

Materiality, Spirituality, and Everyday Life of the Valencian Mudéjar and Morisco Communities: A Study to Recover a Hidden Heritage*

المادية والروحانية والحياة اليومية لجماعتي المدينيين والموريسكيين البلسيين:
دراسة لاسترجاع تراث مخفي

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Abstract:

This research focuses on the recovery and valorization of the post-Andalusian Islamic heritage in the Valencian Region (Spain), particularly relating to the Mudéjar and Morisco communities. Despite the significant material and immaterial legacy left by these groups, it has often been overlooked or marginalized in traditional Spanish historiography. The study addresses the urgent need to preserve this heritage, much of which remains in a state of neglect or clandestinity. Numerous historical and architectural sites, including mosques, farms, and urban structures, remain intact, offering invaluable insights into the daily life, spirituality, and material culture of these communities. For instance, the study highlights the clandestine mosque in Castelló de Rugat and other examples of preserved mosques, like those in Benàçea and La Xara, which provide a window into post-Andalusian religious practices. Additionally, archival documentation has shed light on the social and cultural dynamics of these communities, revealing hidden figures and practices, such as marriage contracts requiring participation in Christian festivals and the clandestine practice of

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Islam. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this research integrates documentary analysis, fieldwork, and technological innovation to bring attention to this neglected heritage. It also emphasizes the importance of education, community engagement, and international collaboration in the preservation and promotion of this unique cultural legacy.

Keywords:

Heritage; Clandestine; Mudéjar; Morisco; Post-andalusi.

ملخص:

يركز هذا البحث على استعادة وتثمين التراث الإسلامي ما بعد الأندلسي في منطقة بلنسية (إسبانيا)، وخاصةً ما يتعلق بالمدجنين والموريسكيين. فعلى الرغم من الإرث المادي والمعنوي الكبير الذي خلفته تلكا الجماعتين، إلا أنه غالبًا ما أهمل أو هُتمش في التأريخ الإسباني التقليدي. تتناول الدراسة الحاجة الملحة للحفاظ على هذا التراث، الذي لا يزال الكثير منه في حالة من الإهمال أو الإخفاء. لا تزال العديد من المواقع التاريخية والمعمارية، بما في ذلك المساجد والمزارع والمباني الحضرية، سليمة، مُقدّمة رؤى قيّمة عن الحياة اليومية والروحانية والثقافة المادية لتلك المجتمعات. على سبيل المثال، تُسلط الدراسة الضوء على المسجد السري في كاستيلو دي روغات وأمثلة أخرى على مساجد محفوظة، مثل تلك الموجودة في بيناسيا ولا زارا، والتي تُتيح نافذةً على الممارسات الدينية ما بعد الأندلسية. علاوةً على ذلك، سلّطت الوثائق الأرشيفية الضوء على الديناميكيات الاجتماعية والثقافية لتلك المجتمعات، كاشفةً عن شخصيات وممارسات خفية، مثل عقود الزواج التي تشترط المشاركة في الأعياد المسيحية، وممارسة الإسلام السرية. ومن خلال نهج متعدد التخصصات، يدمج هذا البحث التحليل الوثائقي والعمل الميداني والابتكار التكنولوجي لتسليط الضوء على هذا التراث المهم؛ كما يؤكد على أهمية التعليم والمشاركة المجتمعية والتعاون الدولي في الحفاظ على هذا الإرث الثقافي الفريد وتعزيزه.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التراث؛ السرية؛ مدجن؛ مورسكي؛ ما بعد الأندلسي.

1. State of the Art

For decades, a segment of research has been devoted to valuing the tangible and intangible heritage of Islamic communities known as *mudéjares* and *moriscos*, or New Christians. However, their presence in traditional Spanish historiography has been, and continues to be, quite limited and localized. Paradoxically, the *morisco* heritage in Tunisia has received more critical attention than that of the Iberian Peninsula itself. In contrast, the historical and cultural phenomena linked to Islam during its majority presence, known as the period of *al-Andalus* or Andalusī Islam, have garnered increasing attention in recent years, particularly for their monumental aspects¹, primarily preserved in Andalusian territory.

In the case of *Sharq al-Andalus*, the presence of Andalusī Islamic tangible and intangible heritage is substantial. However, even more notable is the preservation of a post-Andalusī Valencian Islamic legacy, manifested primarily in the everyday expressions of *mudéjares* and *moriscos*². This Valencian Islamic cultural heritage remains largely unknown, forgotten, and semi-clandestine, existing in a precarious state of conservation and occupying virtually no space in history books. This material heritage, much more tied to daily life and illustrating how religiosity and Islamic culture were experienced during the late medieval and early modern periods in the Kingdom of Valencia, is accompanied by a vast collection of documents that have only begun to be partially analyzed³. These documents are housed in major Valencian archives as well as smaller centers tied to parishes and rural and mountain environments, often in small localities⁴.

This body of documentary, artistic, archaeological, and intangible heritage remains in its original state or only minimally

¹ BERNABÉ PONS (L. F.) : “Paisaje islámico post-andalusí. ¿Un patrimonio clandestino?”, Chr. Mazzoli-Guintard (ed.), *Patrimonio andalusí. Cultura, documentos y paisaje*, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 2021, pp. 55–56.

² Id., p. 56 ; CUENCA ABELLÁN (B.) : “The Tripartite Qibla Wall as a Visual Form of Embodied Belief: From Al-Andalus to Mudejar and Morisco Mosques in Exile—Memory and Identity”, in: *Religions*, n° 15, 1151, 2024, pp. 509–511.

³ BENÍTEZ SÁNCHEZ-BLANCO, (R.) : “El verano del miedo. Conflictividad social en la Valencia agermanada y el bautismo de los mudéjares, 1521”, in: *Estudis: Revista de Historia Moderna*, n° 22, 1996, pp. 36–37.

⁴ CUENCA ABELLÁN : Ibid., p. 508.

altered, a particularity that distinguishes the Valencian context under study. In other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, this heritage has been extensively modified or, in most cases, destroyed. A case in point is the disappearance of the largest Islamic cemetery (*maqbara*)⁵ discovered in Europe, located in the city of Ávila, which was ultimately razed to construct a parking lot. Despite the efforts of experts advocating for its preservation, the reason given for its destruction revolved around its “lack of monumentality”; in other words, if it is not a grand historical building, it holds no importance. Some discriminatory and Islamophobic attitudes could even be detected in the discourse surrounding the issue.

To understand the past, it is crucial to consider the everyday. The so-called “non-monumentality” represents the paradigm in which further work and investigation are necessary. Indeed, those less monumental heritage remains best illustrate the lives of our ancestors and provide a much more realistic image of the cultural context of that past⁶. Paradigmatic buildings such as the Mosque of Córdoba or the Alhambra of Granada—not to mention their significant alterations from their original forms—showcase what was extraordinary, tied to political and religious power. By contrast, the everyday Islamic legacy preserved in Valencian territory, from agricultural practices, such as the palm orchards, to the Arabisms retained in the Valencian language⁷, the urban structure of *morerías*⁸, depopulated *morisco* settlements, or small mosques, is far more significant. Proper interpretation of these elements allows for a more rigorous understanding of past daily realities.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSp3hX9c6Q>

⁶ See : **DÍEZ JORGE (M. E.)** : De puertas para adentro. La casa en los siglos XV y XVI, Comares, Granada, 2019 ; **DÍEZ JORGE (M. E.) & ORIHUELA UZAL (A.)** : Abierta de par en par. La casa del siglo XVI en el reino de Granada, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 2022 ; **FRANCO (B.) & STAGNO (L.)** : Another Sea: The Image of Islam in the Southern Mediterranean Area, Genova University Press, Genova, 2021.

⁷ **BERNABÉ PONS, (L. F.)** : “Mudéjares valencianos viajan a Granada”. in : Sharq al-Andalus. Estudios Mudéjares y Moriscos, vol. 9, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante - Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, Teruel, 1992, p. 152.

⁸ See : **TORRÓ ABAD (J.)** : El urbanismo mudéjar como forma de resistencia: alquerías y morerías en el reino de Valencia (siglos XIII-XVI), in : VI Simposio internacional de Mudejarismo: 16-18 septiembre 1993, Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, Teruel, 1995, pp. 535-598.

2. The Ancient Kingdom of Valencia as a paradigm: from periphery to epicenter

The Valencian Area boasts the preservation of some of the oldest *mudéjar* and *morisco* mosques on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as original Andalusí irrigation canals, an extensive array of baths⁹, ovens, walls, watchtowers, and more. However, the primary challenge in promoting the value of this Valencian Islamic heritage lies in the condition of these remains and their accessibility, which can often be hazardous, as seen in various depopulated *morisco* settlements¹⁰.

The lack of resources for conservation further contributes to this heritage remaining largely unknown to most of society, despite being a cultural legacy embedded in the daily life of Valencian citizens. For instance, in Elche, the palm groves are an integral part of the cityscape, alongside monumental structures like the Tower of Calahorra or the Raval de San Juan. Similarly, in Valencia, the Barrio del Carmen retains many urban elements from the *mudéjar* and *morisco* periods, as this was the site of the Royal *Morería*, where clandestine renovations of a mosque were documented¹¹. Even remnants of walls and mosques mentioned in historical records still exist. This pattern is repeated in countless cities, whether large, medium-sized, or small.

Documentation also sheds light on the individuals—men and many women—who played central roles in these histories and remain forgotten. Figures such as María de Luna¹², considered one

⁹ **MORENO COLL (A.)** : “Diferentes percepciones del arte islámico. Una primera aproximación a través del baño de vapor (s. XV-XX)”. in : *Sharq al-Andalus: Estudios Mudéjares y Moriscos*, nº 21, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante - Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, Teruel, 2014-2016, pp. 53-77.

¹⁰ **SOLER ESTRELA (A.)** : *La arquitectura de los despoblados moriscos en los valles de la Marina Alta*. Tesis Doctoral. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Valencia, 2009, pp. 73-77.

¹¹ **FERRER TABERNER (A.)** : “Descripción de una mezquita de la morería de Valencia en 1525, en relación con unas obras clandestinas de ampliación”. in : *VII Simposio Internacional de Mudejarismo: Instituto de Estudios Turolenses - Centro de Estudios Mudéjares*, Teruel, 1996, pp. 319-334.

¹² **GUIJARRO HORTELANO (E.)** : *La maternidad en las comunidades mudéjar y morisca según un manuscrito aljamiado-morisco aragonés. Estudio y edición crítica (códice T-8, BRAH)*. Centro de Estudios Mudéjares, Teruel, 2010, p. 313.

of the finest *morisco* midwives in 16th-century Valencia, are still largely unknown. Archival records have uncovered intriguing testimonies, including those of Valencian master builders (*alarifes*), still insufficiently studied, or Muslim women who included clauses in marriage contracts requiring their future husbands to take them annually to the *Corpus Christi* celebrations in Valencia, likely for enjoyment and the opportunity to display their jewelry for a day¹³. Inquisitorial surveys also offer insights into various aspects of daily life, such as cooking, household practices, teaching Arabic, women's resistance to conversion, and, in post-Andalusi times, the clandestine practice of Islam, which allowed the faith to persist in the privacy of homes¹⁴.

To systematize and prospectively explore these discoveries, several multidisciplinary research and dissemination initiatives have been launched to effectively highlight the material and intangible post-Andalusi Islamic cultural legacy. Among these efforts is the work of independent researcher Enrique Pérez Cañamares, whose website, www.losmoriscos.com, compiles extensive documentation from Valencian parish archives, offering valuable insights into *morisco* communities. It is also crucial to continue Research projects such as *Antes del Orientalismo. Imágenes, espacios y vida cruzadas en el Mediterráneo entre cristiandad e islam* (IMPI 1 and 2, PID2019-105070GB-I00), and the recently concluded *Cost Action 18129 IS-LE: Islamic Legacy: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350–1750)*, funded by the European Union. These projects have dedicated significant efforts to promoting the value of the Valencian *mudéjar* and *morisco* cultural legacy. However, much remains to be done.

It is important to emphasize that research and efforts to promote the Valencian post-Andalusi cultural heritage also rely heavily on its European and Mediterranean dimensions due to its strong connections with other Mediterranean territories, particularly North Africa. In January 2023, during the international conference

¹³ **RUIZ GARCÍA (E.) & BERNABÉ PONS (L. F.)** : Joan Martí de Figuerola: Works (1519–1521) Disputas. Lumbre de fe contra la secta mahomética y el Alcorán. Vol. 1, Brill, Leiden, 2024, p. 470.

¹⁴ **MILLER (KATHRYN A.)** : Guardians of Islam. Religious authority and Muslim Communities of Late Medieval Spain, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p. 131.

Negotiating Islamic Legacies in Europe: Concepts, Heritages, and Comparative Approaches held at the Benaki Museum in Athens, the urgent need to protect the surviving examples of post-Andalusi Islamic heritage in the Valencian Community was highlighted. The conference concluded that many Mediterranean European countries face similar challenges regarding the protection and safeguarding of Islamic cultural heritage from the modern era.

Additionally, the Andalusi cultural legacy on the Iberian Peninsula has significant relevance in regions such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, where an extensive heritage created by exiled *morisco* communities is preserved. In this context, it is worth reconsidering the terms used to define this architectural, agricultural, everyday, and sometimes intangible heritage. Describing it as “Andalusi” or “Andalusian” can occasionally lead to confusion.

3. From clandestinity to recognition: the case of mosques.



Fig. 1. Prayer hall. Castelló de Rugat mosque. Picture by authors.

Illustrating the discussion with concrete examples is the best way to understand the need—and urgency—to intervene in this cultural legacy. A few years ago, a master's thesis¹⁵ was published on a space identified as a clandestine mosque, known as the *morisco* mosque of Castelló de Rugat (Valencia). This mosque (Fig. 1) represents a clear example of clandestinity in its time, as it appears to have been used in the cellars of the palace of Duke Carles de Borja, a lord who allowed the *moriscos* of Castelló de Rugat to secretly continue practicing their Islamic religious rites¹⁶.

Today, it also exemplifies a form of clandestine heritage, as it is known to very few people and is in an alarmingly poor state of preservation.

In the Valencian Area, two additional mosques have been preserved which, according to prior research¹⁷, reached their peak during the post-Andalusi period. These are the mosque of Benaçea, dating from the 14th century and located in the *morería* of Chelva (Valencia)—today the Hermitage of Santa Cruz—and the Xara Mosque in Simat de Valldigna (Fig. 2), whose oldest remains date back to the 15th century¹⁸. Both buildings are unique examples of preserved mosque architecture, *mudéjar* in both cases, which survive in Valencian territory.

¹⁵ See : **PLÁ GUTIÉRREZ (I.)** : Estudio previo y propuesta de intervención en la mezquita de Castelló de Rugat [tesis doctoral], dirigida por Rafael Marín Sánchez. Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia, 2017.

¹⁶ Id., p. 34.

¹⁷ **TORRALBA RULL (J.)** : “Erario de Santuarios. La arquitectura religiosa de Chelva”. En *Pobles i Llocs del Regne de València*, vol. 2., Real Academia de Cultura Valenciana, Valencia, 2004 ; **TORRÓ ABAD (J.)** : “Mezquita de la Xara. Simat de Valldigna”. En *Excavacions Arqueològiques de Salvament a la Comunitat Valenciana*, vol. 2, La Safor: Servei d'Investigació Prehistòrica i Museu de Prehistòria de València - Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Ciència., Valencia, 1987, pp. 192-193.

¹⁸ **IVARS PÉREZ (J.)** : “De Mesquita de Xara a Ermita de Santa Anna. Història y procés de restauració”. En *L'Avenc: revista d'investigació i assaig de la Valldigna*, nº 2, 22-32, Simat de Valldigna, 1996, pp. 23-26.



Fig. 2. Qibla wall. The Xara Mosque. Picture by authors.

The Xara Mosque is particularly illustrative, as it retains its *qibla* wall divided into three sections¹⁹. Its design is very similar to other examples, such as the Tórtoles Mosque in Aragon, which also features a tripartite *qibla* wall. Interestingly, this visual "iconogram" of the *qibla* divided into three sections reappears in the *morisco* mosque of Testour in Tunisia, built in the 16th century. This seems to be a characteristic element of Hispano-Islamic mosque architecture, with the oldest example being the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which continued to influence design during the Almohad period²⁰.

On the other hand, the clandestine nature of Islamic worship practices was much more common than it seems. This is also evidenced in the inquisitorial document collected by Boronat and

¹⁹ See : CUENCA ABELLÁN, 2024, op. cit., pp. 1-16.

²⁰ CALVO CAPILLA (S.) : Las mezquitas de al-Ándalus, Fundación Ibn Tufayl, Almería, 2014, p. 396 ; CUENCA ABELLÁN, 2024, op. cit., pp. 9-12.

Barrachina²¹ in reference to the trial of Admiral Sancho de Cardona, who allowed the *moriscos* to make pilgrimages to the tomb of Sid Bono, within his lands, and even gave them permission to rebuild the *zāwiya*. Unfortunately, not many remains of this worship space have been located, although the site of its location has been identified²², near Benifato in the province of Alicante. However, poems sung by the *moriscos* during their pilgrimage to these sites have been preserved.

In line with this, and as mentioned earlier, archival documents open up the possibility of locating many mosques still in use during the post-Andalusian period in Valencia. The period of forced conversions in the first half of the 16th century²³ also generated a wealth of data about *mudéjar* mosques in Valencia—over a hundred—detailing their locations and their fate once they were closed to Islamic worship.

It is important to note that research on these mosques, which appear in the accounts of forced conversions in the Kingdom of Valencia, will substantially alter the traditional historical narrative, where the Crown of Castile has historically been given more importance - at least in historiographical terms - than Aragón or the Kingdom of Valencia. Regarding the transformation of mosques, it can now be asserted, thanks to the Valencian example, that there were two distinct processes of conversion, and the conversion of these *mudéjar* and *morisco* mosques did not involve a ceremonial process as sophisticated as the one during the medieval conquest period. The reality reflects a process of mosque conversion in the modern era, in the 16th century. Moreover, the methods used by the Kingdom of Castile in its former Muslim territories were not the same as the practices carried out by the Crown of Aragón, and specifically, the documentation generated by the Kingdom of

²¹ **BORONAT Y BARRACHINA (P.)** : Los moriscos españoles y su expulsión: estudio histórico-crítico, vol. 2, Imprenta Francisco Vives y Mora, Valencia, 1901, p. 451.

²² **FRANCO SÁNCHEZ (Francisco)** : “Identificación de la tumba de los Sid Bono en Benifato (Alicante)”. En *Sharq Al-Andalus. Estudios Árabes*, nº 5, 1988, p. 181.

²³ See : **BENÍTEZ SÁNCHEZ-BLANCO (R.)** : “El verano del miedo. Conflictividad social en la Valencia agermanada y el bautismo de los mudéjares, 1521”, En *Estudis: Revista de Historia Moderna*, nº 22, 1996, pp. 27-52.

Valencia offers very different solutions. Delving into this will help significantly in valuing the political and territorial role of the Kingdom of Valencia, which has often been seen as a “historiographical periphery” in relation to Aragón and Castile.

4. Teaching Innovation as a key to recover post-andalusi Islamic Heritage in Valencian Region

Research actions are fundamental and necessary to achieve the proposed objectives. However, as previously mentioned, proper scientific dissemination is important so that the knowledge generated reaches beyond academia and into society. One of the most effective actions to return to society a cultural heritage that belongs to it is to delve into more basic training within the framework of teaching innovation activities.

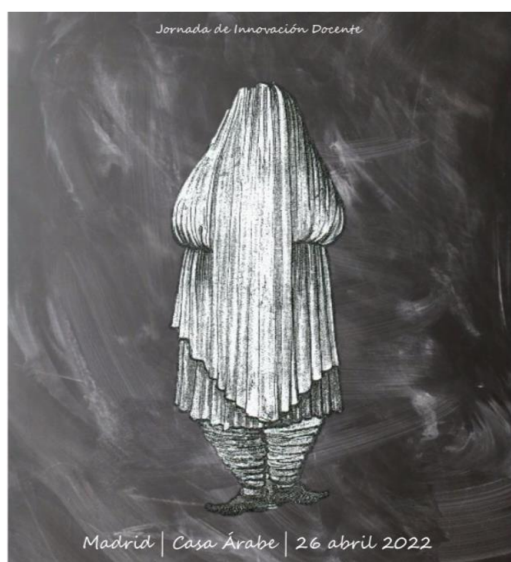


Fig. 3. Event publicity [<https://tulaytula.com/moriscos-y-conversos-en-el-aula-y-mas-alla-casa-arabe-26-de-abril-de-2022/>]

Some events related to these innovative practices have been held previously, such as the event hosted by Casa Árabe in Madrid on April 26, 2022 (Fig. 3). This event featured a Teaching Innovation

Day titled *Moriscos and Converts in the Classroom... and Beyond*²⁴, where the discussion focused on how to include the issue of religious minorities in modern and contemporary classrooms.

The recognition of this vast post-Andalusian heritage corpus, linked to the administrative complexity of the Kingdom of Valencia, also entails a revision of the stereotypes assimilated and transmitted by historiographical tradition about Arab culture, "the Moor," and so on. This post-Andalusian Islamic heritage of Valencia will also help to significantly reduce racism, Islamophobia, and ignorance about the Arab and Islamic world—social issues that are present in everyday life. Through the valorization of this cultural legacy, a sense of belonging has been created among both the native Valencian population and the Muslim migrants who have decided to settle in the Valencian Community.



Fig. 4. Film image *1609 Expulsados. La tragedia de los moriscos*
[<https://www.lahiguera.net/cinemanía/fotos/23216.html>]

One of the most interesting experiences that crossed the boundaries between "us" and "the other" was the campaign surrounding the film *1609 Expulsados. La tragedia de los moriscos* (2009)²⁵. This documentary (Fig. 4) succeeded in generating a sense

²⁴ MARTÍN LÓPEZ (D.) & ORTS-RUIZ (F.) : *Moriscos y conversos en el aula... y más allá*. Dykinson, Madrid, 2023.

²⁵ Technical details: *1609 Expulsados. La tragedia de los moriscos*, Madrid, 2009. Directed by Miguel E. López Lorca. Produced by Sagrera Editorial, Casa Árabe, TV3, TVE, Aragón TV, and Canal Historia. Double DVD distributed by

of empathy, making viewers understand that those expelled *moriscos* were indigenous Valencians, who were expelled from their land because of their faith or the suspicion of their belief.

5. Final Considerations

This research is framed within the priority objective of safeguarding, making visible, and valorizing the post-Andalusian Islamic heritage of the Valencian Community. Through a multidisciplinary approach, that combines documentary research, fieldwork, and technological innovation, a project has been developed that not only contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge but also fosters the transfer of this knowledge to society and educational environments.

Among the notable achievements is the development of a digital tool with Google Maps, which allows for the location, registration, and mapping of the remains of Valencia's Islamic heritage, with plans to integrate functionalities like QR codes in the future to connect heritage sites with their digital representation. This initiative will be managed in collaboration with the Virtual Library “Miguel de Cervantes” at the University of Alicante (<https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/>) and is linked to a broader dissemination strategy through the website www.losmoriscos.com. These actions contribute not only to public access to knowledge but also to its integration into educational contexts, through proposals such as gamification and the design of specific materials for all levels of teaching.

The multidisciplinary methodological approach is the most appropriate for achieving the proposed objectives. Through the philological and paleographic analysis of historical documents, previously unpublished data on Islamic architecture in use from the conquest of Jaume I to the 16th century have been identified, and the transformation of these spaces after the forced conversions has been studied. This analysis is complemented by rigorous fieldwork, which includes photographic documentation and the comparative interpretation of heritage elements and their urban context, making

Divisa Home Video. In this format, the feature film DVD is complemented by a second DVD containing four documentaries about the Moriscos and additional movie extras.

Art History a key part of the correct interpretation of this cultural legacy. Furthermore, the transnational connections of Valencian Islamic communities, such as the silk trade and architectural influence in North Africa, have been studied, reinforcing the plural and dynamic character of this heritage.

From a broader perspective, this research seeks to transform a forgotten heritage into an inclusive and accessible resource that fosters democratic values and belonging. The results obtained highlight the capacity of this legacy to enrich cultural identity and promote a dialogue between the past and present, in line with the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda and European policies on cultural sustainability.

Finally, the consolidation of knowledge transfer is expected through academic publications, scientific events, and cultural products such as a book that will offer itineraries and routes based on this legacy. These actions, along with participation in international meetings, will contribute to strengthening collaboration networks and increasing the global visibility of this heritage. In doing so, the project not only advances in the protection of heritage but also positions it as a living resource for the cultural, social, and educational development of the Valencian Area and beyond.

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