

archaeological site

ATEGUA



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Aerial view of the Roman acropolis, baths and buildings, the late Islamic enclosure and the late medieval marketplace

The surrender and capitulation of Ategua after a long, torturous siege by Julius Caesar's troops led directly to the fall of *Colonia Patricia Corduba*, capital of the Roman province of *Baetica*, in 45 BCE. After that victory, Caesar continued his successful military campaign across Hispania, vanquishing the supporters of Pompey's sons at the Battle of Munda and subsequently returning to Rome in triumph.

That historical event is the best-known episode in the life of this site, described by Julius Caesar himself in his *Bellum Hispaniense*. Yet the history of Ategua began two millennia before and would continue at least another 15 centuries after that decisive battle. Archaeological ruins and artefacts—some visible on the surface, and many more hidden beneath it, sheltered from the ravages of time—tell the fascinating story of this promontory's continued occupation over thousands of years.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ATEGUA TODAY

Phase I. First occupation of the site: The origins of this site are believed to date back to the Copper Age, as field surveys conducted in the 1980s at the highest point in the acropolis indicated the existence of what seem to be Bell-Beaker pottery sherds. These materials and the context in which they appeared were neither studied nor published, and consequently their proposed dating was never empirically proven, although it is probably accurate as the same chronology has been confirmed at other *oppida* in western Andalusia.



The Ategua Stela.
8th-7th century BCE

Phase II. Late Bronze Age: The oldest documented archaeological finds at Ategua date from the Late Bronze Age, after which archaeologists have recorded a more or less unbroken stratigraphic sequence up to the 14th century–CE. From the 9th century BCE it was used as a pre-colonial cremation necropolis, and roughly 150 years after the cemetery was abandoned humans established an urban centre on this site, with orthogonal-plan dwellings defended by an outer wall, which remained in use until the 7th century BCE.

The warrior stela discovered nearby, now on display at the Provincial Archaeological Museum of Córdoba, dates from this period. Such stones are believed to be markers that identified territorial boundaries or even routes used by animal herders. The Ategua Stela is remarkable for its size and the complexity of the motifs depicted on it: we can make out a main figure with schematically rendered attire and status symbols (shield, sword, comb, mirror and spear), and below a row of dancers holding hands and other figures beside horses and a chariot.

Phase III. Early Iron Age: The site grew to occupy a considerable area and experienced its first period of splendour. In the zones studied to date, archaeologists have found evidence that the area of the previous settlement was reoccupied, with obvious modifications in the urban layout, until at least the first half of the 6th century BCE.

View from the acropolis of various Roman buildings, the south section of the late Islamic wall and the countryside surrounding Ategua. In the distance, the villages of Montemayor and Fernán Núñez





View of the acropolis from the southwest corner of the late Islamic wall and late medieval marketplace

In the 4th century BCE new works were undertaken, including the construction of a large wall tentatively identified –pending further excavation– as belonging to a temple from this period.

Phase IV. Late Iron Age: The only evidence from this period is the presence of archaeological material detected during field surveys.

Phase V. The Roman Town: The most important moment in the history of Ategua was during the Roman Republic, specifically during the civil war between Caesar and Pompey's sons. The events that transpired in the town were recorded for posterity in the *Bellum Hispaniense*, which repeatedly mentions Ategua and tells us that, having sided with Pompey, it was besieged by Caesar's army and finally surrendered on 19 February in the year 45 BCE. The Roman town is largely responsible for site's modern-day appearance and morphology.

We know much about the life of the town during this period thanks to the ruins of the defensive wall that once encircled

Partial view of the Roman houses





Partial view of the Roman baths

it (probably erected atop an older wall), several buildings, epigraphic information and historical records.

A group of buildings known as *domus* provide evidence of urban residential architecture in Roman Ategua. The group includes several modest houses built around courtyards with water tanks or wells, two of which open onto a *decumanus* (a high street on an east-west axis). The foundations were found to contain Italic column bases of the Attic and Tuscan variety, indicating that they were probably laid between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE. According to the archaeologists who excavated them, these houses were abandoned in the mid-2nd century CE.

In addition, they located two virtually intact rooms and a series of structures pertaining to a bathhouse. Only one of the spaces, a *frigidarium* with a square bathtub of considerable size, has been positively identified. The floor plan of the entire excavated complex and its constructive features, similar to those of other *thermae* on the Iberian Peninsula, suggest that it was probably built and used in the late Republican or early Imperial period.

Remnants of walls in what may have been the forum or main square of Ategua





Bases of a Roman Republican civil building

Southeast of the upper platform, beneath the foundations of the late Islamic wall, lies a Roman building with columns, which may have been a civil structure, a basilica or a portico connecting two different areas. The Attic bases of this building date from late Republican/Augustan times, although there are small sections of floor from later periods that rest on the column shafts, above the Roman-era ground level, confirming that this space was continually occupied and reused. Alongside the bases we can see massive walls, doors, channels, column capitals and large slabs of locally-quarried stone –most of which were removed during earlier excavations– that testify to the impressive size of the buildings located in this area.

On the southern slope of the hill, outside the defensive wall and beside a road leading to the nearby quarries along which wagons and carts would have travelled, two graves were dug. At this point we do not yet know if they are two isolated tombs or part of a larger cemetery. The few pottery pieces found at levels below these two graves date from between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE.

Furthermore, a funerary inscription from the 2nd century CE suggests that Ategua was granted the title of *Municipium Flavium*.

The most recent reports on the town of Ategua in Roman times are supplied by historical chronicles, which mention that a representative of the Christian church in Ategua attended the Council of Iliberris in the early 4th century, accompanying Bishop Ossius.

Phase VI. Late Antiquity: We know that this area was still inhabited thanks to the discovery and delimitation of an important necropolis on a small hill west of the town, where the pottery pieces retrieved appear to date from Late Antiquity.

Phase VII. Medieval Period: During the Middle Ages, at least from the 10th century onwards, Ategua was a small village in the *kura* or province of Qurtuba (Córdoba). So far, no structures from the early medieval period have been detected.



Eastern section of the late Islamic wall

Given its strategic position at a crossroads vital to the defence of Córdoba, the hilltop was occupied by a castle during the final years of Muslim rule. The castle, with an irregular polygonal plan following the contours of the terrain, had a total of 9 towers and two gates. One of these gates was set into the north wall and reinforced, in the modern era, with an octagonal tower. The other, directly opposite, faced south and was flanked by two square towers. The castle also had a bastion jutting out from the northwest corner. This military structure was maintained throughout the late Middle Ages, and over time a population centre grew up around it, but the hilltop was definitively abandoned sometime in the 14th or 15th century.

The rectangular building at the southwest corner outside the castle wall was built during the Christian era, in the 13th or 14th century, and the typical market-stall layout leaves no doubt as to its commercial purpose.

Late medieval marketplace



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LOCATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

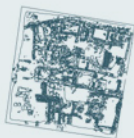
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0 7 14 21 m

Roman
houses



Christian
medieval
marketplace

Southeast gate
in the late
medieval wall

Late medieval wall

Roman
public
buildings

Roman baths

Acropolis

North gate
in the late
medieval wall

Defensive bastion
on the late
medieval wall

Modern tower
on the late
medieval wall

Late medieval
tower

