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Trends and thoughts on the archaeology of Germanic cemeteries

Tendencias y reflexiones sobre la arqueología de los cementerios germánicos

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo *

SUMMARY

This issue of 'Arqueología y Territorio Medieval' includes a compilation of some articles whose intention is to stimulate the debate which, subtly and informally, has been going on during the recent years regarding the ethnic reading of the material culture of the Early Medieval Iberian Peninsula and other related topics under the light shed by recent European research.

The purpose of this dossier is to introduce the new archaeological evidence in order to prepare a new setting in which to revise older ones, debating about the theoretical interpretations given to the so-called "Visigothic necropoleis" and other material evidence, such as Visigothic architecture. This issue includes three monographic articles together with this introduction, which intends to briefly frame the debate.

Palabras claves: Visigothic necropoleis, Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis, Post-processualism.

There has been a profound renovation in the studies on the end of the Roman world and the beginning of the Middle Ages in the past decades by a great number of specialists, as a result of synergies and meetings of researchers from different academic backgrounds (ancient history, archaeology, source specialists, etc.) which have met at different levels.

There is consensus in accepting that the *European Science Foundation* funded project *The Transformation of the Roman World* (1993-1998) has had a great effect in the academic

RESUMEN

En este número de la revista 'Arqueología y Territorio Medieval' se recogen en forma de dossier algunos trabajos que pretenden estimular el debate que, de forma más o menos soterrada e informal, está teniendo lugar en los últimos años en torno a la lectura en términos étnicos del registro material del período altomedieval de la Península Ibérica y otros sectores próximos a la luz de las experiencias europeas más recientes.

El objetivo de este dossier es el de presentar nuevos registros arqueológicos y plantear escenarios para la revisión de otros antiguos reflexionando en torno a la dimensión teórica de las interpretaciones que se han realizado en torno a las "necrópolis visigodas" y otras evidencias materiales, como es el caso de las arquitecturas. El dossier está compuesto por tres artículos monográficos y la presente introducción que pretende encuadrar brevemente el debate.

Palabras claves: Necrópolis visigodas, Etnicidad, Etnogénesis, Postprocesualismo.

revision of this historical period. As the title indicates, the researchers who took part of the seminars and publications related to this project maintained a 'continuist' interpretation of the Early Middle Ages as opposed to the catastrophists and discontinuists, who saw the late antique centuries as the end of a civilization. As a result of these different positions, another group of researchers has constructed new paradigms and has adopted new positions which have contributed to a renewed study of this historical period, searching for a common European 'origin'.

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Another interesting factor that should be highlighted is that this debate has been supported and fed to a great extent to the gargantuan effort of legions of archaeologists who have provided with new material and high-quality interpretations, which have allowed to tackle basic questions such as the evolution of trade through ceramic distributions patterns, the forms of territorial structuring based on rural settlement patterns or the study of the transformation of the Roman society and its elites through urban archaeology.

The debate, which has led to numerous conferences and to the publication of the results of the project mentioned above during the 1990s, has led to the publication of syntheses and monographs of great importance, amongst which those of C. Wickham (2005, 2009), J. Smith (2005), B. Ward-Perkins (2005), M. McCormick (2001), G. P. Brogiolo (2011), G. Halsall (2007) or P. Heather (2005) should be mentioned.

Any careful reader of these volumes (most of which are long books with hundreds of pages) will notice that rather than consensus on the general interpretation of the period between the fourth and eighth centuries, there are very diverse positions, sometimes even opposed, but all are still well-argued on solid bases.

One of the main issues around which *The Transformation of the Roman World* project turned was the role of barbarians as historical agents and of Germanic kingdoms as main organisers or post-Roman politics. The function traditionally assigned to these groups was revised through the analysis of processes of ethnogenesis, stressing the role of ethnic identities on the construction of post-Roman elites (Pöhl 1997; Pöhl, Reimitz 1988; Goetz, Jarhut, Pöhl 2002).

This topic has generated numerous discussions over the past years, both by the authors who have questioned the points of view offered by the ethnogenesis models, the written sources and their limitations (Gillett 2002) and by those who have questioned the role given to the

Germanic peoples by these new historiographic positions. On this purpose, the discussion written by B. Ward-Perkins on the "Euro-Barbarians" in his recent and controversial book is very telling (Ward-Perkins 2005, 172-176).

One of the fields on which this confrontation is more evident is in the study of the archaeology of the barbarians. There has been a recent renewed emphasis to identify barbarians through archaeology as a new priority through which analyse the social and political transformations of Late Antiquity, especially in southern Europe. This emphasis looks back at more "traditional" approaches, even if reformulated and reassessed on new bases. In this way it has been possible to revise the evidence, especially in funerary contexts, which had been studied in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore, new material has been incorporated to the *corpus* of evidence, in particular sunken-featured houses (*grubenhäuser*).

Other archaeologists question these interpretations, both in theoretical and analytical levels, opposing to those studies which value the ethnic component of material culture. From hypercritical approaches towards the use of ethnicity in archaeology (Jones 1997), new interpretative theses based on post-structuralist positions have been built in order to analyse the context of the material culture and the audience at which the funerary rites were aimed (Halsall 1995).

These proposals developed in the recent years (even if currently in a process of oversimplification) have generated two new, completely opposite analytical approaches to the funerary material, which have even entered into conflict one with another:

This debate has deep theoretical roots, even if the background of the proposals is not usually openly presented. But as G. Halsall points out in one of the papers of this issue, 'an object does not have an ethnicity'.

In an extremely succinct statement: the first of the approaches states that it is possible to identify ethnicity through the material record or

that it is possible to distinguish “cultural facies” (even if these lack a label). This interpretation dates back to the normativist and diffusionist proposals which emerged late in the cultural historicism of the late nineteenth century. But then, how is it possible that such arguments are used again (explicitly or implicitly) early in the twenty-first century?

In my opinion, there are two elements that may explain this. Firstly, a clear reaction against the continuist conclusions reached by the aforementioned *The Transformation of the Roman World* project. Barbarians caused a rupture, and brought discontinuity, explaining the ‘end of civilisation’, as expressed by A. Carandini or B. Ward-Perkins. In a recent publication by provocative Marco Valenti, the author underlined precisely how he felt relieved after reading Ward-Perkins book in which he reaffirmed his discontinuist position, because he had no need to feel conservative or retrograde (Valenti 2009, 29). Therefore, for a group of authors, identifying barbarians as historical agents and identifying their material culture are the pillars on which to build their interpretative framework.

A second and more widely-accepted proposal, put forward by G.P. Brogiolo amongst others, is based on the refusal of post-processual and post-modern interpretations with all their implications, claiming back processualism as viable, even if it was thought to be outdated, especially amongst European scholars which are characterised by a lack of an explicit theoretical thought during the years in which this new paradigm emerged. One of the most immediate consequences of this new theoretical approach was to question the theory of ethnogenesis and to put forward newer processualist approaches, in what this author calls “archaeology of complexity” (Brogiolo 2007; Brogiolo, Chavarria Arnau 2010 45-48).

It seems paradoxical that arguments closer to cultural historicism are needed in order to question post-processualism, especially when the New Archaeology emerged as a way to counter these very proposals. On the other hand, the most recent theoretical debate considers post-processualism over (Johnson 2010,

221-222), substituted by new positions, such as processual-plus (Hegmon 2003) or the so-called *New Historical Processualism* (Pauketat 2001).

A second group of authors, which questions the historicist proposals of the previous group, puts forward its proposals also from a double theoretical perspective,

Firstly they use the ethnogenesis theory (Gillett 2006), which despite the suspicions that it generated, has been accepted by authors such as C. Wickham (2005, 83, 311, 786-787). This position, originally proposed by R. Wenkus, questions the biological and ethnic notions of “peoples” in order to argue that culture, based on traditions and common institutions, is more important. Even if certain basic issues have been questioned by his followers (amongst which are Wolfram and the “Viennese School”), the defenders of this proposal argue that the *gentes* were not static elements, but rather that they changed and were reconstructed constantly during the Early Middle Ages, and the barbarian kingdoms were defined in political terms through those ethnic identities which were based on common traditions (Goetz 2002). Considering these proposals, many archaeologists have changed the ethnic interpretations of the material culture in favour of social and contextual analyses.

The most extreme positions completely deny the existence of ethnic identities in archaeology (Brather 2002, 170-175), because as they are a social construct. The processes of aggregation and the strategies of distinction (which are constantly adapted and remade, creating social identities) allow deeper analyses (Pöhl 1998).

Secondly, these proposals are framed inside a theoretical post-modernism and post-processualism, making the emphasis on the context and significance of the material culture, therefore denying the basic starting points of cultural historicism. In this way, more attention is paid to the significance of the funerary ritual, which implies the public destruction of wealth, through which the status of the heirs is legiti-

mised and confirmed in a period of instability and social competition (Halsall 1995; La Rocca 1998, 79-80; Lucy 2002).

Many of the proposals put forward by these authors are extremely suggestive when it comes to understand the context of the archaeological record, but as a consequence, their conclusions are hardly verifiable and rely on written sources (which are always few and problematic) to give significance to their proposals (Gillett 2002).

But beyond these limitations, the conflict between both positions, which may have been exceedingly simplified, allows the revision of old archaeological material from new points of view, and allows to think over again in theoretical terms several of the assumptions we make on early medieval societies.

For this reason, it is frustrating to realise that most of these arguments have not been put forward for the Iberian Peninsula. Ethnogenesis has hardly been used by scholars in the field, with very few exceptions (e.g. García Moreno and recently López Quiroga and Ripoll), although in my opinion the consequences of using this term have not been fully analysed when it comes to study the society of the Peninsula in this period. In fact, in some recent publications traditional interpretations based on the ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record are still present (Barroso *et alii* 2008; Morín, Barroso 2008; López Quiroga 2010).

Without a doubt, there is an urgent need to revise the funerary archaeology of the Iberian Peninsula between the 5th and 8th centuries. It is enough to say that the 1960s map made by Palol showing the "Visigothic necropoleis" is still used, largely because there is no other. Furthermore, we now have new material, like the finds obtained from rescue archaeology, and new analysis possibilities, like stable isotope analysis. But maybe the most important task is to renovate the theoretical and conceptual framework in order to make historical sense out of the new archaeological material. The following volume intends to contribute to the developing of such a debate which may trigger the renovation.

As it has been pointed out, this issue is formed by three papers. In the first one, which is the result of a seminar organised in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Guy Halsall tackles the problem of the interpretation of medieval cemeteries from an ethnicity point of view. In order to do so he takes as a starting point two recent works by Michael Kazanski and Patric Périn, in which they argue for the possibility of making ethnic identifications from the material culture in the Merovingian world. The British author, who for decades argues for a contextual reading of the material culture from Northern Gaul, questions the interpretative bases proposed by these two French authors using their own logic and argumentation. From this internal criticism, the author concludes pointing out that the relationship between material culture and ethnic identity is very problematic, largely because identity is polyedric. Halsall defines it as 'a state of mind' and as a reality 'existing in several layers which can be adopted or highlighted abandoned, played down or concealed'.

In the second article, Carlos Tejerizo, DPhil student of the research group on Patrimony and Cultural Landscape of the University of the Basque Country makes a triple analysis: in the first place he makes a critical revision in historiographical terms on the papers written about the "Visigothic necropoleis"; in the second place, he makes a revision on the archaeological evidence of the eastern part of the Northern Meseta through the study of 43 sites of this period; in the third place, the author suggests new interpretative frameworks which he will further develop in his doctoral thesis.

In the last article, Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado, doctor in Archaeology by the University of the Basque Country, presents the results of some of his works in rescue archaeology carried out in the province of Madrid. This author bases his argument on the deep rupture in territorial organisation throughout the fifth century, its most evident consequence being the formation of a network of villages and farms, which substituted previous forms of centralised production and political organisation based on *villae*. One of the most impressive discoveries in village archaeology (as developed in Madrid)

is that an important part of the “Visigothic necropoleis” are nothing but village cemeteries, and that the integral study of cemeteries plus dwelling areas provides us with new clues to understand these sites. The examples of Góznquez and El Pelicano put forward in this paper are very interesting.

As it is evident, these articles do not intend to tackle all the current interpretative problems in the funerary archaeology of the Iberian Peninsula between the sixth and eighth centuries, as there are other sites and other authors who are nowadays making new and interesting contributions. But we thought that these articles can be an instrument for the debate, which as mentioned above, is emerging.

Just as it has been outlined above, interpreting the role of the *gentes* in the context of the transition from Antiquity to the medieval world and of barbarian archaeology has generated in the recent years very radical positions, which have led to situations of conflict.

This debate, in my opinion, will only make sense as long as it is really productive and it will allow us to advance constructively in our knowledge of what we used to call Late Antiquity (as evident by the many continuities visible from the Roman period) but that now many of us call the Early Middle Ages, even if we position our proposals closer to post-processualism. But in more than one occasion the debate has reached in Europe an unnecessary virulence.

In my opinion, there are more things that link the defenders of both positions than things that keep them apart. Regarding those who were buried in some sites of the Meseta with “Visigothic” grave goods: were they villagers who used elements we consider “Visigothic” to differentiate themselves within the village community, or were they “Visigothic” peasants who lived in a village community?

As we have pointed out recently, when it comes to understand more complex historical dynamics it is more important to determine who they were in social term than to establish

what they were in “ethnic” terms (Quirós Castillo, Vigil-Escalera 2011). On the other hand, if ethnicity has no organising purpose in conceptual terms, it is not possible either to fall back in the nihilism denounced by F. Curta (2007). The existence of markers and signs was important in the past and played an active role in social dynamics. And even if identifying their meaning is not always easy, we cannot simply ignore their significance.

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Ethnicity and early medieval cemeteries¹

Etnicidad y cementerios altomedievales

Guy Halsall *

SUMMARY

This article responds to recent work by Michel Kazanski and Patrick Périn, defending the ability of archaeology to recognise ethnic identity in the burial record of the early Middle Ages. After summarising the main outlines of their argument, it takes the components of their hypothesis in turn and subjects them to analysis. This analysis is based around the archaeological evidence and what it can and cannot say without the intrusion of preconceptions drawn from a (usually old-fashioned) reading of historical sources. After finding the argument wanting even on its own terms, the article concludes by looking at the nature of ethnicity itself and whether it is likely to leave such obvious and straightforward traces in the archaeological record.

Key words: Ethnicity, Burial, Archaeology, Early Middle Ages, Western Europe

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende responder al reciente trabajo de Michel Kazanski y Patrick Périn, que defiende la capacidad de la Arqueología para reconocer la identidad étnica en los registros funerarios altomedievales. Tras resumir las líneas principales de su argumentación, somete a análisis cada postulado de sus hipótesis. Dicho análisis se basa en la evidencia arqueológica y en lo que ésta puede o no aportar, sin introducir preconcepciones extraídas de una lectura (generalmente anticuada) de las fuentes históricas. Tras encontrar el argumento deficiente, incluso en sus propios términos, el artículo concluye planteando la naturaleza de la etnicidad en sí misma, y si es verosímil que deje tan obvias y directas huellas en el registro arqueológico.

Palabras clave: Etnicidad, Enterramiento, Arqueología, Época altomedieval, Europa Occidental

This paper responds to two recent articles by Michel Kazanski and Patrick Périn (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008; 2009), which make an extended and sustained attempt to make a case in favour of archaeology's ability to recognise and identify ethnic identity, particularly in cemeteries. In Britain at least, this would not be a fashionable position to take, since the publication of Siân Jones' monograph on the topic (JONES 1997), even if one can argue that in Anglo-Saxon archaeology its implications have not yet been fully internalised. In the archaeology of mainland

Europe, however, it remains a much more respectable stance and indeed seems currently to be supported by one might call a "counter-revisionist" scholarly offensive. Patrick Périn's knowledge of the archaeological data from France, particularly the burial record, pertaining to the Merovingian era, is second to none; indeed one wonders whether it will ever be matched. Similarly, Michel Kazanski has an unrivalled empirical knowledge of metalwork and of the archaeology of the East Germanic-speaking regions of late antiquity. For all these reasons,

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* Department of History, University of York, United Kingdom

these publications deserve to be taken seriously but the ideas they express must be subjected to close scrutiny. This is a mark of the respect with which this work deserves to be considered.

The argument in the longer and more detailed piece (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008) can be summarised as follows:

Kazanski and Périn take their methodological starting point from work published by H.-J. Eggers (1950), which claimed to derive its strength from the avoidance of the 'Mischargumentation' (mixed argumentation) which avowedly characterised earlier work. Instead, it allegedly treated the different bodies of evidence – historical, archaeological, linguistic or onomastic, etc. – separately and on their own terms. These conclusions are then compared to produce an overall theory. This looks exactly the same as the "multidisciplinary" methodology used in my first book, on the Merovingian Region of Metz (HALSALL 1995). It aims at the same advantages and at avoiding the same pitfalls. Ironically, however, I adopted that methodology to avoid pitfalls in work carried out using Eggers' methodology! There is a link between the claims made in these articles and those which Périn is accustomed to make (not untypically in French academic practice), of 'Cartésianisme': that is to say a radical scepticism, making no prior demands on the evidence; everything must be demonstrated through reason. These assertions of methodological rigour and purity ("purification régressive") must be subjected to close examination.

'Mischargumentation', an alleged mix of archaeology folklore, linguistics and history thrown together in an ad hoc fashion, was what post-war archaeologists like Eggers claimed, not incorrectly, had lain behind the Germanist, nationalist works of Gustav Kossinna. Kossinna's work, of course, had been popular with the Nazis and had underpinned some of Hitler's claims to territory, in France and in the Soviet Union (FEHR 2002). German archaeologists wanted to distance themselves from this. Similarly, Kazanski and Périn argue that Kossinna's ideas had seen archaeological cultures as simple reflections of ethnic groups – equated with

peoples or nations – in too monolithic a way. Their work, they state, is based on quite different premises. They also claim that it would be unrealistic to expect homogenous or monocultural archaeological manifestations of the barbarians planted on Roman soil and make sensible statements about the fluidity of ethnic identity and the mixed and changing composition of supposedly ethnic groups. This takes account not only of the work of Reinhard Wenskus but also of his successors such as Herwig Wolfram and perhaps even of Walter Pohl (WENSKUS 1961; WOLFRAM 1988; 1997; POHL 1998). So far, one might say, so good. However, whether, or to what extent, these fine sentiments are reflected in Périn and Kazanski's actual conclusions needs to be scrutinised.

The two authors argue that the acculturation of barbarians on Roman soil was 'ineluctable' and demonstrate this through the example of the Visigoths. In the course of a 30-year wandering across Europe, by the time the 'Visigoths' arrived in Gaul in 412, 'where they were tasked with the repression of the *Bagaudae* and formed a kingdom' (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:188) they had lost their material culture. This 'disacculturation' led to a rapid acculturation in Aquitaine and explains why the Visigoths left no archaeological traces there. When forced into Spain they developed, by contrast, a national material culture, and in this were helped by their contact with the Ostrogothic army of Widimer. This is an argument that Périn has made before (PÉRIN 1993).

Kazanski and Périn then discuss a series of criteria that are relevant to the definition of ethnicity:

- I: Funerary practices: They claim (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:191) that burial practices are strictly linked to religious belief in traditional societies and thus deeply rooted within ethnic groups. They are also linked to social factors. All that said, Kazanski and Périn nevertheless conclude that it would be impossible to distinguish, archaeologically, a Barbarian who was perfectly integrated in Roman society or a Roman living in *barbaricum* and buried according to local practice.

2: Ethnic costume: This is a key pillar of Kazanski and Périn's argument but it is developed mostly with regard to female costume, as we shall see shortly.

3: Ethnic weapons: Males were trained in the use of weapons from early boyhood onwards, and so, say Kazanski and Périn (2008:195-6), particular weapons can be identified as ethnic markers. The example they use is that of the *francisca*, which is (they say) is found throughout the Frankish 'protectorate'.

4: Traditional Female Costume: As mentioned, this is the key support of the argument (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:196-9). According to Périn and Kazanski, in traditional societies these costumes are sacralised and regulated. Vague reference is made to the work of ethnographers in support of this point, but it is nevertheless claimed to be almost a universal rule, proved over and over by anthropologists (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:196; 2009:150). Against the back-drop of a claimed ethnic costume for east and west Germanic women, they then discuss a series of tombs, where the brooches are of the 'wrong' type, or where the 'right' brooches are worn in the 'wrong' place as examples of acculturation.

Grave 756 at Vicq, for example, wore a Visigothic buckle and a pair of bow brooches at the shoulder but also wore, at the chest two small local zoomorphic brooches (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:196-7 & 195, fig.22).

On the other hand, grave 140 at Nouvion-en-Ponthieu wore two 'Visigothic' brooches but at the waist rather than at the shoulders, where they 'should' have been (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:197-8).

Explanations relating to the dead belonging to the second generation of immigrants are adduced (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:198).

5: Hand-made pottery. This is claimed not to be an object of commerce, but made by women in the settlement and therefore a sign of ethnic identity (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:198-9).

6: Germanic Animal Art. Kazanski and Périn claim that this has specifically pagan and therefore barbarian significance (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008: 199-201).

On the basis of these points, Kazanski and Périn move on to four case studies:

1. The presence of West Germanic barbarians in northern Gaul in the late 4th and early 5th centuries (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:201-207).
2. Eastern Barbarians in Gaul at the same time (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:207).
3. Common Prestige fashions among barbarian warriors in the second half of the fifth century (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:207-209).
4. Germanic minorities in Gaul in the late fifth and early sixth centuries (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:209-12).

So much for Kazanski and Périn's argument, which takes originates in work by Kazanski (KAZANSKI 1997). As stated, it is based upon a very thorough knowledge on the one hand of Merovingian archaeology in France and, on the other, of the material culture, particularly the metalwork, of the cultures from around the Black Sea and Danube areas and their presence in Gaul. As far as empirical awareness of data is concerned I cannot hope to equal these authors. However, the logical and methodological coherence of the arguments they present, in support of the idea that ethnicity can be detected through the archaeology of Gaul at the time of the Migrations, can be examined more closely.

Serious engagement with these ideas is a mark of respect for the work (and knowledge) of their authors. This makes it all the more disappointing that Périn and Kazanski do not deal with the growing literature on early medieval cemeteries that rejects their model and its antecedents. This work is simply ignored. In this heading I could include Sebastian Brather's monumental *Ethnische Interpretation in der frühgeschichtliche Archäologie* (BRATHER 2004a), or Bonnie Effros' writings on the supposedly

conservative dress of barbarian women (EFFROS 2004) or Philipp von Rummel's discussions of the shortcomings of ideas about barbarian dress (VON RUMMEL 2007; see also von RUMMEL 2010), or other Freiburg School studies casting doubt on the geographical origins of key classes of object (GAUSS 2009), or my own or Frans Theuws' studies of the late Roman and Merovingian cemeteries of Gaul (HALSALL 1992; 2000a; 2010:131-67; THEUWS 2009; THEUWS/ALKEMADE 2000), and so on. It is possible to read between the lines and to see these pieces – implicitly – as part of a growing counter-offensive by traditionalist archaeologists against new readings of the excavated data, prompted mainly by the publication of Brather's book (BIERBRAUER 2004; BROGILO/CHAVARRÍA ARNAU 2010; VALENTI 2009), but one would have preferred a closer engagement with the specific arguments proposed in the newer works, rather than a simple restatement of the old views, and the application of an unjust *damnatio memoriae* on revisionist work.

In British archaeology, the approach taken would usually be to address the nature of ethnicity and whether, theoretically, such forms of identity would or could be identifiable in the archaeological record. Adopting that line of argument would, however, leave us in a position (for reasons we shall encounter at the end) with little to say about Kazanski and Périn's works other than simply to restate an important methodological difference between British and much of mainland European early medieval archaeology. Instead, therefore, it has been felt more profitable to examine, in depth and on their own terms, the arguments of this recent and detailed defence of the traditional viewpoint. Other problems with the project of detecting ethnicity in the cemetery evidence will then be discussed.

To what extent does Kazanski and Périn's argument live up to the claims of methodological purity made for it? One obvious point must be made at the very outset, and cannot be made too forcefully: an object does not have an ethnicity. This is perhaps an insultingly obvious point, but how many times do we read in archaeological literature (not just in the work of the two authors under discussion) about a

Visigothic belt buckle, or a *Lombard* brooch? At the 2010 International Medieval Congress in Leeds Philipp von Rummel, was asked what we should call belt buckles or brooches if not Gothic or Vandal or whatever. He replied by drawing attention to the fact that no one has any difficulty in talking about pottery without using ethnic terminology. An amphora is Spanish or Eastern Mediterranean, a fine ware bowl is African Red Slip or a *dérivée sigillée paléochrétienne*, or whatever. There is no reason why we cannot use such general terms for brooches as well, or (perhaps better) just describe them in terms of their principal features (as Anglo-Saxon archaeologists do, with their "Great Square-Headed" Brooches &c.). One really must wonder how much clearer the archaeology of the *Völkerwanderungszeit* would become if all these superfluous ethnic terminologies were abandoned.

Indeed assigning *any* ethnic name to archaeological evidence is quite impossible on archaeological grounds alone. *No* specific ethnic identity of *any* sort can ever simply emerge from the archaeological record on its own, whether that record be studied through artefact design, or from distribution maps or charts of percentage frequencies (as, e.g. in SIEGMUND 1998; 2000). Such an interpretation can only – ever – arise through the application to the archaeological data of a series of assumptions derived from written sources. In other words, the ethnic interpretation of material cultural data can never, ever result from looking at archaeology alone, and taking it on its own terms. Put another way, *no* ethnic interpretation of archaeology can ever claim to be 'Cartesian', or to be using 'pure' archaeological reasoning. To assign any of these names to an object immediately contaminates the archaeological evidence with the influence of an historical narrative. Indeed, a number of Kazanski and Périn's examples are made entirely in accordance with one particular view of the period's history.

Let us take, for example, the case of the Visigoths in Aquitaine and Spain. The first thing that needs to be said is that the whole problem is driven – indeed the 'problem' is *created* – by the historical narrative. Without a historical

record that told us that people called Goths came to Aquitaine in the second decade of the fifth century, there would be no problem, there would be no 'absent' or 'invisible' Goths to explain. The second problem, and it is one to which I will return, is that it assumes that the historical record, in the form of historically-attested ethnic identities, would be simply, passively reflected in the archaeological record, and that the variability in that record will automatically reflect the variability or oppositions suggested in the written data.

The next issue with this case study concerns Widimer and his army. For the last twenty years Patrick Périn has used this 'Ostrogothic' army as the explanation upon which to hang the appearance of an apparently Gothic material culture in Spain (PÉRIN 1993). Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence for this army. Widimer is not attested in any contemporary sources: only in Jordanes' *Getica* from the middle of the sixth century. A Billimer mentioned by Paul the Deacon has been suggested to be the same man but neither source is very trustworthy on these matters. A Wittimer appears in two letters of Ruricius of Limoges who might or might not be the same man, but they say nothing about his arrival from Italy or anything that would confirm Jordanes' story (HALSALL 2007:278-9; 2010:70). Even in the late, unreliable stories we have, there is insufficient evidence to say what became of this army. It is nowhere said that it ever went to Spain. All told, this example is about as far away as one could possibly get from being an example of a 'Cartesian' approach to the archaeological evidence, without being influenced by data from other sources.

A second instance can be found in the citation of the *francisca* as a diagnostically Frankish weapon. Isidore famously, and incorrectly, said that the Franks drew their name from the *francisca* (Isidore, *Etymologiae* 18.6.6) but the association between the Franks and this weapon actually goes back no further than the middle of the fifth century, and Sidonius Apollinaris. Accounts of the fourth-century Franks make no mention of the weapon and the archaeological record of *franciscas* equally does not go back earlier

than the fifth century. Moreover the *francisca* is found overwhelmingly in Gaul and very rarely in *barbaricum*. There is quite abundant evidence that the axe was in use within the Roman army (HALSALL 2010:134-5). Looked at in purely archaeological terms one would argue that the *francisca* was a weapon that appeared in Gaul in the fifth century and was occasionally, usually later, found beyond the Rhine. The archaeological record, when set alongside a more critical reading of the documentary and epigraphical sources, suggests that the *francisca* was a weapon used by the very late Roman army in Gaul and that the Franks adopted it from their service in those armies. Whether or not one accepts that, the interpretation of the *francisca* as diagnostically Frankish could not emerge from the archaeological record on its own.

Indeed, in many cases the archaeological evidence is not being taken on its own terms at all. The example of Germanic barbarians in Late Roman northern Gaul, claimed to be an 'assured' case of archaeology showing the presence of an intrusive ethnic group in Gaul (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:201), is a good illustration. Almost none of the standard interpretation of so-called federate graves in northern Gaul in the fourth century would emerge from a purely archaeological reading (HALSALL 1992; 2000a; 2010:131-67). Were this evidence generated in a prehistoric context, as I wrote nearly twenty years ago (HALSALL 1992:201), no one would ever find in it any evidence of a migration. Almost all of the material culture found in the burials is of Roman Gallic origin; the rite itself is basically the standard rite of Roman Gaul, but with more grave-goods; the rite is actually quite different from that used in the barbarian territories; etc. The traditional argument finds its strongest support in a series of brooch types buried with some of the women in these graves but when one consults the distribution maps of these objects one finds that it is almost exactly the same as that for other items of metalwork such as belt buckles and other belt appliqués, or of Roman pottery and metal vessels, which, as no one is in any doubt about, were produced in Gaul and exported beyond the Rhine to *Germania*. This alone begs the question of

why one interpretation is followed for some types of artefact and not others with the same distribution and, frequently, similar elements of decoration. Close inspection of the artefacts too suggests that they were being manufactured in Gaul, exported to *Germania*, and copied there, as had long been the case with Roman jewellery. It is clear to me that only the intrusion of a pre-determined historical narrative has led to this evidence being read as evidence of barbarian immigration into Gaul. There are many, many other illogical arguments and self-contradictions in the traditional argument which I have discussed at length elsewhere (HALSALL 2010:131-67).

Similar cases from other areas can be adduced. For example, recent work has suggested that some of the brooches used as evidence for the presence of eastern *Germani* in the west in the fifth century are not imports from the east at all (GAUSS 2009). When one looks at distribution maps one can indeed join the dots to produce a 'migration' from the Danube to Gaul or Spain (KAZANSKI/MASTIKOVA/PÉRIN 2008), but one need only do that if one has decided in advance (on the basis of non-archaeological sources) that that has to be the direction of movement. Why not *from* Spain to the Danube? Or, more plausibly and as has apparently been argued recently, from a Mediterranean production centre and then distributed in two directions, east and west, to Gaul or Spain and to the Danube and further east?

Sometimes a historical narrative is adduced, without worrying about the fact that actually it is not attested in any actual written sources! Like Widimer's army, such is the case, with the argument that certain brooch types found in northern Gaul, which have some general similarities with others found on the Danube, represent the presence of East Germanic soldiers in the region. These brooches are items of female apparel, so it is argued that these women are the wives of the (archaeologically invisible) soldiers. I have already drawn attention to the problem with assuming an east-west movement behind the distribution map. No matter that no written source mentions the presence of East Germanic soldiers (let alone their wives)

in northern Gaul. A story is composed on the basis of the political history of the period, which has East Germanic federates arriving in northern Gaul to fight in the armies of the Roman king Syagrius. Note too that the very nature of Syagrius – even the reality of his existence as a king of the Romans, in opposition to invading Franks – cannot be securely proven on the basis of the written evidence! Therefore, the written sources are not being subjected to close scrutiny, either. At every turn, whenever one looks into the details of the approach and the arguments deployed, we could not be further from a methodology which relied upon the strict, rigorous, 'pure' analysis of separate bodies of evidence on their own terms before the comparison of conclusions at a higher level. In actual fact, this is *Mischargumentation* at its *most* mixed! Indeed, *mixtae confusaeque*, to use a phrase of Gregory of Tours.

In fact, in an appendix to the 2008 article, Kazanski criticises R. Hachmann, one of the pioneers of Eggers' methodology, praised at the start (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:185-6), for not making Scandinavian archaeology fit the story provided by Jordanes' *Getica* (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:212-3). Never mind that just about every scholarly analysis of the *Getica* has rejected its account of the Goths' Scandinavian origins (HEATHER 1991; GOFFART 1988:20-111; 1995)... This does not seem to demonstrate a very deep commitment to the principles of 'regressive purification'!

Similar incoherence emerges when the argument's other premises are examined. Let us start with the idea of burial ritual as a marker of ethnic identity. Of course, in theory, the way one disposes of the dead, bound up as it is with ideas of cosmology and religion, might be expected to be an area where traditions were strictly guarded. It is therefore frequently said that burial is a very conservative element of social practice. And yet, in terms of its archaeological traces, it is anything but conservative. Changes in burial practice come thick and fast in antiquity. At least *ten* changes in methods of placing the dead took place in lowland Britain during the first seven and a half centuries of the Christian era (HALSALL 2000b:261). Between the time when unaccompanied inhumation, wra-

pped in a shroud or in simple costume, became normal in Europe sometime in the latter half of the first millennium (ZADORA RIO 2003) and the revival of cremation in the early twentieth century, burial *does* look very conservative across most of Mediterranean and western Europe, in terms of its archaeological remains, but one need only consult other records, about mourning, funerals, commemoration or even the above-ground markers or gravestones to see that burial in fact continued to be a dynamic area of social expression.

The alleged evidence of 'Germanic' migration into northern Gaul in the fourth century again stands as a useful lesson. Here, the custom employed in these supposedly intrusive burials is completely different from that used in the alleged incomers' homeland. This is explained as evidence of acculturation but, for this to carry any weight, archaeologically, one would need to see communities cremating their dead without accompanying goods and then gradually adopting the host population's rites. Instead, were we to assume that these *are* the graves of incomers, something for which I see no good evidence, what we would have here would be communities abandoning their ancestral funerary customs (those supposedly closely guarded, conservative markers of ethnic identity) immediately that they were over the frontier. Another of Kazanski and Périn's arguments in favour of acculturation is that burials with belt buckles alone are 'Roman' whereas those with the belt buckles *and* more grave-goods (weapons for men and suites of jewellery for women) are those of the immigrants, because the latter have included more of their traditional customs (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:191). Yet actually *none* of this custom of burial with grave-goods is traditionally 'Germanic' at all. The barbarians between the Rhine and the Baltic or the North Sea Coast cremated their dead, sometimes including dress-adjuncts or other objects, often not, sometimes in a cremation urn, sometimes with no container at all – indeed often without container *or* goods, making them archaeologically all but invisible.

This brings us on to the key support for Kazanski and Périn's position, which is the alle-

ged conservatism of female dress. It is often argued, against the empirical evidence for the northern Gallic production of the material in these burials, that the way it is used reveals that these burials are of immigrant *Germani* (SCHMAUDER 2003: 279-80, n.31). Allegedly, the brooches are used in the traditional fashion of West Germanic *Tracht* or costume. Two brooches are used at the shoulders, either to fasten a Peplos dress, or probably more plausibly, to pin a shawl over a dress. The problems with this argument are many. Most importantly, as I have just mentioned, the burial record of the areas whence these alleged immigrants are supposed to have come is overwhelmingly formed by cremation (the Frankish homeland famously being more or less blank on distribution maps). This means that we have very little evidence about how brooches were worn by the women of the *Germani*. Indeed most of it is furnished by the burials under discussion (e.g. BÖHME 1974:161), making the argument more logically problematic! A second problem is that, for all the supposed immutability and conservatism of 'sacralised' female costume, the archaeological record reveals great variability in the numbers and positioning of brooches, the presence and absence of other artefacts, and so on. It is often forgotten that Roman women also wore jewellery. Although the brooch had dropped out of use, temporarily at least, by the middle of the fourth century, it had been common and indeed sometimes used in exactly the same ways, up until the third century (FEHR 2008:89-97). One must ask why fashion only explains the Romans' discarding of the brooch, but not their readoption of it; why immigration only explains the brooch's reappearance and not its disappearance; and above all, why Roman female costume, in being subject to fashion like this, was less sacralised and conservative than 'Germanic' women's dress. In fact, though, when looking at late Roman Gallic burials the implicit assumption is that Roman *Tracht* was *more* immutable than Germanic because the archaeologically-revealed diversity of female graves supposedly shows variability and acculturation by 'Germanic' women, whereas they cannot be Roman women because (it is implied) Roman women were not allowed to adopt new items or otherwise change their dress!

The third problem for the Kazanski-Périn hypothesis concerns the very nature of this supposedly North-West 'Germanic' costume with its pairs of brooches at the shoulders. It is actually a pair of problems. The first is that it runs completely against the argument that wearing two brooches at the shoulders is the traditional *East*, not *West*, Germanic female costume, so that burials with brooches at the shoulders can be argued to be of fifth-century 'East Germanic' immigrants (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:201). What the slightly earlier burials from northern Gaul show is that such a mode of employing brooches was already known in that region. Indeed the other half of the problem is that a rigorous examination of the data suggests that not only was it *not* exclusive to eastern *Germani*, it might indeed have been a late Roman provincial Gallic fashion.

This idea of fashion –only a description rather than an explanation, to be sure– nevertheless produces yet more reasons to question our authors' methodology. When one looks at the archaeological record one sees only huge variety, through time and place, such as does not accord with the assertion of deep conservatism in dress. Indeed the notion is more than slightly undermined by the invocation of acculturation. In Gaul the general lesson would indeed seem to be of the general acculturation of the Franks into the structures of fifth-century northern Gallic society at the same time as their political, ethnic identity began to be widely adopted. This nevertheless casts some doubt upon the degree to which female costume is either as conservative and regulated as is being proposed, or as directly, intimately linked to an ethnic identity.

When I have discussed these problems with Patrick Périn² he has explained that he sees the first generation of immigrants keeping closely to their traditional dress but subsequent generations adopting more and more items of the fashions of the host population. This is an interesting idea, but to explore it would require

close scrutiny of all aspects of the burial, not just the grave-goods and their date. It would require us to examine the deceased's *age*, for one would expect, were Périn's model correct, that old women would retain their traditional costume into the second generation of burials. One might expect children in the first generation to be buried in traditional dress by their parents, but what of adolescent and young adult women who died during the first generation, who would otherwise have become the more acculturated women of the second generation? How does this transition play out, and how is it reflected in the archaeological record? The hypothesis requires sophisticated thinking and modelling, not simply mapping onto different chronological phases. It should also be said that where the earliest intrusive graves on a site do not fit the traditional model, the argument is sometimes deployed that these women had partly acculturated before they arrived at the place where they died (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:198; 2009:157)! Of course, if one does not think that they are immigrants in the first place (I have already suggested that the empirical grounds for this assumption are weak) this is not a very convincing argument, even if it is convenient.

These points lead on to two further issues. One is that female costume, as revealed in the cemeteries, not just of Merovingian northern Gaul but in some parts of the Roman frontier provinces, in Anglo-Saxon England, southern Germany, and northern Italy, in fact varies significantly according to the age of the deceased (e.g. BARBIERA 2005; BRATHER 2004b; 2008; CLARK 2000). My study of the Frankish cemeteries of Lorraine reveals that children did not usually receive items related to gendered costume (HALSALL 1995:254; 1996). Most jewellery (the essential elements of 'traditional', 'ethnic' costume) is found with teenagers and young adults, and women older than their twenties are increasingly rarely interred with these artefacts. This alone must make a purely ethnic reading of the costume much too simplistic. It is not to deny that there might be ethnic significance

2 I should underline that M. Périn has always been most friendly, supportive and willing to discuss these issues. I want to make it clear that, although we hold diametrically opposed interpretations, that opposition is founded in no personal animosity.

in the nature of adolescent female costume. If, however, the nature of dress and its adornment changed through the female life-cycle, as I have just suggested, then this seriously questions the model of a progressive abandonment of traditional ethnic costume through time, generation by generation, according to idea of 'acculturation'.

This indeed raises one of the most serious problems of all with the traditional point of view: why the variability observable in the archaeological record need have anything at all to do with ethnicity. Kazanski and Périn acknowledge this point (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:191) but they do not allow it to obstruct their argument. All sorts of other dimensions of an individual's identity can come into play in the construction of the burial record. I have already mentioned, and discussed in detail elsewhere (HALSALL 2010:289-412), the role of gender and age. Kazanski and Périn mention religion and 'social factors' as being involved in the establishment of a burial rite and its archaeologically observable (KAZANSKI/PÉRIN 2008:191) features but they do not pause to consider how these different dimensions might work together as ultimately and primarily 'ethnic', rather than (as I would see it) cross-cutting each other and making the ethnic interpretation more incoherent.

This in turn leads me to the problem that underlies all such traditional 'ethnic' readings, and that is that they ignore the processes behind the creation of the archaeological record itself, seeing it simply (as mentioned) as a passive reflection of 'reality'. Whatever else one might say about British archaeological theory in its current state, in its post-processual phase in the 1980s it did bring to the foreground the idea that the formation of archaeological evidence is a deliberate and meaningful activity, founded upon active choices, designed to create information as well as conveying it to an audience. One must always, therefore, ask *why* people chose to bury their dead in this way. The problem with the ethnic reading is that for many of the ethnic groups known to us it is clearly the case that they did not generally bury their dead in the particular

style that archaeologists have pinned on them. There are no better examples than the Goths themselves. The followers of Theodoric, however, minimalist a view one might want to take, must have numbered very many times more than the fifty or so archaeologically known 'Ostrogothic' graves in Italy and the Balkans (BIERBRAUER 1994). The Goths of Aquitaine and Spain – patently – did not bury all of their dead in a particular, Gothic style. Indeed they did not bury their dead in that way when they were in the Balkans, and even before 376, to judge from the Černjachov/Sintana-de-Mureš culture they did not have a single burial rite in any case, but a mix: cremations and inhumations of all sorts, found within the same cemeteries (for useful survey, see HEATHER/MATTHEWS 1991:59-69). So, even on the 'best-case scenario' (where one actually accepts the ethnic import of the rite), these 'ethnic groups' only buried *some* of their dead – a small minority – in a particular way. So one must ask, again, *why*? There must – clearly – have been some reason, other than simple ethnicity, that led some people to distinguish some of their dead from the great majority. In other words, even where ethnicity might be an acceptable *description* of the meaning of objects, it is rarely a satisfactory *explanation* for their deposition.

Here lies, in my view the solution to the problem –or *non*-problem, as I would prefer – of the archaeological invisibility of the Goths in Aquitaine. The explanation cannot simply lie in the Goths' lack of any Gothic metalwork. As the dominant force in the region surely they could simply have forced Roman craftsmen to make some. Or they could –as the Kazanski-Périn hypothesis suggests with regard to other situations- have worn local products in accordance with the Gothic *Tracht*. The simple absence of the right metalwork cannot explain the abandonment of a rite. At this point it must, however, be said that, as the 'Gothic' inhumation rite was actually only created in later generations (in Spain), Périn's theory about the Aquitanian Goths reverses time in arguing about the non-appearance of something that had in fact not yet been developed! For Kazanski and Périn a Goth is *always* a Goth and will (or should) *always* do

what she or he is attested as doing at some point in Gothic history (regardless of when or where). This is only one instance where, in spite of claiming to believe the opposite, they do in fact treat ethnic identities and cultures as unchanging and monolithic.

Where an ethnic or political identity is displayed in burial with grave-goods, the crucial thing is that it is displayed to an audience for a particular reason (HALSALL 2010:203-60). Therefore one must ask *why* the Goths would necessarily have buried their dead in a costume that proclaimed their Gothiness in Aquitaine in the fifth century. Migration is not something that automatically shows up in the excavated record; indeed it is very often archaeologically invisible. I have argued repeatedly that furnished inhumation (with grave-goods) is essentially a sign of social competition of some sort (HALSALL 2010:203-60). In earlier sixth-century northern Gaulish cemeteries, in a very fluid society with few or no rigid class distinctions and few means of securing local pre-eminence beyond royal service, whole communities seem to have participated in the competitive grave-goods ritual, as they did in lowland Britain (HALSALL 2010:278-84). In other areas, such as Ostrogothic Italy, lavishly furnished grave seem to be concentrated in the urban foci of the realm and may demonstrate a claimed Gothiness to an audience of other members of the aristocracy competing for royal favour (HALSALL 2007:336-8). There is not a blanket explanation for all burial rituals with grave-goods. One must look at what sorts of individual is being buried, in what numbers within what sorts of cemeteries and with what types and quantities of object (HALSALL 2008). But the display of grave-goods is transient by its very nature and therefore requires both the bringing together of an audience to see it and the existence of a symbolic language rendering the message intended by the ritually-deposited objects comprehensible to that audience. All this points, inexorably, towards political competition of some sort.

Indeed, the so-called Gothic cemeteries of Spain lie generally along the fringes of the kingdom: not just in the northern Meseta, as is well-known, but also in the south, around the Byzantine enclaves, and on the Frankish border

in Septimania. Furnished burials are also well attested on the Basque frontier where the presence of that political border must surely be part of the explanation. In other words, on the fringes of political authority, where claims to local power might be contested between individuals or groups asserting the backing of different political forces, and in situations like those of the sixth century, where political and military power were often based on ethnic ideas, we might expect the meaning of objects placed with the dead to have some ethnic import - but in a very different way from that envisaged in traditional readings.

This brings me to my concluding points. I have taken the Kazanski-Périn argument on its own internal merits, to show that the thesis is not very satisfactory even by its own lights, using the sorts of empirical archaeological methodologies that it claims to espouse. From there, my argument has led us, bit by bit, to overall theoretical problems, which cast serious doubt on the whole project.

The first is that the relationship between material culture and ethnic identity is very problematic. A classic anthropological study from many years ago showed that one could quite easily compile a list of features, of language, of dress or hairstyles, or other features that people said distinguished their group from others, or which distinguished other groups from theirs. And yet, in practice one found that these features were either rarely if ever observed in use or, where they were, one found that they did not distinguish one group from another (MOERMAN 1969; POHL 1998 makes similar points about the early Middle Ages). Another study, from East Africa, showed that age-grades within one particular society adopted material culture associated with a neighbouring group to distinguish themselves from the age groups below and above them (LARRICK 1986). It is difficult to begin to imagine the havoc that this would play with any attempt to read ethnic identity from the distribution map of artefacts! Yet we can see similar things within our late antique evidence, where Roman soldiers and aristocrats adopted items of costume which are held to be barbarian –what I have termed

'barbarian chic' (HALSALL 2007:110)– or where people within *barbaricum*, women as well as men, used imported Roman material culture to show their high status (HALSALL 2007:57-58). Indeed, around 400 some people in the north of *Germania* adopted the Roman inhumation rite in order to distinguish themselves from their fellows (BEMMANN 1999; KLEEMANN 1999). This did not make them Romans by birth, although for all we know some of these individuals, if they had served the Roman Empire, might well have styled themselves *Romani*. In Gothic Italy or on the margins of the Gothic kingdom of Spain, individuals might very well have styled themselves *Gothi* without being descended from people who had crossed the Danube in the 370s or 380s. It was a claim to power and status.

That, ultimately, is the point. Ethnicity is a state of mind, with no necessary correlation to things which are objectively measurable, whether material, biological or genetic. This will always make attempts to read off monolithic ethnic identities, or even the interplay between monolithic ethnic identities (which is what is at stake in 'acculturation' arguments), highly dubious. More pertinently, perhaps, ethnicity is itself a complex dimension of an individual's identity, existing in several layers which can be adopted or highlighted, abandoned, played down or concealed. Early medieval people did not have to see themselves as *either* Romans *or* Franks, as *either* Goths *or* Sueves. An inhabitant of sixth-century Spain, who took up arms and attended the army using an assertion of Gothic identity as a means to acceptance within this military-political group, was not thereby precluded from having Roman, provincial or *civitas* identities *as well*, which he might have used at other times in other circumstances. None of these groups was monolithic in itself: Romans self-identified by their *civitas*, a very important and much neglected level of post-imperial identity: there were different groups within the Franks, there were political regional groupings, by kingdom or by Roman province, which have most of the features of ethnicity (Neustrian, Austrasian, Aquitanian or Provençal).

In a sense we have come full circle, because it may be that, as with the military associations

of barbarian ethnic identities, we can propose that some objects in graves – weapons – might have conveyed that identity to an audience. This archaeological reading would fall foul of most of the strictures set out at the beginning of this paper, being a reading of material culture entirely in the light of documentary sources. However, this reading of the documentary sources and its application to material culture is somewhat more subtle (and indeed more grounded in the written data). It might be the case that certain types of brooch, used in particular ways with particular types of people, in particular contexts, *did* have an ethnic connotation, so that a Jutish brooch in England might have implied that the wearer claimed a Jutish identity.

An important caveat for this point, though, is that it only remains a suggestion, which can only be made in a particular context. It cannot be taken as a general rule, such as that people with weapons are always Franks, wherever they are found and in whatever context: that is plainly untrue. It also implies nothing biological, genetic or exclusive about the claim being made. Indeed this suggestion has the fluidity of our modern understandings of ethnicity. Thus, although having the appearance of come round in a circle, we end with a very different understanding of the relationship between material culture, and ethnicity from that with which we started. The argument moves forward, as in a spiral and in so doing I think that it opens up our cemetery evidence to much more interesting and less constricting readings.

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Ethnicity in early middle age cemeteries. The case of the "visigothic" burials

Etnicidad en los cementerios altomedievales. El caso de los enterramientos "visigodos"

Carlos Tejerizo García *

SUMMARY

The study of the Early Middle Age cemeteries in Europe has had a very long path since the beginning of Archaeology as science related to the XIXth nationalism. These cemeteries were used then to establish national identities and to invent traditions, in Hobsbawm's words, for a new bourgeoisie that, for the first time in History, achieved the control of power and economy. Ethnicity played an important role in establishing these national identities, linking the present peoples to the past *Volks* and being the center of the interpretation of historical change from a culture-historical and diffusionist approach. Although in Spain nationalism had a different development comparing to other European countries, the so called "Visigothic" burials were important in the establishment of Archaeology and the interpretation of the Early Middle Age under the paradigm of ethnicity and diffusionism. Although this vision has been clarified after World War II in European historiography, is still hegemonic in Spanish academy.

In this paper it will be presented an interpretation of the so called "visigothic" burials in order to suggest new ways of analysis of the role of ethnicity in the conformation of this archaeological record. For this purpose, a critic of the traditional culture-historical interpretation is made, stressing its limits and problems and the links between national politics and archaeological development. The alternative interpretation is based in the review of the Early Middle Age cemeteries of the oriental part of the Duero basin, stressing the importance of contextual studies and introducing new archaeological views from the excavation of other Spanish regions, over all the area of Madrid. In conclusion, ethnicity is analyzed as one more factor of framing social relations and identities in a historical moment where important changes in settlement pattern and economy are occurring and the social stratification and hierarchy are in constant dispute and construction.

Key words: ethnicity; Early Middle Age cemeteries; visigoths

RESUMEN

El estudio de los cementerios altomedievales en Europa ha tenido un largo recorrido desde el comienzo de la Arqueología como ciencia, relacionado con los nacionalismos del siglo XIX. Estos cementerios fueron utilizados entonces para establecer identidades nacionales e "inventar tradiciones", según Hobsbawm, para una nueva burguesía que, por primera vez en la Historia, consiguió el poder político y económico de los diferentes "Estados-nación". La etnicidad jugó, pues, un importante papel en el establecimiento de estas identidades nacionales, relacionando los pueblos actuales con los pasados *Völker*, siendo el concepto central para la interpretación del cambio histórico desde una perspectiva histórico-cultural y difusionista. Aunque en España el nacionalismo tuvo un desarrollo diferente en comparación con otros países europeos, las mal llamadas "necrópolis visigodas" fueron importantes para el nacimiento de la Arqueología y la interpretación de la Alta Edad Media bajo el paradigma del etnicismo y el difusionismo. Aunque esta visión sufrió algunos cambios tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, todavía es hegemónica en la academia.

El presente trabajo presentará una interpretación de las "necrópolis visigodas" con el objetivo de sugerir nuevas formas de análisis del rol que la etnicidad tuvo en la conformación de este registro arqueológico. Con este propósito se hará una crítica a las concepciones histórico-culturales, resaltando sus límites y problemas y las relaciones entre la política nacional y el desarrollo arqueológico. La interpretación alternativa que se presenta está basada en una revisión de los cementerios altomedievales de la parte oriental de la cuenca del Duero, enfatizando la importancia de los estudios contextuales y la introducción de nuevas visiones arqueológicas desde otras regiones, como Madrid. En conclusión, la etnicidad es analizada como un factor más de las relaciones sociales e identidades dentro de un momento histórico de importantes cambios en el patrón de poblamiento y la economía y en el marco de una débil estratificación social en las comunidades locales en continua disputa y construcción.

Palabras clave: etnicidad; cementerios altomedievales; visigodos.

* Becario FPU, University of the Basque Country. Medieval and Post Medieval Archaeology Research Group. University of the Basque Country, C/ F. Tomás y Valiente s/m, 01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz, quiros.castillo@ehu.es. Work carried out within the framework of the HUM2009-07079 research project funded by the Ministry of Education and Science under the auspices of the National R+D+I Plan entitled "La formación de los paisajes medievales en el Norte Peninsular y en Europa: Agricultura y ganadería los siglos V al XII".

“Lo que percibimos en torno de nosotros, las ciudades y aldeas, los campos y bosques, lleva en sí el sello de la transformación. No solo en su vestimenta y modo de presentarse, en su configuración y en su modo de sentir son los hombres un resultado de la historia, sino que también el modo como ven y oyen es inseparable del proceso de vida social que se ha desarrollado a lo largo de milenios. Los hechos que nos entregan nuestros sentidos están preformados socialmente de dos modos: por el carácter histórico del objeto percibido y por el carácter histórico del órgano percipiente” (HORKHEIMER, 2003 [1937])

I. INTRODUCTION

The actual sociopolitical context is showing a growth of ethnicity, nations and even race as factors for explaining historical and political processes in the present and about the past (DÍAZ-ANDREU and CHAMPION, 1996; HAKENBECK, 2004). This situation has a correspondence in the Archaeological and Medieval History areas, where we assist to a renewal of the old ethnic theories of the 30's German school, sustained by a revitalization of the culture-historical approach, which aim is to study historical processes as a series of responses to movement of population, migrations and cultural adaptation (HAKENBECK, 2008; TRIGGER, 2009 (2nd edition)).

In Europe there is a debate between two opposite theories that analyse ethnicity from the archaeological remains; on the one hand, those who defend a primordialist, objectified and analyzable ethnicity that had a fundamental role in the constitution of past societies; in the other hand, those who question this role or, at least, the supposed primordialism and monolithism of ethnicity, preferring the constructivist and contextual study of ethnicity. Of course, this outline is simplifying a complex scientific debate in which we can find numerous intermediate contributions.

This opposition of theories in Medieval History has had as one of its main object of study the funerary remains of the period of the barbarian invasions (*Volkerwanderungszeit*). The appearance through Europe of new funerary rituals opposed to the old roman tradition has been the object of discussion about the presence of barbarian *gentes* that carried its culture inherent to their Germanic ethnicity since the very beginning of Archaeology in the 19th century.

These studies have generated intense debates, between which is inevitable to mention the one of ethnogenesis since the publication of the works of Wenskus and Wolfram and their continuity just to the present (CURTA, 2007; GILLET, 2002; POHL and REIMITZ, 1998). A debate that is, at this moment, in pause; a pause that has provoked a radicalization of the opinions of their participants, in spite the wish for consensus expressed at the end of 90's (POHL, 1998a: p. 7).

However, in the Iberian Peninsula these processes have taken a very different character: Although the fundamental importance that played ethnicity in the configuration of Archaeology as a science related, firstly, to nationalism and, afterwards, to Franquist dictatorship (MEDEROS MARTÍN, 2003-2004; OLMO, 1991), since the 90's it is having a very strong stagnation in its study. The lack of global studies have created a kind of “theoretical sclerosis” that have produced that the European debate has not taken into consideration in the study of the Early Middle Age cemeteries, in spite of the increasing of archaeological excavations in the last fifteen years¹.

In summary, there is a very important delay in ethnicity studies in the Iberian Peninsula that has not only stagnate the theoretical debate, but also the methodological and analytical fields. On the contrary, there is a growth in the perspectives that take ethnicity as the major factor of historical explanation under a heavy

¹ This lack of global studies has its origins in the political and regional distribution of policies developed since the political transition that established the Heritage Law of 1985. This law made the different regions the main subject in the development of excavations with the consequent regionalization of studies (DÍAZ-ANDREU and CHAMPION, 1996; PARGA-DANS, 2010).

hegemony of the culture-historical studies only worried about the ethnic question in the cemeteries and not about other aspects that are being revealed as fundamentals for the comprehension of the historical process that produced the early medieval burials.

This paper has as a main object questioning the purely ethnic analyses, driving others that allow understand not only who where the buried people in the cemeteries of the North Spanish Plateau, but also the socio-economical context that shaped them and, in some kind of way, determined them.

2. "VISIGOTHIC BURIALS": A CRITIC OF THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Although the so called "visigothic" cemeteries are known since the last years of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th century, it was not until the 30's when the first theoretical frame was developed by Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla. Santa-Olalla, influenced by the germanist culture-historical approach, related to the German nationalism (TRIGGER, 2009 (2nd edition): p. 170) transferred almost literally the kind of analyses carried out in German in order to apply them to the necropolis found in the Duero basin. In almost every statement he did only changed the subject "gothic" by "visigothic". This transference of the culture-historical paradigm meant the beginning of a new school in Spain which aim was to locate, differentiate and describe the more important traits of the different cultures in the Iberian Peninsula during Late Antiquity, that is to say, romans, gothic/visigothic², byzantines and hispanovisigothics, although, evidently, the interest was focused on the Visigoths.

This historicist and primordialist school, yet hegemonic in actual studies of the Early Middle

Age cemeteries, have its origins in a very specific view of ethnicity, acting independently of the subject. The behaviour of these subjects is totally determined by ethnicity and, so, the material culture they produce. An ethnic phenomenon applied to different contexts without critical basis (JONES, 1997). It was supposed that the "Visigothic" subject would have been buried as a "Visigoth" and a "Roman" one with roman objects.

The ontology of this theoretical paradigm is related to the concept of "archaeological culture", based in the question of the existence of human groups (united in tribes or in different units) with homogeneous characteristics, which can be efficiently differentiated; in other words, if "cultures" exist or they do not and, even more important, if they can be studied by Archaeology (BRATHER, 1998: p. 150). Following Childe: "we find certain types of remains [...] constantly recurring together. Such a complex of regularly associated traits we shall term a "cultural group" or just a "culture" (CHILDE, 1929), supposing "an essence, that is, something intrinsically natural that preceded the very existence of the group, led to its creation, an defined its character" (DÍAZ-ANDREU, 1996). An idealist and nationalist theory by which through History different cultures (voluntary related to a "nation" or a "Volk" in a not always innocent game of *presentism*) that, united unconsciously by some common ideological and cultural conceptions, generated the same kind of materials in their productive and reproductive cycles. Materials that actual archaeologist can differentiate applying typologies of traits learned through extra-archaeological sources (normally written sources). These typologies, however, usually take into account only the ethnic assignation to the object, but not the "significación cultural de todas las decisiones tecnológicas presentes en la elaboración del mundo material y asignando, además, un significado social único a

2 One of the most interesting facts about the Archaeology of Late Antiquity in the Iberian Peninsula is the "invisibility" of other cultures such as suevs, alans or vandals. Except from some rare and questionable exceptions, no material associated to this cultures is known (DÍAZ MARTÍNEZ, 2011; Jorge LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2004). A fact very similar to what happens in the south of the Gaul during the visigothic reign of Tolosa. Recent works have tried to explain this recurring to process of "deculturation" and "reconstitution" of a national material culture (KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008: p. 189).

cada objeto, invariable a lo largo del tiempo” (FALQUINA APARICIO; MARÍN SUÁREZ; ROLLAND CALVO and TIERRA DE NADIE, 2006).

This was the main ideas of the theoretical frame that Santa-Olalla transferred to Spain. He assumed the existence of a “gothic” or “visigothic” culture of which archaeologists have to find its material culture. As happened in European contexts, the assumption of Santa-Olalla was based in the documentary sources that situated Visigoths “unmistakable” in the Iberian Peninsula in the 6th century after the defeat of Vouillé (507).

Although Blas Taracena stated that some of the materials of the cemeteries of the Duero Basin could be “visigothic”, it will be Santa-Olalla who would define the visigothic material culture (MARTÍNEZ SANTA-OLALLA, 1934) through a typology commonly used nowadays without major changes³. This typology had to differentiate the Visigothic from the non-Visigothic and, by this way, culture-historical archaeologists could singularise a previous “hispanorroman” culture and a later “hispanovisigothic” culture as a synthesis between the others (PALOL, 1966). In other words, from the material culture of the “Visigoths” others were separated, in spite of, as Brather states, “setting two scientific categories in parallel does not produce historic realities” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 157).

In contrast with what happens in European contexts, where ethnic differences are defined by archaeologists through funerary practices, weapons or pottery (KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008: p. 189 y ss), in *Hispania* two are the main traits that could define the “visigothic culture”: furnished burials and the so-called *Reihengräberfelder*.

Changes in funerary rituals can be detected in the Vth and VIth centuries with the apparition of furnished burials in a “germanic style”.⁴ These burials are also associated with a very pronounced sexual differentiation, with women buried under the so-called “danubian mode”, characterized by the presence of two pair of *fibulae* on the shoulders to hold the *peplum*.⁵ Many studies have been written about this questions that, in some European contexts, are the only sign of a “foreign” presence in cemeteries. In later times some critical responses have arisen, such as Sebastian Brather writing that “it is not posible to detect ethnic differences on the basis of brooches” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 153), or, even more radically, Halsall (HALSALL, 1995, 2011) when he states that, evidently, “an object does not have an ethnicity”, but ethnicity is done to the object by the holder.

The other “visigothic” trait used by the culture-historical school is the appearance of the so-called *Reihengräberfelder*, row cemeteries which were defined in the Iberian Peninsula as:

“Los Reihengräberfelder (o civilización de los cementerios alineados), son característicos en muchos lugares de Europa y abarcan cronológicamente los siglos VI y VII, llegando incluso hasta el siglo VIII. La Península Ibérica en parte ocupada durante estos siglos por una población visigoda, pacífica, vio florecer en la Meseta Castellana varios de estos cementerios. Se trata de una concepción única de las necrópolis y por ello la alineación y la orientación son básicas para que ésta se desarrolle e incremente de forma ordenada con el paso de las generaciones. Las enraizadas tradiciones familiares y de clanes o grupos, junto con unas creencias

3 Although I am stressing the role of Santa Olalla, the importance of other german authors in the expansion of these ideas in the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Nils Aberg, Hans Zeiss or Joachim Werner), is essential to understand this process.

4 Although it was once again Taracena the first in differentiate some furnished burials associated to the last moments of the roman Hispania, it will be Zeiss (ZEISS, 1934) the first one to talk about “necrópolis tardorromanas” that, later on, will become the “necrópolis of the Duero” (CABALLERO ZOREDA, 1974; FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; PALOL, 1958).

5 This mode was detected in some Spanish sites Duratón or Herrera de Pisuerga. Even Though, the argument was very normativist: “this tomb has the pair of fibulae, so it has to be from a woman”. In that moment this method was used to determine the gender of the individual due to the lack of anthropological analysis. We are not stating that the individuals were not woman, but to stand out the important bias that affected these studies. Moreover, in cemeteries recently discovered, as a consequences for the reduced number of furnished burials, no statistical study could have being done.

religiosas muy vivas, hicieron que el pueblo visigodo trajese consigo unas costumbres que quedan patentes en la arqueología funeraria” (RIPOLL, 1991a: p. 28, personal emphasizing)

We only know at the moment just some examples among which we only have the plane of three of them: Carpio de Tajo, La Olmeda Sur y Duratón (and only a little part of it that not remotely seems a *Reihengräberfeld*). From the rest we only have some archaeological notes stating that the tombs are located in rows, that drives them again to use circular arguments and biased ideas about the ethnicity of the individuals buried there.

Weapons are another typical ethnic element used by culture-historical archaeologists in German, France or England (HÄRKE, 1990; KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008). However, in the Iberian Peninsula weapons in burials are very rare with few examples to mention ⁶, so they have never been considered as a truly “Visigothic” trait (AZKÁRATE, 2004).

Using these two elements, the furnished burials and the presence of row graves, the germanist school of the 30’s was able to define a “Visigothic archaeology”; from this moment on ideas have little changed. Even nowadays the main object of funerary archaeology is mainly to locate, determine and characterized ethnic groups in the Iberian Peninsula (J. LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2010). This does not mean that some minor modifications have been produced; so, some researchers, due to the ethnogenesis debate and using its most primordialists ideas, state that we are no longer searching for concrete ethnic groups, but “foreign” and “heterogeneous elements”, but always within the culture-histo-

rical approach (BARROSO CABRERA; MORÍN DE PABLOS and LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2008; Jorge LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2004).

The translation of this theoretical frame caused a tendency to use circular arguments and *ad hoc* hypothesis to adjust the facts to the paradigm. This supposed the establishment of strong biased ideas that, to the extent the number of sites and facts were increased, finally contradict the archaeological remains, as some studies show (HALSALL, 1995, 2011; HÄRKE, 1990; JEPURE, 2006). In the Iberian Peninsula context the most serious of these biased ideas is the chronological question.

The chronology of these cemeteries is, nowadays, one of the most controversial elements when analysing the Early Middle Age cemeteries of the Duero ⁷. Despite the fact that there are several alternative chronologies, all of them were based in the same culture-historical approach ⁸. It is worth mentioning that the most important chronological contribution was made by Gisela Ripoll (RIPOLL, 1991a) and the use of the correlative-complementary table.

Although some improvement has been made using this method, for example, in establishing a more rigorous taxonomy of grave-goods, the main problem arises when trying to give an absolute chronology to these associations (COLLINS, 2005). Ripoll, without other chronological methods ⁹ (RIPOLL, 1991b), linked to a biased historical narrative, related the changes in the archaeological funerary remains to the political and historical events known through the written texts like; the conversion of Recaredo in 589, the byzantine invasion of the peninsular south coast, etc. ¹⁰ Giving a

6 Less than twenty examples in the whole Iberian Peninsula (ARDANAZ ARRANZ; RASCÓN MARQUÉS and SÁNCHEZ MONTES, 1998; BARROSO CABRERA and MORÍN DE PABLOS, 2006)

7 In Madrid this issue has been reformulated through the excavation of sites with both the domestic and funerary areas (J.A QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2011)

8 The Works of Martínez Santa-Olalla, Ebel-Zepezaue; Pablo Ciezar or Barbara Sasse are some examples (JEPURE, 2009).

9 “No poseemos ningún elemento fiable de datación, por tanto mientras la situación de los hallazgos no varíe [...] tendremos que seguir apoyándonos en las cronologías de los materiales hallados fuera de la geografía hispánica y en algunas referencias históricas respecto a Hispania –a pesar de lo que ello significa- que parece no presentan graves dudas cronológicas” (RIPOLL, 1991b: p. 111)

10 Something similar happens with the case of the ‘invisibility’ of Visigoths in the south of Gaul. “Without a historical record that told us that people called Goths came to Aquitaine in the second decade of the fifth century, there would be no problem, there would be no ‘absent’ or ‘invisible’ Goths to explain” (HALSALL, 2011)

random date to the changes detected in the archaeological record, as long-term changes, by relating them to a particular historical fact committing an archaeological mistake because, as Brather writes, “the identification of long-term developments (which archaeology can identify) with short term political and ethnic situations (which history reconstructs) is wrong” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 171).

This methodology generated supposedly neutral absolute chronologies, but which were, in fact, interpreting the already dated material. For example, if we find a particular group of brooches we date the cemetery in the VIth century and before the conversion of Reccared. So, the cemetery has to be “visigothic” and in a moment when these peoples were totally separated from the roman bulk, as happens in the typical “visigothic” necropolis, as Duratón (Segovia) or Herrera de Pisuerga (Palencia). Moreover, this methodology usually gives a chronology to all burials in one site, without considering phases or internal development; this is the error called “sincronía aparente”, very common in culture-historical studies (FELIPE BATE, 1998: p. 129). (Fig 1).

To summarize, these cemeteries have been given a chronology only within the conceptual and methodological limits of the Culture-Historical approach, based not only in empiricist and arbitrary criteria, but also in serious methodological problems that we carry out until today, standing out the question of the open area excavation and the radiocarbon dating. It is worth mentioning that over 2000 burials we do not have a sole radiocarbon dating¹¹ that allow to construct a reliable chronological sequence. Only with the implantation of correct protocols of archaeological work, appropriate to the record handled in these cemeteries, can archaeologists solve the chronological problem. However, this chronology is used in

almost all the publications nowadays to date the cemeteries.

And, at last, we also find some analytical problems about how are these cemeteries studied. Having the main object the differentiation of ethnic groups, be them “visigothic”, “foreigners”, or “romans”, scholars usually leave apart the study of societies behind the ethnic groups in a given historical and geographical context, the “contexto-momento” (FELIPE BATE, 1998: p. 109).

For these “a-historical” scholars, the huge cemetery of Duratón or Madrona (Segovia)¹² is just the same visigothic necropolis as the small one of Herrera de Pisuerga or Espirido-Veladiez (Segovia). By this methodological approach they are merely rejecting the study of some minor cemeteries like Ventosilla y Tejadilla (Segovia) in Segovia or Las Quintanas (Valladolid), in spite of giving important information about the settlement and social organization in the Iberian Peninsula in the VIth and VIIth century.

The example of Las Quintanas (Valladolid) is very noteworthy. Situated close to the prehistoric city of Pintia, is a cemetery where approximately 100 burials have been excavated¹³. Among them only three are furnished with rings and earrings. More interesting is the different treatment of the gender in the ritual; while women are buried directly in the earth, men are buried in coffins or structures that separates the body from the earth (VELASCO, SANZ and CENTENO, 2003). The archaeological study of the materials in the site has determined a lengthy occupation from the IV-Vth century to the VIIth century. From a strictly ethnic analysis these people wouldn't be Visigoths, but a group of indigenous, probably “hipanoromans” that stayed contemporaneously at the moment of the Visigoth's invasion preserving its own culture. The simply apparition of just one brooch would have totally changed this reading.

11 About the question of open area excavation in the Iberian Peninsula context (FERNÁNDEZ UGALDE, 2005) For the question of radiocarbon dating in early medieval cemeteries context (QUIRÓS CASTILLO, 2009)

12 It is worth mentioning that, at the moment, Antonel Jepure is in process of revision of the cemeteries excavated by Antonio Molinero in Segovia. (JEPURE, 2009).

13 Not published at the moment.

Moreover, Las Quintanas could be one of the few examples that could establish a bridge between the Vth and the VIth century and, for that reason, it is very important to analyse other aspects beyond ethnicity.

Besides the contextual study of the sites, we cannot simply ignore the socio-economic issues as factors of change. If we explain changes in the archaeological record using just external influence, if we deny the capability of societies to have an internal development and that this capability could play a role in the change of the archaeological record, we will lose the core studies of economic and social development of societies behind cemeteries and only debate about the “culture” that adapts the better to the traits that are found. It is a common mistake within the culture-historical paradigm to understand “archaeological cultures” as monolithic beings, that is to say, denying the internal struggle caused by domination relationships (FALQUINA APARICIO et alii, 2006).

Gisela Ripoll exemplified this aspect when, in her 2007 publication, against the criticisms of Roger Collins (COLLINS, 2005) and other scholars, she answered: “se debe contemplar la posibilidad de que las denominadas necropolis visigodas de la Meseta castellana, en realidad no lo sean. Pero si no lo son habrá que preguntarse quién está enterrado en esas sepulturas fechadas desde finales del siglo V hasta finales del siglo VI y halladas casi de forma exclusiva en la Meseta” (RIPOLL, 2007). The point for us is not to analyze who were the specific people buried, but how were their societies. In other words, the main point is not if they were Visigoths or not, but if they were Visigoths, so what? Does that affect the understanding of the society behind the burials? And if it so, how does it work in each context? It’s not only a matter of questioning the archaeological record “How

can people be distinguished?” (POHL, 1998b:p. 17) but also, why people need to be distinguished? (HALSALL, 1995).

In summary, we observe how in the study of the visigothic cemeteries have predominated a primordialist and essentialist vision of ethnicity. This instrumental vision denies a complexity well reflected in the archaeological record

3. AN ATTEMPT OF INTERPRETATION OF ETHNICITY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGE NECROPOLIS OF THE ORIENTAL PART OF THE DUERO BASIN

In the oriental area of the North Plateau we found, at least, 43 sites dated between VIth and VIIth century (Fig 2) ¹⁴. It’s interesting that among those 43 cemeteries, 24 are located in spaces that weren’t previously occupied showing important changes in the settlement organization by the communities of this period¹⁵.

Considering the size of the sites we can differentiate two types; the small ones (6 to 100 burials); and the big ones (over 100 burials; Aguilafuente, Madrona, Castiltierra, Duratón and Piña de Esgueva). The important difference between them reinforces the idea of studying them contextually in order not to fall in monolithic or “God’s eye” explanations typical of culture-historical approaches (HAKENBECK, 2008).

It is worth mentioning the contrast between these cemeteries and the previous ones, wrongly known as the “Duero Necropolis” ¹⁶, with 24 examples in the Duero basin. At first sight, the most interesting fact is that, quantitatively, the number of archaeological sites increases from one period to the next. From 23 necropolis

¹⁴ We have considered here not only the “classic” examples of these cemeteries, such as Castiltierra or Duratón but also all of the excavated sites within this chronological frame.

¹⁵ We must consider the fact that we know little about some of these cemeteries and it is possible that previous phases were not detected.

¹⁶ This denomination is now obsolete and has been replaced with others such as “postimperial necropolis” (FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009) as they are not limited to the Duero basin and show a different socioeconomic reality from the roman past.

documented in the previous phase we now find almost the double. However, the radical change is related to the grave-goods, based on roman tradition in the cemeteries of the IVth and Vth, and personal and "germanist" in the second phase of this burial process.

The study of these two "horizons" has been traditionally separated because they were considered to belong to two different cultures. The barbarian invasions supposed such a break with the "hispanoroman" culture that it would have no sense to study them together. However, and following the proposals of some scholars (DOMÍNGUEZ MONEDERO, 1985; FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009), it is necessary to study the changes between them in order to analyze the importance of the internal development of these communities.

Studies in this area and others all over the Iberian Peninsula (CHAVARRÍA ARNAU, 2007; Juan Antonio QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2006; WICKHAM, 2005), show a clear break that we can situate in the middle of the Vth century. A break not only affecting the rituals and the culture, as we can deduce from the changes produced in burials or the typology of grave-goods, but also a break in the settlement pattern, the economy and social organization.

New logics of production, more local and less orientated to a roman "world economy" lead the local communities to adaptation (HALSALL, 1995) with very different development according to the context where they were occurring. So, we can find different situations, or better, different ways of adaptation to the new world that was emerging. Examples of different ways of developments from the concentration in hillforts, possibly associated with old elites, as in Simancas (Valladolid), to the occupation of spaces not used since the Iron Age, as Tolmos de Caracena (Soria), or the continuity of some productive areas as La Olmeda (Palencia) or urban contexts as Duratón (Segovia). The funerary results of these changes were the postimperial necropolis. This does not mean that the change was as catastrophic as Hidatyus' writings may suggest. There was a continuity in some productions, with a special mention to the Terra

Sigillata Hispanica Tardía or glasses, at least until the end of the fifth century, which indicate some hints of productive continuity with the Roman past but in a more local and regional scale.

Within this approach, that of radical but progressive change, that of slow adaptation to new logics of production, we may insert the appearance of new rituals and furnished burials. As Halsall and Pohl have stated (HALSALL, 1995, 2007; POHL, 1998a: p. 3), the furnished burials and the ethnicity expression associated to them are the consequences of periods of strong political stress within the communities where the social *status* and power were in continuous dispute, justification and reproduction.

So, as another phase of ritual development of local communities, we have the "visigothic cemeteries". What is the role of ethnicity in the study of funerary remains? We believe some crucial facts should be considered. On the one hand the "visigoths", that is to say a group of individuals who penetrated in the Iberian Peninsula between the end of the Vth century and the beginnings of the VIth century, were a minority comparing to local population (DOMÍNGUEZ MONEDERO, 1986; RIPOLL, 1989, 1991a). On the other hand, these Visigoths, as they were recognized as that by others reached the political power and could exercise an hegemonic control over that power, which culminated by the visigothic monarchy.

A power that seems to be characterized by weakness, fragmentation and insecurity, excepting during those periods of political stability under strong kings who certainly managed to fully control the political and military powers to the state. A central power that couldn't exist if not through a patronage system and relations with inferior and local powers and in different scales (CASTELLANOS and MARTÍN VISO, 2005; ESCALONA MONGE, 2002). These local communities of the visigothic period aren't but the result of the economical development and expansion of those communities which were in process of generation in IVth and Vth centuries and whose funerary representation was the postimperial necropolis but in a different political context.

The radical change in grave goods we detect between the end of the Vth century and the beginning of the VIth century is related in some ways to the arrival of that minority that achieved power and, even more important, the elements of representation of that power; "in the absence of any Roman threat, Gothiness came to be redefined there in relation to landowning [...] the achievement of sixth-century Visigothic kings in making local elites take notice of, and indeed direct their political lives around, the court at Toledo, should not be underestimated" (HEATHER, 1998: p. 305 y 306)

From the political and economical point of view we think we can understand better the changes perceived in the archaeological record. Firstly we had communities adapting to a new logic of production; now, the same kind of communities get to expand and develop in a more controlled space. We see these societies and their elites in a continuous state of political stress, adapting their ways of framing social relationships and the ways to preserve them (BOURDIEU, 1997) to new forms of power and simbology.

Simplifying, through the archaeological record we can divide these communities in two big groups (HAMEROW, 2002; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2007): single farmsteads, usually composed of few familiar units which habitat is supposedly isolated, this could be the example of Las Tenerías (Burgos) (PALOMINO; NEGREDO and ABARQUERO, 1997-1998); and villages, with a group of families integrated in communal economic strategies. As a consequence, firstly of the breaking up of the *villae* as the economical and social centre of the rural world, and secondly of the own internal development of the communities, villages were progressively generated. These villages are characterized by the unification of several familiar units in the same habitat and organized in the same economical relationships. The consequence of the development of these relationships is a faint social stratification that we can define as "la desigualdad [que] ha tomado cuerpo o se ha institucionalizado, y que existe un sistema de relaciones sociales que determina quién recibe qué y por qué" (KERBO, 2003). A social stratification that, in precapitalist societies,

not depend only of the access to resources and the hoarding of the surplus value (the economist reading), but also depend of the different *status* within a value system exteriorized by different simbologies and *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 1997; HALSALL, 1995; LENSKI, 1969; MARX and HOBBSBAWN, 1979). We may think that this kind of social stratification is what we can detect in the early middle age cemeteries of the Duero basin and is what is showed in the distribution of furnished burials within the cemeteries "what we can see in the graves is primarily social rank and distinction *within* societies –not conscious distinction from adjoining societies" (BRATHER, 1998: p. 157).

The picture, however, gets more complicated as we take into consideration that some of these cemeteries are not inserted exclusively in rural contexts, but in suburban ones, as it seems to happen with the example of Duratón (JEPURE, 2006). Again, although we are trying to define some general ideas of the development of the Early Middle Age cemeteries, we have to take into consideration local contexts.

In consequence, what we are analysing are the members of a local elite that takes the "gothic element" (be themselves descendants or not of gothic individuals) as "key to the political power" (CURTA, 2007; POHL, 1998a: p. 2). These keys are justifying the social relations of production developed within the communities, based in a better situation in the production and distribution of resources and the subsequent *status*. As Heather states "the new element in the elite of the Peninsula may well have chosen to assert their Gothic origin in clothing [...] because belonging to the immigrant group was the source of their claim to landed wealth and social prominence [...]" (HEATHER, 1998: p. 311). We may suggest that, in the moment that economy develops and more territories are integrated under the control of the same elites, there must be a more coercive power over the subordinates. Visigothic ethnicity and its representation in death could work to shape and justify this power; but an ethnicity built on changing elements and adapted to different contexts and revealed by elements in the form of weapons, brooches, dressing, etc (POHL, 1998b).

We can therefore interpret ethnicity as an element of “gothic” simbology inside a wide hegemonic system. A hegemony defined, in a gramscian way as “el modo en que el poder, la élite local y regional de las aldeas y ciudades, se gana el consentimiento de aquellos a los que sojuzga” (FALQUINA APARICIO et alii, 2006; GRAMSCI, 2010). A “visigothic” simbology as far as it is recognized by the individuals. Symbols through which a community can understand and structure the social position of the bearer of the grave-goods and, maybe more important, recognize the position of its family and its clients in a public ceremony as the burial one (HALSALL, 1995).

These social relationships are related to the geographical and historical context in which the communities are involved, so they can vary through the Iberian Peninsula. This could be the explanation of the example of Aldaieta and others in the north (AZKÁRATE, 2004) or the poor degree of social differentiation detected in the domestic areas of the Madrid village network (QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2006). However, the number of furnished burials in Early Middle Age cemeteries shows that only a minority had the access to these “Germanic” objects, so the ethnic vision of these *habitus* gets more complicated, with social, political and economical elements interacting in the same social action field.

In other words, these new *habitus* may be the expression of a new socio-political structure of a new local elite that has in its hands not only the economic capital (as we see in the wealth of the furnished burials), but also the symbolic one. As Heather states, gothic identity belongs primarily to the dominant class (HEATHER, 1992: p. 323). An ethnicity that did exist and it was recognized by the bulk of the people. A fluid ethnicity which purpose would be framing and defining identities, not only the individual ones, but also the social and economic identities. An ethnicity defining not only the difference

between the *us* and *them*, but as Halsall states; the difference between ‘the *us* and *us*’ within the communities (HALSALL, 2007). An ethnicity that, as opposed as what is supported by the germanist school “are in no way natural facts. They are highly abstract, culturally constructed ways of categorising people who might differ a lot among each other” (POHL, 1998a: p. 4).

Following this logic, the progressive decrease of the furnished burials since the VIth century would be explained beyond the “cambio de moda” (mode changing) due to the invasion of the byzantine empire (J. LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2010; PALOL and RIPOLL, 1988; RIPOLL, 1991a). We may suggest that, in a moment when the economical development of local communities fixed the internal social stratification, the public ceremonies that externalized the symbolic power where unnecessary and new forms of public ostentation and social differentiation, were established, as for example the construction of religious buildings and the privatization of the funerary spaces (HALSALL, 1995). As Pohl states: “as barbarian dominion came to seem natural, these sharp and often visual perceptions disappeared” (POHL, 1998b: p. 62).

However, we don't want to fall into ingenuous instrumentalist explanations about a conscious and “evil” minority that, assuming the concrete *habitus* they have made up, only apply them in order to preserve the social structure¹⁷. The social field is a complex area within the cognitive processes of social stratification is grasped both voluntary (through different access to resources) and involuntary (through process of socialization).

Neither want we to state that ethnicity was the unique way of structuring these societies. Identities are multi-layered, and within these multiple layers, ethnicity plays its role. A necessary role but not the only one: urbanity and rurality, stockbreeding and agriculture, artisans and peasants, man and woman (as we have

¹⁷ We don't want to deny the importance of the conscious and individual strategies that social agents can have in the development of ethnic identities, as showed in some anthropological studies (BARTH, 1976) However, what is described here are the main tendencies where the particular cases converge.

seen in the case of Las Quintanas)... are mental structures that also played a role in the formation and conservation of societies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper the main aim was to suggest an alternative interpretation of the early middle age necropolis of the Duero basin through a critic to the Culture-Historical approach, hegemonic in the Iberian Peninsula studies. We focused on the necessity of the reconstruction of the general theoretical frame after a time when the regional and local studies have been the rule and beyond culture-historical explanations.

However, there are still some problems to solve. Through the paper we tried to give a meaning to the furnished burials within the cemeteries, wrongly called "Visigothic". These ideas allow us to state that we may change the focus to the question of the signifiers as archaeological objects, where were they made? Which were the mechanism of distribution of these objects? Why in a so wide and so localized territory could these symbols of power spread? Were they acting as symbols and marks of a social stratification as we suggest?

We now detect some archaeological examples of productive areas within the villages that could be used as metal furnace in the North Plateau, as Mata del Palomar (Segovia), Ladera de los Prados (Valladolid) or Veranes (Asturias), dated in the VIth and VIIth centuries. Nevertheless, they were probably used to produce local products more than specialized and luxury ones as those found in the graves. In fact, the absence of these objects in domestic areas is very significant as we can observe in sites as Gózquez (Madrid) or La Cárcava de la Peladera (Segovia). This idea calls us to think that these elements were mainly used in funerary contexts, reinforcing the idea that they were symbolic markers and not simply elements used in life and re-used in death.

So, we can consider the presence of specialized centres of manufacture of these "luxury" elements, possibly situated in urban centres

(Mérida, Barcino, ¿Clunia?, etc...). Through inter-change relationships we can relate the urban elites with local and rural ones, maybe in a strategy hold by the urban aristocracy to have an indirect control of far properties, as some hypothesis suggest (VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009).

As a conclusion, we stress that, far from some approaches (BARROSO CABRERA et alii, 2008; BROGIOLO and CHAVARRÍA ARNAU, 2008; VALENTI, 2009), we don't have a doubt about the arrival of a "foreign" population to the Iberian Peninsula; that is to say, Visigoths DID came into the Peninsula. However, this does not imply the necessity of a different "material culture" that we, archaeologists, can differentiate. What is stated here is that the process of migration, adaptation (never simply "acculturation") and internal development, through the archaeological remains, were much more complex as the ethnic paradigm interprets. As Clark states: "existence [of invasions and minor intrusions] has to be demonstrated rather than assumed" (quoted in HAKENBECK, 2008: p. 14). We may consider that we can only detect and differentiate archaeologically only the final testimonies of these processes, when they were established. Ethnic paradigm is based, as it has no alternative, in the detection of immutable traits. Nevertheless, we have suggested that, from the archaeological record we may recover from the Early Middle Age cemeteries, this idea is hardly testable. Walter Pohl simplifies this idea when he states: "the most fundamental point is that ethnic communities are not immutable biological or ontological essences, but the results of historical processes, or, as one might put it, historical processes in themselves" (POHL, 1998a: p. 8).

This leads us, finally, to stand out the actual political relevance of the historical study of ethnicity. Unfortunately this is not an issue without implications beyond the scientific field (if there is any), and we can question about the political and ideological implications of some scientific positions about ethnicity in defending nationalistic narratives or the creation of conservative identities and local traditions (HAKENBECK, 2008; HOBBSBAWN, 2002). Historical critic is necessary in order to denaturalized the present and to

show how narratives are constructed and what kind of discourses they are legitimizing (HORKHEIMER, 1966, 2003 [1937]). As Halsall fears: "In many ways the most worrying aspect of the thesis presented here is that it may well be right!" (HALSALL, 1992: p. 207).

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Is it really relevant the ethnicity of our historical subjects?

¿Es relevante la etnicidad de nuestros sujetos históricos?

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera *

SUMMARY

The debate on the implications of two conflicting ways of interpreting the early medieval funerary records is raising a great dust in this days. The archaeological analysis of a couple of recently excavated sites in the center of the Iberian Peninsula (in which the cemetery has been documented at the same time that the habitat) reveals some of the contradictions in the ethnic assumption. The distinguishing features of specific funeral deposits in both cases correspond to a material record that (in the settlement) could only be defined as the characteristic of village communities. In light of these data is not very convincing the causal link proposed by some authors between the barbarian immigration phenomenon and the emergence of the first early medieval villages.

The increasing verbal aggressiveness shown by the participants of the ongoing debate on the presence of ethnic features in the archaeological record may have gone too far, in my opinion. Overall when, and as professor Quirós has presented in the first pages of this issue, there are more things that link us than things that keep us separated. Therefore we believe it is necessary to intervene, to ask for a pause to think and tackle the topic with calm, although not without still being firm on what is really important.

Amongst witty arguments and other provocations, we risk moving from a theatrical parody of the frontier conflict presented some

RESUMEN

El debate sobre las implicaciones de dos opuestas formas de interpretación de los más antiguos registros funerarios altomedievales está levantando una gran polvareda en fechas recientes. El análisis arqueológico de un par de yacimientos de reciente excavación en el centro de la península Ibérica en los que la necrópolis ha sido documentada al mismo tiempo que el hábitat revela algunas de las contradicciones presentes en los postulados etnicistas. Los específicos rasgos diferenciales de los depósitos funerarios corresponden en ambos casos a un registro material que en los asentamientos sólo podría definirse como el característico de sendas comunidades aldeanas. A la luz de estos datos parece poco convincente la relación de causalidad propuesta por algunos autores entre el fenómeno inmigratorio bárbaro y la emergencia de las primeras aldeas altomedievales.

years ago by Sahlins (2005) to a re-edition of a minor version (caricature) of the argument held between this author and Obeyesekere (SAHLINS 1988, OBEYESEKERE 1992, SAHLINS 1995). This is no place to assess who or what was politically correct, neither who or which proposals can be socially or scientifically more or less responsible¹.

What in certain cases could have begun as a conflict originated in its specific national scholarly environment, and in others it emerged as an urgent response of social responsibility towards the social and political turn of events, should not have ever come so far as to pollute a scientific (and social) debate about the meaning

¹ These pages were written soon after the Oslo terrorist attacks. A draft was previously presented at the Leeds 2011 International Medieval Conference.

and transcendence of ethnicity in Early Medieval archaeology. And even less when the formidable recent development in this branch of knowledge is providing the possibility of bringing both many traditionally neglected questions and many new ones to a rich and suggestive critical analysis. Thus, the 'internationalisation' of the course of the debate should correct the legacy of the claims held by the alleged historiographical positions (conceptual or theoretical) of the litigants based on their origin or school. The process of factional affiliation of the contestants to either a post-processual theoretical horizon or to a positivist position would be part of such strategies for automatic disqualification, while leaving the architecture of argument offered by individuals (peers and colleagues) with their names and surnames aside.

Our relative position away from that debate (especially regarding the different approaches to the ways it has been proposed) should not be understood as lack of interest, but rather as a result of the conviction that their bases should be established on productive terms, far from any manichaeism; terms on which the small differences regain their importance, and that the way in which the analysis and criticism of the archaeological information is carried out should not be taken *a priori* as an ethic or political alternative. Therefore, we do not believe that in a socio-temporal context such as the fragmentation of the imperial political system in the fifth century AD a simple dichotomy between Roman and barbarian cultural forms (including all the diverse and antagonistic elements each cultural form contains) can be established. It is still extremely significant that an imperial law enacted in 416 banned wearing long hair or clothes made of fur (both considered barbaric customs) not only inside the city but in nearby districts² (ARCE 2007: 260-1). For a late-imperial city-dweller could be difficult to discriminate between the appearance of a barbarian and a Roman *rusticus*. Being aware of such phenomena, it is at least worrisome that some authors may consider 'something brought from outside'

(BROGIOLO, CHAVARRIA 2010: 47) some of the most remarkable features and breakthrough of this period, as those referring to the new modes of agricultural use, the location of settlements, and even the development of the integrated system of villages, their specific architectural features or internal organization. Some of these will occupy our attention in this paper:

Thus, we are looking again at some material evidence from territories of inland Spain dating to the troubled fifth and sixth centuries. It is possible that these materials help us to understand a bit better what may have been the social, economic and political meaning of those objects deposited in burials.

All seems to indicate that most of the rural population, the labourers of great late Roman estates, left hardly any remains about their beliefs or their eschatological positions. The disproportion between the knowledge we have on late Roman urban burial practice and the burial practices of the rural environment in the same period leads us to wonder whether if either people from the countryside were buried in peri-urban necropoleis or if burial rites took place around their settlements without leaving any archaeologically visible remains. A third alternative would be to assume that the corpses of those socially-excluded from the community did not receive any specific funerary ritual.

This overview is significantly changed in the first fourth of the fifth century when sociopolitical instability in these territories becomes evident. This crisis was, in the first place, the result of military conflicts between the Spanish relatives of the legitimate emperor (Honorius) and the legions of the usurper Constantine III, and secondly, the result of the entry of Sueves, Vandals and Alans in the Peninsula. I do not think that the recruitment of *rustici* by the members of the most important Spanish estate-owner families and their later defeat has been taken into account by scholars, as far as it

² Arce 2007: 260-1. This author concludes that "Undoubtedly, many of the signs of distinction in dress (brooches, belt buckles) were equally used by Romans and barbarian people" (Id.: 263).

concerns the impact this had on the society of the Peninsula. The presence of barbarian military groups during a long period of time before their relationship with the local political structure was normalized (after the collapse of the imperial administrative structure and the intervention of Visigothic armies in Spain for almost a century, either commanded by Rome or by their own initiative) certainly contributed to forge a new landscape in all conceivable aspects of life.

The remains of funerary constructions built close to the most representative areas of the great late Roman *villae* are more frequent from the beginning of the fifth century onwards. In the region of Madrid, three sites with such characteristics have been found in the recent years (Arroyomolinos (VIGIL-ESCALERA 2009a), Torrejón de Velasco ³, Villaviciosa de Odón (VEGA, 2005). For some unknown reason, some important figures of the community (high-rank individuals which may have been the *possessores* of these estates) invested large amounts of money in these mausolea, and decide to bury themselves there, away from the city ⁴. While some use expensive lead sarcophagi, publicly displaying their Christian beliefs (El Pelicano), others chose to bury with all the items linked to their social and administrative or military rank (Torrejón de Velasco): weapons (long sword, dagger, spear), gold belt buckles, bronze, silver, and glass wares and ceramics.

A new type of funerary display is archaeologically visible immediately afterwards ⁵, although this time led by individuals of a much lower social rank. These are the post-Imperial necropoleis (previously known as “Duero necropoleis” (Fuentes 1989), in which several types of individuals were buried: these range from those with the right to bear weapons to those that are simply buried with their personal belongings. The use of pottery and glass wares in these funerary deposits (certainly linked to a

funerary banquet) is one of their most common characteristics. The post-Imperial regional productions of late Samian wares (TSHT) play in these necropoleis and in this period a key role, together with other artifacts of undeniable technical complexity (glass, metals ⁶).

For almost half a century (410/420 up to 460/470, this type of cemeteries became the norm in our archaeological register. Hardly any other funerary ritual is known in the Peninsula. These necropoleis are linked both to small towns (such as Simancas (RIVERA 1940), hill forts (Saldaña (ABÁSULO *et al.* 1984), Pontón de la Oliva (VIGIL-ESCALERA *e.p.2*), big and small *villae* (La Olmeda (ABÁSULO *et al.* 1997), Pelicano (VIGIL-ESCALERA 2009a), and small rural settlements (El Soto). These necropoleis range from those with hundreds of burials to those with hardly a dozen inhumations. The point up to which these necropoleis are a reflection of the composition of their communities is difficult to assess. Short-lived cemeteries (limited to the two first thirds of the fifth century) present these type of deposits in most of their burials (66-95%). These percentages significantly coincide with those sites in which their life-span are thought to go beyond the date suggested by the cemeteries.

Between the end of the fifth and the end of the sixth century the vast majority of the territory previously occupied by the post-imperial necropoleis became the territory of the so-called “Visigothic necropoleis”. However, what may seem confusing if seen from high above is greatly clearer when focusing closer to the terrain (“searching for truffles” as Hodges would say (HODGES 1989). The degree of location coincidence is minimal. Furthermore, in most cases the old post-Imperial necropoleis are abandoned, and the ‘Visigothic type’ ones appear in a new near location. The cases in which both necropoleis coincide (or rather,

3 Still unpublished. We thank Raúl Flores for allowing us to see in situ the context and characteristics of the finds.

4 These are the last investments made by late imperial rural aristocrats in Madrid.

5 This seems to indicate that it was triggered by the previous action.

6 Nothing can be said about those materials which have left no archaeological remains, such as clothing, which must have had in these social contexts a very important significance (Brumfiel 1996).

where the former is still in use) are very few, and it is worth considering these details.

The archaeological discontinuity visible in the last third of the fifth century does not only apply to necropoleis. A series of new hill forts (at least most of the ones which are known, like Navasangil, El Castellón or Muelas del Pan) show destruction contexts dated to this period. In some cases the site would be later reoccupied (Navasangil), but in others there is no continuity (El Castellón), while it seems to lack evidence of such an impact on the remaining (Pontón de la Oliva, possibly Bernardos (GONZALO 2006). It seems, anyway, that all these were the places where the fate of political dominion over the interior of the Peninsula would be decided; local powers and Visigothic military forces were the most probable protagonists.

TWO CASE STUDIES

The material provided from some sites recently excavated in great extension provide us with new hints which are worth following if we intend to critically compare some conventional interpretations of these necropoleis, and can generally be applied to the post-Imperial period. Gózquez and El Pelicano, 28km apart, are two early Medieval villages in the south of the province of Madrid, the histories of which run in parallel between the sixth and eighth centuries. This region is part of the old rural territory north of the city of Toledo, which was turned into the capital of the Visigothic Kingdom. Archaeological research carried out in the aforementioned sites has shown the relationship between the settlements and their respective funerary areas. This opens up the possibility to solve some of the problems created by archaeological record whose biggest problem has always been its bias and partiality. It is extremely important to identify the differences between both sites, but it is also important what they have in common, because out of these common elements derive

the weight that the ethno-cultural component will receive from our interpretations of the historical development of this territory in the Visigothic period.

The village of Gózquez was built *ex novo*, probably during the second quarter of the sixth century, without any known link to a previous settlement. Its toponym, according to some authors, could be linked to the Latin root Gothicus, -i, in which case, it would be alluding to a foreign demographic situation inside a local context. Furthermore, the necropoleis with 'Visigothic' material are rather frequent in the region (as in Tinto Juan de la Cruz, for instance (OÑATE *et al.* 2007), which is only 9 km from Gózquez⁷).

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the settlement is its rigid urban planning, established from the beginning and its remarkable stability until the site's abandonment. The village is formed by a group of between six and ten domestic units, distributed in two neighbourhoods, and the area in between is where the necropolis is located. Each domestic unit had a rectangular plot, roughly 2650 m² in extension, and separated from its neighbouring plots by paths, fences and ploughed fields of the same shape and size, in which permanent structures were never built (Vigil-Escalera 2010). Each plot contained at least one main building and a cluster of satellite structures which include sunken-featured huts, silos, wells and other minor spaces of doubtful function.

The cemetery, with over 350 tombs, is located in an area suggesting the existence of a rectangular enclosure. The degree of burial reuse is remarkable, although moderate (1.5 individuals per tomb on average). Some tombs have one or two lateral cavities or niches, in which the deceased is/are located. Inside the cemetery, the burials are organised in streets or rows, following the main North-South axis. The oldest recognisable materials are some bow-brooches (CONTRERAS 2006; CONTRERAS,

7 Some of the necropoleis with Gothic-type materials in this region are (amongst others) Cubas-Griñón, Acedinos (Getafe), Carabanchel (Madrid), Cabeza Gorda (Carabaña) or Cacara de las Ranas (Aranjuez).

FERNÁNDEZ UGALDE 2007). The newest are belt buckles with a bronze-casted plaque which are usually dated to the first half of the seventh century. However, some of the contexts of the settlement have produced material dated with certainty to the end of the seventh and the first half of the eighth (belt buckles with lily-form plaques and pottery dated to that period). Radiocarbon dating of samples from contexts which had been *a priori* dated to both ends of the settlement occupation confirm (or rather, do not contradict) the proposed chronology. Considering the wide chronological range in which the cemetery was in use, the global percentage of furnished burials (35%) correspond to a higher proportion during its first century (AD 525/550-650), because we know that during the following century (AD 650-750), burials lacked almost any recognisable grave-goods.

The village of El Pelicano has its origins in an older Roman settlement, without a noticeable topographic discontinuity. During the first half of the fifth century the first mutations become evident. At the beginning of this century, an individual of considerable importance (maybe the owner of the estate) decided to get buried in a lead sarcophagus inside a squared plant mausoleum, some 50m towards the East of the main structures of the villa. Soon afterwards another sarcophagus was placed inside, this time for a child, which had clear Christian imagery: a chi-rho golden pendant and two open-end crosses on the short sides of the lead box.

This Roman concrete building, with its three-column porticoed façade and polychrome wall paintings, seems to be built immediately before the abandonment of residential and productive structures by the landowning elite. Throughout the following centuries and up to the abandonment of the village, the cemetery developed around this remarkable monument. Meanwhile, after the second quarter of the fifth century, the rooms of the villa were used as dwelling areas by the families of the *rustici*, as evidenced

by the presence of hearths and the accumulation of domestic residues in them⁸. Next to the late Roman walls of buildings sunken huts were built. This modest community buried their dead next to the mausoleum, although keeping a distance from it, in tombs of variable orientation. These tombs are characterised by the presence of fine table wares (TSHT Samian wares and painted wares), common pottery, oil lamps, and glass vases together with personal belongings and ornaments (including spiked-soled boots). The main characteristics of these burials match those of the previously-called "Duero necropoleis", now more accurately described as post-Imperial." (VIGIL-ESCALERA i.p.). The deposition of grave goods becomes increasingly rare from the last third of the fifth century on, when only sporadically oval belt buckles with simple or shield-base pins are to be found, always following traditional late Roman patterns.

Furthermore, from then on the previously unorganised settlement shifted to an area immediately to the East of the cemetery, where it became a compact cluster of small houses with stone foundations built around courtyards, with sunken huts, silos and wells. From the second third of the sixth century, however, the village began to spread again, with domestic units separated by several plots of arable land. In this format, the village extended for over a kilometre and a half on the north bank of a river which acted as the village's main axis. The settlement was abandoned in the mid-eighth century. During the last occupation period the burials have not produced any recognisable grave good.

However, as we have seen previously in Gózquez, several metallic finds have been recovered from the abandonment contexts of dwelling or auxiliary structures. These include two lily-form belt buckles (one in bronze and another in iron with bronze plaques and silver decoration) and a belt end decorated with knots and engraved dots. The archaeological

⁸ The roman-style management system of household waste was probably already out of use.

contexts from El Pelicano have some elements or characteristics which are often referred to as foreign: rectangular sunken huts (*Grübenhäuser*) and grey polished wares (with or without stamped decoration)⁹. And yet, the funerary behavior of the community is outstandingly different from that from Gózquez. In the period whilst the tombs from Gózquez present material usually labeled as 'Visigothic', at El Pelicano all the grave goods consist of belt buckles, earrings and necklaces of Roman tradition.

As a consequence of what we know nowadays about the social structure of both communities (regarding the management of its economic production, its crops and livestock, the domestic sphere of grain storage, the degree of integration of both communities in a regional network of basic exchange, etc) nothing really indicates that a village community like Gózquez, with Visigothic material in the necropolis, could be distinguished from another like El Pelicano, which appear to be identified as exclusively Roman. Currently it is impossible to tell if the specific organisation of either village is a result of the different origin of their inhabitants or if it derives from their specific social organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

We now reach the predictable conclusion: is ethnic identity really important when it comes to analyse the first centuries of medieval history? And above all, is the impact of the supposed arrival of barbarian people relevant for the emergence of village communities in this territory? Within half a century (or maybe less) the working population of *villae* (now peasants) ended up organised in a true village system, and this is a really consistent structural change; an absolute transformation as far as the management of the agrarian production by domestic units, the storage systems of the families which form these communities, their increasing territorialisation and the organisation of their cemeteries are concerned.

The possibility of two massive processes of depopulation can be securely discarded as an explanation for the emergence of two different burial practices (post-Imperial and Visigothic). Understanding them as the result of the arrival and settlement of large numbers of incoming populations is neither an option. No matter how much we try to create a precise territorial limit for the distribution and location of the aforementioned burial practices, it is difficult to believe that the regions created in this way may indicate the settlement of specific populations. Our archaeological categories are nothing but the reflection of direct or indirect social, political, military and economic influences of an elite whose social reproduction played a key role in the processes of identity distinction.

This interpretation does not exclude the settlement of immigrant communities in given territories, taking over abandoned lands or estates, but it makes the importance of specific burial practices and the use of grave goods as indicators of ethnic adscription relative, emphasising the political environment (patronage) in which these objects vertically circulated. The substitution of a broad range of provincial, late Roman material indicators in the necropoleis by a new one in which the indicators point toward the exotic fashion should be understood as a change of the cultural and political reference of the local elites. We believe that the public expression of this link to the new ruling power by a part of the members of some communities can also be linked to the preservation of social order within these populations.

Those early medieval archaeological finds recently discovered from the inner provinces of Hispania indicate an extraordinary disruption in the social, economic, political and ideological forms of landscape inherited from the Roman Empire. In our opinion, the importance of identifying through archaeology the different identities that are formed in this period would only be relevant if out of these identifications any impact on the emergence of village communities (the hard core for future research) could be inferred.

⁹ The foreign character of certain types of wares is a hypothesis recently proposed by some Spanish authors (Ariño, Dahi 2008).

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Figure 1. Map locating the sites mentioned in the text. 1-2 La Olmeda-Saldaña; 3 El Castellón (Sta Eulalia Tábara); 4 Cristo S. Esteban (Muelas del Pan); 5 Simancas; 6 Toledo; 7 Bernardos; 8 Navasangil; 9 Dehesa de la Oliva; 10 Villaviciosa de Odón; 11 El Soto; 12 El Pelicano; 13 Gózquez; 14 Torrejón de Velasco.

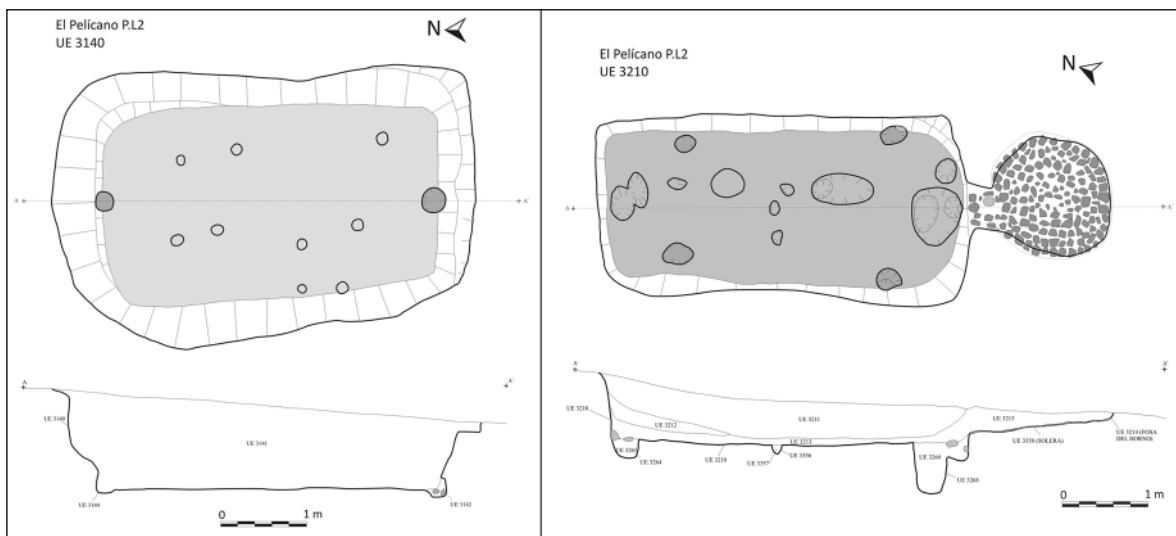


Figure 3. Sunken huts (Grübenhäuser) in El Pelicano.

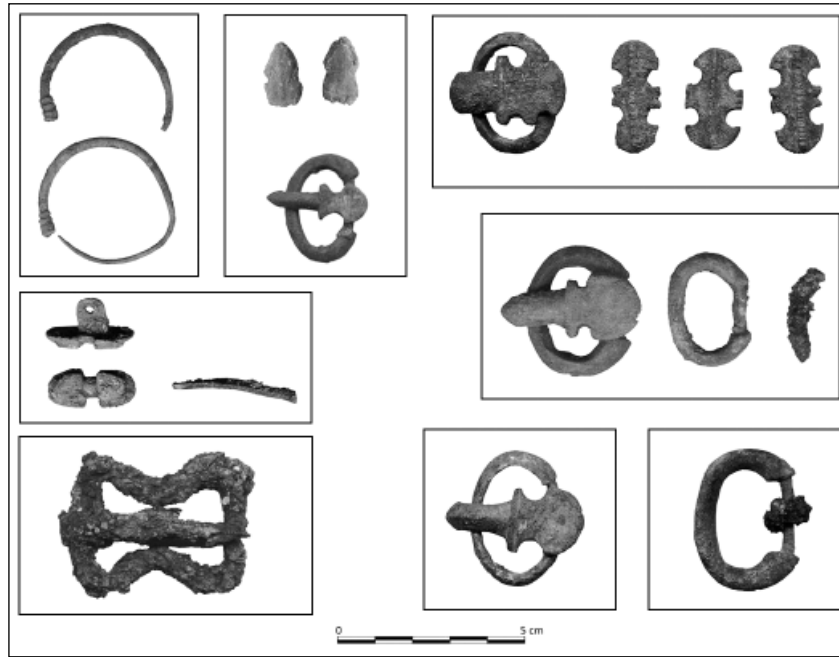


Figure 4. Metallic findings from the necropolis at Jardín-El Pelicano.



Figura 5. Personal objects from domestic contexts at El Pelicano.

I. Tendencias y planteamientos de la arqueología de los cementerios germánicos

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo ¹

En los últimos decenios se ha producido una profunda renovación del estudio del fin del mundo romano y del inicio de la Edad Media por parte de un amplio número de especialistas como resultado de sinergias y convergencias de investigadores procedentes de distintos ámbitos académicos (la historia antigua y medieval, la arqueología y los especialistas en textos, etc.) que se han confrontado a varias escalas.

Existe un consenso a la hora de reconocer que el proyecto financiado por la *European Science Foundation* titulado *The Transformation of the Roman World* (1993-1998) ha tenido un efecto muy notable en la revisión de este período histórico. El título mismo del proyecto indica que, frente a las posiciones más catastrofistas y discontinuistas que veían los siglos "tardoantiguos" como el fin de una civilización, los investigadores que han participado en estos seminarios y en las publicaciones que se han derivado han sostenido una interpretación de la Alta Edad Media desde un paradigma transformador o si se quiere, más "continuista". Como resultado de estas posiciones, otro grupo de investigadores ha construido nuevos paradigmas y adoptado nuevas posiciones que han animado de forma muy notable el estudio de este período histórico, considerado crucial en la búsqueda de un 'origen' europeo común.

Otro factor interesante que hay que señalar es que este debate ha sido estimulado y alimentado en buena medida por el enorme esfuerzo realizado por legiones de arqueólogos que han construido nuevos registros materiales de calidad a partir de los cuales se han podido abordar aspectos básicos como es la historia de los intercambios a través de la circulación de la cerámica, las formas de articulación territorial a partir de la arqueología de los espacios rurales o el estudio de las transformaciones de las élites y la sociedad romana a través de la arqueología urbana, por señalar algunas de las principales temáticas.

El debate, que ha dado lugar a la realización de numerosos coloquios y a la edición de los resultados del mencionado proyecto a lo largo de los años noventa del siglo pasado, ha dado paso en los últimos años a la realización de síntesis y monografías interpretativas de notable calado, entre las que se pueden señalar, entre otros, los trabajos de C. Wickham (2005, 2009), J. Smith (2005), B. Ward-Perkins (2005), M. McCormick (2001), G. P. Brogiolo (2011), G. Halsall (2007) o P. Heather (2005).

Cualquier lector atento de estos volúmenes, casi todos ellos gruesos libros con cientos de páginas, se percatará de que lejos de existir un consenso en torno a la interpretación general del período comprendido entre los siglos IV y VII, hay posiciones muy heterogéneas, incluso contrapuestas, pero sólidamente formadas y argumentadas.

Uno de los nudos principales en torno al cual se articuló el proyecto *The Transformation of the Roman World* fue el estudio del papel de los bárbaros como sujetos históricos y de los reinos bárbaros como articuladores de la política postromana. Analizando el papel de las identidades étnicas en la construcción de las élites postromanas, se revisó a la baja el papel asignado tradicionalmente a estos grupos en la descomposición del mundo romano a través del empleo de paradigmas como el de la etnogénesis (Pöhl 1997; Pöhl, Reimitz 1988; Goetz, Jarnut, Pöhl 2002).

Este temática ha generado numerosas controversias a lo largo de los años, tanto por parte de aquéllos autores que han cuestionado desde distintos puntos de vista la validez y las limitaciones del paradigma de la etnogénesis así como el uso de las fuentes (Gillett 2002), como por parte de aquéllos autores que han cuestionado el papel otorgado por estos nuevos planteamientos historiográficos a los germanos. Es muy elocuente a este propósito la discusión realizada por B. Ward-Perkins acerca de los "Euro-Bárbaros" en su reciente polémico volumen (Ward-Perkins 2005, 172-176).

¹ Trabajo realizado en el marco del proyecto de investigación "La formación de los paisajes medievales en el Norte Peninsular y en Europa" (HUM 2009-07079) financiado por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación y de la actividad del Grupo de Investigación en Patrimonio y Paisajes Culturales (IT315-10), financiado por el Gobierno Vasco.

Indudablemente uno de los campos en los que se ha hecho más visible esta confrontación ha sido a través del estudio arqueológico de los bárbaros. Retomando posiciones tradicionales, aunque en ocasiones tamizadas y reformuladas desde nuevas bases, se ha asistido en los últimos tiempos a la reivindicación del reconocimiento arqueológico de los bárbaros como una de las prioridades a través de las cuáles analizar los procesos de transformación social y política del período tardoantiguo, especialmente en la Europa meridional. De esta forma ha sido posible retomar algunos registros, especialmente de carácter funerario, sobre los que se habían construido entre finales del siglo XIX e inicios del XX los antecedentes de la Arqueología Medieval. Además, se han ido incorporando nuevos elementos materiales, como es el caso de la arquitectura doméstica, y más concretamente, las *grubenhäuser*.

Frente a estas lecturas, que revalorizan la dimensión étnica de la cultura material, otros arqueólogos han cuestionado este tipo de interpretaciones, tanto en términos teóricos como interpretativos. Recurriendo a planteamientos hiper-críticos hacia el uso de la etnicidad en arqueología (Jones 1997), se han construido otras propuestas interpretativas basadas en posiciones postestructuralistas orientadas hacia el análisis contextual de la cultura material y la audiencia a la que se dirige el ritual funerario (Halsall 1995).

Aunque se esté simplificando quizás en exceso, estos planteamientos que se han ido construyendo y consolidando en los últimos años han generado formas de análisis del registro funerario tremendamente divergentes y, en ocasiones, han llegado a polemizar entre sí.

Indudablemente se trata de un debate que tiene hondas raíces de carácter teórico, aunque no siempre se formulen de forma explícita los planteamientos que subyacen tras estas posiciones. Pero tal y como señala G. Halsall en uno de los textos que se incluyen en este dossier; 'an object does not have an ethnicity'.

De forma extremadamente sintética, la primera línea interpretativa que sostiene la posibilidad de identificar en términos étnicos el registro material o bien diferenciar "facies culturales" (aunque carezcan de apellidos identitarios explícitos) hunde sus raíces en los planteamientos normativistas y difusionistas que se generaron a finales del siglo XIX en el marco del historicismo cultural. Pero entonces, ¿cómo es posible que a inicios del siglo XXI se retome explícita o implícitamente planteamientos de esta naturaleza?

Dos son, en mi opinión, los elementos que pueden explicar esta tendencia. En primer lugar, una marcada y profunda reacción frente a las posiciones más continuistas derivadas del proyecto *The Transformation of the Roman World* antes mencionado. Los bárbaros supusieron una fractura, comportan discontinuidad y permiten explicar el 'fin de la civilización', por utilizar una expresión que aparece en la obra de autores como A. Carandini o el ya recordado Ward-Perkins. En un trabajo reciente de título provocador Marco Valenti subrayaba precisamente cómo se había sentido liberado leyendo el libro de Ward-Perkins reafirmando su posición discontinuista sin sentirse por ello considerado conservador o retrógrado (Valenti 2009, 29). Por lo tanto, para un grupo de autores, la identificación como sujetos históricos de los bárbaros y su identificación material constituye un pilar sobre el que re-construir un paradigma interpretativo.

Una segunda argumentación de mayor calado, que ha sido planteada entre otros por autores como G. P. Brogiolo, parte del rechazo al episodio posprocesual y posmoderno con todas sus implicaciones, reclamando un nuevo protagonismo para un procesualismo que muchos pensaban adormecido y superado especialmente en el ámbito europeo, caracterizado precisamente por la ausencia de una reflexión teórica explícita en los años en los que este paradigma emergía con más fuerza. Una de las consecuencias más inmediatas de este planteamiento teórico ha sido el cuestionamiento de la teoría de la etnogénesis y la apuesta por planteamientos más integradores de carácter procesualista en el seno de lo que este autor ha denominado "arqueología de la complejidad" (Brogiolo 2007; Brogiolo, Chavarria Arnau 2010 45-48).

Resulta paradójico que para cuestionar las posiciones posprocesuales se termine apostando por planteamientos próximos al historicismo cultural teniendo en cuenta que precisamente, la *New Archaeology* surgió con el fin de contrastar estos planteamientos. Por otro lado el debate teórico más reciente ha apostado, una vez que ha dado por superado el posprocesualismo (Johnson 2010, 221-222), por posiciones más integradoras, como los planteamientos del *Processual-plus* (Hegmon 2003) o del denominado *New Historical Processualism* (Pauketat 2001).

Un segundo grupo, que cuestiona los planteamientos historicistas del grupo anterior, articula sus planteamientos también desde una doble perspectiva teórica.

En primer lugar la denominada teoría de la etnogénesis (Gillett 2006), que a pesar de las suspicacias que ha planteado, ha sido abrazada por autores tan significativos como C. Wickham (2005, 83, 311, 786-787). Este planteamiento, propuesto inicialmente por R. Wenskus, cuestiona la noción biológica y étnica de los "pueblos" para argumentar que son construcciones de carácter cultural basadas en tradiciones e instituciones comunes. Aunque aspectos básicos de estos planteamientos han sido cuestionados por sus continuadores, entre los que destacan Wolfram y la denominada 'Escuela de Viena', los defensores de estos planteamientos sostienen que las *gentes* no eran elementos estáticos, sino que se modificaban y se reconstruían permanentemente durante la alta edad media, y que los reinos bárbaricos se definían

en términos políticos a través de la retórica de las identidades étnicas basadas en tradiciones comunes (Goetz 2002). Teniendo en cuenta estos planteamientos, muchos arqueólogos han cuestionado las lecturas étnicas del registro material a favor de análisis que privilegian los análisis sociales y contextuales.

En su posición más extrema los autores han negado completamente la existencia de identidades étnicas en arqueología (Brather 2002, 170-175), puesto que en cuanto constructo social, los procesos de agregación y las estrategias de distinción que se adoptan y se reelaboran permanentemente gestando identidades sociales, permiten analizar procesos de profundo calado (Pöhl 1998).

En segundo lugar, estos planteamientos encuentran su ubicación en el marco teórico del posmodernismo y del posprocesualismo que pone el acento en el carácter contextual y significativo de la cultura material, negando por tanto los presupuestos básicos del historicismo cultural. De esta forma se presta atención al significado que adquiere el ritual funerario que supone la destrucción pública de riqueza a través del cual se legitima la continuidad del estatus de los descendientes del difunto en una situación de inestabilidad y competitividad social muy acentuada (Halsall 1995; La Rocca 1998, 79-80; Lucy 2002).

Muchos de los planteamientos formulados por estos autores, que resultan extremadamente sugestivos a la hora de comprender el contexto significativo del registro arqueológico, pecan sustancialmente del hecho de que sus conclusiones son difícilmente verificables y precisan de soportes textuales –escasos y problemáticos– para hallar los significados de estos significantes (Gillett 2002).

Pero más allá de estas limitaciones, la confrontación entre ambas posiciones, que como se ha recordado se han simplificado quizás en exceso, está permitiendo revisar desde nuevas ópticas viejos registros arqueológicos y repensar en términos teóricos muchas de las inferencias que realizamos en torno a las sociedades altomedievales.

Por este motivo resulta bastante frustrante darse cuenta que la mayor parte de estos argumentos no hayan sido planteados explícitamente en la Península Ibérica. Nociones como la de la etnogénesis apenas han sido utilizadas por los especialistas salvo excepciones muy puntuales (p.e. García Moreno y recientemente por López Quiroga y Ripoll), aunque en mi opinión no se han analizado todas sus consecuencias a la hora de estudiar la sociedad hispana de este período. De hecho, en algunas publicaciones recientes se siguen manejando planteamientos profundamente tradicionales anclados en la interpretación étnica del registro funerario (p.e. Barroso *et alii* 2008; Morín, Barroso 2008; López Quiroga 2010).

No cabe ninguna duda que la arqueología funeraria de los siglos V-VIII en la Península Ibérica requiere de una urgente revisión desde hace muchos decenios. Baste decir que sigue utilizándose como mapa de distribución de las "necrópolis visigodas" el realizado por P. Palol en los años sesenta, porque no hay otro. Además, contamos con nuevos registros, como son los hallazgos realizados en el marco de la arqueología preventiva, y nuevos instrumentos de análisis, entre los que se puede mencionar el uso de los isótopos estables. Pero quizás la tarea más importante es la de renovar nuestro aparato teórico y conceptual con el fin de dotar de significado y profundidad histórica este tipo de evidencias materiales. El presente dossier pretende contribuir al desarrollo del debate necesario para que se produzca esta renovación.

Como se ha señalado, el dossier está compuesto por tres artículos. En el primero de ellos, fruto de un seminario celebrado en Vitoria-Gasteiz, Guy Halsall aborda el problema de la interpretación de los cementerios medievales desde el paradigma de la etnicidad. Para ello toma como punto de partida dos recientes trabajos realizados por Michel Kazanski y Patric Périn en el que sostienen la posibilidad de realizar identificaciones étnicas en el ámbito merovingio a partir del registro material. El autor británico, que desde hace dos decenios sostiene una lectura contextual del registro material a partir del estudio de las evidencias del noroeste de la Galia, cuestiona las bases de la interpretación propuesta por los dos autores franceses siguiendo la lógica y la argumentación empleada por éstos. A partir de esta crítica interna, el autor concluye señalando que la relación entre cultura material e identidad étnica es muy problemática, en buena medida porque la identidad es poliédrica. Halsall la define como 'a state of mind' y como una realidad 'existing in several layers which can be adopted or highlighted, abandoned, played down or concealed'.

En el segundo de los trabajos incluidos, C. Tejerizo, doctorando en el Grupo de investigación en Patrimonio y Paisajes Culturales de la Universidad del País Vasco, realiza un triple ejercicio: en primer lugar hace una revisión crítica en términos historiográficos de los trabajos que se han realizado en torno a las "necrópolis visigodas"; en segundo lugar hace una revisión de la evidencia arqueológica del sector oriental de la meseta septentrional, a través del análisis de 43 yacimientos de este período; en tercer lugar sugiere nuevos escenarios interpretativos abriendo nuevos caminos que desarrollará en su tesis doctoral.

En el último de los artículos, Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado, doctor en Arqueología por la Universidad del País Vasco, expone los resultados de algunos de sus trabajos realizados desde el ámbito de la arqueología profesional en la región de Madrid. Este autor parte de la definición de una profunda fractura en la organización del territorio en el curso del siglo V, cuyo efecto más evidente ha sido la conformación de sistemas de aldeas y granjas rurales que vienen

a sustituir las formas centralizadas de producción y organización política que pivotaban sobre las *villae*. Uno de los descubrimientos más importantes realizados por la arqueología de las aldeas tal y como se ha desarrollado en Madrid ha sido el de percatarse que al menos una parte relevante de las “necrópolis visigodas” no son sino cementerios aldeanos y que el estudio integral de los espacios habitados y funerarios proporciona nuevas claves para entender este tipo de yacimientos. Los ejemplos aquí propuestos de Gózquez y de El Pelicano son muy interesantes para repensar estas evidencias materiales.

Como es evidente estos trabajos no pretenden agotar, ni mucho menos, los problemas interpretativos que nos plantea en la actualidad la arqueología funeraria de los siglos VI y VII en la Península Ibérica, y hay nuevos yacimientos y otros autores que están realizando propuestas de gran interés. Pero pensamos que puede ser un instrumento para animar un debate que, como señalábamos al principio, está larvado.

Tal y como hemos señalado, la interpretación del papel de las *gens* en el contexto de la transición del mundo antiguo al medieval y de la arqueología bárbara ha generado en los últimos años posiciones muy radicalizadas, que han llevado a situaciones potencialmente muy conflictivas.

Este debate, en mi opinión, tendrá sentido en tanto en cuanto sea realmente productivo y nos permita avanzar de forma constructiva en el conocimiento del período que antes llamábamos tardoantigüedad, evidenciando la larga continuidad de tendencias heredadas del mundo romano, pero que muchos denominamos ya Alta Edad Media aunque nos posicionemos en planteamientos más próximos al posprocesualismo. Pero en más de una ocasión este debate ha adquirido en Europa una virulencia innecesaria y un enrocamiento de las posiciones de partida.

En mi opinión son muchas más las cosas que acercan a los defensores de las dos posiciones aquí esquematizadas que las que les alejan. Los inhumados con objetos de adorno personal “visigodos” en algunos yacimientos de la Meseta, ¿son campesinos que utilizan estrategias de distinción que connotamos como “visigodos” para diferenciarse en el seno de la comunidad aldeana, o son campesinos “visigodos” que viven dentro de una comunidad aldeana?

Como hemos señalado recientemente, es mucho más relevante determinar quiénes son en términos sociales que establecer qué son en términos “étnicos” a la hora de comprender las dinámicas históricas más complejas (Quirós Castillo, Vigil-Escalera 2011). Por otro lado, si la etnicidad no tiene este papel ordenador en términos conceptuales, tampoco se puede caer en el nihilismo denunciado recientemente por F. Curta (Curta 2007). La existencia de marcadores y signos fueron importantes en el pasado y jugaron un papel activo en las dinámicas sociales. Y aunque identificar los significados no siempre es sencillo, no podemos por ello obviar los significantes.

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¿Es relevante la etnicidad de nuestros sujetos históricos? ¹

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado

“Cuando un hombre cambia de vestidos, inmediatamente cambia su rango”
(Salviano de Marsella, *De Gubernatione Dei*, 4, 7)

A mi modo de ver, es posible que la escalada en la agresividad verbal mostrada por los participantes en el debate en curso sobre el reconocimiento de la etnicidad en el registro arqueológico haya llegado demasiado lejos. Máxime teniendo en cuenta que, sin duda, y como expresa brillantemente el profesor Quirós en la introducción a estas páginas, son más las cosas que nos unen que las que nos separan. Los más recalcitrantes extremistas en esta cuestión permanecen casi siempre agazapados. Creemos necesario, pues, intervenir: Solicitar una pausa para la reflexión y proceder con mesura, aunque sin dejar de ser contundentes en lo que juzgamos realmente sustancial.

Entre alguna que otra boutade y más de una provocación podemos pasar de escenificar una quasi parodia del caso del conflicto entre las aldeas fronterizas catalano-cerdañesas expuesto hace pocos años por Sahlins (2005) a lograr reeditar una variante menor de la polémica suscitada entre éste y Obeyesekere ². No se trata aquí de evaluar quien ni qué enfoque es más políticamente correcto ni quien o qué planteamientos pueden ser social o científicamente más o menos responsables ³.

Lo que en ciertos casos pudo arrancar como un conflicto larvado en un específico ámbito académico nacional, en otros como una urgencia de responsabilidad social ante el cariz de los acontecimientos sociopolíticos, no debería haber llegado nunca tan lejos como para contaminar el debate científico (y por ello también social, en clave actualista) en torno al significado de la etnicidad en el ámbito arqueológico de la Alta Edad Media europea. Y menos aún cuando el formidable desarrollo reciente de esta rama de conocimiento está brindando la posibilidad de someter a un análisis crítico enriquecedor y sugestivo muchas cuestiones relegadas tradicionalmente por la investigación y otras tantas nuevas. La ‘internacionalización’ del curso del debate, en este sentido, debería soltar el lastre de la pretendida alegación a las supuestas posiciones historiográficas, conceptuales o teóricas de los litigantes en función de su origen o escuela. El proceso de adscripción faccional de los contendientes bien a una corriente u horizonte teórico postprocesual, bien a otra de corte positivista, formaría parte de esa clase de estrategias de descalificación automática, dejando al margen la arquitectura argumental ofrecida por individuos (colegas y compañeros) con nombres y apellidos.

Nuestro relativo distanciamiento respecto al debate en cuestión (y especialmente en cuanto respecta a las formas o la manera en que se ha podido llegar a plantear) no debería pues entenderse como resultado del desinterés, sino al contrario, como producto de una reflexión que conduce a entender la necesidad de que su planteamiento se establezca en unos términos productivos, alejados de todo maniqueísmo, en el que los matices recuperen su trascendencia y de que la forma en que se desarrolle el análisis del documento arqueológico y la crítica del mismo no sea asumida apriorísticamente como una alternativa ética o política sin escapatoria. No creemos, por tanto, que para un contexto sociotemporal como el de la fragmentación del sistema político imperial en el siglo V d.C. pueda establecerse una sencilla dicotomía entre formas culturales romanas y bárbaras orillando todo lo que de diverso y antagónico encierra cada una de ellas en su seno. En un reciente trabajo de Javier Arce se subrayaban las dificultades que para la mentalidad clásica bajoimperial, la de un residente en la ciudad, podía entrañar la discriminación entre el aspecto o los modales de un bárbaro y los de un rústico campesino romano (ARCE 2007). Siendo conscientes de esta clase de fenómenos, resulta cuando menos extraño (sólo explicable en función de ese deslizamiento hacia posiciones extremas de los participantes en el debate) que pueda describirse como ‘algo traído de fuera’ (BROGIOLO, CHAVARRÍA 2010: 47) todo lo referente a los nuevos modos de aprovechamiento agrario, la selección del emplazamiento de los asentamientos, e incluso el desarrollo del sistema integrado constituido por las aldeas, sus específicos rasgos arquitectónicos o su organización interna. Y son precisamente estos aspectos los que ocuparán nuestra atención aquí.

¹ Trabajo realizado en el marco del proyecto de investigación “La formación de los paisajes medievales en el Norte Peninsular y en Europa” (HUM 2009-07079) financiado por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación y de la actividad del Grupo de Investigación en Patrimonio y Paisajes Culturales (IT315-10), financiado por el Gobierno Vasco.

² Sahlins 1988, Obeyesekere 1992, Sahlins 1995. El debate, que generó abundante literatura, fue descrito por Ashley (2007: 136) como “ill-tempered exchange.” Andrade (2004) ofreció a este respecto algunos claros y desapasionados comentarios útiles.

³ Estas páginas han terminado de redactarse a escasa distancia de los debates suscitados en los foros del IMC de Leeds 2011 y de los atentados de Oslo.

Volvemos a retomar, pues, el caso de algunos de los registros materiales de los territorios del interior de Hispania durante el convulso siglo V y parte del VI d.C. Es posible que estos documentos nos puedan ayudar a comprender un poco mejor cual ha podido ser la trascendencia en términos sociales, económicos y políticos del carácter de los objetos amortizados en las sepulturas.

Todo parece indicar que la parte mayoritaria de la población rural, los trabajadores de las grandes haciendas romanas de época bajoimperial, dejaron pocos o ningún testimonio acerca de sus creencias o posición escatológica. La desproporción existente entre el conocimiento arqueológico del universo funerario urbano de época bajoimperial y el propio del ámbito rural puede llevar a pensar que, o bien la gente del campo era transportada a las necrópolis periurbanas para ser objeto allí del ritual funerario, o bien que ese ritual se desarrollaba en las proximidades de los asentamientos sin dejar huellas arqueológicas reconocibles. Una tercera alternativa sería la de asumir que, excluidos del cuerpo social de la comunidad, los despojos de los fallecidos no llegaron a recibir un tratamiento funerario específico.

Ese panorama se trastoca significativamente durante el primer cuarto de la quinta centuria, momento en el que la inestabilidad sociopolítica de los territorios sometidos a examen alcanza una cota indiscutible. Este crisis es producto, en primer lugar, del enfrentamiento militar entre los parientes hispanos del emperador legítimo (Honorio) y las legiones del aspirante a la púrpura Constantino III, y en un segundo momento, del ingreso en la península Ibérica de suevos, vándalos y alanos. El episodio del reclutamiento de un ejército de rústicos por los miembros de una de las más relevantes familias hispanas de grandes propietarios y su posterior derrota no creo que haya sido aún suficientemente valorado en cuanto al impacto que pudo dejar en una parte significativa del cuerpo social peninsular. La presencia de contingentes militares bárbaros durante un periodo prolongado de tiempo antes de que se 'normalizara' su relación con la estructura política nativa surgida tras el desmembramiento de la estructura administrativa imperial y las intervenciones de los ejércitos visigodos en suelo hispano durante casi un siglo por encargo del lejano gobierno imperial o por iniciativa propia sin duda contribuyeron a forjar un paisaje nuevo en todos los aspectos imaginables.

A partir de inicios de la quinta centuria comienzan a ser frecuentes los testimonios de construcciones funerarias levantadas a muy escasa distancia de las instalaciones de representación de las grandes *villae* bajoimperiales. En la región de Madrid destaca el descubrimiento durante estos últimos años de tres yacimientos en los que se constata tal fenómeno (Arroyomolinos (VIGIL-ESCALERA 2009A), Torrejón de Velasco ⁴, Villaviciosa de Odón (VEGA 2005)). Por motivos que desconocemos, algunas figuras destacadas de la comunidad, personajes de alto rango que tal vez puedan ser identificados como los *possessores* de esas haciendas, invierten fuertes sumas en estos mausoleos y deciden recibir sepultura allí, lejos de la ciudad ⁵. Algunos lo harán en costosos sarcófagos de plomo, expresando públicamente las creencias religiosas cristianas de los fallecidos (Pelicano). Otros se harán enterrar con todos los elementos característicos de su rango administrativo o militar y social (Torrejón de Velasco): armas (espada larga, cuchillo, lanza), hebillas de cinturón de oro, vajilla de bronce, plata, cerámica y vidrio.

Casi inmediatamente a continuación ⁶ se hace visible una nueva categoría de manifestación funeraria, esta vez protagonizada por elementos sociales de mucho menor rango. Son las necrópolis postimperiales antes denominadas 'necrópolis del Duero' (FUENTES 1989), en las que reciben sepultura una variada gama de individuos: desde los que tienen derecho a portar armas a los que simplemente se entierran con sus escasos adornos personales. La utilización de la vajilla cerámica y de vidrio en esta clase de manifestaciones funerarias (sin duda tras ser empleadas en el banquete) es una de sus características más comunes. Las producciones de cronología postimperial de las variedades regionales de la sigillata tardía (TSHT) parecen jugar en este periodo y en estas necrópolis un destacado papel, como otras producciones artesanales de indudable complejidad (metalistería, vidrio ⁷).

Durante medio siglo aproximadamente (410/420 hasta 460/470 dC), esta clase de cementerios constituirán la norma en nuestros registros arqueológicos. Apenas se conocen otras manifestaciones funerarias coetáneas en los territorios del interior peninsular. Estas necrópolis se asocian tanto a ámbitos urbanos de primera categoría (como podría ser el caso de Duratón (MOLINERO 1948) como a pequeñas ciudades (Simancas (RIVERA 1940)), a fortalezas o asentamientos en altura de nueva planta (Saldaña (ABÁSULO ET AL. 1984), Pontón de la Oliva (VIGIL-ESCALERA E.P2)), a grandes y medianas villae (La Olmeda (ABÁSULO ET AL. 1997), Pelicano (VIGIL-ESCALERA 2009A)) o a pequeños establecimientos rurales (El Soto). Se conocen, por tanto, necrópolis formadas por centenares de sepulturas y otras que apenas cuentan con media docena de inhumaciones. Hasta qué punto encontramos en estas necrópolis un reflejo

4 Hallazgo aún inédito. Agradecemos a Raúl Flores la posibilidad de comprobar *in situ* las características y contexto del hallazgo.

5 En el ámbito arqueológico madrileño (al menos) son las últimas inversiones de la clase aristocrática bajoimperial en el medio rural.

6 Lo que parece abogar por el carácter desencadenante de la acción anterior.

7 Nada se puede decir sobre el material del cual no se conservan trazas arqueológicas reconocibles, como el tejido, que sin duda alcanza en estos contextos sociales una importancia trascendental (Brumfiel 1996; Arce 2007).

de la composición de las comunidades a las que se asociaron es difícil de evaluar. Los cementerios con secuencias de uso relativamente cortas, restringidas a los dos primeros tercios del siglo V dC, presentan esta clase de depósitos en la inmensa mayoría de las sepulturas (entre el 66 y el 95%). Esos porcentajes caen significativamente en yacimientos en los que se sospecha una persistencia temporal más allá del lapso temporal mencionado.

Entre finales del siglo V dC y cubriendo al menos todo el VI, la misma geografía, la mayor parte del mismo ámbito territorial de las necrópolis postimperiales conocerá la implantación de las denominadas 'necrópolis visigodas'. Sin embargo, lo que podría ser confundido en su observación a una escala peninsular desde un paracaídas se desdibuja notablemente si logramos acercarnos al terreno (buscando trufas, como diría Hodges (1989)). El grado de coincidencia en el emplazamiento de unas y otras es realmente mínimo. Es más, en una brumadora mayoría de casos, la antigua necrópolis de tipo postimperial es abandonada a favor de un nuevo emplazamiento donde aparecen depósitos fúnebres de tipología visigoda. Los casos de coexistencia de ambas versiones del ritual funerario (en realidad hablamos de la clase de materiales amortizados con el difunto) son escasos, y tal vez merezca la pena entrar en esa clase de detalles.

La discontinuidad arqueológica documentada en el último tercio del siglo V dC no se restringe al campo de las necrópolis. Una serie de asentamientos en altura o fortificados (o al menos una parte importante de los que conocemos, como Navasangil, El Castellón o Muelas del Pan) presenta contextos de destrucción datados en ese mismo periodo. En algunos casos se recuperará la ocupación del sitio (Navasangil), pero en otros parece quedar definitivamente trunca (Castillón). No se identifica impacto alguno en otros asentamientos de carácter jerárquico (Pontón de la Oliva, posiblemente Bernardos (GONZALO 2006)). Parece, en todo caso, que estos son los escenarios en los que acabará decidiéndose el dominio político del interior de Hispania, siendo los poderes locales nativos y las fuerzas militares visigodas sus más probables actores protagonistas.

DOS CASOS DE ESTUDIO

La documentación ofrecida por algunos yacimientos recientemente excavados en extensión proporciona pistas que merece la pena seguir si tratamos de comparar críticamente algunas de las interpretaciones asumidas de forma convencional para estas necrópolis y, en general, para este periodo postimperial. Gózquez y El Pelicano, a 28 kilómetros de distancia en línea recta, son dos aldeas altomedievales del Sur de Madrid cuya historia corre en paralelo entre los siglos VI y VIII dC. Toda la comarca forma parte del antiguo distrito rural localizado al Norte de la ciudad de Toledo, convertida en capital del reino visigodo por su posición central en el ámbito peninsular y su equidistancia entre Mérida y Zaragoza. Los trabajos arqueológicos desarrollados en los sitios citados han permitido revelar la relación existente entre el asentamiento y su espacio funerario respectivo, lo que abre la posibilidad de aclarar muchos interrogantes suscitados por registros cuyo principal inconveniente ha radicado precisamente en su parcialidad. Resulta extremadamente importante identificar las diferencias entre ambos, pero también lo que tienen en común, porque de ello se deriva el peso específico que el posible componente etno-cultural haya de recibir en nuestras interpretaciones sobre el desarrollo histórico de este territorio durante el periodo visigodo.

La aldea de Gózquez se fundó de nueva planta, sin conexión reconocida a ningún asentamiento previo, probablemente durante el segundo cuarto de la sexta centuria. El propio topónimo, según algunos autores, podría vincularse y derivar de una raíz latina *Gothicus*, -i, en cuyo caso estaría aludiendo a una situación demográfica relativamente ajena dentro de un contexto 'nativo'. Sin embargo, las necrópolis con materiales 'visigodos' son bastante frecuentes en toda la comarca (la de Tinto Juan de la Cruz, por ejemplo (OÑATE ET AL. 2007), dista sólo 9 km de la de Gózquez⁸).

Uno de los rasgos más distintivos del asentamiento es su rígida planificación urbanística, establecida desde su inicio, y su llamativa estabilidad hasta que éste viene abandonado. La aldea está formada por entre seis y diez unidades domésticas repartidas en dos barrios en medio de los cuales se emplaza la necrópolis. Cada unidad doméstica disfruta de una parcela rectangular 'urbanizable' de unos 2650 m² de superficie y queda separada de sus inmediatas vecinas por caminos, vallas o parcelas vacías dedicadas al cultivo de la misma forma y tamaño, donde nunca se levantaron edificaciones o estructuras estables (Vigil-Escalera 2010). Cada parcela ofrece los restos de al menos un edificio principal con núcleos de estructuras satélite formadas por cabañas de suelo rehundido, silos, pozos y otros espacios menores de dudosa atribución funcional.

El cementerio, con más de 350 tumbas, se dispone en un área que sugiere la existencia de un recinto cuadrangular. El grado de reutilización de las sepulturas es significativo, aunque moderado dentro de ciertos márgenes (1,5 individuos por sepultura de media). Alguna tumba dispone de una o dos cavidades laterales a modo de nicho donde queda alo-

8 Algunas de las necrópolis con materiales de tipo godo en esta misma comarca serían (entre otras) las de Cubas-Griñón, Acedinos (Getafe), Carabanchel (Madrid), Cabeza Gorda (Carabaña) o Cacería de las Ranas (Aranjuez).

jado el (o los) difunto(s). Dentro se organizan las sepulturas en calles o alineaciones según un eje principal Norte-Sur. Los materiales más antiguos reconocidos son fíbulas de arco de técnica trilaminar en hierro y bronce (CONTRERAS 2006; CONTRERAS, FERNÁNDEZ UGALDE 2007). Los más modernos, algunas hebillas de cinturón con placa calada en bronce que suelen datarse en la primera mitad del siglo VII d.C. Sin embargo, algunos contextos del asentamiento proporcionan inequívocamente materiales asignables a finales del siglo VII y la primera mitad del VIII d.C. (hebillas de cinturón con placa de perfil liriiforme y cerámicas asignadas a ese mismo periodo). Las dataciones radiocarbónicas de muestras de contextos fechables a priori en los extremos de la secuencia de ocupación confirman (o al menos no contradicen) la cronología propuesta. Dado el amplio margen cronológico durante el cual el cementerio estuvo en activo, el porcentaje global de sepulturas con depósito (35%) podría corresponder a una tasa mucho más elevada durante su primer siglo (525/550-650 d.C.), ya que sabemos que durante casi todo el siglo siguiente (650-750 d.C.), las tumbas no contuvieron depósitos reconocibles.

La aldea de El Pelicano, por su parte, se origina a partir de un antiguo asentamiento romano sin discontinuidades apreciables de signo topográfico. Ya durante la primera mitad del siglo V d.C. se observan importantes mutaciones. A inicios de ese siglo, un personaje de cierto relieve (tal vez el propietario de la hacienda) decide enterrarse en un sarcófago de plomo bajo una compleja cámara sepulcral doble dentro de un mausoleo, a unos 50 metros al Este de los edificios de la villa. Poco después recibe alojamiento a su lado otro sarcófago, esta vez para un individuo infantil, que incluye expresas manifestaciones de la fe cristiana: un colgante de oro con forma de crismón y sendas cruces patadas en los lados cortos de la caja de plomo.

Con un pórtico de tres columnas cuya fachada daba al camino de acceso a las instalaciones de la antigua villa y las paredes decoradas con pintura policroma, esta construcción de hormigón romano conforma un verdadero hito durante el periodo inmediatamente anterior al abandono de las instalaciones por la elite propietaria. A lo largo de los siguientes siglos y hasta el abandono de la aldea, el cementerio se desarrolla en torno a ese elemento destacado. Mientras tanto, a partir del segundo cuarto del siglo V d.C., las salas de la villa son utilizadas como residencia por las familias de rústicos, lo que comporta la instalación de hogares y la acumulación de residuos domésticos en su interior⁹. Cerca de los muros bajoimperiales se construyen cabañas de suelo rehundido. Esta modesta comunidad se entierra cerca del mausoleo, pero respetando una cierta distancia al mismo, en sepulturas con orientación variable. Esas tumbas se caracterizan por la amortización de cerámica fina de mesa (TSHT y pintada), cerámica común, lucernas y vasos de vidrio, junto con adornos y elementos personales (calzado de suela claveteada). El conjunto de rasgos presente es el propio de las antes denominadas 'necrópolis del Duero', tal vez mejor descritas como postimperiales (VIGIL-ESCALERA E.P.). El depósito de objetos en las sepulturas se rarifica hacia el último tercio de la quinta centuria, cuando sólo de forma esporádica encontramos hebillas ovaladas de aguja simple o con aguja de base escutiforme, dentro de patrones tradicionales tardorromanos.

A partir de entonces, además, el asentamiento previamente desordenado se desplaza a una zona inmediatamente al Este del cementerio, donde conforma un núcleo compacto de pequeñas casas con zócalos de piedra en torno a patios o corrales, con cabañas de suelo rehundido, silos y pozos. Desde el segundo tercio del siglo VI, sin embargo, la aldea comienza a adoptar un formato otra vez desagregado, con las unidades domésticas separadas entre sí por parcelas vacías, destinadas al cultivo. Con este formato, la aldea llega a ocupar un kilómetro y medio de extensión a lo largo de la orilla norte del arroyo que forma su eje. El complejo se abandona a mediados del siglo VIII d.C. Durante este último periodo del asentamiento las sepulturas no proporcionan depósitos reconocibles.

Sin embargo, como hemos visto antes en Gózquez, diversos materiales metálicos han podido recuperarse en contextos de amortización de estructuras residenciales o auxiliares. Estos incluyen dos hebillas de placa liriiforme, una en bronce y otra en hierro dulce con decoración damasquinada en plata y plaquitas de bronce, y un remate de cinturón con decoración de nudos sin fin y líneas punteadas. Los contextos arqueológicos del poblado de El Pelicano presentan algunos de los elementos o rasgos que a menudo se aducen como prueba del carácter alóctono de una determinada población: cabañas de suelo rehundido de planta rectangular (del tipo conocido como *grübenhaus*) o cerámicas bruñidas o espatuladas grises con o sin decoración estampada¹⁰. Y sin embargo, el comportamiento funerario de la comunidad es sustancialmente diverso del de Gózquez. A lo largo de todo el periodo durante el cual las tumbas de Gózquez proporcionan materiales de connotaciones 'godas', en El Pelicano los depósitos consisten en hebillas de cinturón, pendientes y collares de tradición romana.

A resultados de lo que hasta ahora conocemos sobre la estructura social de ambas comunidades en lo que concierne a la gestión de la producción económica, sus cultivos y ganado, sobre el contexto doméstico en que se encuadra el almacenamiento del cereal, en el grado de integración de las dos aldeas en redes de intercambio a una escala regional,

⁹ Es probable que, para entonces, ya hubiera caído en desuso la gestión de los residuos a la romana que implica su retirada a vertederos estables.

¹⁰ El carácter alóctono de ciertas especies cerámicas es una hipótesis planteada recientemente por algún autor español (Ariño, Dahi 2008). Esta clase de identificaciones resultan bastante frecuentes en la historiografía italiana.

etcétera, nada invita a pensar que una comunidad aldeana como la de Gózquez, con materiales de estilo godo en su necrópolis, pueda llegar a distinguirse de otra, como la de El Pelicano, de carácter exclusivamente romano provincial. Por el momento resulta imposible discernir si la específica organización especial de cada una de las aldeas es producto del diverso origen de sus habitantes o si deriva en exclusiva de sus específicas formas de ordenamiento social.

CONCLUSIONES

Llegamos así al predecible corolario. ¿Es realmente importante la cuestión de la identidad étnica a la hora de analizar la historia de estos primeros siglos altomedievales? Y sobre todo, ¿es trascendente rastrear el impacto de la llegada de los rasgos culturales bárbaros en la emergencia del fenómeno de la aldeanización del territorio? En el lapso de medio siglo, tal vez menos, la población trabajadora de las *villae* (ahora campesinos) acabará organizada en el seno de un verdadero sistema aldeano, y este es un cambio estructural realmente consistente, una completa mutación en lo que concierne a la gestión por parte de las unidades domésticas de la producción agraria, a los sistemas de almacenamiento de las reservas estratégicas de las familias que integran estas comunidades y a su progresiva territorialización, a la producción de su cotidianeidad y la organización de sus cementerios.

Parece sencillamente descartable la posibilidad de aducir dos fenómenos de despoblación masiva para explicar el resultado de dos hábitos funerarios como son el postimperial y el visigodo. Menos aún entenderlos como el resultado de la llegada y establecimiento de poblaciones de inmigrantes en número significativo. Por mucho que procuremos establecer una demarcación territorial precisa para la distribución y el emplazamiento de las manifestaciones funerarias características antes citadas, resulta difícil de asumir que las regiones así delimitadas lleguen en algún momento a expresar o a hablarnos del asentamiento de pueblos específicos. Nuestras categorías arqueológicas no serían sino el reflejo de unos determinados ámbitos de influencia (social, política-militar, económica), directa o indirecta, de unas élites en cuya autorreproducción social jugaron un papel destacable esa clase de elementos distintivos de identificación.

Esta interpretación no excluye el asentamiento de comunidades de inmigrantes en determinados territorios, ocupando tierras o haciendas abandonadas incluso en una escala significativa, pero relativiza la trascendencia de unas formas específicas del ritual funerario y del material allí amortizado como expresión identitaria en clave étnica, poniendo el acento en el aspecto político (patronazgo) en que se desenvuelve la circulación vertical de estos objetos. La sustitución de una gama homogénea de indicadores materiales de signo tardorromano provincial en las necrópolis por otra diversa en la que es visible una reivindicación del carácter exótico de esos indicadores no debería entenderse más que como el resultado del reemplazo de las coordenadas culturales distintivas de un grupo jerárquicamente preeminente por las de otro, con toda la permeabilidad gatopardiana que ello suele implicar. La manifestación pública de esa vinculación con el poder de una parte de los efectivos de las comunidades entendemos que puede relacionarse también con el mantenimiento del orden social dentro de esas poblaciones, de las sólo conocemos su parte visible, pero en las que los excluidos, herramientas con lengua, también cuentan.

Los registros arqueológicos altomedievales recientemente logrados en las provincias interiores de Hispania avalan una extraordinaria disrupción en las formas del paisaje heredado del Imperio romano, tanto en lo social, en lo económico, en lo político y en lo ideológico. Al menos desde nuestra perspectiva, la importancia de identificar por medios arqueológicos las diferentes identidades que se construyen y representan durante este periodo sólo sería importante si de ellas se derivara algún impacto sobre la emergencia de esas nuevas formas de sociabilidad aldeana, el núcleo duro de la investigación para el futuro inmediato.

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