The reoccupation of the late Roman *villae* of the Iberian Peninsula and the record of the subaltern debris. The case of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba)

by Jesús Bermejo Tirado

Recent studies on the peasantry in the ancient world and early Middle Ages on the Iberian Peninsula have experienced a revitalization due to new archaeological records and the application of landscape archaeology. Alternative historiographical perspectives that focus on concepts such as collective action, peasant agency, and small politics have led to a rethinking of peasant communities in rural areas. However, the historiography of the ancient peasantry on the Iberian Peninsula still struggles with historical explanations for the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages. This paper proposes an alternative historiographic perspective that analyses the archaeological record of the final phases of occupation in Roman *villae* using concepts from peasant and subaltern studies. The focus of our approach is on understanding the everyday practices and agency of subaltern rural communities during Late Antiquity, rather than viewing the archaeological record solely from an architectural perspective. We illustrate our proposal using a case study: the late antique reoccupation of the Roman *villae* of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba).

Late Antiquity, Iberian Peninsula, Roman *villae*, Peasantry, Subaltern agency, Everyday practices.

1. *Introduction*

In recent years we have witnessed a revitalisation in studies of the peasantry in the ancient world and during the early Middle Ages on the Iberian

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Peninsula.[1] To a large extent, this revival has been based on the evaluation of new archaeological records resulting from preventive archaeology and the generalisation of spatial studies that we can group under the denomination of landscape archaeology.[2] The development of these new methodological perspectives has led to an exponential increase in the volume of empirical evidence available for the analysis of these peasant communities. In parallel to this increase in evidence, the introduction of alternative historiographical perspectives based on the application of concepts such as collective action,[3] peasant agency[4] or small politics,[5] has led us to rethink the making of peasant communities in various rural areas.

Despite all these undeniable advances, the archaeology of the peasantry on the Iberian Peninsula is still marked by the search for historical explanations regarding the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages.[6] In other words, the study of late antique peasant communities is still conceived mainly as a transition between the slave[7] and peasant modes of production.[8]

Perhaps one of the best examples of the application of this historiographical framework is the question of the purported "end" of the Roman *villae*.[9] This historiographical trope is repeatedly cited as a precedent in the first chapters of the most recent syntheses on the late antique and early medieval

[1] Vigil-Escalera, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas;* Bermejo Tirado, "Roman peasant habitats;" Quirós Castillo, *Archaeology and History of Peasantries 1*, *Archaeology and History of Peasantries 2*; Quirós Castillo e Tejerizo García, "Filling the gap;" Bermejo Tirado, and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Peasantry*; Kirchner, "La arqueología del campesinado en época alto-medieval;" Nesbitt, "New Book Chronicle."

[2] Mayoral, Grau and Bellón, *Arqueología y sociedad de los espacios agrarios*; Fernández Mier et al. "La formación de los paisajes;" Kirchner, "Arqueología del paisaje y arqueología de los espacios de cultivo;" Ballesteros Arias, et al. "Por una arqueología agraria."

[3] Carballo, Roscoe and Feinman, "Cooperation and Collective Action;" Feinman, "Multiple pathways to large-scale;" Carballo, "Cultural and evolutionary dynamics;" DeMarrais and Earle, "Collective Action Theory;" Blanton, "Collective Action and Adaptative;" Blanton and Fargher, *Collective Action in the Formation*. For the Iberian case, Carvajal Castro, "Collective Action and Local Leaderships."

[4] Bouchard, *Negotiation and Resistance*, 128-53.

[5] Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community*; Grey, *Constructing Communities in the Late Roman*, 91-121. For the Iberian case Martín Viso, "Unequal Small Worlds."

[6] Francovich and Hodges, *Villa to Village*. For a nuanced review of these historiographic approaches, Quirós Castillo, "From Villa to Village?."

[7] Carandini, *Settefinestre. Una villa schiavistica*; Leveau, ""villa, romanisation, développement économique."

[8] Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*; Tejerizo García, "The Archaeology of the Peasant Mode of Production."

[9] To frame this general discussion Brogiolo, *La fine delle ville romane*; Francovich and Hodges, *Villa to Village*; Metráux, "Late Antique Villas;" Castrorao Barba, *La fine delle ville romane in Italia*; Munro, "Recycling, demand for materials;" Brogiolo, Chavarría and Valenti, *Dopo la fine delle ville*; Cavaleri and Sacchi, *La villa dopo la villa*; Cavaleri and Sfameni, *La villa dopo la villa 2*. For the Iberian case, Chavarría Arnau, "Considerazioni sulla fine delle ville;" Chavarìa Arnau, *El final de las 'villae' en 'Hispania'*; Ripoll and Arce, "The Transformation and End of Roman;" Chavarría Arnau and Brogiolo, "El final de las villas y las transformaciones."

rural communities and landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula.[10] Ironically, although introduced as the conclusion of an era, the end of the *villae* is the basis on which most published historiographical proposals explain the emergence of early medieval peasant communities.[11] However, as Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo has recently pointed out,[12] this type of proposal eclipses the previous existence of peasant communities in Roman times[13] as fundamental agents for understanding the historical evolution of the rural world in late antiquity.

In this paper, we propose an alternative historiographic perspective for analysing in their own context the people who lived in the Roman *villae* in their final phases of occupation. These human groups constitute an example of "people without history"[14] who need to be analysed independently of previous historiographic agendas and academic specialisations. One of the essential points of our proposal is based on the application of several concepts taken from the so-called peasant studies.[15] Our main aim is to explain how the archaeological record of these last phases should not be understood as the result of an abandonment process but as a reflection of the everyday practices and agency of the subaltern rural communities that inhabited these sites during late antiquity.

2. *The end of the Roman villae: a historical overview*

The final decades of the 20th century witnessed the shaping of a profound historiographical debate regarding the "end" of the *villae* in the *pars occidentalis*. This debate was insightfully systematised in a work by Brian Ward-Perkins[16] from the formulation of two opposing trends: catastrophist and continuist. In summary, the catastrophic tendency brought together those scholars who argued that the end of the *villae* would have been the result of a process of abrupt destruction explained by the impact of such phenomena as the crisis of the 3rd century AD and the Germanic invasions. This group, mainly composed of historians, made use of accounts from late antique authors to support this view. Another group of scholars, the so-called continuists, disagreed with this idea of sudden destruction. They supported a more detailed review of the archaeological record of every single case, cit-

[10] Caballero, Mateos and Cordero, *Visigodos y Omeyas: el territorio*; Ariño, "El hábitat rural en la Península;" Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique & Early Medieval*.
[11] E. g. Vigil-Escalera, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*.
[12] Quirós Castillo "From Villa to Village?."
[13] Several recent publications have defended the importance of the peasant communities in the Roman period: Reddé, "Fermes et villae romaines," Bermejo Tirado, "Roman peasant habitats;" Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Roman Peasantry*; Bowes, *The Roman Peasant Project*; Van Oyen, "Innovation and investment."
[14] Woolf, *Europe and the People*.
[15] Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Roman Peasantry*.
[16] Ward-Perkins, "Continuitists, Catastrophists."

ing the existence of a late occupancy of these settlements associated with the transformation of the features recorded at those sites.

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, the works of Alexandra Chavarría Arnau[17] can be justifiably considered as a fundamental landmark in disproving the catastrophic hypothesis. Her studies confirmed the generalised absence of devastation layers that could be linked to this hypothetical sudden devastation caused by the Germanic invasions or other similar warfare episodes. In addition, her studies have served to document systematically the architectural reconfiguration of many late Roman *villae* through the building of productive features related to agriculture.[18]

Nevertheless, Chavarría's work was influenced by a series of limitations that conditioned her interpretations. Even when her famous book contained a catalogue with many *villae*,[19] in very few cases was precise stratigraphic documentation from archaeological excavations available. In most cases, the documentation of different occupation phases recorded in the *villae* can be established from the presence of constructive elements overlaying the monumental phases or the installation of productive features in the residential sectors of the settlements.[20] These limitations, which in no way can be attributed to Chavarria but to the state of the evidence itself, forced her to take a fundamentally architectural point of view in which the monumental phases of the settlement remained the focus of the perspective, as is referred to in the very title of her well-known essay, *El final de las* villae *en Hispania*. Even when this "finalist" perspective[21] is linked to the continuist trend (*sensu* Ward-Perkins), it implies a hierarchisation of the occupation phases that eclipses the remains generated by other forms of habitation that are only revealed if we apply a broader concept of the archaeological record not exclusively focused on architectural elements.

The first decades of the new millennium have brought the publication of the results of new excavations with the application of precise stratigraphic documentation, including the recording of a large number of find assemblages. These new archaeological records have opened up novel discussions on the end of the *villae* in the Roman West. A good example of this type of discussion can be found in two articles published in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*.[22] In his article, *Vanishing Villas*, Tamara Lewit theorises that the changes seen in this type of settlement can be interpreted as a result of the cultural

[17] Chavarría Arnau, "Considerazioni sulla fine delle ville," Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las 'villae' en 'Hispania'*.
[18] Chavarría Arnau, 126-9.
[19] Chavarría Arnau, 163-298.
[20] On this kind of taphonomic problems in the context of the late antique occupation of Roman *villae* see Kasprzyk, "Léquipement et les formes," 235-8.
[21] Rooted in the Italian tradition of late antique e early medieval archaeology, e.g. Brogiolo, *La fine delle ville romane*.
[22] Lewit, *Vanishing villas*; Bowes and Gutteridge, "Rethinking the later."

revolution experienced by the rural elites of late antiquity.[23] Lewit openly rejects the interpretation of the changes in that period as evidence of decadence or impoverishment and supports the continuity of occupation by elites whose aesthetic expectations would have been changing in the new cultural context of late antiquity.

Two years later, in direct response to Lewit's work, Kimberly Bowes and Adam Gutteridge proposed the need to rethink the late antique rural settlement from a different perspective. This paper highlights the need to analyse the archaeological strata of these late antique occupations in their own context, independently of any possible beginning or end. In other words, they should not be seen from an *a priori* classical or medieval perspective and more comprehensive consideration should be given to the possibilities offered by the new archaeological records generated by landscape archaeology and preventive excavations.

Implicitly, the impact of many of the ideas raised in this paper has been felt in some of the more recent studies on this issue. This is the case of Beth Munro's study[24] of the recycling activities and management of the resources available to the inhabitants in the final phases of the *villae*. Other studies of interest can be found in the recent volumes entitled *La villa dopo la villa*[25] on the archaeology of rural settlement in the central and northern sectors of the Italic Peninsula.

3. *Peasant agency: A Roman archaeologist's perspective*

The use of the term *peasantry* in historical studies has been controversial in recent decades. Many authors have preferred to avoid it in different historiographical contexts, replacing it with more ambiguous terms.[26] This controversy cannot be separated from the decline in peasant studies in the social sciences since the late 1980s.

In the case of Roman studies, this decline[27] is marked by the success of the *villa schiavistica* paradigm, which is linked to the model introduced by the Settefinestre excavations under the direction of Andrea Carandini.[28] The application of this paradigm implied acceptance of the Marxist slave mode of production model as the basis for the economic and social structure of the entire Roman rural world. This also implies accepting the idea that the reason

[23] Lewit, *Vanishing villas*, 270-1.
[24] Munro, "Recycling, demand for materials."
[25] Cavaleri and Sacchi, *La villa dopo la villa*; Cavaleri and Sfameni, *La villa dopo la villa 2*.
[26] On this question see Quiros Castillo, "Do we need an archaeology;" Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo García, "Filling the gap."
[27] Even when we attested the publication of some remarkable studies on the Roman peasantry since the late seventies (Garnsey, "Peasants in ancient Roman," "Non-slave labour;" Evans, "*Plebs Rustica* I;" Evans, "*Plebs Rustica* II").
[28] Carandini, *Settefinestre*.

peasant communities disappeared from the fields was the Roman imperialist expansion in the Mediterranean.[29]

In recent years, however, thanks to several research projects focusing on the application of various spatial analysis methodologies in archaeology and, above all, the systematic study of new archaeological records generated by preventive excavations, we have witnessed the explicit reintroduction of the concept of peasantry in several publications on the Roman rural world.[30] A common factor in many of these studies is the application of models and analytical concepts developed in the field of the so-called peasant studies. Another common point is the recognition of wide diversity in the peasant communities of all the territories of the Roman Empire.

The recognition of this heterogeneity renders any attempt to establish an essentialist definition of peasantry in Roman times an impossible task. As scholars such as Theodor Shanin or Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg have already pointed out,[31] the idea of establishing a fixed definition of this term does not work from an analytical point of view. By way of contrast, we advocate the use of this concept in a more pragmatic sense, speaking of peasant communities rather than of a peasant class in itself.

In spite of this diversity, we believe there is a common element that must appear in any attempt to characterise the peasant communities of the Roman period, i.e. their subaltern condition. These groups were usually subjected to different forms of control or coercion by the authorities, either through a specific landowner or through a state or provincial administration or magistracy,[32] as was often the case during the Roman period. The subaltern condition of these peasant communities and their own lack of definition in terms of social class make it very difficult to record their historical evolution from a diachronic perspective. These difficulties are marked by the fact that most of the historical sources to which we can turn for information on them are not narratives.[33] This is a particularly relevant problem in relation to our ability to record their agency. Traditionally, scholars interested in the historical analysis of subalterns have used synchronic sources for their study (e.g. an inscription alluding to an episode in the life of a person or a document referring to litigation by a community against an authority or higher institution). However, to analyse the profound historical impact of peasant community agency, we have to adopt diachronic perspectives different from those traditionally posited by conventional historical narratives. As Kostas Vlassopoulos recent-

[29] On this assumption Garnsey, "Peasants in ancient Roman;" Rathbone, "The Development of Agriculture."
[30] E.g. Grey, *Constructing Communities*; Bowes, *The Roman Peasant Project*; Reddé "Fermes et villae romaines"; Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Peasantry*.
[31] Shanin, *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, 20-3; Van der Ploeg, *El Campesinado y el arte de la agricultura*, 104-19.
[32] Grey, "Contextualizing Colonatus."
[33] Vlassopoulos, "Subaltern community formation," 36-7.

ly pointed out,[34] our capacity to analyse the role of these subaltern groups in the making of antiquity depends on our ability to situate their agency at the forefront of historiographical debates.

Another especially relevant problem for the study of peasant agency in antiquity refers to the very definition of the historical agents. In the framework of social theory at the end of the 20th century, agency was essentially linked to the ability of individuals to act independently of the possibilities previously established by social structures. This way of conceiving agency was largely influential in the archaeology of the turn of the millennium.[35] In recent years, however, a new generation of archaeologists has endeavoured to overcome the old dichotomy of individuals vs social structures by applying a new paradigm of agency based on the concept of collective action.[36] In the context of late antique and early medieval studies, these perspectives have been applied to study the management of commons or, more frequently, in relation to litigation undertaken by local communities.[37] Many of these works are structured around the creation of new legal and social interaction scenarios established between peasant communities and the political authorities and based on the structuring of tax systems.[38]

Despite the undeniable interest of this research, this collective concept of peasant community agency poses certain analytical problems. In most cases, the sources in which such collective actions are recorded were mediated by elites. They often present peasant communities as abstract entities organised in opposition to the interests of a given ruler or large landowner. Such abstractions tend to oversimplify the inner social structures of those communities. They encompass different mechanisms of cooperation and solidarity,[39] as well as of competition and individualism.[40] This is particularly significant if we consider other scales of social relations within these communities. On other levels the individual, the household or family may have been above the local community itself. This tension between solidarity and competition has been best explained by Cam Grey who states that "those communities offered mutual insurance against economic disaster, for they provided opportunities to access and exploit a range of strategies for managing subsistence risk. But they were also characterised by inequality and tension, in the form of social differentiation, disagreements between closely related neighbours, and an

[34] Vlassopoulos, 39.
[35] Dobres and Robb, *Agency in Archaeology*; Robb, *The Early Mediterranean*; Knapp and Van Domelen, "Past Practices."
[36] Carballo, Roscoe and Feinman. "Cooperation and Collective Action;" Feinman "Multiple pathways to large-scale;" Carballo, "Cultural and evolutionary dynamics;" DeMarrais and Earle, "Collective Action Theory;" Blanton, "Collective Action and Adaptative;" Blanton and Fargher, *Collective Action in the Formation*.
[37] E. g. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*; Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 148-60. For the Iberian case, Carvajal Castro, "Collective Action and Local Leaderships."
[38] Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*.
[39] Mayer, *The Articulated Peasant*, 89-94.
[40] Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 91-120.

array of mutually contradictory demands upon scarce social and economic resources. As a consequence, we may observe these communities participating in a variety of activities which function as brakes upon conflict and safety valves for dissatisfactions and jealousy".[41]

The identification of peasant community agency as a form of collective action in historical studies often overshadows the internal dynamics that affect the interests of individuals, households and families. This way of conceiving the agency of past peasant communities is very important when interpreting the question of the end of the *villae*, as it has been put forward as the basis of a political emancipation process among early medieval peasantry, as opposed to the slave mode of production, which would have enabled these emerging communities to "control the land and their own work process"[42] or to "control their own holdings and keep their fruits after rents were paid".[43]

Restricting the historical analysis of peasant community agency to the recording of coordinated actions against elites, such as legal disputes, rebellions or *bagaudas* would be the same as limiting the analysis of 19th, 20th and 21st-century working class trade union struggles to strikes and other forms of organised protest. If we limit ourselves to considering these kinds of cooperative or coordinated actions, we run the risk of ignoring more prosaic (but more constant) ways in which the late antique peasant communities developed their agency.

4. *Subaltern debris in the archaeological record of the Western villae*

Our approach to the archaeological analysis of peasant community agency will be structured around the application of the subaltern debris concept, as formulated by Beatriz Marín-Aguilera in a recent article.[44] Based on the Gramscian definition of common sense (*senso comune*)[45] and the matrix of dominations notion developed by the feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins,[46] Marín-Aguilera states that the archaeological record generated in most of the excavated habitats forms a debris with the material traces of the everyday practices of the subaltern communities.

This way of understanding the archaeological record is especially useful for interpreting the late antique reoccupation of many of the Roman *villae* systematically excavated in recent decades. As we have discussed, a large part of all the debates around the end of the Roman *villae* has been focused on the analysis of the building elements as essential archaeological proxies. In many

[41] Grey, 111.
[42] Wickham, "The Other Transition," 9.
[43] Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages,* 560, *versus* Banaji, "Aristocracies, Peasantries."
[44] Marín-Aguilera, "Subaltern Debris."
[45] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison,* 419.
[46] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 203, 287.

cases, the occupation phases (or their absence) are established according to different types of architectural markers (e.g. the segmentation of rooms, the looting of decorative elements or their reuse for other functions). However, the analysis of the strata and finds assemblages that fill these structures has traditionally been left in the background. In many cases these deposits have been considered as "abandonment levels", if not levels directly generated by squatters.[47] However, this kind of interpretation is based on a very superficial assessment of the formative processes that served to configure these deposits and assemblages.

Nevertheless, in recent years archaeological excavations have been carried out on several Roman *villae* on the Iberian Peninsula using more systematic recording procedures, including those of Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid),[48] Baños de la Reina (Alicante),[49] Horta da Torres (Alentejo),[50] Balazote (Albacete),[51] Fuente Álamo (Córdoba)[52] and El Salar (Granada).[53] They have revealed that the archaeological deposits that fill the monumental spaces of the late Roman aristocratic residences contain clear evidence of a continuous inhabitation of these rural sites well into the 8th century AD. These deposits, traditionally interpreted as abandonment levels or the result of squatter frequentation,[54] must now be seen as possible examples of subaltern debris generated by their later inhabitants. As I will try to illustrate in the second part of this study, the detailed analysis of the assemblages recorded in these later occupation phases must be considered as essential sources for the historical record of the everyday resistance strategies of late antique peasant communities.

5. *The late antique occupation of the Roman* villa *of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Spain)*

As an example of our proposed analytical perspective, we will focus our attention on a case study in the Roman *villa* of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba). This archaeological site in Baetica province has a long history of research[55] that began in the 19th century with the fortuitous discovery of a series of mosaics.[56] A second research phase encompassed a series of excavation campaigns carried out from the early nineteen-eighties. They revealed

47 Lewit, *'Vanishing villas'*, 37, 91-165, 168-77.
48 García Merino and Sánchez Simón, *El final de la villa de Almenara*.
49 Abascal Palazón et al, *Baños de la reina (Calpe, Alicante)*, 115-8, 167-9, 197.
50 Carneiro, "Adapting to change."
51 Sarabia Bautista, "Exploring the Dynamics of Occupation."
52 Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colomina, "Economías domésticas y patrones."
53 Román Punzón et al. "Life and afterlife of a Roman villa."
54 López-Palomo, "Balneum y villa."
55 Delgado and Jaén, "La Fuente del Álamo: historia y arqueología."
56 Neira Jiménez, "Acerca de dos mosaicos hallados."

a series of structures related to several sectors of this rural settlement.[57] Finally, the resumption of excavations in the first decade of the 21st century has provided us with a detailed record of the stratigraphic sequence documented in this settlement.[58] From these records, it is possible to reconstruct various periods of occupation at the site with different transformations between the early Imperial and the Islamic periods.

An initial early Roman phase is associated with a series of structures interpreted as a possible *Balneum*.[59] A second late Roman phase corresponds to the monumentalisation of the *villa* and can be compared to the events recorded in similar aristocratic residences in many other parts of the Iberian Peninsula. This is the phase to which most of the figural mosaics discovered in the settlement belong.[60] This monumental phase would have lasted until the end of the 4th or probably the beginning of the 5th century AD, at which point the archaeological record of the settlement shows a series of changes on which we will focus the rest of this section. That phase includes the construction of a *horreum* attached to the northern part of the *pars urbana*.[61] The last of the settlement's occupational phases is marked by the construction of an Islamic olive oil mill attached to different parts of the late Roman *villa*'s *pars urbana*.

Thanks to the detailed stratigraphic recording undertaken by the archaeologists in charge of the site,[62] it was possible to document the remains of the settlement's late antique phase. This covered a period from the middle decades of the 5th century AD to an undetermined point in the 7th century AD[63] and is marked by the segmentation of the structures corresponding to the late Roman *villa*'s *pars urbana* with various adobe walls. In addition to the adobe collapses documented during the excavations, several of the rooms in the so-called Sector C of the late Roman villa's *pars urbana* were refurbished with hearths composed of vitrified ceramic blocks laid directly on the sumptuous mosaics that decorated this sector of the aristocratic residence.

The presence of these hearths and other ash levels directly resting on these pavements indicates several things. The first is that these sectors were reoccupied at a time when the *villa*'s mosaics had not been subject to a pro-

[57] López Palomo, "Excavaciones de urgencia;" "Balneum y villa." For a complete study of all the Roman mosaics discovered in the residential sectors of this site see Neira Jiménez, "Los mosaicos romanos del yacimiento."
[58] Delgado and Jaén, "Territorio y ciudad. El yacimiento;" "El Conjunto Arqueológico de Fuente Álamo."
[59] López Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 307-28; Delgado e Jaén, "Territorio y ciudad. El yacimiento," 72-4. For a chronological discussion of finds vid. Bermejo Tirado, Moreno and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 243-53.
[60] Neira Jiménez, "Los mosaicos romanos del yacimiento."
[61] López-Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 340-3.
[62] We would like to thank Manuel Delgado and David Jaén (Puente Genil Town Council. Parque Arqueológico de la Villa Romana de Fuente Álamo) for their help in reviewing all the archaeological finds relating to our study of this late antique phase of the site.
[63] For a more detailed chronological discussion of this phase see Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 254-8.

longed period of abandonment. The second implication, though somewhat obvious, is that the hearths indicate that the late antique occupants of the settlement no longer had the same aesthetic appreciation of these figural mosaics as the aristocratic *domini* of the late Roman period. The final implication is that it is most likely that the construction of these hearths can be linked to the occupation of various rooms joined together by different households, thus segmenting a property that until then had been conceived as a unitary residential space. It is plausible to believe that each hearth would have corresponded to the dwelling of a different conjugal group within the settlement. In other words, having once been the home of a *dominus*, his family, relatives and domestic service, this area was converted into several independent households (although perhaps related by neighbourhood or kinship ties).

6. *Everyday practices during the late antique occupation of Fuente Álamo*

To analyse the daily activities of the people who inhabited the settlement during this late ancient phase, we proposed applying a study methodology similar to that of the so-called household archaeology.[64] As usual in this type of analysis, our study began with the comparison of all the taphonomic processes documented in the strata recorded during the excavation, to avoid possible quantitative and qualitative bias related to the so-called "Pompeii premise".[65] Among all the registered archaeological deposits, we identified two that met all these taphonomic requirements (Strata C. 63 and C. 64). These deposits were resting directly on the paving of various rooms in Sector C and sealed by homogeneous collapse levels. Moreover, both strata contained assemblages composed of a high percentage of almost complete (although fractured) vessels linked in groupings that included the majority of the fragments of each piece.[66]

After selecting these strata, we carried out an exhaustive examination of the artefact (and ecofact) assemblages documented in them. We had two main objectives. The first was to engender a detailed chronological discussion of this occupation phase. The second, and most important for this chapter, was the characterisation of the everyday domestic activities undertaken by the successive inhabitants of this phase. We should note that it was never our aim to propose a quantitative study linked to concrete moments of occupation or specific households. Given the nature of the taphonomic processes documented in the sampled archaeological deposits, this was simply not possible.

[64] Allison, *The Archaeology of Household*; Bermejo Tirado, *Arqueología de los espacios domésticos*; Bermejo Tirado, Moreno, and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones."
[65] For a more detailed methodological e theoretical discussion see Binford "Behavioral Archaeology;" Schiffer "Toward the Identification;" "Is There a 'Pompeii Premise';" *Formation Processes*, 84.
[66] Bermejo Tirado, Moreno, and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones", 240-4.

However, we do not have enough room in this paper to offer a detailed review of all inferences recorded. Instead, we will summarise the main documented patterns in relation to the daily production, storage and consumption practices recorded in the assemblages.

With regard to the production practices, we can identify a small group of tools consisting of a rake leaf and two sharpeners linked to the maintenance of farm implements. This type of find can be used to characterise a relatively simple (at least in technological terms) set of agricultural tools probably used in some kind of intensive farming.

In terms of storage practices, we have had the opportunity to document several fragments of *dolia* or large handmade pottery jars (belonging to at least two different examples). This type of large storage vessel reveals the concern of the inhabitants of this occupation phase to preserve a certain volume of agricultural yield. However, given the number of finds, it would not have been possible to store a large volume of agricultural surplus. Rather the storage would have been intended to supply the pantry of a small or medium-sized household. Also relevant is the presence of a base fragment of a possible African amphora and a complete vessel of the Late Roman 1 type, a wine amphora of eastern production manufactured in workshops from Cyprus and Cilicia.[67] The latter has parallels that can be related to a classical type with a broader neck and cylindrical handles that is generally dated to the mid-5th century AD.[68] Although these amphorae finds allow us to establish connections between this occupation phase at the site and the long-distance trade networks operating in the Mediterranean of the late antiquity, these vessels had probably been recycled (especially in the case of the wine vessel) as part of the domestic storage set.

The documentation of these containers reveals a pattern of small-scale domestic storage that in no way can be linked to a scale of surplus production aimed at supplying regional or interprovincial markets. In addition, the fact that we document these containers among the deposits corresponding to one of the conjugal dwellings arising from the segmentation of the late Roman *villa*'s *pars urbana,* we could also be seeing the segmentation of storage practices that would have been managed within each household.

We have much more information about the consumption patterns during this occupation stage. The analysis of the tableware from this phase of the settlement offers us interesting patterns. A significant percentage of the sample (approximately a quarter) is made up of TSH sherds of Baetican origin and African cookware, all of them early Imperial period productions.[69] The major presence of finds of this chronology in these deposits could have a similar explanation to that proposed by Margarita Sánchez Simón and Car-

[67] Pieri, *Le commerce du vin*; Reynolds, "Hispania in the late Roman."
[68] Egloff, *Kellia III*, 196.
[69] Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 254.

men García Merino in the case of the last occupation phase of the town of Almenara de Adaja-Puras.[70] According to those scholars, the documentation of large volumes of early Imperial pottery is explained by its reuse as a binder for earthen wall construction. In the excavations it is impossible to distinguish the collapsed walls from other abandonment processes. In fact, the elevated presence of such finds in these contexts can be interpreted as an indicator of the use of earth construction techniques to segment internal areas in this sector of the *villa*.

Other items of tableware included examples of oxidized coarse ware and, above all, various pieces of TSA, such as a Hayes 73 bowl,[71] a Hayes 76 African D patera with an decoration of incised concentric circles on its base,[72] as well as another fragment of a patera or an African C open plate, probably Hayes 51.[73]

A notable aspect of the consumption patterns recorded at this stage concerns cookware. The most outstanding finds in these assemblages are the pots with turned rims and no handles, very similar to other simple vessels documented in 5th and 6th century AD Andalusian contexts.[74] Also within this section, we have to mention several casserole sherds that present profiles similar to those documented in late antique contexts in the Malaga area.[75] These consumption data are complemented by the archaeofaunal analysis carried out by L. Colominas (ICAC). Although the faunal remains found were particularly exiguous, in the sample recorded in these contexts the remains of up to seven molluscs (belonging to the genera Ostrea, Callista and Glycymeris) were identified.[76]

7. *Discussion: The late antique occupation of Fuente Álamo and the art of not being governed*

The analysis of the daily practices recorded in the subaltern debris of Fuente Álamo constituted by these so-called abandonment levels can be considered an essential source from which to register the historical agencies (in plural) of these peasant communities that inhabited the site during late antiquity. The reconfiguration of the built environments, together with all the changes recorded in the daily practices, provide undeniable proof of the alterations in the ways of life in the settlement. Confronted with the thesis that advocates interpreting these changes as a "cultural revolution" organised by

[70] García Merino and Sánchez Simón, *El final de la villa de Almenara*, 19-32.
[71] Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, fig. 21, 134.
[72] Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, 125; Bonifay, *Etudes sur la céramique,* 203.
[73] Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, fig. 13.
[74] Serrano Ramos, *Cerámica común romana*, 134; Acién Almansa et al. "Cerámicas tardorromanas y altomedievales," 515-30.
[75] Serrano Ramos, 155; figs. 17-22.
[76] Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 261-2.

the elites themselves, I believe that those seen in this later phase of Fuente Álamo correspond to the reoccupation of this built environment by a community with a social and economic structure very different to that of the late Roman *villa*.

The comparative analysis of the daily practices described above allows us to characterise very precisely the type of domestic economy developed by these communities. The relative simplicity of the recorded agricultural equipment is similar to that which would have been present in any peasant household involved in intensive farming with little surplus production.[77] This limited ability to generate surpluses appears to be confirmed by the relatively low number of domestic storage vessels found. The fact that these *dolia* or examples of amphorae plausibly reused for storage (all located in the new segmented conjugal dwellings) suggests the individualised domestic management of agricultural yields. Although we have not yet been able to make a detailed study of the stratigraphic sequence recorded in the *horreum* of the late Roman *villa*,[78] the distribution and capacity of storage vessels located in the analysed assemblages appears to rule out the possible re-use of this *horreum* for the storage of a large surplus generated by the late antique community. In view of the type and simplicity of the agricultural tools and storage vessels recorded in the analysed phase of the settlement, we must consider a production structure based on small or medium-sized plots, probably exploited by several peasant households. This would have been a relatively simple system of agricultural exploitation whose productive yield would have been on the margins of subsistence.

These finds reveal the importance of the individual households as a structural element of the settlement's economy. This type of agricultural exploitation is closer to that reflected in the records of individual disputes documented in the papyri of later Roman Egypt[79] than to the models of collective action based on the organised management of communal resources in the early medieval period.[80] It is a type of economic and social structure more representative of the distinct needs and agencies generated by different persons, families and households within these communities.

The analysis of consumption patterns also raises very interesting elements for our discussion. The cookware contained in the sample shows a relatively small repertoire of forms, all of them locally produced. Very revealing are the fire abrasion trace analyses performed on these sherds. Most of them show very irregular abrasion patterns all over the surface.[81] These types of traces of use, together with the relative morphological simplicity of the pot rims, tell us

[77] Netting, *Smallholders, Householders*.
[78] López Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 340-3.
[79] e.g. Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 91-121.
[80] Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle*, 560.
[81] For a more detailed discussion see Bermejo Tirado, Moreno and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 271-2.

of poorly controlled cooking processes. This means that, in many cases, these vessels were used as part of very simple cooking methods in which the pots and their contents would have been placed close to the heat sources with little control. These relatively simple cooking processes (such as soups or stews that are simmered) are those traditionally used for cooking in parallel with agricultural tasks, since they do not require much attention.

The archaeofaunal record, composed exclusively of shellfish shells, would confirm these relatively simple cooking practices. Given the inland location of the *villa* de Fuente Álamo in the surroundings of the Andalusian *campiña*, this type of shellfish could be interpreted as a prestige item. However, when compared to the faunal record of other phases of the settlement, we observed that the presence of this type of species is constant throughout its occupation.[82] More significant in this comparison is the absence of mammalian remains such as *ovidae* and *equidae*, which are represented in the early Roman phases of the settlement. This fact suggests that not only should the molluscs documented in the analysed phase not be interpreted as prestige items, but that in reality we find a certain impoverishment in the meat consumption habits recorded in the levels under discussion.

These changes in cooking practices contrast with the patterns recorded in tableware. The important presence of TSA items, some of them of a certain quality, tell us that the convivial practices were still linked to the trade networks established between the pottery production centres of North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean. In addition, the absence of use-wear traces presented by the pieces recovered in Fuente Álamo (so frequent in other Roman peasant contexts in central Spain)[83] indicates that the inhabitants of this occupation phase had sufficient resources to renew their tableware with imported products relatively frequently. Although the domestic economic structure that characterised this settlement phase could be related to a low capacity for surplus production, these groups were still willing to invest a certain amount in decorating their tables with this type of imported pottery. This pattern, linked to the acquisition and use of conspicuous products such as TSA objects, contradicts the conservatism with which the peasant community consumption practices are usually characterised. This sort of practice reveals the economic complexity of these households, as well as the social importance given to the convivial practices within these rural communities.

8. *"Now this is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end..."*

The title of this final point refers to a well-known quotation from a 1942 speech by Winston Churchill concerning the Second Battle of El Alamein. It

[82] Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, 260-1.
[83] Bermejo Tirado, "Early Imperial Roman Peasant."

contains an implicit reference to the partiality with which we, archaeologists and historians, seek to establish milestones in the past of human societies. The formulation of the question of the end of the *villae* is a clear example of the extent to which our interpretation of the archaeological record has been conditioned by a sequential concept of history. In most cases, these historical sequences have been set from the top, regardless of the subaltern communities of the past.

As Bowes and Gutteridge stated in their aforementioned article,[84] the problem of the so-called end of the *villae* had been caught between two antagonistic historiographical perspectives. On one side we have the classical archaeologists, who have not hesitated to qualify the late occupation phases of these settlements as levels of abandonment or squatter habitations because they contravened the aesthetic and formal criteria arising from traditional Roman models. On the other hand, we have medievalists who need a turning point, a milestone from which to begin the formative processes from which to analyse the making of the medieval peasantry as a social class. The main challenge of both historical perspectives is that they renounce the study of the communities that inhabited these late antique phases in their own historical context, as an object of independent analysis and not as mere epigones or prologues (depending on the approach) of other historical phases that have traditionally taken the focus in conventional narratives. As we have seen, what some archaeologists have termed "abandonment layers" actually contain traces of a time-dilated occupation. The archaeological record of the peasant communities that inhabited many of these settlements between the end of the 4th and the 8th centuries AD, especially that we have denominated the subaltern debris, should be studied as a way (perhaps the only way) to register the agency of these "people without history" beyond previous historiographical perspectives. In addition, their study should be approached from alternative temporal sequences to those traditionally posed by conventional historical narratives. Only in this way can we be in a position to escape the synchronic tendency of most studies of the subaltern groups of antiquity.[85]

Although this is a single case study, from which no generalisations can be drawn, the example of Fuente Álamo shows us how the analysis of this subaltern debris constitutes a window for recording these peasant agencies in their own historical context. The detailed analysis of these contexts indicates that the site was occupied between the 5th and the 8th centuries AD by a community of peasants grouped in different households. A preliminary study of the burials recorded in this period has confirmed this continuity of occupation.[86] The data presented here are a plausible indication that, more than the end of the *villa*, what we are recording is the end of a model of exploitation linked

[84] Bowes and Gutteridge, "Rethinking the later."
[85] Vlassopoulos, "Subaltern community formation."
[86] Jaén and Delgado, "Morir en el campo," 343-5.

to the late Roman period aristocratic residence. However, in no case can this be considered the end of the occupation of the settlement that would henceforth be inhabited by a community following a completely different economic model.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how, through a systematic study of the assemblages documented in the so-called abandonment levels, it is possible to record the living conditions of these groups. Perhaps if we integrate the analysis of other similar phases documented in a growing number of the *villae* on the Iberian Peninsula and in the Roman West in general, we can propose a historical reinterpretation of the diachronic evolution of these communities, given the historiographical perspectives that can reflect the complex matrix of agencies gestated within it. However, to achieve this objective we must adopt temporal frameworks different to those generated by the areas of chronological specialisation that usually guide archaeological studies.

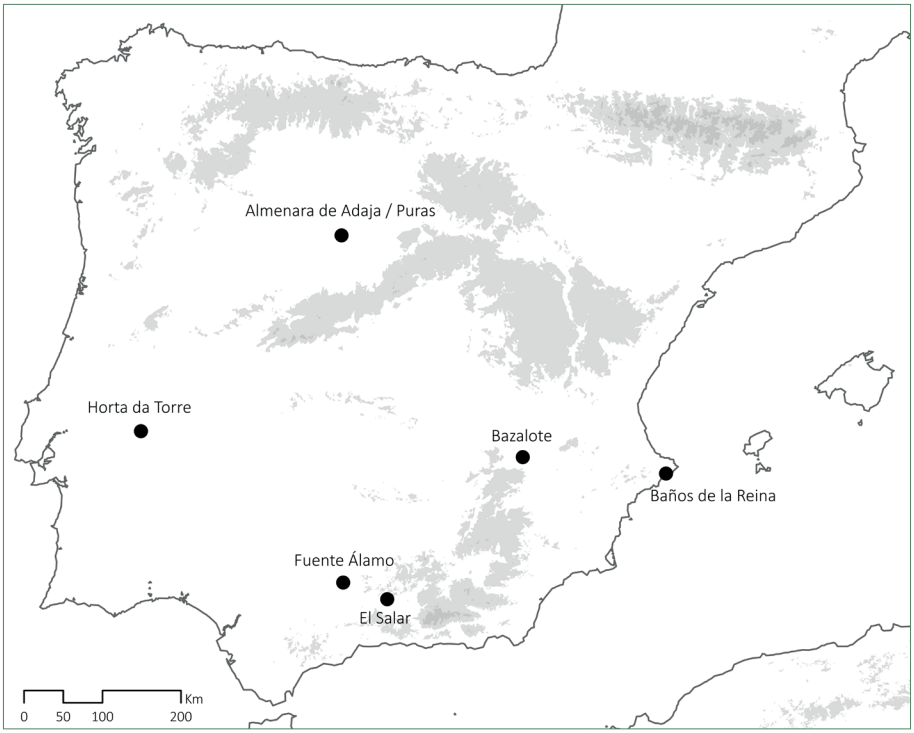

Figure 1. Map with the main Roman *villa* sites mentioned in the text (CAD: Fernando Moreno).

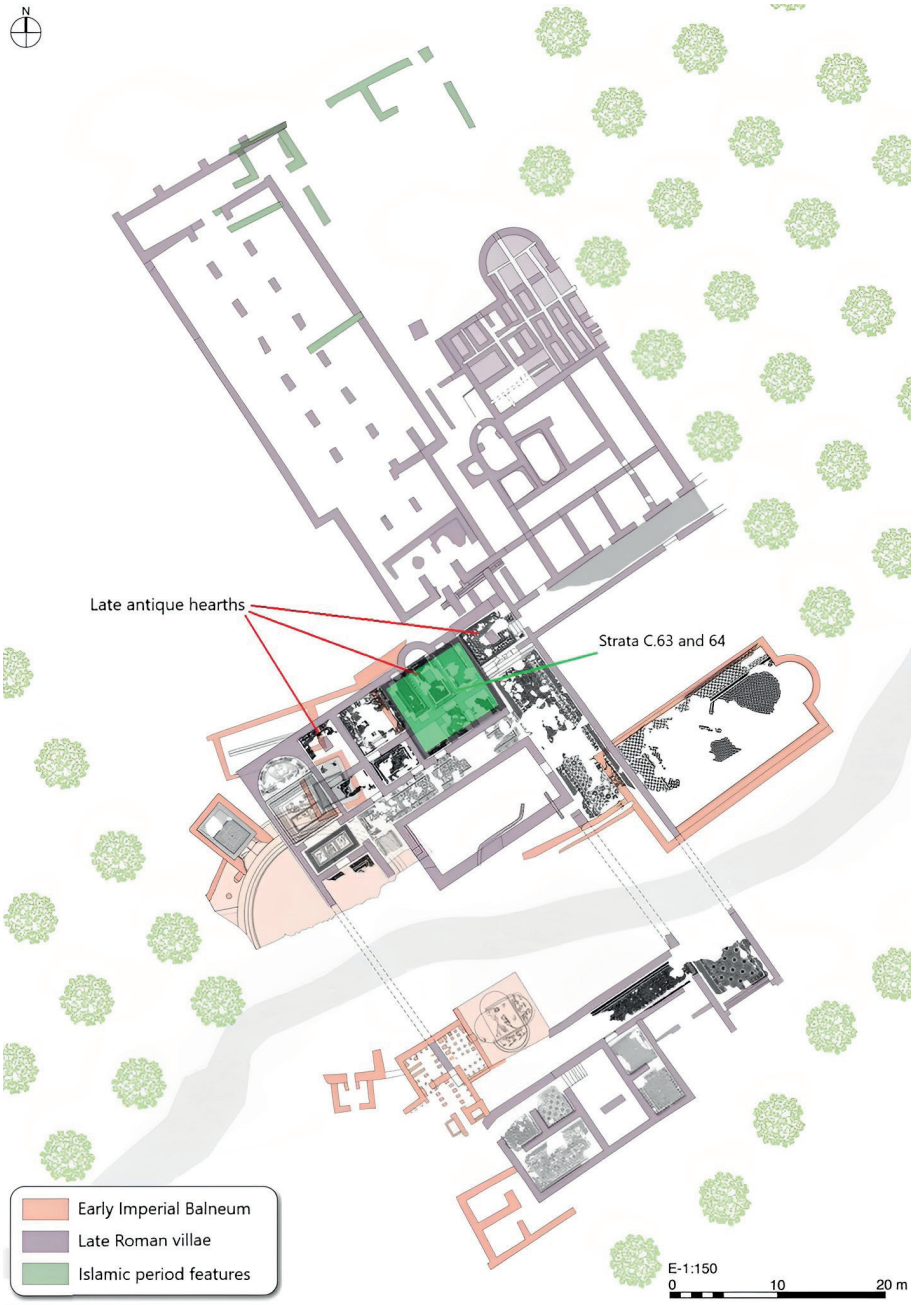

Figure 2. Plan of the structures belonging to each occupation phase documented at Fuente Álamo (with modifications after https://fuentealamovillaromana.es/). Courtesy of Manuel Delgado and David Jaén.

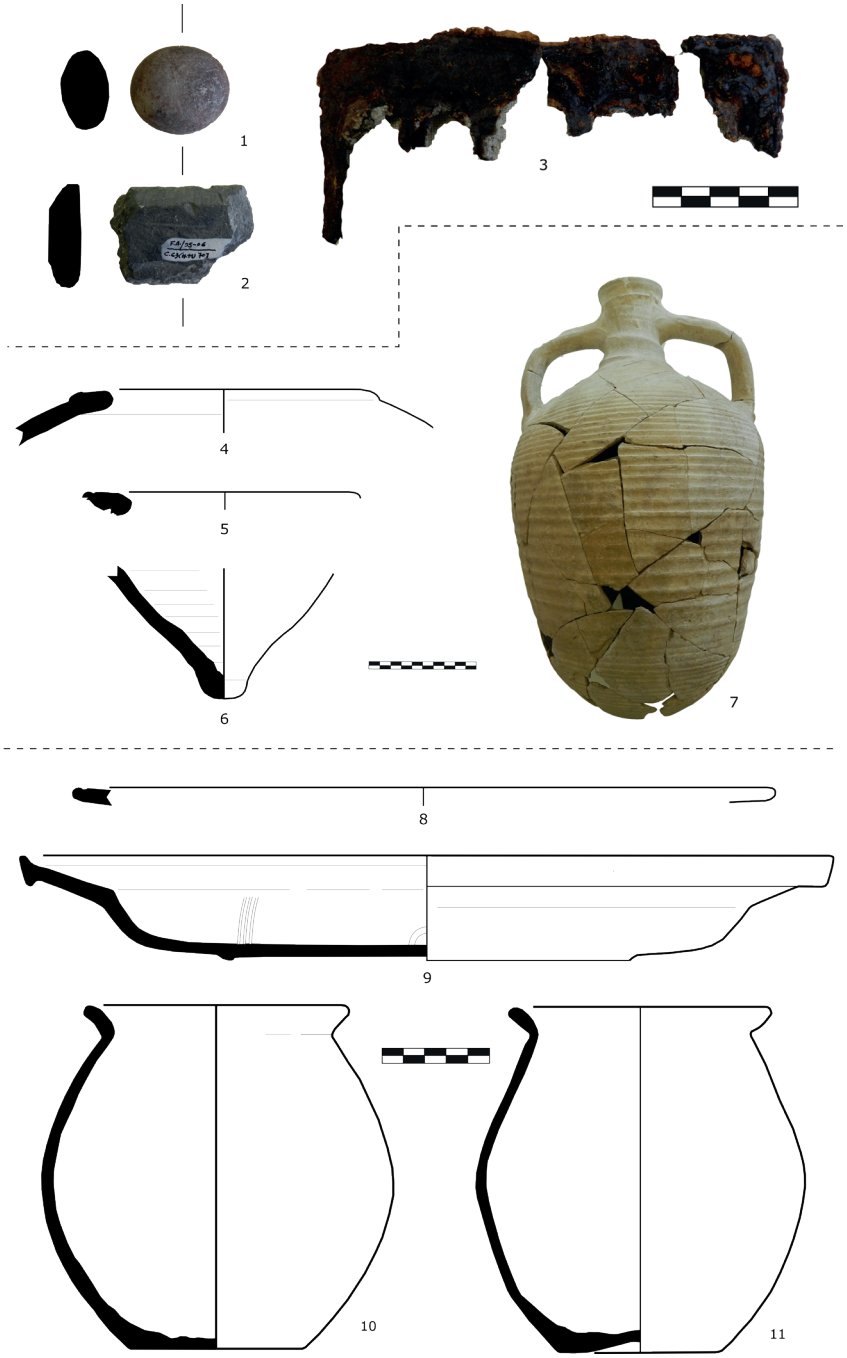

Figure 3. Resume of the main finds belonging to the strata c. 63 and c. 64 mentioned in the text. 1-3) Finds related to production activities. 4-7) Finds related to storage activities. 8-11) Finds related to consumption patterns.

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