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New approaches in peasant archaeology***

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Early Medieval Villages in Spain in the light of European experience. New approaches in peasant archaeology

JUAN ANTONIO QUIRÓS CASTILLO¹

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the results of the recent practice of peasant archaeology in Spain in relation to interventions carried out in Europe. The circumstances as well as some of the most significant results obtained from the archaeological study of villages in several sectors of the continent are studied. This is followed by the study of peasant archaeology in the north of Spain from a variety of viewpoints. To this end, we shall avail of a historiographic analysis to reveal the bases on which village archaeology has been built; a sociological analysis to help us understand the development of this archaeological practice within the framework of heritage management; and an historical analysis allowing us to understand the social transformations of landscape. Last of all, some of the main problems currently under study by specialists in this subject are discussed.

KEY WORDS: Village, Early Middle Ages, Europe, Longhouse, farm, peasantry

1. INTRODUCTION

The identification and study of the villages of the Early Middle Ages has undergone significant development throughout Europe in recent years, particularly in the south of the continent. Whereas in England or in central and northern Europe the study of these sites was one of the subjects on which modern Medieval Archaeology was built, in France, Spain and, to a certain extent, in Italy too, the boom in Early Middle

Ages peasant archaeology came about within a totally different framework marked by contract archaeology and the management of the destruction of Archaeological Heritage.

In a very short time an important archaeological record, highly significant as regards quality and quantity, was created.

The introduction of excavation in extensive areas, for example, took place in Spain as well as in other European countries under the auspices of the abovementioned contract archaeology. In the north east of Europe, archaeological intervention involving over 18 and 20 hectares (Hamerow 2002, p. 4-8) was carried out. In France or in England, it frequently occurred that, due to public works of differing size, areas several hectares in size needed to undergo archaeological excavation. In Spain too, large-scale and detailed excavation has been carried out on some villages (Fernández Ugalde 2005), in line with European standards, and there are also some important examples of this kind of intervention in Catalonia, Madrid, Castile-Leon and the Basque Country.

What's more, the often criticised professional archaeology has likewise managed to incorporate protocols and complex, highly articulated techniques into the creation of the archaeological record. Indeed, the development of systematic bioarchaeological studies in early medieval contexts occurred within this same framework. A good quality archaeological record has thus been built up and highly refined intervention protocols have been established.

Furthermore, we have numerous cases at our disposal and, although very few of them have actually reached the publishing stage, particularly in Spain, their number gives us an idea of their size. In France, excavation work has been carried out on over 500 Early Medieval villages (Lorren 2006, p. 9) and at least 308 had been published in 1999 when Edith Peytremann synthesised the findings in her doctoral thesis (Peytremann 2003). In Spain, there have been almost a hundred

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interventions in approximately ten years of excavations in this type of site, and, yet, hardly any excavation reports have been published.

This situation, which has developed in very few years, has given rise to a series of consequences at different scales (relating to heritage, history, ideology, etc.), which will need to be analysed in the coming years.

In Spain, the first reactions to this situation were articulated from very different approaches and were the background for the meeting whose minutes are now being published.

On the one hand, from the traditional archaeological approach riddled with reminiscences of cultural historicism, there has been a re-assessment of the Visigothic period in the light of the new available record, with an emphasis on the tradition of «Visigothic archaeology» (Morín de Pablos 2007). Other different approaches, related rather to heritage management, broached aspects linked to intervention in extensive sites or to the actual concept of site and record, as is reflected in the Minutes of the First Congress on Archaeological Heritage of the Autonomous Community of Madrid published in 2007. Another different line of work, more closely related to social analysis from the perspective of the archaeological study of peasantry, has allowed us to take a new approach when writing the history of this type of evidence (Vigil-Escalera Guirado 2007).

All these interventions resulted in placing the social practices of the peasantry at the centre of archaeological analysis and banishing the traditional static view of rural landscapes and subordinate classes.

It is likewise important to keep in mind that the history of this archaeological record needs to be written in a very specific scientific context. For quite a few years now new interpretative scenarios have been completely overhauling the interpretative paradigms on the formation of medieval landscapes and the significance of the collapse of the ancient world and the beginning of the Middle Ages. Specialists from all over Europe are holding lively discussions on the meaning of the end of civilization (Ward-Perkins 2005), on how to frame the Early Middle Ages (Wickham 2005), on the start of the Middle Ages (Francovich, Hodges 2003), on continuity and catastrophes (Hallsall 2007) or on the role of the barbarians (Heather 2006), among other subjects

and stances. In this list, which is considerably longer, two notable aspects need to be underlined: on the one hand, the increasingly important role taken on by the archaeological record of the peasantry in these syntheses and, on the other, the practically total absence of Spanish records.

The wish to include the most recent interventions in Spain (particularly north of the Tagus) in this book, and to rethink this record at European scale, responds to the wish to be able to analyse these historical sources with some perspective.

As E. Zadora-Rio (2003, p. 8) pointed out, these archaeological findings give rise to many conflicts with prevailing historical paradigms, which is why it is necessary to examine the entire period.

With this article, the aim is to broach, by way of an introduction to this work, some of the main problems relating to history and heritage that village archaeology poses in Spain. As a preliminary step, it is important to take up again some central matters which have been approached from the European experience, and which serve as a reference to understand some basic aspects of the new record which we are beginning to handle. It is not our aim to make an exhaustive and detailed review, which would go beyond the limits of this work, but rather to simply outline some of the main problems posed by the archaeological study of villages in the Early Middle Ages.

2. VILLAGE ARCHAEOLOGY IN EUROPE

Although throughout Europe Early Middle Ages archaeology was basically built from the study of Germanic cemeteries (furnished burials), the excavation of medieval villages has a long tradition in the centre and north of the continent. Indeed, in the Netherlands, Denmark or England, the first interventions on early medieval peasant villages can be dated to the twenties and thirties of the last century (Hamerow 2002, 5-8).

Nevertheless, it was after the Second World War and following the progressive mechanisation of farming activity that the wealth of rural heritage became apparent, and work commenced on the mapping of the abandoned settlements and rural villages which began to emerge either through contrast with written texts or through fortuitous finds. Although at first, specialists focused their attention on the analysis of the abandoned settlement phenomenon or the formation of the medieval

village (AA.VV. 1965), they soon acknowledged the existence of prior stages and occupations.

During these years some landmark sites were excavated such as those of Warendor in Westphalia (the fifties), Vorbasse in Jutland in the sixties or Brebières (France) and Mucking (England) in the seventies, large extensions of which were excavated and helped us to understand the full complexity of the nature of these records. These records were more closely linked to the archaeological traditions of recent prehistory than to traditional historical archaeology, of a more monumental nature. This «demonumentalisation» phenomenon which characterised the Medieval Archaeology of broad sectors of Europe helped extend the sphere of action and the interests from which this discipline has developed.

The increase in interventions in this type of site during the sixties and seventies not only helped form the first coherent archaeological syntheses on the early medieval architecture and villages of central Europe (Donat 1980), but also led to theorising on new historical paradigms based on the use of archaeological documents.

Particularly influential was the work of R. Fossier and J. Chapelot (1980), in which written and archaeological sources were significantly integrated for the first time. Availing of information from excavations carried out mainly in France, although cases from Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and other sectors of central Europe were also included, these authors came to the conclusion that towards the 10 and 11th centuries *la naissance du village comme unité d'habitat, comme cadre socio-économique, comme donnée architecturale* occurred throughout Europe within the framework of the consolidation of feudalism (Fossier, Chapelot 1980, 335). The paradigm of the birth of the village, which runs parallel to the conceptualisation of the *incastellamento* phenomenon in Italy in the 10-11th centuries and had been theorised by P. Toubert a few years previously (Toubert 1973), raises the value of the image of the «mature» village articulated around a church within a seigniority, while diminishing the importance of the early medieval peasant settlements. The characterisation of this settlement as unstable is attributed to the insecurity and the drop in population of the period, until concentration occurred in around the 10th century within the framework of the feudal mutation or revolution, the creation of the cell, in the words of Fossier, which gave rise to the village.

This paradigm, reinterpreted or formulated from different historical traditions, significantly marked the works carried out in the eighties and nineties. The use of categories like *habitat pre-villageois* (Guadagnin 1988, p. 116) or *non-villages* (Lewis, Mitchell-Fox, Dier 1997, p. 8) to characterise the early medieval settlement in France or in England reveal the importance these approaches had when characterising such illuminating sites as Villiers-le-Sec or Baillet-en-France.

In the case of Italy, as defended by Marco Valenti (2004, p. 5), there has not been a specific debate on the paradigm of the birth of the village, and, indeed, the very notion of the village has yielded to other more visible realities in the textual tradition such as that of the *curtis*.

Nevertheless, the significant development enjoyed by village archaeology within the framework of contract archaeology in recent decades throughout Europe (Klapste, Jaubert 2007, p. 77; Hamerow 2002, p. 4-11; Carré et alii 2009, 52 ss), together with the many research projects on specific sectors has led to an exponential increase in the number of villages from the 5th to the 10th centuries being excavated. On the other hand, this evidence has given rise to numerous tensions with the paradigms formulated from the textual record, to the extent that, in the mid nineties, E. Zadora-Rio did not hesitate to confront the «historians' villages» with the «archaeologists' villages» (Zadora-Rio 1995).

It was not until the last decade that the paradigm of the *naissance du village* was definitively given up in France in the year two thousand (Watteaux 2003), that *incastellamento* was considered another stage in the configuration of Italian medieval landscapes, which had started several centuries before the year one thousand (Francovich, Hodges 2003), or that the social dimension of Anglo-Saxon village communities was broached in England (Reynolds 1999, 135-154). Moreover, only in recent years has it been possible to integrate southern Europe regions into the debate, having up till then received merely testimonial references.

New syntheses oriented from new perspectives which reassess the internal reading of the archaeological record, regardless of external historiographic conditions, have been drawn up in recent years (Hamerow 2002, Zimmermann 1998, Valenti 2004, Wickham 2005, Peytremann 2003, Lorren 2006, Perin 2004,...).

All these works have helped reformulate the social history of the Early Middle Ages from new bases, and make a critical fresh reading of the written testimony in the light of material documents. As Ch. Wickham recently demonstrated, historical analysis calls for a comparative approach which helps us go beyond the limits imposed by national scientific traditions. The archaeological study of villages undoubtedly calls for an analysis of this nature, especially when, in sectors like southern Europe, we have still only partial evidence at our disposal.

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The European landscapes of the Early Middle Ages, from Denmark to England, and from Germany to the north of France, are village landscapes, frequently alternating with farms and more disperse settlements. Villages had already been before the Middle Ages, particularly in the north, whereas in the Roman West they were rare until the 5th or 6th centuries.

The most recent syntheses have shown that European Early Medieval peasant communities already had a certain identity and enjoyed stability in the Early Middle Ages, and, far from being isolated structures and dedicated to subsistence, they were actually involved in exchange networks and were active social and political subjects.

The main traditions of the study of early medieval villages have focused on the analysis of the architecture and urban structure of the settlements, which is why we have highly significant syntheses of this subject matter.

As a norm, the majority of European early medieval villages were made up of domestic units (farmstead blocks or households) close to one another, but with a clear territorial identity. As H. Hamerow points out in this work, «the household was the basic unit of agricultural production» in the period herein analysed. Within these domestic units there was a main residential structure, which was frequently restored and rebuilt following generational cycles. Apart from these dwellings, there were other kinds of structures within the domestic units. Semi-excavated constructions called sunken featured buildings, *Grubenhäuser* or *fonds de cabane* were very frequent.

Territorial differences are well marked as far as the nature of these buildings, the techniques used and the actual internal structure of the villages is

concerned. Moreover, though some common tendencies are recognised, there are also significant differences.

In the case of England, the first known villages can be dated to the 5th century, and are characterised by having a very informal urban structure, with no limits between the different domestic units, and with frequent shifting of the same, as can be appreciated in the case of Mucking (Hamerow 1993). The dwellings are built on wooden posts, but they show marked differences with the longhouses documented in the north east of Europe. Likewise frequent are the sunken featured buildings.

From the end of the 6th century and the 7th century, the first élites become evident in rural territory, and short-lived power centres, active over one or two generations, have been documented. The architecture is more complex and a certain planning and ordering of the village space can be appreciated. In places like Chalton or Foxley, these structures are arranged around patios or courtyards.

In France too, numerous small-sized villages from the 6th and 7th centuries have been documented. These are formed by domestic units with no clear limits between them, as is the case of Tautécourt. E. Zadora-Rio (see herein) has characterised these villages as polyfocal (polyfocal villages), the existence of burials arranged within the domestic system being frequent. The dwellings are similar to the English ones, and there is a marked difference between the southern and northern regions in several aspects of the village planning. A significant difference is that, although the storage system of the south of France is based on an abundance of silos, as in Spain, in the north of France on the other hand, and, in general, in England and in the north of Europe, granaries on wooden posts were prevalent.

A large number of European villages recorded striking changes in their structure and internal morphology in the 8th century, a reflection of the social transformations taking place in this period in the heart of peasant societies. Specialists characterise this transformation of the village landscape in terms of the stabilisation and maturation of the rural population (Klapste, Jaubert 2007, p. 80). The villages were still made up of regular plots of farmsteads whose interior held a longhouse or main dwelling and several sunken featured buildings (SFB), but a process of

nucleation, restructuring and formalisation of the village space can be appreciated.

From this period onwards, in Britain, the villages were planned and had clear limits between domestic units and enclosure systems (ditches). The planimetric study of the enclosure systems and boundaries of the English villages of the 8th to the 10th can be directly linked to the creation of more structured territorial powers and the emergence of village leaders within the framework of the consolidation of Anglo Saxon kingdoms (Reynolds 2003).

Some of the best cases illustrating these transformations are the villages of Catholme and Goltho. These cases indicate planned patterns, though the presence of village leaders is not apparent.

Archaeologists have defined the concept of a «Middle Saxon shift» to explain these transformations in morphological terms, and is necessarily related to the existence of a new social and economic order linked to the emergence of ecclesiastical and secular élites, and of the wics or emporia that have been documented from this period (Hamerow 2002, 123-124, 139).

From the 9th century onwards, we can appreciate the presence of local power centres (manors) and churches which transform and subsequently hierarchise the village landscape, pre-announcing the model of the «classic English village» defined by historians.

Likewise in north-western Europe these changes are visible with regard to planning in sectors like the Netherlands or Denmark, where changes in terms of planning and standardisation of domestic units and constructions are evident. In Lauchhheim, in the upper Danube valley, the village, founded towards the 6th century and made up of ten domestic units, was transformed in the 7th century when the presence of a village power was evident, and, in the 8th century, with the building of a new church associated with a cemetery (Wickham 2005, 708-709).

In France too, a true break in terms of concentration and nucleation of the peasantry into grouped villages is observed towards 700 (Peytreman 2003, 335).

The urban structure of the villages reveals an important degree of planning, with ditched enclosures around households being frequent. Significant artisanal activity can likewise be appreciated in the heart of the villages, particularly

of a textile and metallurgical nature (Peytreman 2003, p. 348), and certain areas are expressly developed for storage.

Architecture likewise reflects these changes; resulting in an increase in the size of dwellings on posts while the sunken featured buildings almost disappeared, except in sectors of the north and east.

Yet, perhaps one of the most characteristic aspects of French village geography is the building of numerous churches. Some temples can be dated to the 6th century, though the majority of these rural buildings were founded in the villages from 700 onwards (Peytreman 2003, 297).

In Italy too, this period saw highly significant transformations. In the centre of the peninsula, towards the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th century, hilltop villages were founded, preceding the castles and curtis characterising the Carolingian and post Carolingian period (Francovich, Hodges 2003, p. 72-74).

These changes in the structure of the villages are equally appreciable in farming spaces, and the most recent bioarchaeological studies suggest that there was a relevant change in the patterns of land use towards 700 (Rippon et alii 2006). In France too, a growth in farming is observed towards the 8th century, which has been interpreted in terms of intensification rather than in the introduction of new features (Durand, Leveau 2004, 240)

In general, the archaeologists who have worked in Europe admit that the ordered and planned structure of the villages created from the 8th century onwards are necessarily related to the formation of territorial powers and, on occasions, of village leaders who resort to different strategies of distinction especially during their lifetime and no longer on their demise, and particularly in the context of neighbourly relations in the heart of the villages.

It is from the 9th century onwards that forms of power active at local level become more evident, a result of processes of political centralisation and integration in patronage networks.

A case that represents these dynamics is the curtis centres which have been found in Tuscan villages in recent years. Poggibonsi and Montarrenti, among others, are clear examples of how power is articulated on a local scale, operating in the heart of the villages and imposing production and rent management strategies with a certain degree of sophistication (Valenti 2004).

If village identity was fluid in the first centuries of the Early Middle Ages, in the 10th and 11th centuries, there was a social, political and territorial formalisation which is recognisable in the village structure and the social organisation of space. However, this formalisation is no more than a link in a long process of construction of village systems, which are now more visible in the documentary record, reflected in texts from the point of view of the different powers. Furthermore, this formalisation process was not lineal, and there are numerous examples of villages which were deserted in the 10th century in France, for example (Perin 2004). In any case, the «documentary revelation» of the village in 1000 cannot be identified with the «feudal revolution».

3. VILLAGE ARCHAEOLOGY IN SPAIN

In a recent synthesis on Early Medieval rural settlements in Europe, a reference was made to our territory in a terse sentence which stated that «in the Mediterranean regions, the discovery of settlements that can be dated to the seventh to tenth centuries has been infrequent» (Klápste, Jaubert 2007, 93).

The recognition and study of Early Medieval villages in Spain is a very recent phenomenon. In fact, up to a little over ten years ago no extensive area of any early medieval village had been excavated and, even today, a complete excavation report on this type of site has yet to be published.

Prior to this, excavation work had been carried out in some villages and hilltop occupations in Castile (Monte Cildá, Diego Álvaro, Yecla de Silos, El Castellar, Fuenteungrillo, Dehesa del Cañal), in Navarre (Apardués, Ascoz and Puyo), in Catalonia (El Bovalar, Vilaclara, Puig Rom) and in isolated cases in other sectors of the peninsula, such as Villa Bidualdi in Galicia, to mention the main interventions. These sites were excavated from the sixties to the eighties within the framework of research projects varying in importance, and were interpreted in the light of the problems and historiographic problems prevailing in those years.

As we pointed out on a previous occasion, there were several reasons why a proper archaeology of villages and abandoned settlements of the size and significance similar to that which took place in other European sectors has not evolved in Spain (Quirós Castillo 2007, 74-76)

In any case, recent years have seen a deep renovation in the heart of medieval archaeology as a result of preventive interventions.

We would not be exaggerating if we said that, in a large part of Spain, city archaeology is what has led to a deep transformation in the study of post-Roman societies (analysis of ceramics, town planning, monumental productions, etc.). Only in recent years has new subject matter for study started to emerge, such as the analysis of farms and peasant villages, the examination of early medieval castles and power centres, the social history of artisans, the critical analysis of monumental architecture and others which will need to be revised and analysed in the coming years in the light of new interpretative paradigms.

On the other hand, there has also been a transformation in the geography of the archaeology of the Early Middle Ages in Spain. If, during the eighties and the nineties, the Mediterranean and the south of the peninsula saw the development of interpretative proposals and models of major importance which have influenced the development of Early Medieval Archaeology in the south of Europe, the novelty of recent years is that the regions located in the centre and north of the peninsula have joined this debate.

Another of the innovations evolving on the Spanish archaeological scene in recent years is the fact that professional archaeology has reached maturity, and not only as regards age, since, in now distant 1985, the Spanish Historical Heritage Act opened the way to a new way of understanding, managing and intervening in Heritage. We are referring rather to problems of a conceptual and practical nature. Though, at first, the coexistence of academic and commercial archaeology was quite difficult (if not stormy), bridges are being built to consolidate formulae for collaboration and co-participation on equal levels among all the professionals operating in the different institutions. As for Spanish early medieval villages, they would never have been found in their current density nor would their social meaning have been understood if it had not been for the effort of the archaeologists who work in businesses.

This new archaeological practice, which has arisen within the framework of large public works or town planning processes, has helped introduce into Spain the idea of archaeological excavation on extensive areas, which, as we have seen, was fundamental in the European experience. The

change in scale which has implied having to intervene in spaces in excess of a hectare of excavation has led to the reformulation of the actual concept of the archaeological site and to the approach of the study of landscape in an integral fashion. When the study of villages, farms and rural spaces is tackled as a result of an integration of populated areas and production spaces (cultivation fields, grazing grounds, woodlands, etc.), the former spatial references are lost and the traditional rural landscape is analysed as a truly extensive site in which it is possible to read a story which often runs right up to the present day (Quirós Castillo 2009).

This «management of destruction» has been carried out using very different criteria and strategies in each Region or Autonomous Community, with the result that, though there is a relation between the greater number of finds and the pace of destruction, this equation is not simple. Besides the intensity of the destruction of heritage, the factors that can influence are, possibly, the quality and nature of the inventories held by the different authorities, the actual policies developed by these administrations and market dynamics.

The early medieval peasant sites that we are analysing on this occasion could be grouped into two main categories: those in which there has been continuity of occupation, which is why archaeological practice is similar to Urban Archaeology, and those in which, on the contrary, the villages were abandoned and became for the most part areas for farming.

Taking into account the scale and nature of the deposits in these sites, characterised by the predominance of structures in the negative and the absence of monumental elements, it frequently occurs that on occasions there is no reflection of the occupation on the surface. What's more, if the proper precautions fail to be taken during the monitoring of the works, this type of structure is more than likely not identified or that, in the best of cases, isolated «fields of silos» or, on rare occasions, burials are recognised.

Consequently, developing preventive policies that give priority to intervention in large areas and understanding the logic of occupation of space by early medieval villages is fundamental. Nevertheless, so far there have been no common guidelines and legal and administrative frameworks are heterogeneous.

In Madrid, for example, priority has been given to preventive intervention in large areas, especially in the case of the town planning processes for

extensive areas. In Castile and León or Galicia, where linear public works have been more incisive (roads, railway lines gas pipelines, etc.), interventions are restricted to smaller samples which are to be totally destroyed by the works. The treatment of areas that are to be concealed by embankments and massive infill likewise gives rise to numerous difficulties with the administrations.

On the other hand, it is surprising that broad sectors of the peninsula where works similar in importance to those in Madrid, Galicia, Catalonia or Castile and León, perhaps fewer in number, similar archaeological finds were not made. One is led to wonder if these silences can be attributed to the nature of the deposits, the absence of this type of site, or to the preventive and diagnostic policies existing in each territory.

In the Basque Country, for example, no extensive excavation had been carried out on an early medieval village up till 2008. Up till then, the most common practice was to perform small surveys on these sites, which afforded negative results or ones impossible to interpret. Thus, for example, in the excavation of the abandoned settlement of Guernica (Arrazua-Ubarrundia, Vitoria-Gasteiz), seven two by two-metre trial trenches were made, in which «isolated fragments of turned fritted and unfritted ceramics of postmedieval workmanship» were found, and strata in which «negligible remains of turned unfritted ceramics of medieval and postmedieval workmanship were collected... (including one which was unturned)» (Fillooy 2007, p. 248). All the levels were considered removed and «of no archaeological interest» because «a depositional record of an archaeological nature, nor ascribable to this site» was not found. It was then concluded that the abandoned settlement was more likely to be situated in the vicinity, but not in the area affected by the works. Thanks to extensive excavations, we now know that these archaeologists were excavating medieval and postmedieval cultivation fields fertilised by domestic waste. Our experience leads us to conclude that in this type of site the proximity between inhabited spaces and the fields fertilised by this type of waste is immediate, which is why we believe that, with seven small surveys, the systematic destruction of peasant spaces was authorised (Quirós Castillo 2009).

In other regions, such as in the south of the peninsula, the Mediterranean region or sectors of Cantabrian area, to a large extent, we have no knowledge of the morphology of the early medieval

peasant population, and it will be necessary to go on working on its examination and analysis in the coming years.

The last variable to take into account is the professional market itself. To a certain extent and within certain limits, the standards with which archaeology companies operate are determined by the competition and market dynamics. It is clear that, although in areas like Madrid, Barcelona or Castile and León, for example, some companies have drawn up appropriate action protocols for inspecting and studying these villages, this has not always been the case. The basis for these differences may reside in the ignorance of the size of these sites, the use of strategies which are not always appropriate, or the banalisation of archaeological practice in the quest for easy profit margins. Pedagogy is highly important in this field, in other words, providing explanations on what these sites are like, on how to intervene on them, as well as setting up quality controls on professional practice.

Certainly, these problems are not exclusive to the situation in Spain. G.P. Brogiolo has qualified the Italian case as being the worst in the European context (Brogiolo in this book), and, in France too, recent administrative and legal reforms have failed to create the necessary budgets for developing village archaeology (Carré et alii 2009).

Despite all these problems, all this archaeological activity related to management and research projects has resulted in the creation, in a very short space of time, of a significant volume of archaeological evidence. Proof of these dynamics were the three consecutive symposia held at the end of 2008 in Vitoria-Gasteiz (Archaeology of villages in Early Middle Ages, 20-21 November), Barcelona (In favour of agrarian archaeology: the prospects of research on cultivation spaces in Hispanic medieval societies, Barcelona, 27-28 November) and Mérida (Visigoths and Omeyas. V: Territory, 17-19 December) which covered most of the activity carried out in recent years.

As the results of this edition have yet to be released, on this occasion, we would just like to give an account of the most relevant results obtained, as presented at the symposium in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

4. EARLY MEDIEVAL VILLAGES IN SPAIN

As can be appreciated from the different papers presented at the Vitoria-Gasteiz symposium, the

data currently at our disposal reveal the existence of a profound territorial compartmentation throughout the Iberian Peninsula, which is why it is necessary to do a comparative analysis of the different archaeological scenarios.

In fact, we know that this territorial variability already existed during the Roman period, although it subsequently intensified in the Early Middle Ages. The latest archaeological studies indicate that the systemic collapse of Roman landscape occurred towards 450, at least in the Meseta, the upper Ebro and the Cantabrian region. The abandonment or functional transformation of Roman *villae* is perhaps one of the most significant indicators of these changes, as can be seen in Madrid (e.g. in El Pelicano), in the Meseta (Las Lagunillas) or in Catalonia (Plaça Major in Castellar del Vallès).

The existence of true village networks in several sectors of the peninsula in the 6th century has been recorded, which would indicate that a new balance had been reached following the end of the Roman state. These post Roman landscapes made up of numerous villae and farmsteads which revolve around main hierarchical centres have been documented in Madrid, Catalonia and Castile and León.

In Madrid, and particularly in the south of the region, Alfonso Vigil-Escalera has identified the existence of almost a hundred sites from the 6th to the 8th centuries, although only a part of them has been excavated. In Catalonia, the largest concentration of finds presented by Jordi Roig are grouped around the Roman cities of Barcelona and Tarrasa (Egara), with finds on the coast being equally common.

The situation in the Duero basin is much more complex. In this area, peasant villages and settlements from the 6th and 8th centuries have been excavated in several sectors, although in only isolated spots in densities comparable to those in Madrid or Catalonia. Some of them are located in the province of Salamanca, and specifically in sectors like the valley of Alagón, La Armuña or the Santa Teresa reservoir (Ariño Gil 2006). As a result of several prospection and excavation projects, Enrique Ariño and other authors have managed to identify a relevant group of sites from the Visigothic period which can be considered villages or farmsteads, of particular importance being the work currently in progress on the Santa Teresas reservoir. In the eastern sector, and specifically in the belt situated between Valladolid and Segovia,

Aratikos and Strato archaeology companies have intervened in recent years on a series of village sites within the framework of some major public works (Las Lagunillas, Ladera de los Prados, Navamboal, Mata del Palomar, Cárcava de la Peladera, etc.). In some areas of this belt, there are enough elements to convince us of the existence of village networks, such as the case of Íscar (Valladolid). Apart from the already mentioned site of Navamboal, we know of at least half a dozen near-contemporary settlements in this zone (Mañanes Pérez 2002, p. 102-113). Likewise in the vicinity of Toro (Sanz García et alii 1996), similar indicators have been found. Also frequent are the isolated finds of villages (La Huesa in Zamora) or farmsteads (El Pelambre in León), which do not permit a precise characterisation of the territorial structure.

In Catalonia so far, the cases of villages from the 6th and 7th centuries that were founded in the proximity of, or over, Roman occupations are more numerous, whereas in the Meseta, new foundations are more frequent.

Only in Madrid, and in some cases in parts of the Duero, is it possible to analyse the internal structure of the villages. The cases of Gózquez or Prado Viejo in Madrid reveal a structure which is very similar to European villages. Farmstead blocks or households close to one another alternate with empty spaces identified as cultivation zones. Similarly, sunken featured buildings have been identified inside each one of these domestic units, although in places like Gózquez, La Huelga or El Pelicano in Madrid, the main building was constructed with stone plinths and earth walls.

In some villages, likewise documented is the existence of spaces set aside specifically for artisan activities, especially for the production of tiles and ceramics (La Mata del Palomar in Segovia, Prado Viejo, Griñón, Arroyo Culbero in Madrid, Illescas in Toledo) or metallurgy (La Legoriza, Salamanca). It is likewise important to point out the presence of structures required for pressing in the production of wine and oil, which are especially frequent in the case of Catalonia, although they are also present in other sectors (Gózquez in Madrid or El Cuquero and Monte Alcaide in Salamanca). In fact, recent paleo-botanical analyses carried out in the Sierra de Gredos have demonstrated the importance of olive cultivation during these centuries (López Sáez et alii 2009).

To sum up, the records at our disposal in the areas analysed reveal analogies and also some

important differences with other cases in Europe. In any case, it is extremely important to underline the fact that, during the 6th and 7th centuries, large tracts of the peninsula lacked village networks similar to those we have so far identified.

Taking into account the difficulty posed by using an *argumentum ex silentio* when characterising the Early Middle Ages, I shall limit myself only to the regions for which we have adequate systematic studies. One of these is the Basque Country. In this sector of the peninsula, the absence of stable villages similar to those analysed for the 6th and 7th centuries has been recognised. Although stable villages do exist in this area, there is a predominance of smaller-sized farmsteads which sometimes last for one or two generations and, in other cases, several centuries. This territorial organisation could probably be extended to the Cantabrian sector but available data are scarce.

As we pointed out on a previous occasion, the difference between Basque and Meseta landscapes reflects a notable difference in the social geography and power structures of each territory (Quirós Castillo, Vigil-Escalera 2006).

As in the rest of Europe, in the sectors of the Iberian Peninsula that have been analysed, the 8th century implies a major break and transformation, although of a very different nature and significance in each territory.

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera and Jordi Roig have revealed in the case of Madrid and Catalonia the existence of a true cessation, in the course of the 8th century, of the network of Early Medieval villages. In the case of Catalonia, the logic of peasant occupation in the 9th and 10th centuries is radically different to that of previous centuries². Arrangement around churches, the lack of artisan sectors and the deep transformation in architecture are just some of the main indicators of this change. In Madrid, the most apparent change is the abandonment of rural space recorded from 760 onwards. In this case, the transformation is related to the Andalusí conquest and the foundation of concentrated proto-urban realities.

However, it is in the southern sector where the transformations are closer to the processes observed in other European experiences. Just like in France,

² Similar processes can be appreciated in the confining Eastern Pyrenees Department where it was observed that new villages were founded from in France, the 8th century onwards, Jandot 2007.

in the Basque Country, the 8th century is the moment of nucleation and densification of the former peasant settlements, with the creation of true village networks. Unlike in France, churches do not appear to have played a major role in the internal structuring of the villages until the 10th and 11th centuries.

In this case too, the arrangement in domestic units is seen to be maintained, although there are no enclosure systems (enclosures and ditches) nor a formalised town plan such as that observed in this same period, for example, in England or north eastern Europe.

The processes of hierarchisation and differentiation of some villages towards the 10th century are evident, as Agustín Azkarate and José Luis Solaún pointed out, in the case of the village of Gasteiz. Some centres, which already had a sophisticated economic structure connoted by the presence of stable artisanal structures in the 8th and 9th centuries, developed different political forms at local scale towards the 10th century. Village leaders are clearly identified archaeologically and their domestic units reveal evident signs of differentiation.

The case of Galicia likewise offers elements of great importance, as in this case the activity of the peasant community can be interpreted in the construction of the agrarian spaces (Ballesteros, Blanco in this book). Furthermore, in this case, chronologies exist which allow us to anticipate some of the processes observed in other sectors of the peninsula at least in the 7th century. However, a more in-depth characterisation of these first occupations will be required in order to be able to evaluate the significance that the processes of nucleation of the peasant settlement may have had within the framework of the transition from fortified hilltop sites occupations to villages.

Last of all, we wish to point out that bio-archaeological studies are beginning to provide relevant information for understanding, in comparative terms, Early Medieval agricultural and livestock production in the peninsula. And, although data are still only partial as they refer to a limited number of sites, some dominant tendencies can be observed.

As opposed to the massive predominance of rye in Europe, particularly from the 8th century onwards (Hamerow 2002, p. 135), the archaeological data currently at our disposal in Spain indicate a predominance of wheat with a view to diversification in production and avoiding

the risks of excessive specialisation. The findings from sites like Vitoria-Gasteiz or Zornoztegi are significant in this respect. This pattern is likewise observed in England, especially from the 9th century onwards (Hamerow 2002, 153).

In Spain, some peculiarities are likewise observed in the make-up of the livestock sheds. Although the tendency towards a reduction in the size of the farm animals is common with the rest of Europe, and is a phenomenon which has been associated with the failure to carry out selection in breeding, differentiating features do exist. For example, the weight of the pig is much smaller in Spain than in Europe, despite the fact that this species is usually poorly represented due to the fact that the animals are slaughtered at an early age (Hamerow 2002, p. 128). In fact, the pig has been characterised as an animal of an aristocratic nature in the peninsula in the Early Middle Ages (Morales 1992). The predominant tendency is that specialist livestock practices did not exist in early medieval villages in the peninsula, and the animals were used in the main as draught animals or for the production of secondary products. On the other hand, as A. Vigil Escalera points out, in the area around Toledo, evidence of the existence of a specialist orientation in production can be identified in places like the village of Gózquez. Likewise observed in some Anglo Saxon villages too is the existence of livestock specialisation, which is normally related to the provisioning of the wics or emporia existing from the 7th century onwards (Hamerow 2002, 151).

5. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

To bring these notes to a conclusion, we would like to point out that the archaeological study of early medieval villages poses a whole series of complex interpretative problems due both to the nature of the archaeological records of these villages, which rarely reveal sharp internal differences, and to the historiographic content which has been accumulating on analysis of the period from the 5th to the 10th centuries. We shall only mention concrete subject matter.

In the first place, it must be said that the decodification in social terms of the archaeological record on villages is not problem-free. Thanks to the extensive, good quality interventions carried out in recent years, we can study the geography of the village network, its internal structures and the

basic aspects of its economy. However, the nature of the records frequently complicates their social analysis, particularly in the absence of written texts, as Chris Wickham stated in his synthesis (2005, 723 ss). It is true that an archaeological practice which gave substantial value to the architectural dimension of the village and only recently has started to value in a dynamic fashion the bio-archaeological records, records and describes better than it explains social dynamics. The need to approach the integral archaeological study of village territoriality, paying special attention to agricultural, livestock and forest spaces from solid social anchors, could broaden the range of tools for the analysis of these sites. In Spain, agrarian archaeology has undergone considerable development, especially in the Andalusi spaces, and particularly irrigated spaces. Only in recent years has a true agrarian archaeology on feudal territories been developed (Fernández Mier 1999, Ballesteros et alii 2006, Quirós Castillo 2009).

A second subject for analysis, which aroused polemics when presented at the Vitoria-Gasteiz symposium, is the possibility of reading material culture in ethical terms, and, in the last analysis, the role that one aims at attributing to the Germanic peoples in the process of configuration of medieval landscapes (see Valenti and Brogiolo in this book).

One of the archaeological indicators most frequently used to defend this type of reading are the sunken featured buildings (Valenti in this book), considered as an innovation and the key to interpreting autochthonous elements. Not all authors share this idea (Hamerow 2002, 34-35), not even when we speak of the materials for personal use which crop up in furnished burials (Hallsall 2007).

However, as has been mentioned, underlying these readings is the use of the Germanic peoples as subjects for explaining the transformations that took place during these centuries. In his fundamental work on the Early Middle Ages, Chris Wickham speaks of how the ethnical origin of the aristocrats or the different players active in the Early Middle Ages must be considered «of insignificant importance when the main lines of social and economic structures are considered, and was hardly visible even in cultural terms in many of the post-Roman regions» (Wickham 2005, 829).

Indeed, it is within the framework of village societies and the social relations that are established

in their heart that the significance of certain practices or strategies of distinction, in W. Pohl terms, can and ought to be discussed, as, for example, certain trappings and elements of personal attire.

In this respect, it may be important to point out that in the very few examples of anthropological studies carried out on «Visigothic cemeteries» in Hispania, the results have shown that we are in the presence of peasant communities. Let us give just two examples.

The anthropological analyses in some necropolis such as that of Les Goges (Girona) have revealed the presence of degenerative diseases in different articulations of the body (arthrosis, slipped discs), and enthesopathic lesions that mainly affect the male population. These symptoms are typical of social groups involved in agricultural and livestock breeding activities in which there is a differentiation between the sexes in relation to work. On the other hand, the absence of bone trauma has been related to the absence of activities relating to war or violence which could identify a clear aristocratic group standing out from the remaining inhabitants (Mestre, Agustí 1995). The same occurs in the case of the necropolis of Castilltierra (Segovia), where biometrical analyses have shown that the population buried therein is formed by peasants. In this case too, there is a difference between men (who bore greater weight and mobility) and women, although all of them had performed manual tasks (Trancho et alii 2001).

In conclusion, we wish to point out that, although the actual dynamics of management archaeology will imply an increase in the number of available cases in the coming years, an enhancement in qualitative terms of our knowledge of Early Medieval peasant communities must necessarily imply the publication of the excavation reports of the main projects and the collective creation of new historical paradigms. So far, only the Direcció General de Patrimoni Cultural of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Government's Department of Culture) has placed a significant number of excavation reports in digital format online³, and the Autonomous Community of

³ <http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/CulturaDepartament/menuitem.a625b6371f5b8238683b6510b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=89105df9d3471110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=89105df9d3471110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=default>, consulted in June 2009.

Madrid has also created a «Directory of Archaeological and Paleontological Actions of the Community of Madrid» in digital format, providing some very concise information relating to the excavations carried out each year⁴. It is our opinion that the implication and collaboration of research centres with administrations and professionals is the only way to tackle the challenge implied by incorporating this information into historical accounts.

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⁴ <http://213.4.104.210/cgi-bin/WebObjects/arqueologia-CAM>, consulted in June 2009.

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