

SECTION 9

AVIENO AND THE GRADUAL DECLINE OF GADES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The period extending from the 3rd century, with the Severan dynasty of emperors, to the arrival of Islam at the beginning of the 8th century is called Late Antiquity: a time of great changes and instability, with raids by the Mauri, the fall of the Roman Empire, the rise of the Germanic kingdoms, and the presence in our lands of the Vandals, the Byzantines, and finally the Visigoths.

In the 4th century AD, a substantial change occurred in the Roman Empire: Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313, and shortly thereafter, with the Edict of Thessalonica, the Empire converted to the new religion (380). For decades, the new religion coexisted with Roman polytheism, as seems to have happened in Cádiz, since Avienus reminds us that at this time the millenary Heracleian sanctuary of Cádiz was still in use.

We have very little information about the Late Roman period in Cádiz, as it is the least studied period of its Ancient History. We know that much of the city's major public buildings had been abandoned by the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century, as stratigraphic evidence from excavations shows (Roman theater, Casa del Obispo, old Comic Theater).

But others remained active, such as the fish-salting factory of the Andalucía Theater, which remained in use until well into the 5th century AD. It was during this period that someone drew a lighthouse with twelve floors, crowned with the eternal flame, in its cistern.



VRBS IVLIA GADITANA

Desempolvando su pasado

The city's port also remained operational, as indicated by Byzantine ceramics found in contexts dating from the 4th to the 7th centuries AD in various excavations of the historic center, which suggest that the city's perimeter was reduced during this period, as happened in many other Mediterranean cities.

However, hundreds of tombs excavated in various locations in Eritía and Cotinusa confirm that there was notable activity in the city, both in urban and suburban areas, generating a possibly dispersed settlement pattern with several population nuclei.

Gades lost administrative importance, and it seems that the municipal offices were gradually moved to Medina Sidonia, a city situated on a defensible height during these complex times, which later became a bishopric. Nevertheless, active religious communities continued to exist in Cádiz until the Visigothic period, as evidenced, for example, by the monastery that Saint Fructuosus of Braga founded on the *ad Gaditanam insulam* around the year 650. A few decades later, we witness the first Islamic presences in the Strait region, marking the beginning of a new era: the Middle Ages.

Did you know that no basilicas or monasteries have yet been discovered in Cádiz?

Archaeologists will find them in the future, possibly around the cathedral and the old Roman theater, where Late Roman tombs and some inscriptions have already been found, such as one discovered near Plaza Fray Félix. This inscription records the epitaph of the cleric Florianus, who lived 23 years and died on the third day of the Nones of the era 708, that is, in the year 670. It is the latest known inscription, illustrating the existence of active ecclesiastical communities in the city during the Visigothic period.

