from the very beginning, a series of activities were proposed, characterized by their capacity to motivate and encourage the user to participate with all their senses, engaging physical, mental and emotional dimensions.

The information outreach and dissemination programme designed for Noheda adopts innovative new forms and perspectives that represent a break from the common way of teaching in an archaeological site. Thus, a fundamental element of the success of a site is believed to lie in the degree of involvement of the society where it is located. As such, in order to publicize the work carried out, and above all to ensure the involvement of and raise awareness among the local community, several activities were organized with the residents from the surrounding area, encompassed in two formally and spatially distinct actions. On the one hand, there are the *Roman Villa of Noheda*

*Cultural Days* held during one week in summer in the village of Villar de Domingo García. On the other hand, a whole series of events were also planned and held over the course of the year (called *Long-term Activities*) both in the municipality and with other entities from the surrounding areas. Indeed, it was understood that in such a poor, depopulated rural area, it was necessary to work at a regional scope.

The design of all the actions involved both the scientific team and local residents, in several work meetings. Special interest was given to enhancing the work and direct relationship with the local community, offering them the opportunity to actively participate in the development of the activities (Tully, 2007), as well as respecting the multiple points of view of all the groups involved (Hodder, 2003; *idem*, 2008).

### 3.1.2. *Long-term activities*

The aim was to avoid specific activities focused only on certain dates, which would leave the rest of the year without any educational action (Vienni, 2014). It was essential to demonstrate the scientific team's ongoing commitment to the site and to the community.

- **Open excavation accessible to the public:** One of the first actions implemented was to change the classical conception of an archaeological intervention, in which access to the site is limited or directly restricted to the archaeological team. Each excavation campaign became a genuine testing ground for new ways to bring archaeology closer to the public (Ayán *et al.*, 2012).

During the course of the field work, all visitors that came to the site were offered a detailed explanation of the complex. As a result, word rapidly spread, which prompted even more visits. Everyone appreciated the efforts made, both in terms of the work on the excavation and the dissemination of the results obtained.

- **The excavation as an excuse for intergenerational relationships:** As in most archaeological excavations, the scientific team encouraged the involvement of students and university graduates on certain dates. Although this action is standard in most research projects, which use university students as workers in exchange for the learning opportunity, the idea at Noheda was to take it a step further. Thus, the aim was to integrate in the same field of work—and learning— young people and their older counterparts with one thing in common: their status as university students. Young students from various Spanish and European universities came together with students from the José Saramango University Programme for Mature Students of the University of Castilla-La Mancha campus in Cuenca. An intergenerational group was thus formed, with a notable contribution from people aged over 55, representing a very strong source of human, social and cultural capital, and providing a sense of commitment and knowledge.

One of the goals of bringing together participants of different ages was to optimize teamwork, as some group members could fill in the gaps left by others. This also boosted the potential of the group as a whole; if one of the group members was especially effective at doing a particular activity, he/she was not limited to simply carrying out the task but rather explained the method to his/her companions. This result is much sought-after in programmes for older people (Pinazo *et al.*, 2009): the mutual

exchange of knowledge and values between different generations, creating a benefit for both groups.

- **Activities with schoolchildren:** Through outreach activities with schoolchildren, efforts are made to contribute to citizenship-building with children. The aim is to make them aware of the rich heritage so that this knowledge may encourage them to value and protect it.

It was considered fundamental that the first children to visit Noheda were from the surrounding villages, especially Villar de Domingo García. They could all see for themselves how the archaeological work was carried out, the state of the excavations and the latest discoveries, as well as the materials found during this campaign.

- **Lectures and seminars:** Another area that was considered an important part of the information outreach activities carried out during the year, were the talks and lectures given in various municipalities of the region. Efforts were made to find the best time to ensure as many members of the public as possible could attend, which often meant giving presentations at the weekend.

Of central interest were undoubtedly the lectures on the research carried out in the Roman villa of Noheda, which provided real-time information on the progress being made in the archaeological works. But the goal of raising societal awareness of archaeology and the Roman world would not be fulfilled if Noheda was the only subject addressed. As such, a substantial effort was made to engage in conversations with various researchers, who generously agreed to give presentations about their investigations.

**Figure 3.** Picture of the Function Room in the Village Hall of Villar de Domingo García, during one of the lectures.



Source: Authors

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### 3.1.3. Roman Villa of Noheda Cultural Days

In addition to the long-term activities, it was considered necessary to organize a periodic event to mark milestones and capture the interest of those people who, because of their working hours or for other reasons, had not yet participated in any of the programme actions.

With that in mind, the first cultural week was held in the third week of July 2012. From that year until the present date (2019), the event has continued unabated and is now in its eighth year. Visiting the municipality on these dates has become an unmissable event for residents of the region. There is a busy programme of scientific dissemination and information outreach activities, along with other more entertaining activities revolving around the Roman world in general and the Noheda villa in particular.

- **Activities with children.** As part of the cultural week, every morning from Monday to Friday is reserved for activities with children. They are educational in nature but designed to be fun, so that the children learn when their curiosity is sparked by the games and interaction.

Obviously, some of the actions carried out with children from the municipality in the school year are repeated in this cultural week held during the holiday period. However, as in the rest of Spain, the population of these villages almost doubles in July and August due to the effect of migrant workers. As such, 90% of the children who participate in the activities live elsewhere in winter but spend their holidays in the village of their parents and grandparents, meaning that the activities are a novelty for them. For the remaining 10% who have already had the opportunity to participate in these activities during the school year, complementary events are organized, or they may be asked to help explain and run the activities, which gives them a certain sense of importance that clearly shows on their faces.

One of the most popular activities is the *ludi*. As its name suggests, these involve various Roman games that encourage participation and collective fun. In developing these games, the aim was not solely for the children to have fun but also to take advantage of the characteristics of each game so that they develop other skills. Thus, following the guidelines set out in various specialized publications (Lillo, 2004), before they can play the various games the children themselves build their own Roman *ludus*.

Furthermore, also aimed at children, the so-called "myth-telling" sessions are held on one day that week. In the well-known storytelling style commonly used in cultural programming, an expert tells a Roman myth in an entertaining, theatrical way.

- **Roman clothing workshop** Another of the most popular activities has been the Roman clothing workshop. The aim was for the inhabitants of the region to have their own Roman costumes. The success was overwhelming; in the first years, almost all of the local residents made clothes.

As with other activities at Noheda, this workshop also has an accurate scientific basis, which gives it much more credibility. Thus, the morphology and attributes of each clothing item were first analysed in detail (Edmonson and Keith, 2008). Several

seamstresses from the village then helped to translate the research work into sewing patterns and adapt them to the materials available.

The result was remarkable: depending on the different degrees of difficulty taken on, in some classes all the participants were able to make different items of clothing.

Another added value of this action was that the "students" of the sewing workshop spontaneously and generously offered throughout the rest of the year to get together to knit the various trimmings and ornaments of Roman symbolism that decorate the municipality during the cultural days, creating a certain ambience.

- **Lectures and exhibitions.** While the mornings feature activities focus on children's participation and workshops to complement the cultural days, the afternoons are reserved for other events targeted at a wider audience. Thus, from Monday to Thursday various conferences are organized, primarily focusing on a Roman context but also including other periods.

Likewise, all the cultural days have featured a new exhibition on various aspects of the Roman world. These are done with panel display boards or sometimes with videos.

This aspect is in line with the overall philosophy of the cultural days that under no circumstances should they entail any expense to either to the municipal council or to the archaeological project. They have always been covered by contributions from private entities or grants requested in calls for proposals for such purposes. The first cultural days had a budget of only €215 in addition to some donations. As the event became more successful and began to have more of an impact, there was an increase in both public and private contributions.

- **Local theatre.** At weekends, the academic activities gradually give way to more entertaining activities. One of the first such events is the local theatre group. During the months leading up to the cultural week, various residents from the local vicinity get together and begin rehearsing a play, always with a Latin theme. Clearly, the theatre is always very popular with the public, but when the actors are from the village itself, the attraction multiplies exponentially.

**Figure 4.** Picture of the local theatre



Source: Authors

- **Roman market, banquet and music.** On the last day, three activities are carried out. First of all, throughout the day there is a Roman-themed market, where vendors of traditional products gather to offer their wares. Moreover, in recent years, several village residents of the town have also taken part with items they have made themselves.

Obviously this activity draws a large crowd of people from the village, from neighbouring municipalities, and even people from further afield, who have found out about this colourful, lively event through word of mouth.

When night begins to fall, a Roman dinner is held, in which practically all the local residents and a good number of outsiders enjoy delicacies based on Roman cuisine.

After the feast, all the diners and other people joining in afterwards take part in a big costume ball; the theme is obviously aligned with the cultural days, so the costumes made in the workshops are used that night.

#### **4. FINAL DISCUSSION**

The region of Alcarria faces an uncertain future: the population is progressively shrinking and the few young people see no prospects there. However, this territory has an important archaeological heritage, which could be exploited as a tourism resource. This could foster economic development while at the same time achieving the conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage.

This article sets out the multiple ways in which archaeology can become a resource that acts as a stimulus for a region such as the Alcarria Conquense, with a particular emphasis on the development of a social function. One example of this new cultural, tourist and, above all, social reality is the Roman villa of Noheda. Since the start of the research process, the site has been, to the extent possible, a driving force in the local area, generating jobs directly linked to archaeology (*per se*), as well providing other indirect benefits in the region.

Archaeology not only offers an understanding of the history of a society, it also helps people to appreciate archaeological sites more fully, while highlighting their value for appropriate exploitation as a tourist resource. In addition, this scientific discipline is in itself capable of contributing economic wealth and a series of benefits to the local population.

Economic development work must be accompanied by social awareness and pedagogical work; as such, it was considered necessary to carry out an information outreach and dissemination programme specifically designed for Noheda (but applicable to other sites). It entails innovative new forms and perspectives that represent a break from the common way of teaching in an archaeological site.

It is therefore desirable to provide villages and their residents with a proud collective consciousness of their past, which would enable them to develop as heirs to and conveyors of those cultural assets and at the same time as creators of a new heritage. Society in general should take on the task of passing on its heritage to future generations. Heritage should be viewed as part of our cultural identity, while also becoming an object of demand and consumption.

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