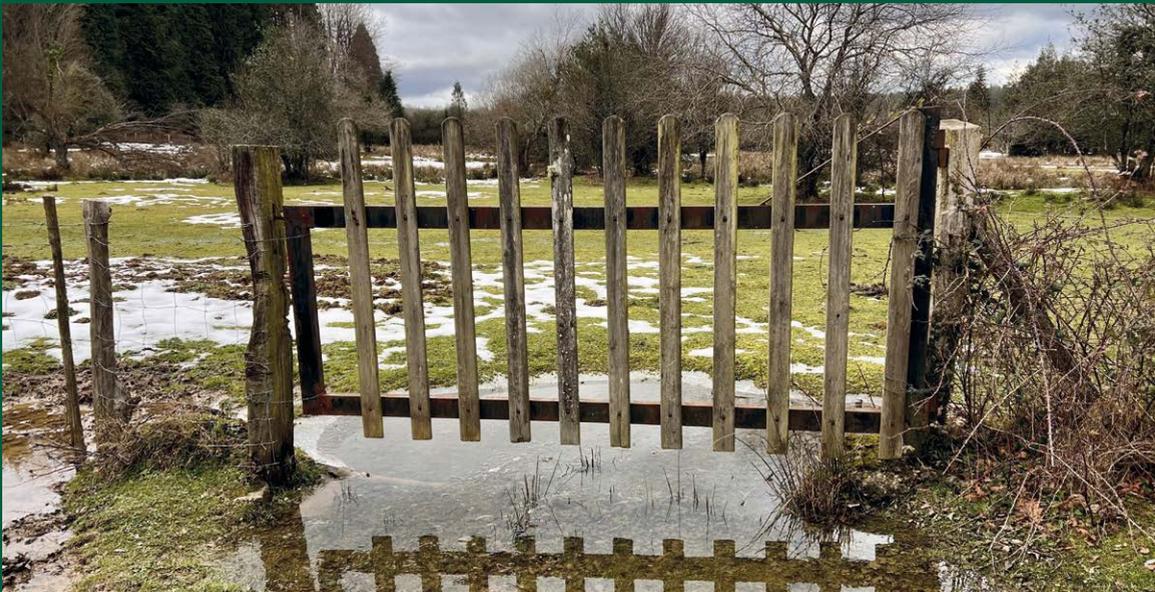




# LOCAL SOCIETIES AND PEASANTRY AGENCIES IN MEDIEVAL IBERIA

*edited by*

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo



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IBERIAN LOCAL SOCIETIES  
IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN CONTEXT

*Settings, practices and territorialities*  
*(5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries)*

2

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ed. by Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo

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# **Local Societies and Relational Agency in Medieval Iberia.**

## **Two Avenues for the Study of Subaltern Groups**

by Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo

This book was written in the framework of two research projects funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation focusing on the agency of peasantry and local societies in medieval southern Europe. This introductory paper discusses the goals, approaches, conceptual framework, and some of the major statements presented in each chapter. For this reason, it introduces the notions of relational agencies and subaltern collective action, as well as micropolitics and the arenas of struggle in which social life occurred. It is argued that these approaches provide a nuanced and multiscale comprehension of preindustrial rural societies, taking into account case studies from the medieval period. Finally, some general trends and proposals for future research are suggested.

Middle Ages, Al-Andalus, Central Europe, localities, peasantry, elites, social practices.

### **1. Introduction**

This book was produced within the framework of two research projects funded by the National Research Plan of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation devoted to studying the agency of the peasantry and analysing local medieval societies.<sup>1</sup> The first project sought to define the peasantry and

<sup>1</sup> Projects “Peasant agency and social complexity in north-western Iberia in the medieval period” (AEI/FEDER UE HAR2016-76094-C4-2R), and “Archaeology of the local societies in Southern Europe: identities, collectives, and territorialities (5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) (PID2020-112506GB-C41) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

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subaltern groups as historically active agents and not merely reactive to external stimuli. To do this, these social groups' social and political practices were studied in a theoretical framework that took into account different forms of domination, including non-coercive ones. The second explored the mechanisms of the exercise of power and social inequalities based on micropolitics and practices undertaken on a daily basis in pre-industrial rural spaces. In this case, the study was based on the theories of practice developed by such specialists as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens.

There are two key concepts at the heart of these projects. The first is the notion of peasant agency. As formulated by several of the studies included in this compilation, the agency is understood as the capacity of different agents to act within a social structure in order to analyse the causalities of the social phenomena observed in the past.<sup>2</sup> In general, there are no qualms when it comes to attributing agency capacity to the elites and the powerful since this is one of the fundamental criteria that define their identity.<sup>3</sup> It is much less evident to think about, identify and define the agency capacity of the collectives and individuals belonging to dependent groups. This is a subject that has not yet received sufficient attention from scholars, and we intend to address this issue through an analysis of the peasantry.

In recent decades, numerous historians and archaeologists have avoided or rejected outright the use of the term "peasantry", considering it a "dirty word", an ideologically connoted concept or one influenced by negative representations.<sup>4</sup> However, the alternatives (dwellers, commoners, non-elites, etc.) have turned out to be elusive, ambiguous and imprecise. Consequently, the peasantry has been under-theorised, and the dominated groups have been presented as passive, uniform, non-active subjects. However, the study of peasantry agency capacity within the framework of multiple agencies of a relational nature opens up new avenues to give voice to those who usually lack it.<sup>5</sup>

The second conceptual frame of reference is that of local societies. The term has been used in the past with very different meanings,<sup>6</sup> but in this project we wished to give it a specific significance. The notion of local society does not primarily refer to a scale of analysis or an object of study, but to a recurring arena of sociopolitical interaction involving a diversity of agents (surrounding societies, elites active on different scales, regular people and subaltern groups, invisible groups, etc.) that operate and make up a diversity of sociopolitical horizons. For this purpose, of particular importance is Pierre

<sup>2</sup> Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practice." The ability to make a difference in the world, either through maintaining the status quo or by challenging accepted 'norms' of how to act as part of a larger collective. Barrett, "Agency: A Revisionist Account."

<sup>3</sup> For the medieval period see Bougard, Bühner-Thierry, y Le Jan, "Les élites du haut Moyen Âge;" Wickham, "The Changing Composition of early élites;" Devroey, Feller, y Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse au Haut Moyen Âge*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*.

<sup>5</sup> Quirós Castillo y Tejerizo García, "Filling the gap."

<sup>6</sup> Zeller et al., *Neighbours and stranger*; Coss et al., *Episcopal power and local society*.

Bourdieu's concept of *field*, which defines a social space of contention, action and influence in which social relations are established through the creation, destruction, re-elaboration and negotiation of forms of domination.<sup>7</sup> Resorting to approaches typical of microhistory (the analysis of specific case studies to address large issues, comparative studies, and attention to multiple agencies), the hypothesis sustained in this project is that the analysis of these fields of action through the identification of practices also allows us to visualise the agency of dominated groups. A perspective of this type allows us to overcome the (false) dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

This introduction presents the analytical categories used in the volume, contextualises this study within the framework of recent works devoted to the peasantry, introduces the chapters included, and proposes some perspectives for future studies.

## *2. The context: peasant studies*

On opening a book that aims to offer new perspectives for studying subaltern groups, it is useful to ask why we would want to analyse the peasantry in the medieval period. Several reasons determined this choice.

While the projects and publications devoted to the study of the elites and powers of the medieval period have undergone a particular development in recent decades, the same cannot be said of the peasantry.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, in recent years, the informative records capable of shedding light on the peasantry have continued to increase as a result of the huge rise in preventive archaeology, the increasing availability of publications critical of medieval documentation, and the impulse of the digital humanities. However, perhaps the main innovation is not empirical, but theoretical, methodological, and social.

In the last few years, the Social Sciences and Humanities have developed an increasing interest in the study of peasantries and subaltern groups from such perspectives as economic inequality or political domination in the framework of the 2008 recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an understanding of the limits of national-state welfare policies. It could be argued whether the historical-archaeological studies of the peasantry are actually a novel phenomenon or whether they have remained in the mainstream. In any case, there is no doubt that an ontological rethinking of historical causalities has taken place based on a profound theoretical reconceptualisation of the role of dependent groups and the tension between agency and structure.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, "Espacio social y poder simbólico."

<sup>8</sup> The scientific production is massive. Among others, it is worth mentioning the collective project carried out in France on the élites, or the growing attention to the study of early medieval states (Carvajal Castro y Tejerizo García, *El Estado y la Alta Edad Media*; Monsalvo Antón, *La construcción del poder real*.) These trends can be traced in Wickham, *Medieval Europe*.

<sup>9</sup> Barrett, "Agency: A Revisionist Account;" Dobres y Robb, *Agency in archaeology*.

In theoretical terms, the consideration of the peasantry as an endangered, if not totally extinct, species has been questioned by numerous observers as latent within a social history that, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, has underlined, in the first place, the existence of the process of “re-peasantisation” understood as the retreat of non-peasants or former peasants into “defensive” or “autonomous” peasant-like forms of production oriented significantly around subsistence.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, several active political movements, mainly in non-European contexts, advocate for the peasant reappropriation of social, political and physical landscapes in order to pursue food sovereignty and promote deglobalisation following the dramatic episode of the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, there has been growing interest on the part of a renewed social history in reconceptualising the peasantry as a historical subject.<sup>12</sup> Although this exercise has resulted in a gap between peasant studies and the historical studies of peasantries,<sup>13</sup> bridges are being built between these and other disciplines.

In methodological terms, numerous initiatives are positively affecting the promotion of historical and archaeological studies of the peasantry. The growing involvement of experimental sciences in the study of the past is one of these vectors.<sup>14</sup> The explosion of the archaeological sciences, the development of palaeoclimatology or landscape studies driven by the climate crisis, and the search for forms of socio-ecological sustainability illustrate these trends. Likewise, the end of the hegemony of history based on Great Narratives has opened the doors to important innovations and trends ranging from subaltern studies to multi-scale analyses, innovative quantitative approaches, or the growing relevance of comparative studies in the context of consolidating global histories.

In short, the history and archaeology of the medieval peasantry have seen significant development in recent years. In fact, this volume is not an isolated initiative, but must be inserted into a broader, theoretically oriented and often politically engaged intellectual and academic movement. It is neither possible nor opportune to make a detailed and precise list of these works here, although there are some important contributions that should be mentioned.<sup>15</sup>

Without doubt, the United Kingdom is one of the places where this type of study has been developed to the highest degree, to the point that in one of the studies included in this volume, Ladislav Čapek and Lukáš Holata refer to it in terms of “peasantology studies”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ploeg, *The new peasantries*.

<sup>11</sup> Among others, see *Vía Campesina*: <https://viacampesina.org/es/>

<sup>12</sup> Schofield, *Peasants and historians*.

<sup>13</sup> Quirós Castillo y Tejerizo García, “Filling the gap.”

<sup>14</sup> Haldon et al., “History meets palaeoscience.”

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most evident testimony of this multiplication of peasantry studies is that the European survey published fifteen years ago has been totally superseded, Alfonso Antón, *The rural history of medieval European*.

<sup>16</sup> Among other recent studies, see Dyer, *Peasants Making History*; Mileson y Brookes, *Peasant perceptions of landscape*; Kilby, *Peasant perspectives on the Medieval landscape*.

In the French-speaking sphere, the studies of the *paysannerie médiévale* are undergoing a certain development, although with conceptual and methodological parameters very different to those of the British.<sup>17</sup> Among many other initiatives, the magazine *Histoire et Sociétés Rurales*,<sup>18</sup> published by the *Association d'histoire des sociétés rurales*, is the meeting point for a broad scientific community.

In Italy, particular mention should be made of the works of Luigi Provero.<sup>19</sup> They add to the solid tradition of rural history studies, despite the centrality the study of towns has had and continues to have in transalpine historiography.

In the case of Spain, the resilience of social history gestated in the context of the end of Francoism has determined that the study of the peasantry has been one of the cherished topics, particularly among early medievalists. Also on this occasion, the journal *Historia Agraria (Agrarian History)* has played, and continues to play, a notable role in the revitalisation of this field of study.<sup>20</sup> However, one of the most interesting innovations has been the growing importance of archaeology of the peasantry.<sup>21</sup> Features that characterise these works are their cross-sectional nature in chronological terms and the theoretical and methodological broadening of the study topics.<sup>22</sup>

Taking into account this reference context and the conceptual framework presented in the first section, the main questions addressed in this volume are:

- a) To what extent does the proposed conceptual and methodological framework allow the history of groups lacking in history and demarcated by the great narratives to be related from an innovative perspective?
- b) How can the capacity for agency and sociopolitical action of dominated groups be defined in conceptual terms? What are their limits and capacity to influence and participate in social life based on the analysis of the peasantry?
- c) How can this capacity for agency be investigated, recognised and analysed, taking into account the numerous documentary and/or conceptual filters that have been have accepted by the humanities when defining, representing and analysing subaltern groups?
- d) To what extent is an approach of this nature capable of promoting transverse readings that go beyond the traditional academic taxonomies that

<sup>17</sup> Dierkens, Schroeder, y Wilkin, *Penser la paysannerie médiévale*.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-et-societes-rurales.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Provero, *Contadini e potere nel Medioevo*; Provero, *Le parole dei sudditi*.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.historiaagraria.com/en/>

<sup>21</sup> View the critical balances of Portass, "The archaeology of peasant protagonism," Escalona, "The early Castilian peasantry."

<sup>22</sup> Among other works, see Bermejo Tirado y Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Peasantry*; Quirós Castillo, *Archaeology and History 1*; Quirós Castillo, *Archaeology and History 2*; Vigil-Escalera Guirado, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*.

divide historical from archaeological studies, the study of Islamic and Christian societies, medieval history from the modern age, etc? The most recent studies have shown that it is precisely the more transversal works that provide the most interesting results when it comes to analysing the social practices of both the dominant and the dominated groups.

### 3. *The content of the book*

To address these challenges, the collection of papers included in this book look into case studies from the Iberian Peninsula, although a study devoted to Central Europe has also been included. The papers cover a wide range of local Christian and Muslim societies and are authored by American and European scholars working from different archaeological and historical traditions. Most of the contributions analyse early medieval societies. These are considered an ideal laboratory for analysing the agency of subaltern groups, although other chronologies have also been explored and, furthermore, attention was paid to long durations.

Given the nature and range of the papers, it is not easy to divide them into different groups, although it is possible to distinguish three main topics: the theoretical aspects, the methodological challenges, and the analytical contexts through which it is possible to define this agency capacity.

#### 3.1. *Theoretical aspects for studying the peasantry*

In a more or less rhetorical manner, some of the studies included in this book ask to what extent the peasantry had agency capacity or was it precisely their subaltern nature that prevented this possibility. Some of the main underlying problems, however, reside in knowing how collective and individual agency was articulated, how it was deployed in terms of horizontal and vertical relationships, what limits peasantry agency was subjected to, and how tensions between the structuring frameworks and agents' actions were resolved. These theoretical aspects are analysed in two of the contributions included in this book.

Álvaro Carvajal Castro approaches these questions in light of the textual documentation from the northwestern Iberian Peninsula, taking as his starting point the difficulty in defining and delimiting collective action and individual agency in the case of subaltern groups. To do this, he proposes resorting to a relational approach to agency by which social relationships are continuously produced, reproduced and transformed through different practices. Using this approach, it is possible to assess to what extent peasants' initiatives were able to influence and transform the conditions of subordination and overcome the basic, classic lords-peasantries contraposition. To develop his argument, he considers three main themes: the notion of property in early

medieval times, the management of common resources, and gender relationships. The resulting picture is highly evocative when it is based on a relational approach, which should not be confused with the theoretical apparatus developed by the new materialisms.<sup>23</sup> This relational agency is organised around specific social practices that become, from this approach, the focus of historical and archaeological analysis. In this way, normative concepts are dissolved in favour of a denser analysis in social terms.

However, one of the main risks of excessively emphasising the agency of the peasantry and subaltern groups is that of building segmented, partial and distorted narratives of social life. Carlos Tejerizo points out in his contribution that some of the risks of this overoptimistic understanding include misinterpreting records, forgetting or undervaluing the importance of local identities and localities, and losing the meaningful context of the material culture. To reassess this challenge, the author resorts to the notion of areas of struggle, understood as a formula for spatialising the practices around which social life is organised. He also makes use of the concept of relational agency as an instrument to relocate the tension between elites and peasants in dialectical and conflict terms (larval or open). To test this analytical proposal, he uses two case studies from the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula based on the study of population patterns and an analysis of funerary areas. He argues that the systemic collapse of the Western Roman Empire favoured the agency capacity of subaltern groups, the most tangible result of which was the creation of the medieval peasantry. And although they are not always expressive in monumental terms, the material records show how the local communities of the Duero basin were subjected to sociopolitical stress that determined both the development of important internal inequalities and the progressive insertion of the elites into these local realities.

### *3.2. Powers and peasants. How is it possible to study peasantry agency?*

The medievalist Luigi Provero has argued that the main challenge of studying the peasantry is not to admit their capacity for sociopolitical action, but rather to identify these actions from partial and biased sources, conditioned by numerous filters and silences<sup>24</sup>. And this is the main concern that characterises the second of the blocks that make up this book.

Jesús Bermejo's study introduces some critical concepts and reflections for the study of the peasantry between the end of the Roman era and the beginning of the Middle Ages. This is a particularly important work given the recent increase in the number of known subaltern groups in the Roman

<sup>23</sup> In particular, these studies emphasise the agency of acting and non-acting actors, deconstructing anthropocentric interpretations in ontological terms, Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms."

<sup>24</sup> Provero, *Le parole dei sudditi*.

period. Beginning with the concept of subaltern debris, described by James C. Scott as a material manifestation of everyday peasant resistance, the significance of the end of the Roman *villae* is reviewed. This subject has been considered as an end point for classical archaeologists and a starting point for specialists in the medieval period. As a consequence, the faint evidence of non-monumental material elements dated between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries has often been considered as marginal or the result of anomalous uses by squatters and occupiers. Based on a renewed conceptual and methodological apparatus, the agency of the peasant communities is explored by revisiting this evidence, which has rarely been reviewed in depth. The late antiquity occupation of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Spain), taking into account the material culture and other evidence, provides the opportunity to shed light on a series of individual peasant households, offering a fresh perspective on the analysis of the peasantry.

The work of the Brazilian researcher Eduardo Cardoso Daflón is particularly indicative, as he goes right to the heart of the question when he points out the difficulty in combining the written and material sources referring to the early medieval peasantry on the Iberian Peninsula, and specifically the Duero basin between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The texts mainly deal with large landowners and territorially well-established powers, while the archaeological evidence is much sparser when it comes to showing social hierarchies, forms of domination and social asymmetries. The amount of evidence is still limited in both cases, but this contraposition has given rise to a more or less formalised debate between the different specialists. To unravel this skein, the author undertakes a detailed geographical and chronological analysis. He evidences both the micro-stratifications generated within local communities as a result of internal tensions and the mechanisms through which religious and secular elites affirmed themselves in the local sphere. These were long processes spread over 250 years after the peasantry had enjoyed a period of relative autonomy following the fall of the Western Empire. Of particular interest is the relationship established between the abandonment of first-generation castles, the affirmation of urban bishoprics, and the creation of a new social model. In this way, a highly articulated proposal is formulated on the agency capacity of the early medieval peasantry.

Undoubtedly, such a study is faced with precariousness and the meagre number of preserved sources. Having said that, is it easier to study peasantry agency in more recent centuries, when the volume of information is much greater? This is the challenge faced by Josu Narbarte and Mattin Aiestaran in their study of the transformations of agricultural practices in the modern period. More specifically, the authors question the role played by the peasantry in the agrarian revolution that introduced American crops, the new methods of forest resource management, the different forms of communal land appropriation, and the mutation of the rural communities in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For this purpose, they take into consideration a well-recognisable practice through both texts and agrarian archaeology: the use of lime to fer-

tilise crop fields and maintain highly intensive agricultural methods that has been documented in the eastern Cantabrian area since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly interesting results were provided by the multiproxy research combining the study of written sources, toponymy, field surveys, excavations in currently inhabited domestic spaces and geoarchaeology in Aizarna (Gipuzkoa) and Amaiur (Navarra). The authors conclude that the agronomy improvement narrative fails to adequately explain the way in which this practice has been used, the implementation of which has far-reaching social consequences that transcend the dominant economic and functionalist logic. The *chaîne opératoire* of lime production, the forms of use or absence of lime, and the methods of crop rotation configured dense social landscapes shaped by peasantry agency. Despite its chronological proximity, this case study shows that mere recourse to written memory does not allow us to adequately focus these dynamics.

The last chapter in this block was written by Ladislav Čapek and Lukáš Holata and deals with the eastern part of Central Europe. This densely packed chapter makes it possible to compare the Iberian experience with other underrepresented or absent academic trajectories in the debate on the peasantry of Western Europe. The paper has three main objectives: to present in historiographical terms the theoretical and conceptual framework with which the peasantry in central Europe has been studied; to carry out a survey of some of the main themes studied by the archaeology of the peasantry in the area of the Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary; to present a research programme for the future, identifying some of the most promising topics, as well as the methodological and conceptual instruments to address their study. The starting point is that the agency of the medieval peasantry, or even the peasantry itself, has not yet received the attention it deserves from historians and archaeologists in Central Europe. The proposal presented is based on different study traditions, and more specifically on those from the United Kingdom, Germany and the Central European nations, and is organised around eleven main themes: village formation and settlement patterns; domestic records; agrarian and craft production; food; markets; environments and landscapes; rural elites; churches and parishes; living standards; social identities and village desertion. It is true that the results provided are still provisional, but they are of particular importance to contextualise peasant studies in a broad geographical area. In fact, the contribution introduces a large number of case studies published in languages that are not very accessible to our academy.

### *3.3. Inhabited landscapes and peasantry agency capacity*

However, if there is consensus among specialists when it comes to analysing the agency of the peasantry, it is that inhabited spaces and social landscapes are the ideal scenario for the analysis of dependent rural groups. The third block of contributions considers this aspect. Teresa Campos examines

the agency capacity of the peasantry in one of the main processes analysed by European medieval archaeology: village formation. This is a subject that has been the object of study by traditions such as those of the French or the British, since it has been assumed that the “crystallisation”, formalisation or creation of medieval villages would have been the material translation of the establishment of lordly power relations<sup>25</sup>. The issue has been widely debated and has often been resolved in terms of opposition between those who give centrality to secular and religious powers, versus those who emphasise the role of the peasantry. And although nowadays more nuanced and multivariate narratives have been proposed, it is interesting to analyse this process in early medieval Bizkaia, an area characterised by a certain weakness of the local powers. An analysis of the occupational sequence, the archaeological materials and other indicators suggests that in the case of Gorliz the peasantry was the protagonist of the founding of this locality, although it is an internally diversified and hierarchical subject. Gorliz, like other examples investigated in the Basque area, sheds light on the process of creating marked social differences from within the neighbouring communities themselves. In addition, and in contrast to more traditional approaches, this example shows the profound functional, morphological and social transformations to which medieval rural spaces were subjected.

The analysis of settlement and agricultural production is also the argumentative axis of the work presented by Catarina Tente and Sara Prata dedicated to two Portuguese territories, Alto Alentejo and Beira Alta. They are, without doubt, two of the best researched early medieval zones in Portugal in recent years and allow a comparative analysis of two multi-year projects. The trends observed in settlement patterns or burial areas reveal notable differences, as well as in the economic patterns that characterise the wide valleys of Alentejo with respect to the Beira mountains. However, there are also some traits the analyses have in common. Firstly, the analysis of agricultural production and everyday artifacts reveals how these peasant societies participated in active sociopolitical systems on various scales, as well as the existence of regional elites that did not always resort to forms of monumentalisation and flaunting of their positions. Secondly, the existence of microstratifications within the local communities defined by the neighbourhood and the construction of shared social memories is intuited. However, perhaps the most important contribution of this study resides in the fact that the authors suggest that the reading of the archaeological records of peasant societies can be contradictory if a solid theoretical apparatus is not used. In other words, the contrast between lords and peasants, or even the more elaborate contrast

<sup>25</sup> There is an abundant bibliography. Among other studies see Chapelot y Fossier, *Le village et la maison au Moyen Âge*; Zadora Rio, “Le village des historiens;” Rippon, *Beyond the medieval village*; Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*; Klapste y Nissen Jaubert, “Rural settlement.”

between powers and local communities, is inoperative and limiting for conceptualising the dynamics observed in local societies.

The study carried out by Karen Álvaro and Esther Trave once again considers how to study the agency of the peasantry through the forms of settlement and transformations that took place during the Early Middle Ages. For this, they consider the example of present-day Catalonia, which is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and best researched regions in which to study the agency capacity of the peasantry. In fact, important contributions have been made over the last three decades from the perspective of both rescue and preventive archaeology, as well as by academic research projects. This region also has the most abundant documentary records of the entire Iberian Early Middle Ages. It is currently therefore one of the best known regions in the Western Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup> However, as in other places, the exponential increase in archaeological interventions and the complex processes involved in their publication make it difficult to count on up-to-date syntheses and suitable interpretative theses. In this paper the authors argue that by analysing the transformations of the inhabited landscapes it is possible to detect the strategies deployed by the peasantry during the Early Middle Ages. To do this, they divide their survey into two main stages: Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. The thesis defended is that the agency of the peasantry contributed to the transformation of rural settlement and the emergence of medieval society. The end of the late-Roman *villae* is related to the establishment of a new kind of settlement following patterns that accentuated the geographical and chronological diversity between the coast and the interior. The eighth century represented a turning point in the territorial organisation, marked both by a transformation of rural economies and the creation of new inhabited landscapes. Of particular importance in this context is the process in which the number of churches in the towns multiplied, since they reorganised the rural occupations based on new logicalities. In short, the study shows the importance of peasant initiatives and how the forms of domination by the elites were changing.

The final study included in this section of the book is that of Alberto García Porras. Its purpose is to explore the agency capacity of the peasantry in societies characterised by strong tax-based states, such as the Nasrid Kingdom. To do this, it argues that the farmhouse towers constitute the appropriate setting for understand how the relationship between the state, the peasantry and the local powers was organised. Previous studies have identified this type of construction as shelters for local communities, as watchtowers, or as the residences of aristocracies and/or representatives of the state. One of the best studied

<sup>26</sup> The bibliography is very extensive. Among other works, worthy of mention are those of Roig Buxó, "Prácticas funerarias de época visigoda;" Roig Buxó, "Asentamientos rurales y poblados tardoantiguos;" Folch Iglesias, "Territorios y poblamiento en el noreste;" Martí Castelló y Negre Pérez, "Assentaments i espais agraris;" Pratdesaba i Sala, *El procés de fortificació i reocupació del territori*.

examples in recent years is the Agicampe tower<sup>27</sup> in Loja. The site has been the subject of an intensive study that has included territorial surveys, geoarchaeological studies of cultivated fields (micromorphology, phytoliths), the study of the architecture, and the excavation of the construction. All these records have made it possible to analyse the long-term transformations of the site, from recent prehistory to the present. The main conclusion proposed is that the tower was built by the peasantry in the context of the agrarian intensification that characterised the Almohad period. Moreover, these towers would have had a notable importance in the reproduction of peasant communities and the maintenance of the tax-based state domination. And although it is not formalised as such, in this study we see the re-emergence of the notion of relationship agencies that are one of the main focuses of the studies included in the volume.

#### 4. Coda

To conclude these brief notes, we wish to focus on three of the main contributions made by the studies that make up this volume.

Firstly, both the chapters included in the book and the other studies<sup>28</sup> cited reveal that, although the notion of peasantry has been defined mainly on the basis of economic criteria (direct producers, submission to the payment of rents and/or taxes<sup>29</sup>), their capacity for agency goes far beyond the economic sphere. In fact, assuming this perspective, it is possible to question the organisation of the social life of subaltern groups from new perspectives. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century research agendas of peasant studies had insisted, above all, on peasant revolts and resistance, the progressive degradation of the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, and the narrative of a progressive and inevitable affirmation of the elites over the rural groups. And without ceasing to be central themes in the analysis of medieval societies, there is no doubt that the use of more sophisticated theoretical frameworks based on relational approaches allows us to significantly widen the analytical scenario. Just to give one example, it is of particular interest to point out how I. Martín proposed approaching the study of *sernas*, community cultivation spaces that are frequently mentioned among the assets of the monarchy and early medieval aristocracies. This author proposes differentiating a double level of action in the *sernas*. On the one hand, peasant families would have built, farmed and used these cultivation spaces on a daily basis, and on the other, there was a higher level of safeguarding that guaranteed the correct use and defence of those rights. This second level defined the agency of the elites in the local

<sup>27</sup> A more analytical and detailed presentation of the archaeological record is available at García Porras, Pluskowski, y Banerjea, "Gestión de los recursos agrícolas."

<sup>28</sup> See notes 17-22. In addition, Alfonso Antón, "Iglesias rurales en el norte de Castilla."

<sup>29</sup> Wolf, *Los campesinos*; Ploeg, *Peasants and the art of farming*; Shanin, *Peasants and peasant societies*; Redfield, *The little community, and Peasant society and culture*.

sphere and constituted an instrument of eminent domination<sup>30</sup>. Likewise, the implementation of perspectives such as that of the “resistance of the weak”<sup>31</sup> contributes decisively to articulating richer and more organised narratives.

Secondly, the elusive and tenuous nature that characterises the testimonies and preserved evidence related to subaltern groups causes evident difficulties in terms of social characterisation. The three main resources used by the authors of these studies were a high level of theoretical conceptualisation, the selection of records of high chronological and social resolution, and the use of microhistory approaches. It is not a mere methodological deployment or a strategic approach, as much as the verification that the studies oriented around the “small worlds” provides the opportunity for a more intensive understanding of the relational agencies interwoven in local medieval societies<sup>32</sup>. It can be affirmed that there is an inverse correspondence between the degree of theorisation of subaltern groups and the possibility of understanding the capacity and limits of agency, not only of the peasantry, but also of the elites. Several of the studies included in this collection are very eloquent when it comes to showing how “microstratifications” are formed within local communities; the processes of mobility and social promotion that take place in them; and the mechanisms used by the ecclesiastical and secular elites or the state when it came to reconfiguring the relations of domination.

Finally, another line that emerges strongly in the works included in this volume is the importance of localities, understood not as mere “landscapes” or “scenarios” of social life, but rather as active components, as well as social and cultural constructions configured by their production, reproduction and continuous transformation. In particular, I believe to be of particular interest the concept of production of localities proposed by the second generation of Italian microhistorians, who have developed their proposals through the study of local societies in the modern period<sup>33</sup>. The peasant societies of the *ancien régime* provide a perfect setting for carrying out this type of study as, on the one hand, they offer enough testimonies and evidence to carry out a detailed case analysis. On the other hand, they were “traditional” societies in which interpersonal relationships were negotiated in spatialised terms, building relationships, meanings, perceptions and practices that configured localities. Although these perspectives are more complex to use in older chronologies, I believe they provide a rich framework for studying local societies.

In short, this book aims to offer a series of analytical concepts, examples and situations that can be applied to other chronological and geographical contexts.

<sup>30</sup> Martín Viso, *Pastos, iglesias y tierras*. 53

<sup>31</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the weak*.

<sup>32</sup> The reference work is of course Davies, *Small Worlds*. See also Quirós Castillo, “An archaeology of ‘small worlds’;” Portass, “Rethinking the ‘small worlds’;” West, “Visions in a Ninth-Century Village;” Wickham, *Community and clientele*; Wickham, *The mountains and the city*.

<sup>33</sup> Torre, “La produzione storica dei luoghi.”

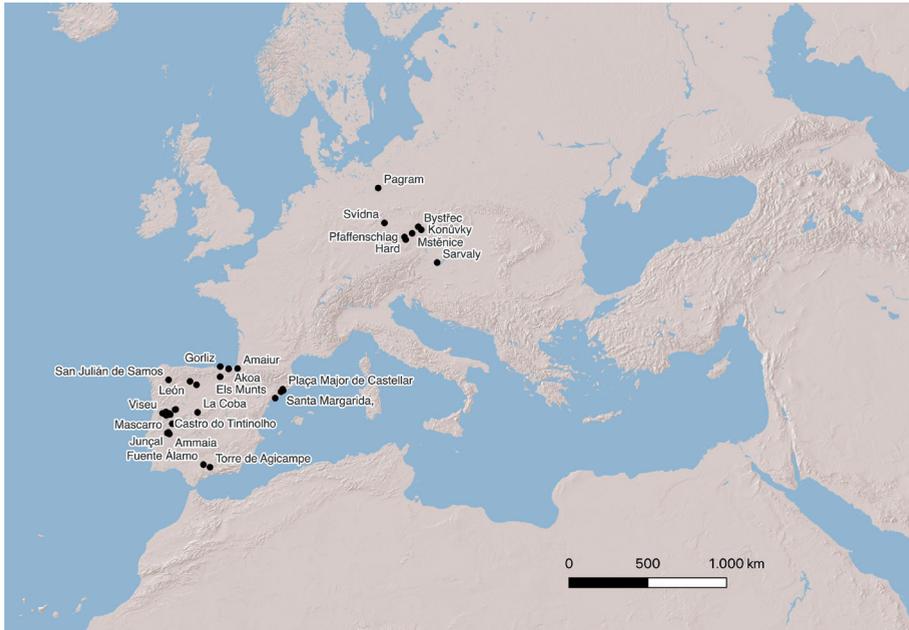


Figure 1. Map of the main sites and regions cited in this volume.

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# **Peasant agency, collective action, and institutions in early medieval societies: an approach from NW Iberia**

by Álvaro Carvajal Castro\*

This paper engages critically with the idea that the individual household is the basic unit of social production and reproduction in peasant societies. Building upon a relational approach to agency and a critical approach to institutions, it argues that in order to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework on peasant agency in early medieval societies, we must account for the attested forms of collective action and consider the institutions that may have served as an interface between individual and collective agency. To demonstrate the potential of such approach, the paper addresses the role of property and commons as institutions mediating access to natural resources and conditioning individual agency. For this, the paper focuses on the extant written sources from NW Iberia. Ultimately, the aim is to explore avenues for dialogue between different disciplinary and methodological approaches to peasant agency in early medieval societies.

Early Middle Ages, Iberian Peninsula, Critical Institutionalism, Agency, Peasants.

## **1. Introduction: from Punjab to Delhi**

In 2020, the laws passed by the Indian government to deregulate produce markets sparked major protests in the country. Tens of thousands of farmers camped in the outskirts of Delhi. One of them, a man from Punjab called Jas-

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pal Singh, declared: “I have promised my family and my villagers that I will not return home till the laws are repealed”.<sup>1</sup> He thus bridged his engagement in that particular protest movement with the complex network of social relationships and values he was bound to, linking the realm of national politics to the daily life of the locality he was from.<sup>2</sup> Yet exactly what he meant by family and what tied him and his fellow villagers together we cannot tell, and while the feeling of obligation that his statement expresses conveys a notion of belonging and an idea of representativeness, at the same time it conceals Mr. Singh’s very distinctiveness. For why was he in Delhi, and not any other member of his family, or any other of his fellow villagers?

Mr. Singh’s statement encapsulates some of the anxieties that historians and archaeologists face when confronting the question of collective action in early medieval local societies. Groups of people acting together for different purposes are well documented.<sup>3</sup> However, the words with which they are labelled frequently present themselves as black boxes. Terms and expressions such as *homines de*, *concilium*, or *collatio* seemingly identify groups with an agency of their own, but say little about membership and the internal composition of these groups, the social practices and relationships that bound their members together, or the values and norms that regulated their workings, let alone the motivations of the individuals that belonged to them. As a result, collective action in early medieval local societies and how it shaped individual agency are difficult to assess. In contrast to the attention paid to early medieval elites, and despite some recent contributions on the issue, these, as other dimensions of peasant agency, remain significantly under-theorised and understudied.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will address this problem by developing a critical approach to the institutions that served as an interface between individuals and collective

<sup>1</sup> “Violent clashes as Indian farmers storm Delhi’s Red Fort”, Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Aakash Hassan, *The Guardian*, 26/01/2021 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/26/violent-clashes-as-indian-farmers-storm-delhis-red-fort>) [Date accessed: 26/01/2022].

<sup>2</sup> On social movements and protest, see, for a sociological approach, Tarrow, *Power*; Tilly, *The politics*.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities*. The study of local communities in early medieval Europe has a long tradition, though they have frequently been regarded as undeveloped forms of their later, high medieval counterparts. See, among others, *Les communautés*, edited by Higounet; Genicot, *Rural communities*; Mouthon, *Les communautés*; and n. 27 for critiques of this view. For a specific focus on the early medieval period, see the works collected in *People and space*, edited by Davies et al. In recent years, work on assemblies and commons has open way to discussions veering towards the analysis of collective action and institutions. Cf. *Assembly places*, edited by Pantos and Semple; Oosthuizen, “Beyond hierarchy;” Semple and Sanmark, “Assembly.” On the areas here addressed, see Carvajal Castro, “Local meetings and meeting places;” Escalona, “Community Meetings;” Martín Viso, *Pastos*. More specifically, on peasant groups in the context of conflicts and disputes, see Wickham, “Looking forward.” For a more cautious approach, see Zeller et al., *Neighbours and strangers*, chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Quirós Castillo, “Introducción: Agencia del campesinado.” For an overview of recent work on the elites, see *La royauté*, edited by Le Jan; *Les élites*, edited by Bougard et al.; *Les élites et leurs espaces*, edited by Depreux et al.; *La culture*, edited by Bougard; *Les élites et la richesse*, edited by Devroey et al.

action in early medieval societies.<sup>5</sup> It will argue that this can provide a more nuanced understanding of both collective action and individual agency at the local level, thus complementing current approaches to peasant agency in the early Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> In particular, it will focus on commons and property, that is, on the institutions that regulated the individual and collective appropriation and use of land and other natural resources.

The area studied is the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula, which is particularly well suited for such a purpose (Map 1). The written sources are abundant and provide ample evidence for the study of local societies, which has gained momentum in recent years.<sup>7</sup> Local groups and instances of collective action – most notably, but not only in the form of local communities engaging in land disputes – are relatively well documented in many different forms and from an early date, in comparison to other European regions.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the exponential development of archaeological research over the last twenty years has significantly enhanced our knowledge of early medieval settlements and has radically altered our understanding of local societies.<sup>9</sup> Commons, collective action, and the institutions for collective action may not be as visible in the archaeological record, but this does not mean that archaeology cannot play a significant role in their study and contribute to better illuminate the socioeconomic and political organisation of early medieval localities.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while the approach in this contribution is based on the written sources, following Marcia-Anne Dobres and James E. Robb, I depart from the idea that “different forms of agency likely operated in the past, that they involved context-specific mechanisms of materiality and sociality, and that empirical evidence of them occurs at many different scales”. I take this to mean that a history of agency cannot be built upon one single type of empirical record and “can have no ‘one size fits all’ methodology”.<sup>11</sup> On these grounds, I acknowledge the partiality of the view on peasant agency that this paper offers, but nonetheless hope that it will be useful as a contribution to interdisciplinary dialogue, and with it, to the development broader theoretical considerations about peasant agency in early medieval societies.

<sup>5</sup> For the critical-institutional approach, see Cleaver and de Koning, “Furthering critical institutionalism;” Cleaver, *Development through bricolage*.

<sup>6</sup> Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo-García, “Filling the gap.”

<sup>7</sup> Martín Viso, “Unequal small worlds.” In studies about NW Iberia the concept of “local society” now prevails over the attention once paid to peasants and local communities, in tune with historiographical developments elsewhere in Europe but contrary to other historiographical approaches elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula. See Kirchner, “La arqueología del campesinado.” See also García-Porras in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> Carvajal Castro, “Collective Action.” For the observation that the phenomenon becomes apparent earlier than in other European areas, see Wickham, “Space and society;” Wickham, “La cristalización.”

<sup>9</sup> Escalona, “The early Castilian peasantry.”

<sup>10</sup> Fernández Mier and Quirós Castillo, “El aprovechamiento;” Oosthuizen, “Beyond hierarchy;” Quirós Castillo, “An archaeology of ‘small worlds’.” See also the remarks by Teresa Campos in her contribution to this volume.

<sup>11</sup> Dobres and Robb, “‘Doing’ Agency,” 162.

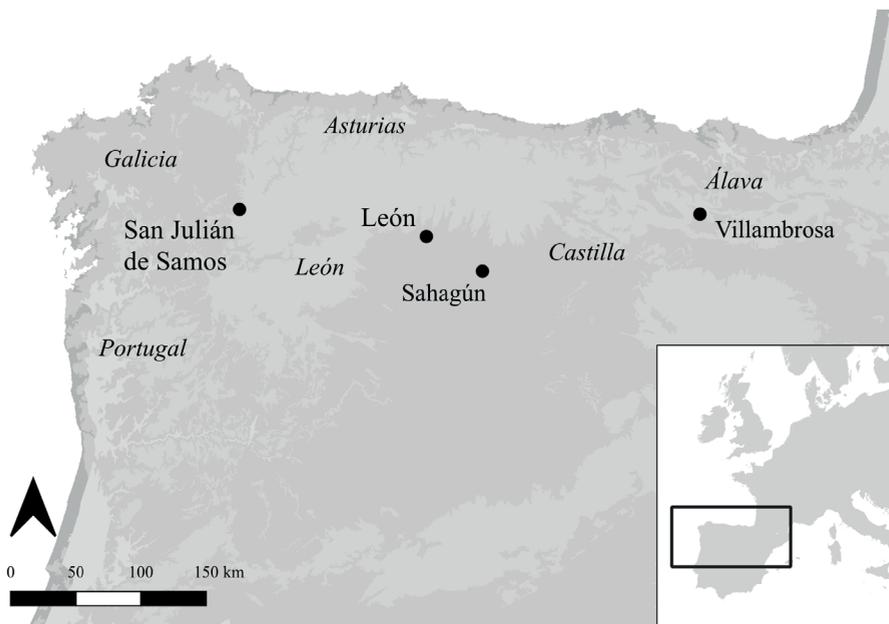


Figure 1. Places in NW Iberia mentioned in the text.

## 2. Peasant agency? A collective conundrum

Over the last forty years, analyses of the written sources sparked by seminal works by authors like Wendy Davies and Chris Wickham, combined with extensive archaeological research on early medieval settlements throughout Europe, have contributed to illuminating the variety of social positions and trajectories, relationships and practice, that characterised early medieval localities.<sup>12</sup> This has brought two significant theoretical advancements. First, it has made it possible to consider the capacity that individuals acting at the local scale had to develop their own, self-motivated strategies. This has been mainly realised for local elites, whose patrimonial strategies and materiality are more visible in the records,<sup>13</sup> but it has also been developed for the lower social strata, based on the realisation – advanced theoretically long ago –, that lordly domination did not absolutely determine peasant initiatives.<sup>14</sup> Rather, peasants had some autonomy to organise certain aspects of their so-

<sup>12</sup> Two classic studies are Davies, *Small worlds*; Wickham, *The mountains*. For results derived from archaeological research see Hamerow, *Early medieval settlements; The archaeology*, edited by Quirós Castillo; Yante and Bultot-Verleysen, *Autour du “village”*. For a comprehensive analysis of local societies in early medieval Europe, see Zeller et al., *Neighbours and strangers*.

<sup>13</sup> On local elites and social promotion, see, among others, Bullimore, “Folcwin;” Feller et al., *La fortune*. On materiality and “life-styles”, see Loveluck, *Northwest Europe*.

<sup>14</sup> Wickham, “Le forme.”

cial life, both individually and collectively.<sup>15</sup> Second, it has done away with the idea that the local community was the sole horizon structuring collective organisation at the local level, which has dominated much of the historiography on the issue, and has allowed for the recognition and analysis of other types of groups and forms of collective action, as has already been explored for later periods.<sup>16</sup>

It could be argued that this does not represent such a radical departure from previous historiographical models. Nineteenth-century ideals of community may have conveyed a homogenizing picture of early medieval local societies, and dominant accounts of early medieval societies in the 1960s and 1970s may have been structured around the dichotomy lords vs. peasants.<sup>17</sup> However, since the 1980s historians have been careful to stress that local societies and the peasantry were far from uniform, and consequently that local communities were not homogeneous.<sup>18</sup> Also, and more importantly from an epistemological perspective, many current approaches continue to portray groups – whether local communities or other – as the result of the aggregation of individuals and individual households, as previous historiographical models did, and thus continue to depart from a methodological individualistic position.<sup>19</sup>

The latter is in accordance with the anthropological characterisation of the household as the basic social unit of production and reproduction of the peasantry, as discussed in some recent work on early medieval societies.<sup>20</sup> This notion is methodologically sound and is based on solid empirical grounds. If we take the case of NW Iberia, the written sources predominantly record social practice at the level of the individual household – namely transactions made by individuals or members of a nuclear family, and more rarely of extended kin groups. Moreover, the sources show that rights to shared natural resources such as grazing areas, woods, and waters were attached to households individually.<sup>21</sup> It is clear from this that households had a significant weight in the appropriation of land, the distribution of other natural resources, and the organisation of production, and also that household members built on this to develop key aspects of social practice such as land trans-

<sup>15</sup> Kohl, “La agencia campesina;” Portass, “Peasants;” Schroeder, “Iniciativa campesina.”

<sup>16</sup> Carvajal Castro et al., “Collective action;” Provero, *Contadini e potere*.

<sup>17</sup> For the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see, for example: Joyce, *Social history*; Maine, *Village communities*; Marx and Engels, *Pre-capitalist economic formations*; von Maurer, *Geschichte*; Vinogradoff, *Villainage*. For the dichotomy of lords and peasants, see, paradigmatically, Duby, *Guerriers et paysans*.

<sup>18</sup> See the works collected in *Les communautés*, edited by Higounet. See also Genicot, *Rural communities*; Hilton, “Reasons for inequality.”

<sup>19</sup> Sánchez León, “El poder.”

<sup>20</sup> For the anthropological approaches, see Chayanov, *The theory of peasant economy*; Shanin, *Naturaleza y lógica*; Van der Ploeg, *Peasants and the art of farming*; Wolf, *Peasants*. For recent discussions in the historiography, see Wickham, *Framing*, 536-7; Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo-García, “Filling the gap.” See also the contribution by Carlos Tejerizo-García in this volume.

<sup>21</sup> Larrea, “De la invisibilidad,” 186-8.

actions. On top of that, archaeologically, houses are among the most visible structures in the extant material record, and analyses at the level of individual households, as well as intra and inter-site comparison have a significant potential for the assessment of production and social reproduction, of social inequalities, and, more broadly, of social relationships and practice in early medieval localities.<sup>22</sup>

However, this methodological approach relegates the collective dimension of social life to the position of a secondary phenomenon, both in theoretical and historical terms. Theoretically, in a Lockean manner, it presents collective action and institutions as the result of interactions and negotiations between individuals or individual households. In pure theoretical terms, though, we should also contemplate the idea that shared expectations, values, and norms may have developed and have been built –whether they were negotiated, agreed on, imposed upon, or contested – from the very first engagements and have a bearing on how continued interactions and long-term relationships were established, thus moulding the process of group formation rather than being merely a consequence of it.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, historically, it characterises collective action and institutions as the outcome of long processes of social aggregation – whether around the year 1000, or before, or after.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, recent archaeological research has shown that during specific periods of time – the fifth and the sixth centuries in some areas of NW Iberia, for example – individual households had a very significant weight as frameworks for productive and ideological relationships.<sup>25</sup> However, this does not necessarily exclude the possibility that certain forms of collective action and institutions had already developed or would soon do so. The fact that we do not see them recurrently in the early medieval sources does not mean that they did not exist, as they may have been reproduced or transformed through daily practice without being continuously open to negotiation or contested – though neither should we take their existence for granted.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, while we should not reproduce the assumptions of primitive communalism, neither should we wait to see fully fledged, formalised local communities as they appear later in the Middle Ages to accept that such collective arrangements could exist.<sup>27</sup>

What I want to argue here, though, is not only that the focus on individual actors and on the interactions between them hinders the assessment of groups and collective action in early medieval societies, but also that it precludes an adequate characterisation of individual agency. Much recent writing on peas-

<sup>22</sup> Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo-García, “Filling the gap,” 10. See also Quirós Castillo, “La compleja interpretación;” *Social inequality*, edited by Quirós Castillo; Lewis, “Elitismo y estatus.”

<sup>23</sup> Axelrod, *The evolution of cooperation*; Ostrom, *Understanding institutional diversity*.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Chapelot and Fossier, *Le village*; Schreg, “El campesino eterno;” Wickham, “La cristalización.”

<sup>25</sup> Tejerizo-García, *Arqueología*; Tejerizo García. “The archaeology.”

<sup>26</sup> See Escalona, “Vínculos comunitarios.”

<sup>27</sup> Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities*, 1; Wickham, *Comunità e clientele*, 15-6.

ant agency in the early Middle Ages has Giddensian overtones in that agency is conceived of as the individual capacity to do things and act strategically on the basis of given resources and in accordance to a reflexive assessment of ongoing social situations.<sup>28</sup> Such a characterisation of agency offers a limited perspective of power relations. It acknowledges that subordinate actors can influence the activities of their superiors, but risks failing to question the very nature of domination and the actors' potential not just to mutually influence each other, but also to transform the very relationship that bounds them together.<sup>29</sup> Also, it assumes horizontal cooperation between peasants without considering how cooperation itself – in actuality or potentially – may have shaped individual agency.

In this regard, Juan Antonio Quirós and Carlos Tejerizo-García's call to adopt a relational approach to agency is much welcomed.<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, social relationships are not merely seen as constraining or enabling individual initiatives, but rather as being themselves constitutive of individual agency and as being continuously produced, reproduced and transformed through practice.<sup>31</sup> This can provide us with a clearer understanding of how peasant' initiatives could transform the socioeconomic conditions of their subordination, and how this in turn could influence their agency. For example, and to mention but one recent contribution to the current debate, Nicolas Schroeder has shown how peasant initiatives in tenth-century monastic estates in Lotharingia could lead to the transformation of demesne land into tenure – and note also Isabel Alfonso's earlier studies on the weight of peasant initiatives in the formalisation of local bylaws and the configuration of rents and obligations.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, this approach also compels us to move beyond individual relationships and interactions between individual actors, and assess the changing networks of relationships in which the actors were embedded. Thus, it can be applied to consider not just the relationships between lords and peasants, but also the panoply of relationships in which peasants were enmeshed at the local level, including family relationships, as well as those tying them to their neighbours. They provided the immediate context for collective action and the articulation, reproduction, and transformation of groups at the local scale. This does not mean that we should adopt an idealized view of local sociability and group building. Such relationships could be based on cooperation for specific purposes, though cooperation could be imposed from above rather than result from mutual accord, and group building could be based on unequal relationships such as patronage and clientship. Collective

<sup>28</sup> Giddens, *The constitution of society*, 2-16.

<sup>29</sup> Giddens, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo-García, "Filling the gap."

<sup>31</sup> Burkitt, "Relational agency;" Long, *Development sociology*.

<sup>32</sup> Schroeder, "Iniciativa campesina," 86-9. Cf. Alfonso, "Campesinado y derecho;" Alfonso, "La contestation paysanne."

institutions could be aligned with individual interests and be beneficial for all but restrains to individual initiatives through social sanctioning must also be contemplated. That is, after all, what stories about the demons active in Kempton and in the villages visited by Theodore of Sykeōn tell us about.<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, interpersonal interactions would have been structured not only by personal relationships but also by institutions. The definition of this latter term is problematic. Approaches vary, most significantly for our purpose here – there are other definitions but their applicability to the analysis of early medieval societies is more limited – between those who regard them as rules and prescriptions, and those who see them as regularities in social behaviour, with the efforts to reconcile them meeting little success.<sup>34</sup> I will here resort to Frances Cleaver’s critical approach to institutions as “arrangements between people which are reproduced and regularized across time and space and which are subject to constant processes of evolution and change”.<sup>35</sup> I find this approach useful for three main reasons – others could be adduced but go beyond the purpose of this paper.

First, a critical institutional approach allows us to contemplate not only the formal rules that may have regulated social behaviour in early medieval localities in NW Iberia in the abstract – such as the prescriptions of the Visigothic law that are sometimes mentioned in the charters and invoked in dispute processes<sup>36</sup> – but also any informal arrangements and the social embeddedness of institutions in terms of their constitution, reproduction, and transformation over time, considering the impact of social inequality and power relations on how they were shaped and, at the same time, the role of institutions in the reproduction of social inequality and power relations. In this, it is compatible with a relational approach to institutions, understood as a condensation of specific social relations that are reproduced and transformed through practice; as well as with a strategic approach, that is, one contemplating that institutions may offer different opportunities for different actors and affect them differently.<sup>37</sup> It also seems better suited to address the social complexity of early medieval localities, as well as what processual approaches to justice have shown about the operationalisation of rules in conflicts and dispute settlement in early medieval societies.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Costambeys, Innes, and MacLean, *The Carolingian world*, 231-2; Wickham, *Framing*, 408-10.

<sup>34</sup> For institutions as norms and prescriptions, see North, *Institutions*; Ostrom, *Understanding institutional diversity*; as regularities in social behaviour, see Greif, *Institutions*; Aoki, “Endogenizing institutions;” and for the effort to reconcile them, see Hindriks and Guala, “Institutions.”

<sup>35</sup> Cleaver, *Development*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Collins, “*Sicut lex Gothorum continet*,” Collins, “Visigothic law;” Isla Frez, “La pervivencia.”

<sup>37</sup> Jessop, “Institutional re(turns);” Jessop, *State power*, 21-53.

<sup>38</sup> See the works collected in *The settlement of disputes*, edited by Davies and Fouracre; *Conflict*, edited by Brown and Górecki.

Second, it explicitly aims to link the social to the material. More specifically, it is concerned with the ways in which institutions shape access to natural resources. From this, it is easy to build a dialogue on economic terms with current definitions of the peasantry, some of which could be reconciled with such a critical institutional approach. For example, Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg's reappraisal of Chayanov's theory of balances contemplates the role of institutions in surplus exaction.<sup>39</sup> The same could be said with regards to the balances between people and living nature and between production and reproduction.<sup>40</sup> As he notes in relation to the resources of the peasant farm, "the available social and material resources represent an organic unity... The rules governing the interrelations between the actors and defining their relations with the resources are typically derived from, and embedded in, local cultural repertoires, including gender relations".<sup>41</sup> Van der Ploeg talks about rules in the abstract, but it does not take such a leap to assume that in some, historically situated contexts, such rules may have been part and parcel of commons, understood as "institutions for the collective use and management of land and other natural resources";<sup>42</sup> and also to consider the social – and not only the cultural – embeddedness of such institutions, in as much as they were grounded on specific assemblages of social practice and relationships that could define clear boundaries with regards to membership – this being a key factor in the reproduction of the commons overtime.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, then, access to certain social and material resources that were integral to the individual households' productive and reproductive processes could be mediated by institutions, and thus conditioned by the households' belonging to the groups so defined – whether local communities or other.

Third, Cleaver's approach contemplates the multifunctional, multi-scalar nature of institutions. This is in accordance to what we know about the forms of collective organisation in early medieval localities, which could serve as fora in which land transactions were formalised, conflicts settled, and justice exercised; as well as arenas of sociability for festive and ceremonial purposes, among others.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, it forces us to consider the different institutional arrangements in which people may be enmeshed at different scales, both within and across the different groups to which they belong. From this perspective, agency should be assessed at the scale of the individual household as a collective actor – as in current definitions of the peasantry –, as well as at the level of their members, whose agency could be defined both by relationships internal to the household and on the basis of their belonging to

<sup>39</sup> Van der Ploeg, *Peasants and the art of farming*, 60-2.

<sup>40</sup> Van der Ploeg, 48-54.

<sup>41</sup> Van der Ploeg, *Peasants and the art of farming*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> De Moor, *The dilemma*. 24; see also Ostrom, *Governing the commons*. 30-3.

<sup>43</sup> Lana Berasain and Iriarte Goñi, "The social embeddedness;" De Keyzer, *Inclusive commons*.

<sup>44</sup> See Barnwell, "The early Frankish *mallus*;" *Assembly places*, edited by Pantos and Semple; and more specifically for NW Iberia, Carvajal Castro, "Local meetings;" Escalona, "Community Meetings."

different sets of social relationships and groups beyond the household – and ultimately even, to different institutional realms. This is most evident with regards to gender relations. Households, like communities, were not ungendered units, neither were the articulation and reproduction (or transformation) of gender relationships solely restricted to the arena of individual households or communities.<sup>45</sup> The household was indeed one of the social arenas in which they were articulated, but they were also shaped by norms that cut across households and affected larger groups, as in the case of inheritance rules.<sup>46</sup> Gender relations could also affect other aspects of local life such as the construction and reproduction of local territorialities, in as much as this was built on memory, and memory itself could be gendered.<sup>47</sup>

In order to ground this on the analysis early medieval societies and to engage with the definition of the household as the basic unit of production and reproduction in both its material and social dimension, the remaining part of this paper will focus on the appropriation and use of natural resources in early medieval NW Iberia, considering both its individual and collective dimension. It will combine a twofold approach, departing first from some remarks on the labour processes associated to farming practice and commons; and then discussing “property” as an institution from the point of view of social practice and the social relationships that made the appropriation and use of natural resources effective in each historically situated context.<sup>48</sup> The notion of property adopted here derives from the ‘bundle-of-rights’ approach, as classically defined by Henri Sumner Maine, while also attending to the different capacities that individuals can have with regards to a particular resource.<sup>49</sup> For example, some people may be allowed to collect wood in a forest, but may not be permitted to clear land. The differentiation between *proprietas*, as ownership, and *possessio*, as the capacity to make effective use of the land, which has been frequently contemplated in the historiography on the early Middle Ages, would also fall within this conceptual framework – as in the case of peasants who were allowed to cultivate a plot of land but could not sell it or donate it freely, this being a prerogative of the lord.<sup>50</sup> From this perspective, Elinor Ostrom and Edella Schlager distinguished between five types of rights – access, withdrawal, management, exclusion, and alienation –, which they characterised as rights to which different actors can be differentially entitled.<sup>51</sup> For example, an actor could have access and withdrawal rights but not management rights, as in the example of the forest. I will here adopt such a five-tier bundle but characterise its constituent elements as “ca-

<sup>45</sup> Agarwal, “Environmental action.”

<sup>46</sup> Casari and Lisciandra, “Gender discrimination.”

<sup>47</sup> McDonagh, “Feminist historical geographies;” Whyte, “Custodians of Memory.”

<sup>48</sup> Congost, “Property Rights.”

<sup>49</sup> Maine, *Ancient Law*, 178-9.

<sup>50</sup> E.g.: Sánchez-Albornoz, “Repoblación,” 635-9.

<sup>51</sup> Schlager and Ostrom, “Property-rights regimes.”

capacities” rather than “rights”, in order to contemplate not just their normative dimension but also the web of resources and social relationships that enabled any given actor to make any such claim over a resource effective.<sup>52</sup> The aim is to bridge the concepts of “property” and “agency”, contemplating how individual and collective capacities to appropriate and make use of land and other natural resources may have been shaped by relationships between actors with a shared interest in a given resource, and between these and other actors.

### *3. Property, commons, and gender in early medieval localities*

Agrarian production in the early Middle Ages in NW Iberia largely depended on mixed farming, though a certain degree of productive specialisation can be observed even at relatively low scales of social complexity – as recently argued for networks of settlements in the modern day districts of Álava (Spain) and Guarda (Portugal).<sup>53</sup> Farming practice included individual appropriation and use of arable plots and meadows; and could have also included semi-collective arrangements in fields in which cultivation was carried out individually in stripes of land held in severalty and cattle was grazed collectively after the crops had been harvested.<sup>54</sup> Access to natural resources that were also central for household economies, such as grazing areas, woods, and waters was shared. As noted above, it is clear from the sources that it was conferred upon individual households.

That resources were shared does not entail that work was undertaken collectively, though it cannot be discarded that this was so on specific occasions or for specific tasks.<sup>55</sup> For example, the inhabitants of Villambrosa (Castile), at the instance of Bishop Diego, cleared a *serna* (see below) on behalf of the local church.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, even if shared resources were used individually, we should probably expect that their use was regulated by institutions that were collectively upheld – i.e. by commons. Commons could regulate aspects such as exclusion or inclusion of members, the times in which resources could be exploited, the intensity of exploitation, and even the transformation of the resources, as with regards to the conditions under which new land could be brought under cultivation. This means that group membership – being a member of a common, and analogously of a community, in as much as this was a condition to be granted access to natural resources within the territory of a given locality – could shape the capacities of individual households with

<sup>52</sup> Galik and Jagger, “Bundles, duties, and rights;” Ribot and Peluso, “A theory of access.”

<sup>53</sup> Quirós Castillo, “Archaeology of early medieval peasantry;” Tente, “Social complexity.” See also C. Tente and S. Prata’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>54</sup> Fernández Mier, “Campos de cultivo,” 44.

<sup>55</sup> Bonales Cortés, “Individualismo agrícola.”

<sup>56</sup> See Larrea, “Construir iglesias,” 333; see also Corbera Millán and Ingelmo Casado, “Aportación a la historia.”

regards to the exploitation of resources that were integral to their production and reproduction processes.

While the emphasis has usually been on the appropriation on individual holdings as the road to the imposition of seigneurial domination, relations between lords and peasants, or rather between lords and groups of peasants,<sup>57</sup> could also be articulated through commons, both at the level of whole communities and of individual households.<sup>58</sup> Commons facilitated horizontal forms of collective action but could also sustain lordly exactions, while claiming the prerogative to grant membership and access, or to impose rules and monitor compliance, were some of the blocks with which lords could build their authority.<sup>59</sup> So much is apparent in the case of *sernas*. From what we can gather from the sources, these were fields that were regarded as a single unit, but were presumably divided into plots that were exploited individually. The use of the term varies greatly across NW Iberia, but in certain regions, most notably in León and in some instances in Castile, it seemingly identifies fields controlled by kings and lords, who would probably derive some benefits from this, and who could also rely on them to imbricate their authority within the localities.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, judicial records show that disputes over commons did not only revolve around the ownership of the resources – as shown in landmark studies on peasant resistance.<sup>61</sup> Some concern use, as in the case of conflicts relating to access and withdrawal restrictions. Others concern management, as in the case of disputes over the capacity to clear land, or over how shared infrastructures, such as watermills and canals, were to be maintained and by whom.<sup>62</sup>

How labour processes were organised at the level of the household is rarely evident in the sources but the information concerning property is relatively abundant, more so with regards to the differential capacity that individuals had to alienate land – after all, that is essentially what the majority of the extant written sources talk about. To begin with, it is perfectly clear that land could be owned individually but also that kinship could condition individual capacities in at least two different manners. First, the notion that kin could contest an individual's capacity to alienate land is omnipresent in the record and affects all kinds of transactions. The sanction clauses included in the charters frequently contemplate the possibility that close relatives and kin contest the transaction, establishing sanctions to prevent it.<sup>63</sup> Some even resort to Visigothic law to reaffirm the donors' capacity to dispose of the land freely, either because they expect trouble or in response to it. That is the case

<sup>57</sup> Escalona, "De señores y campesinos;" Pastor, "Sobre la articulación."

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Justo Sánchez and Martín Viso, "Territories and kingdom;" Estepa Díez, "Propiedad agraria."

<sup>59</sup> Bhaduri, "Economic power;" Sikor and Lund, "Access and property."

<sup>60</sup> Carvajal Castro, "Prácticas colectivas;" Gómez Gómez and Martín Viso, "*Rationes y decimas*;" Escalona, "De señores y campesinos;" Martín Viso, "Commons."

<sup>61</sup> Most notably, Pastor, *Resistencias*.

<sup>62</sup> Carvajal Castro et al., "Collective action."

<sup>63</sup> Carvajal Castro, "Secular sanctions;" Mattoso, "*Sanctio*."

of a grant recorded in the cartulary of San Julián de Samos, which invokes both law IV.II.XX (“Ut qui filios non reliquerit faciendi de rebus suis quod voluerit habeat potestatem”) and law V.II.IV (“De rebus extra dotem uxori a marito conlati”) to reassert the donors’ capacity to donate their properties freely.<sup>64</sup> Dispute records show that such conflicts actually occurred and, for later periods, that it was part of the dynamics through which certain kin groups and monasteries actualised their relationships across generations.<sup>65</sup> This does not mean that lands were held in common by kin groups thus attempting to fetter individual members from diminishing their resources, as earlier historiographical models suggested.<sup>66</sup> Rather, it conveys the idea that the holding of certain resources was multi-layered and that members of kin groups could hold reasonable expectations with regards to land held individually by their members, based on actual or expected inheritance entitlements.<sup>67</sup>

Second, access to certain resources may have been granted to kin groups or to groups of individuals within kin groups. A case in point is that of a *serna*, allegedly owned by the bishops of León, but which had been held by a certain Froila and his relatives, and which would later be claimed by a group men and their wives, some of which referred to Froila as their father-in-law:

*nos, Petro, Atari, Arias et Argileoua... quia prouocauit nos et nostras mulieres iste Berulfus uel alios plures... socer noster Froila uel sui parentes habuerunt seneras addiligatas de Sancta Maria et de antecessoribus domni Ouecconi episcopi.*<sup>68</sup>

Leaving aside the conflict over ownership that constitutes the main subject of this record, for the purpose of this paper I want to draw attention to the fact that those claiming the *serna* were a group of relatives, and that their claims spanned over generations. Kinship was central to their claim. It is also worth noting that one of the individuals named at the beginning, Argileuua, was a woman, which contrasts with subsequent references to men as protagonists of the conflict. The text presents them speaking in the first person as they narrate how they had been challenged by Berulfo, while their wives are mentioned but have no voice. Moreover, Froila is referred to as their father-in-law, the implication seemingly being that while Froila’s daughters’ rights over the *serna* were acknowledged, notionally their legal capacity to intervene in the process was limited, even if they could have some in practice – as the appearance to Argileuua indicates.

This leads us to the question of gender in relation to property and how it conditioned individual agency – and women’s agency more particularly.<sup>69</sup> In

<sup>64</sup> Lucas Álvarez, *Tumbo*. Doc. 132, AD 978. For the edition of the Visigothic laws I follow *Leges visigothorum*, edited by Zeumer.

<sup>65</sup> Alfonso, “Litigios por la tierra.”

<sup>66</sup> Barbero and Vigil, *La formación*.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish*, 259-303. White, *Custom*.

<sup>68</sup> Sáez, *Colección 1*. Doc. 191, AD 946.

<sup>69</sup> Howell, “The problem.”

NW Iberia, both men and women could own land. Women, like men, could acquire it through different means, including inheritance – Visigothic law provides for sons and daughters to inherit equally if parents die intestate (IV.2.1), though this was not so in all early medieval legal codes.<sup>70</sup> Also, they could alienate it, which is particularly important given that land transactions were not merely economic affairs, but part and parcel of the dynamics through which social relationships were established and maintained both at the local level and beyond.<sup>71</sup>

The overall impression that we get from the record is that while both men and women could own and transfer land, their respective capacities with regards to property differed. To put numbers to this impression, I have performed a cursory analysis of the charters from the monastery of Sahagún before the year 1000, and they reveal a telling picture that offers further lines of enquiry. First of all, while women, regardless of their status, are abundantly recorded as donors and sellers, even if less frequently than men, women performing land transactions on their own appear more rarely (7%), while men do so more frequently (32%). Women appear more frequently with their husbands (24%) – and couples occasionally do so with their offspring (5%) –, as well as alone with their offspring (7%), this probably indicating that they were widows; or else as part of groups of men of and women of different size.<sup>72</sup> This suggests a strong association between their condition as spouses, and probably as widows – perhaps tied to age –, as well as their belonging to kin and other groups, and their capacity to perform land transactions – something which is much less pronounced in the case of men.

Alienating land was not the only relevant capacity with regards to property, though. Land transactions were public affairs for which social recognition was needed. This was so not only to make the transaction effective, but presumably also on the assumption that, should a conflict over the land arise, witnesses could be called to testify on the matter. In NW Iberia, the calling of witnesses is a practice frequently attested in dispute records, and to judge from what the sources from other regions tell us, we should also expect it to be gendered, though the weight attributed to women's testimonies may have

<sup>70</sup> Nelson and Rio, "Women and laws," 110-3; see more broadly Bitel, *Women*.

<sup>71</sup> The literature on this is very vast; for NW Iberia, see Davies, *Acts of giving*; Portass, *The village world*; and from a broader historical perspective, Pastor et al., *Beyond the market*.

<sup>72</sup> For this analysis, I have only taken into account charters from Sahagún before the year 1000 that are presumably preserved in full – that is, they were not abbreviated in lists of transactions (e.g.: Mínguez, *El dominio*. Docs. 36 and 94). I have only considered the information relating to the transaction that is the main subject of the charter – i.e.: I have not taken into account information about previous transactions, which is sometimes recorded when the history of the property is narrated. I have excluded forgeries and dubious charters, as well as dispute records that are not formulated as transactions. See Alfonso, "El formato." The total number of legal acts thus resulting is 353. Groups is here used indistinctly to refer to kin groups, local communities, and small groups of individuals with no apparent or various types of relationships between them.

varied across regions.<sup>73</sup> Two of the roles in which people appear in charters recording land transfers are relevant in this regard. First, charters are usually accompanied by witness lists that evidence the public character of the transactions – G. Barrett provides an excellent discussion of the NW Iberian charters, and see also the work of B. M. Tock on the issue for a broader perspective.<sup>74</sup> Women are conspicuously absent from witness lists in Sahagún's charters – only 2% of names are female, even if we only consider original charters.<sup>75</sup> This does not necessarily mean that they did not attend the social occasions in which transactions were performed, but does suggest that it was rarely deemed relevant to record their names. Second, property descriptions sometimes include boundary clauses listing the adjacent properties, and these are sometimes referred to by the names of their owners who, we may assume, could be expected to testify on the basis of their knowledge should there be a conflict. To mention but one example:

*terra in Villa que vocidant Seceos iusta flumen Porma, locum predictum de termino de domna Visclavara et per terminu de Silonia et per terminu de Auria et reafige in termino de domna Visclavara unde primus diximus.*<sup>76</sup>

This boundary clause is exceptional in that several women are mentioned. In general, of the names recorded in boundary clauses in the charters from Sahagún, only 6% can be identified as female.<sup>77</sup>

Ultimately, women rarely appear in the charters in roles that are associated to the public recognition of land transfers and, potentially, to witnessing in the case of land disputes. Whether they acted as witnesses or not should be contrasted with dispute records specifying the names of the witnesses called, though this is not always possible as names are not always provided. In any case, it should be noted that the suitability of a person as a witness was defined on the basis of different criteria, including old age and “worthiness”.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, other factors, including gender, could determine a person's knowledge and the authority granted to his or her testimonies – on this, later records suggest that women in León and Castile performed a more prominent role than in other European regions.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Davies, *Windows*. On the gender dimension, see Van Houts, “Gender and authority.”

<sup>74</sup> Barrett, *Text and textuality*, 163-71; Tock, *Scribes*.

<sup>75</sup> The total number of names that I have been able to identify as male or female is 3,302. Note that the figure does not correspond to the number of individuals – individuals can appear more than once in the witness lists of different charters – but rather to individual mentions of names. The observation about original charters is important in as much as witness lists were sometimes abbreviated in later copies. On this, see Fernández Flórez and Herrero de la Fuente, “Libertades de los copistas.” Forgeries have been excluded.

<sup>76</sup> Mínguez, *El dominio*. Doc. 205, AD 962.

<sup>77</sup> The total number of names that I have been able to identify as male or female is 485. Forgeries have been excluded.

<sup>78</sup> Andrade Cernadas, “La voz;” Luis Corral, “Lugares de reunión.”

<sup>79</sup> Van Houts, *Memory and gender*. Cf. Alfonso, “Construir la identidad.”

In order to offer a fuller and more nuanced picture of how gender relationships were constructed in relation to property, these analyses should be extended to the whole of the charter corpus and further nuanced on the basis of the contexts in which the charters were produced – to see, for example, whether church records impose their own bias different to those of lay charters and archives –, and of other individual attributes of individual status, such as age, wealth, class, and so on.<sup>80</sup> In any case, this preliminary approach to the evidence shows that men and women could enjoy very different capacities in relation to property, and that this was something that was not limited to the household, but rather conformed to broader sets of norms.

#### 4. *Conclusion*

This paper has argued that in order to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework of peasant agency in early medieval societies, and to do so in relational terms, we need to revise how we conceptualise the peasantry as a social group, and that this partly entails integrating the notion of the household, as a social unit, within the social and institutional contexts to which it belonged in each historical situation. This is key not only to assess agency at the level of the household, but also at the level of the individual members of the household. Their respective agency was defined by social relationships both within the household and beyond, and different members may have engaged differently in the latter, as a cursory analysis of gender relations with regards to property suggests. Taking this into consideration could contribute to further our understanding of how collective action was articulated.

It has also been argued that a critical approach to institutions as an interface between individual and collective agency can be a fruitful line of enquiry, as suggested by cursory analyses of commons and property, and that this is something that can enrich not only historiographical approaches to early medieval societies, but peasant studies more broadly. Ultimately, the aim has been to explore some avenues for dialogue between disciplines working on different methodological and empirical grounds and which may provide a more solid theoretical basis to collectively solve the conundrum of peasant agency in the early Middle Ages.

<sup>80</sup> Kosto, “*Sicut mos esse solet.*”

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# Reflecting Peasant Agency in Medieval Rural Milieu Research of East Central Europe\*

by Ladislav Čapek, Lukáš Holata

Despite an exceptionally long tradition of research on medieval rural milieu, peasant agency represents a new theoretical approach that has not yet been coherently reflected in East Central Europe. Issues within social archaeology remain on the fringes of the archaeological interpretations. The view of the peasantry was heavily influenced by economic history and Marxist historiography, portraying peasants as a passive, conservative, homogeneous, socially unequal, and subaltern group *vis-à-vis* the upper class/elites. This text represents the very first effort to assess the rich evidence obtained by large-scale excavations of deserted medieval villages by adopting a peasant agency perspective. To achieve this, we introduce seven prospective themes in which the diversity and complexity of rural communities that have taken an active role in historical processes making collective and individual decisions can be illustrated. Our ambition is to offer a new insight into late medieval peasants in East Central Europe, enhance their comprehensive understanding, and stimulate future research directions.

Late Middle Age, East Central Europe, Deserted medieval village, rural archaeology, historiography, peasantry, agency.

## 1. Introduction

Medieval archaeology in the eastern part of Central Europe has a rich and long-standing tradition of systematic investigations into the rural milieu, with a particular emphasis on large-scale programme-oriented excava-

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tions of deserted medieval villages (DMVs), which are unique in the broader pan-European context. These extensive research campaigns have led to the collection of comprehensive evidence and the making of numerous conclusions and insights on a range of rural and peasant-related topics for the Late Middle Ages (in Central Europe in 1250-1550 AD); particularly, these topics include individual settlement structures such as farmsteads, peasant houses, manor houses, material culture and everyday life, agrarian and non-agrarian production, environmental context and topography, settlement patterns, village origin, and abandonment.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the current state of the art, formulated interpretations, as well as the quality of published outcomes are inconsistent. Much of it has been shaped by historical paradigms and an interest in economic rather than social history. Although many regional and site-specific studies of rural archaeology have been undertaken, there is a lack of broader analytical and comparative assessments of the rural milieu and peasantry that address new theoretical discourse. The contextual approach reflecting the social practice of peasants as social agents is still neglected. Previous research on this subject has only reflected on differences in the social stratification of peasants through the study of architecture or material culture.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, we aim to bridge this significant research gap with this pilot study; it represents the first comprehensive effort to assess existing outcomes from the perspective of peasant agency. Our objectives are: 1) to revise the existing social interpretations in the literature that implicitly reflect or are close to the concept of the agency, 2) to offer a new perspective on subaltern societies in East Central Europe, and contribute to a holistic, nuanced understanding of them, 3) to stimulate new research avenues and interpretive frameworks for several perspective topics. A separate objective 4) is also to present a different environment to the research community in Spain regarding settlement development and research tradition.

The paper does not encompass the extensive European discourse on the social history and geography of the early modern peasantry.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we intend to draw attention to possible manifestations of peasant agency in archaeological evidence which is particularly rich for the late medieval period in East Central Europe. In contrast, the evidence of written sources for this period is sparse, limited to only a few spatially defined regions.<sup>4</sup> In any case, we will avoid relating interpretations based on early modern written sources back to the Middle Ages.

In the following sections: 1) we briefly outline how peasants have been characterised, understood, and perceived in East Central Europe, then in

<sup>1</sup> Nekuda, "Das hoch- und spätmittelalterliche;" Klápště. *The Archaeology of Prague*, 15-40; Čapek, Holata, "General Overview;" Scholkmann, Kenzler, Schreg, *Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 151-63.

<sup>2</sup> Nekuda, "Sociální skladba;" Goßler, "Gedanken zur sozialen;" Kypta, "Das Lebensmilieu."

<sup>3</sup> Sreenivasan, "Beyond the Village."

<sup>4</sup> Klír, *Roľníctvo na pozdně*.

the main part, 2) we offer an overview of seven themes, providing: a) a short context for the research, followed by b) peasant agency perspectives. For this purpose, well-published evidence from the large-scale excavations of DMVs will be used. Due to the limited scope of the paper, we will refer only to the most relevant synthesizing publications. In conclusion, 3) a pilot characterization of rural communities from peasant agency perspective will be attempted, which we consider as a stimulus for thorough re-evaluations of existing research interpretations or newly designed research.

## *2. Understanding peasants: A research framework in East Central Europe*

The eastern part of Central Europe is geographically defined by the areas east of the rivers Elbe and Saale (the *Germanica Slavica* area) and north of the Alps. This territory includes countries such as East Germany (former GDR), Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Hungary. These countries are generally characterized by a similar settlement-historical development with specific regional variations and socio-economic and demographic divergences.

The beginnings of systematic interest in the medieval rural settlement are associated with historical discourse on the Late Medieval Crisis and village desertion.<sup>5</sup> Historical geography and settlement archaeology (*Siedlung-sarchäologie*)<sup>6</sup> have had an exceptional tradition. These approaches inspired extensive surface surveys of DMVs.<sup>7</sup> A characteristic feature of medieval archaeology in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was systematic open-area excavations of settlements. However, they have been prompted primarily by the need for heritage-oriented archaeology rather than academic interest. Research on DMVs has been more descriptive and empirical but lacked theoretical depth. The outcomes of excavations were more oriented towards contextualizing the material evidence in culture and economic (agrarian) history. Medieval archaeology has long been under the umbrella of cultural history, heavily influenced by economic history and Marxist historiography.<sup>8</sup> A significant impact, albeit on a limited group of scholars, was also made by the French Annales school of history with its concept of 'total history' and its interest in structural processes and changes viewed from *longue durée* perspective.<sup>9</sup>

A significant change in existing approaches occurred after the fall of the Iron Curtain, which resulted in 1) the gradual termination of systematic,

<sup>5</sup> Schreg, "Die Krisen des späten Mittelalters."

<sup>6</sup> Denecke. "Die historisch-geographische Landesaufnahme;" Jankuhn, *Einführung*.

<sup>7</sup> Čapek and Holata, "General Overview;" Michl, *Wüstungsforschung in Deutschland*.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Klápště, *Archaeology of Prague*, 15, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Schöttler, "Zur Geschichte;" Klápště, "Studies of structural changes;" Klápště, "Změna – středověká transformace;" Schreg, "Dorfgenese und histoire totale."

state-subsidized open-area excavations, 2) an increase in rescue archaeology alongside a gradual decline of interest in rural settlements, and 3) the development of landscape archaeology with the integration of new non-invasive methods and other disciplines. The response of processual archaeology found little resonance in general, often being considered ‘anti-historical’.<sup>10</sup> Only questions concerning the adaptation of rural communities to the natural environment were discussed. Rather than theory, the approaches of processual archaeology were integrated into the methods of archaeological survey. Post-processual archaeology, with its emphasis on the interpretation of context and social practice, had virtually no influence on medieval archaeology in Central Europe.

The study of peasants and peasantry (peasantology) and their social stratification differs between Western and Central Europe.<sup>11</sup> According to economic historians, the Central European peasantry can be generally defined as a group of primarily agricultural producers living in a subsistence model of production. They utilized their own family labour and cultivated the land they held in hereditary tenure based on a contract with the landlords; they aimed to optimize the use of land, capital, and labour within local economic and ecological conditions, allowing them to generate a ‘surplus’ for fiscal income within the market economy system.<sup>12</sup> The status of peasants was legally anchored by the purchase right or declaration of customs (emptytheical law), which remained almost unchanged throughout the Late Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup>

Peasants generally emerged in older literature as a homogeneous, passive group whose life destinies were determined by historical events such as wars, epidemics, and crop failures, as well as by structural and environmental processes, including climatic factors. The conservatism, stability, and immutability of the rural communities were highlighted. Peasants were depicted as ‘locked in time’, bound to the seasonal cycles of agriculture between sowing and harvesting, without the ability to influence their irreversible fate in life. Due to the scarcity of written sources, medieval peasantry was considered as ‘timeless’ or ‘historyless’.<sup>14</sup> Marxist historiography considers peasants a subaltern group (low classes, serfs) dependent on the elites. The relationship between the peasants and the elites (the socially upper class) was seen confrontationally regarding power, subordination, and the principles of ‘class struggle’. Peasants were studied hierarchically in terms of dominance and subordination from a top-down perspective. The peasants’ voices were ‘muffled’ or ‘obscured’ by the ruling classes of society, and peasants had minimal

<sup>10</sup> Fehring, *Die Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Several synthetic works have been published: Graus, *Dějiny venkovského lidu*; Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*; Rösener, *Bauern im Mittelalter*; Rösener, *The peasantry of Europe*; Čechura, “Rolnictvo v Čechách.”

<sup>12</sup> Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 36-7; cf. Cerman, “Social structure.”

<sup>13</sup> Čechura, “Rolnictvo v Čechách;” Rösener, *Grundherrschaft im Wandel*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. critically Aparisi, “Fractures in the Community;” Van Oyen, “Rural time;” Schreg, “The Eternal Peasant.”

opportunities to resist or develop alternatives to the dominant structures. There was no recognition that peasants, as active social agents, also had the potential to influence historical processes.<sup>15</sup>

However, such a view overlooked several essential aspects, as demonstrated in new studies that have emerged in recent decades.<sup>16</sup> (1) The internal hierarchy was not reflected; in fact, a large group consisted of hierarchically lower sub-peasant groups referred to as 'sub-villagers', which included 'smallholders' (gardeners, cottagers) and landless people that were not exclusively agricultural producers.<sup>17</sup> (2) Not all inhabitants of villages can be described as 'farmers', as some had other sources of income (craft, mining, etc.). (3) Although peasants were personally unfree, they were granted a certain degree of autonomy.<sup>18</sup> From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the status of peasants improved, and their land rights were strengthened. (4) The life of the late medieval peasantry is characterized by significant horizontal and vertical social mobility, manifested in considerable property flexibility, which allowed peasants to acquire possession of the land as well as to leave it. The right of hereditary tenants to buy and sell their land (i.e., to effect property transfers between peasants) brought considerable mobility in land ownership.<sup>19</sup> (5) During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, peasants became more involved in the market economy. They may have been actively participated in the real estate and land market in some regions of Central Europe, as recorded in land registers.<sup>20</sup>

Although archaeology has offered great opportunities for the study of medieval peasantry from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the research framework (and interpretations of archaeological data) has been predominantly influenced by historical discourse and economic history; the topics such as agriculture, craft production, rural architecture, and material culture have been prioritized, highlighting the disparities in living standards between rural and noble 'classes'.<sup>21</sup> Archaeology has been primarily supposed to prove historical interpretations, even though the evidence obtained contradicted traditional ideas of continuity, stability, conservatism, or even rigidity. These are demonstrated in the transformation of settlement and field patterns, various village layouts or peasants' house architecture, and striking differences in material culture indicating internal social differentiation. Despite this evidence, however, the active role of peasant communities has not yet been given much consideration. The influence of the *Annales* in Central European archaeology meant that collective agents and structured human behaviour were more like-

<sup>15</sup> Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 66-7; Quirós-Castillo, Tejerizo García, "Filling the gap."

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Carocci, "Social Mobility;" Van Oyen, "Rural time;" Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*.

<sup>17</sup> Čechura, "Rolnictvo v Čechách;" Mitterauer, "Formen ländlicher;" Cerman, "Mittelalterliche Ursprünge;" Ghosh, "Rural Economies."

<sup>18</sup> Čechura, "Rolnictvo v Čechách;" Rösener, *Grundherrschaft im Wandel*.

<sup>19</sup> Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*.

<sup>20</sup> Cerman, "Social structure," 57-67.

<sup>21</sup> Nekuda, "Zemědělská výroba v období feudalismu;" Nekuda, "Sociální skladba;" Jannsen, "Gewerbliche Produktion."

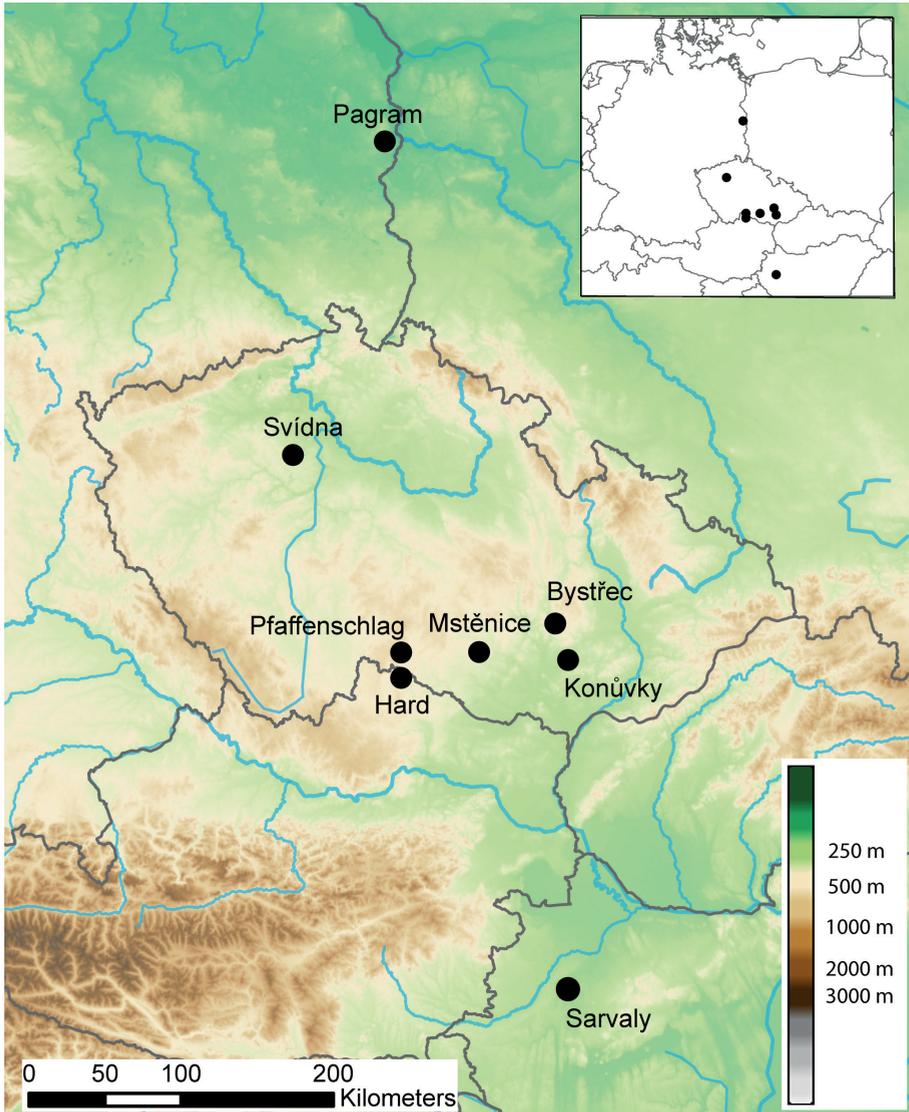


Figure 1. The location of deserted villages explored by extensive excavations in central Europe, which are the subject of detailed assessment.

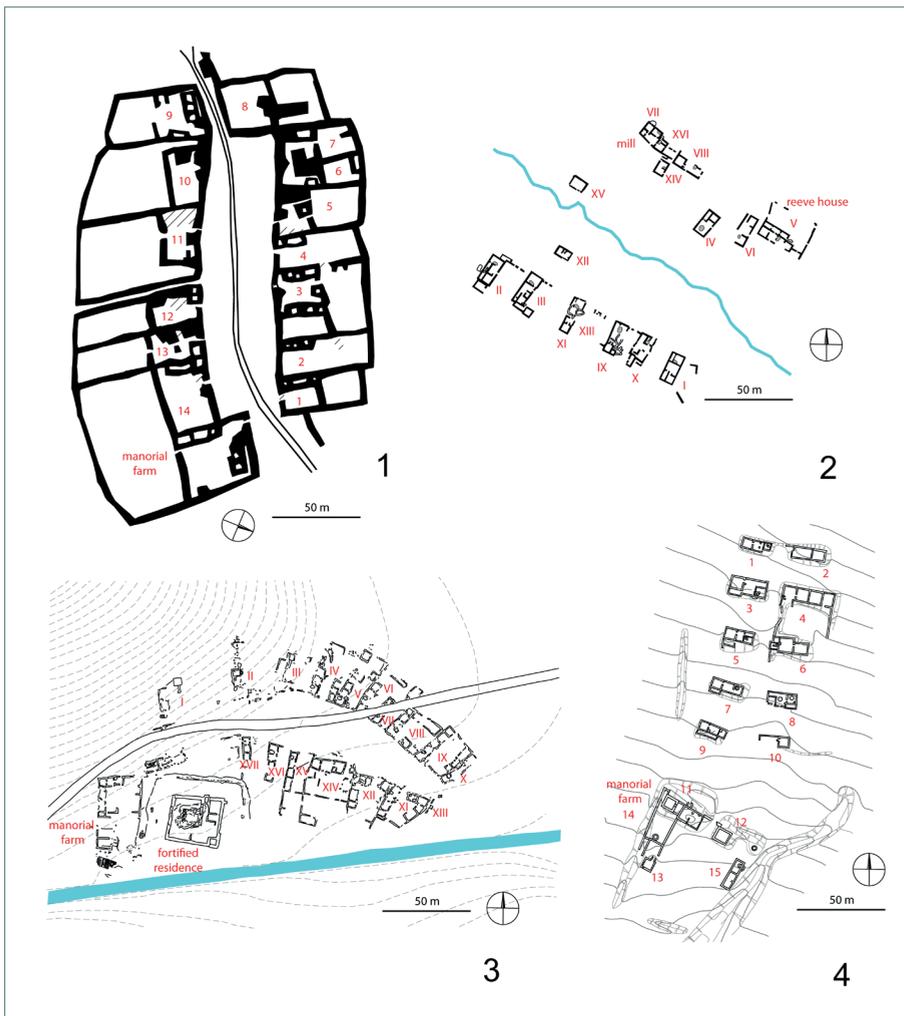


Figure 2. The plans of excavated deserted medieval villages with large-scale excavations – 1. Svidna (schematically), 2. Pffenschlag, 3. Mstěnice, 4. Hard (all on the same scale).

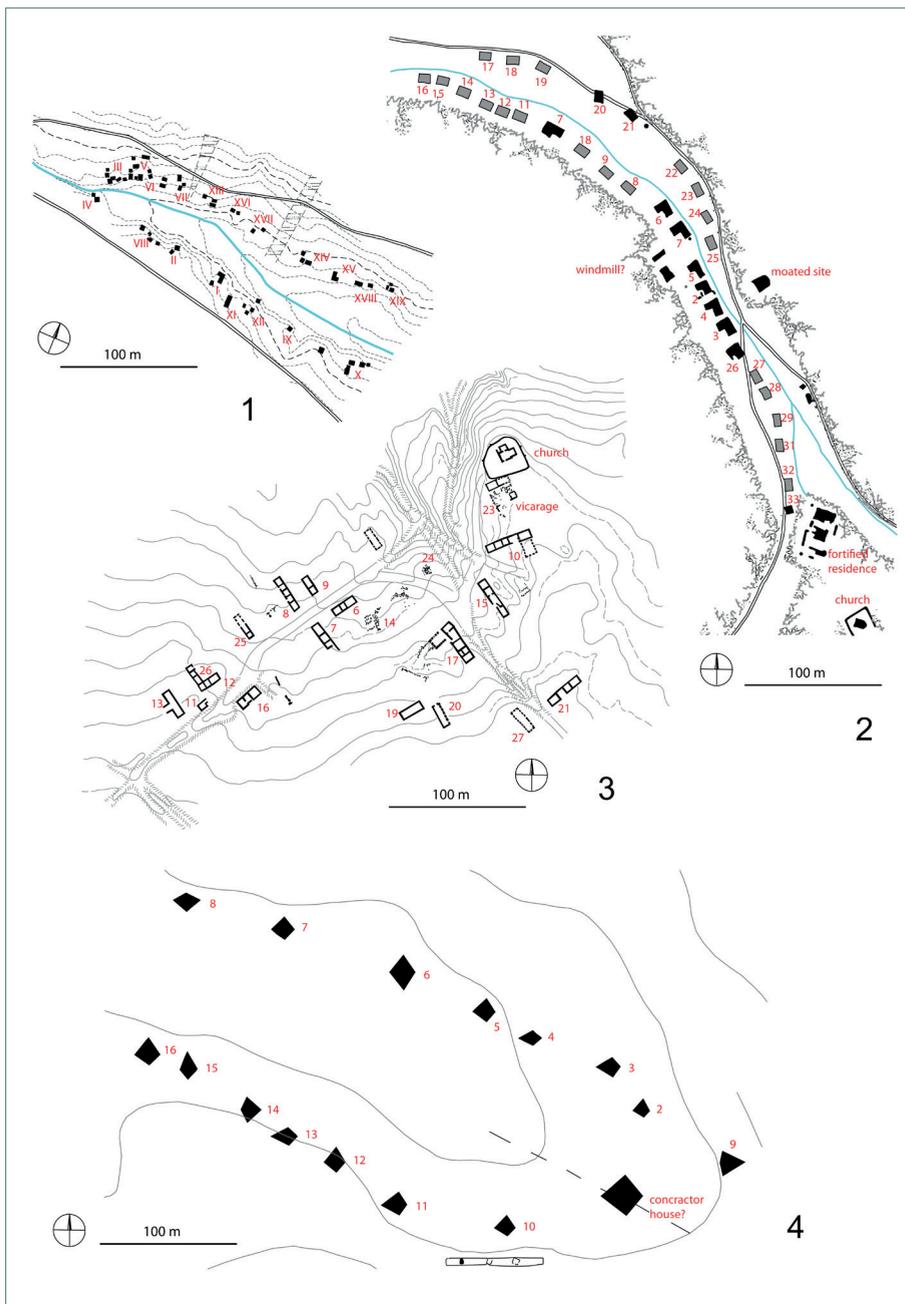


Figure 3. The plans of excavated deserted medieval villages with large-scale excavations – 1. Bystřec, 2. Konůvky, 3. Sarvaly, 4. Pagram (all in the same scale).

ly to be seen as the ‘maker of things/events’. The peasant habitus, the social identity of peasantry, and their capacity for agency are still poorly reflected in the literature, partly due to the scarcity of written sources from the late Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, peasant agency has not even become part of the archaeological discourse.<sup>23</sup>

### *3. Assessing selected themes from an agency perspective*

In the main, we present seven topics<sup>24</sup> that we consider highly relevant for further research from an agency perspective. Each topic is sufficiently supported by the evidence, which is primarily based on the open-area excavations of the DMVs; thus, we draw mainly on summarising publications on the village excavations from Pagram<sup>25</sup> (Germany), Svídna,<sup>26</sup> Mstěnice,<sup>27</sup> Pfaffenschlag,<sup>28</sup> Bystřec,<sup>29</sup> Konůvky (Czech Republic),<sup>30</sup> Hard (Austria),<sup>31</sup> and Sarvaly (Hungary).<sup>32</sup> At this initial stage, contextual analysis and reinterpretation are not our ambition – that must be the task of further research. Here, we only reflect on some of the facts through the prism of peasant agency.

### *4. Spatial reorganisation of settlement, changes in the layout of the ploughland, and the formation of the village*

Field surveys and archaeological excavation have confirmed the dispersed character of early medieval settlement patterns in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, consisting of spatially isolated farmsteads or small clusters of them (‘hamlets’), each surrounded by their fields and communal pastures.<sup>33</sup> These settlements were predominantly constructed using low-durability structures with a significant proportion of wood and clay.<sup>34</sup> A characteristic feature is their spatial

<sup>22</sup> Schreg, “Eternal Peasant,” 55.

<sup>23</sup> An exception is the work of R. Schreg in relation to ecological impact (Schreg, “Ecological Approaches”); implicitly, the concept of peasant agency appears in Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku* dealing with the social mobility.

<sup>24</sup> Quirós-Castillo, “Inequality and social complexity;” Schreg, “Eternal Peasant,” 66.

<sup>25</sup> Theune, «das dorff pagerem».

<sup>26</sup> Smetánka, *Život středověké vesnice*.

<sup>27</sup> Nekuda, *Mstěnice 1*; Nekuda, Nekuda, *Mstěnice. Zaniklá středověká ves u Hrotovic 2*; Nekuda, *Mstěnice. Zaniklá ves u Hrotovic. 3*.

<sup>28</sup> Nekuda, *Pfaffenschlag*.

<sup>29</sup> Belcredi, *Bystřec*.

<sup>30</sup> Měchurová, *Konůvky*.

<sup>31</sup> Felgenhauer-Schmiedt, *Hard*.

<sup>32</sup> Holl, Parádi, *Das mittelalterliche Dorf Sarvaly*.

<sup>33</sup> Klápště, “Změna – středověká transformace,” 44; Klápště, *Archaeology of Prague*, 22; Scholkmann, Kenzler, and Schreg, *Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 155-6; Nowotny, “Changes in Rural Settlement;” Schreg, “Eternal Peasant.”

<sup>34</sup> Zimmermann, “Pfoften, Ständer und Schwelle,” 50.

displacement within a settlement area (the predecessor of a cadastral territory) after a certain time interval. The reasons for the frequent shifting of the settlement are not yet well understood; there are increasing indications that these shifts are primarily related to land management.<sup>35</sup>

In general, early medieval agriculture can be characterized as extensive, conducted on a large scale with few inputs, little crop diversification, and no indoor animal housing.<sup>36</sup> Farming practices were more individualistic, without the need to synchronize the work with the rest of the community.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, land ownership was not yet firmly and legally established, which could also contribute to frequent spatial changes.<sup>38</sup>

Subsequently, three significant changes occurred during an exceptionally complex process referred to as the medieval transformation. It unfolded differently and gradually in various areas of Central Europe but culminated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It can be summarised in three most significant manifestations regarding the form and layout of the village: 1) Stabilization and nucleation of the dispersed settlement pattern begun ('village origin') across the territory of East Central Europe.<sup>39</sup> Stable village layouts (Pfaffenschlag, Svídna, Hard) consisting of farmsteads situated around a church, village green (Svídna, Mstěnice, Sarvaly, Pagram), road, or stream (Bystřec and Konůvky) emerged. Additionally, more durable construction materials, including stone, became widely used in architecture. 2) In parallel, a village cadastre was being created. The nucleation process was closely tied to changes in legal regulations and land ownership rights, which led to new land remeasuring and redistributions. Consequently, regulated field systems emerged<sup>40</sup> with the land divided into approximately three equally sized open-field complexes. These were cultivated using a three-field crop rotation system, with farming occurring in regular rhythms in the autumn and spring, interspersed with one-year fallow periods. The height of serfs' rents and other obligations were calculated and paid to landlords based on the size of the farmstead and cultivated fields. At the same time, there was 3) an expansion of settlement into higher altitude areas, associated with the so-called 'improvement of the land' (known as *Landesausbau* in German).<sup>41</sup>

The medieval settlement expansion, associated with the founding of normative village layouts according to the *laneus* system in East Central Europe, has often been interpreted as an institutionalized colonization of previously sparsely populated or climatically marginal landscapes directed by rulers and

<sup>35</sup> Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 56.

<sup>36</sup> Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 97.

<sup>37</sup> Klápště, *Proměna Českých*, 188.

<sup>38</sup> Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 57.

<sup>39</sup> Klápště, "Změna – středověká transformace," 44; Schreg, "Mobilität der Siedlungen."

<sup>40</sup> Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 57; Klápště, *The Czech Lands*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> Biermann, Mangelsdorf, *Die bäuerliche Ostsiedlung des Mittelalters* 7; Gringmuth-Dallmer, "Die hochmittelalterliche Ostsiedlung;" Krause, Kühnreiter, "Hochmittelalterliche Transformationsprozesse."

elites. The process was viewed within the context of lordly power dominance over the peasantry.<sup>42</sup> However, the role of the peasant agency in settlement reorganization has been largely overlooked.<sup>43</sup>

Historical literature tends to emphasize the role of seigneurial agents – entrepreneurs (*locatores*), who were responsible for attracting settlers (peasants) while overseeing land measurement and tenant plot allocation. These agents represented the emerging village community in negotiation with local authorities, determining the terms and conditions for village establishment, including the amount of serfs' rents to be paid and other obligations.<sup>44</sup> This is well described and illustrated in the German-language legal book known as the 'Saxon Mirror' – *Sachsenspiegel*.<sup>45</sup>

However, the role of peasants was even broader than traditionally attributed to them. Within the 'bounded space' of the colonized area, peasants seemed to have had the free choice to select an appropriate place to establish a village. This choice could have been influenced by various social-economical, ecological, and even spiritual factors that determined the success or failure of the settlement and its future development. Peasants were very sensitive to the perception of the landscape.<sup>46</sup> The optimal location of ploughland as the primary economic base of peasant farmsteads, was therefore crucial for them, among other factors. Peasant communities arriving on new land (or in a new country) had to assist each other, both with the construction of farmsteads and cultivating open fields. Collaborative efforts in village establishment significantly shaped peasant communities and strengthened their social ties. Undoubtedly, they had to make numerous collective and individual decisions, some of which may be evident archaeologically, such as the choice of a suitable site for the village, determining settlement's layout, distributing field plots, meadows, and pastures, and implementing of new land management practise, e. g. the three-field system (similar considerations applied to the reorganisation of existing settlements). Additionally, individual agency played a role in designing farmstead layouts and determining cultivation practise.

The new arrangements – stable, nucleated villages and tightly demarcated land – must have entailed a transformation of the peasant community and social relations within the village, leading to the emergence of municipal and neighbourhood rural society (which were internally stratified, as demonstrated in material culture, see below).<sup>47</sup> Living in the villa neighbourhood facilitated the creation and maintenance of closer interpersonal ties among peasants. These ties were based on residence, solidarity, obligations, property, and

<sup>42</sup> Saunders, "The Feudal Construction of Space."

<sup>43</sup> Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 61.

<sup>44</sup> Klápště, *Proměna Českých zemí*, 204-7.

<sup>45</sup> Schmidt-Wiegand, *Text-Bild-Interpretation*.

<sup>46</sup> Altenberg, *Experiencing landscapes*.

<sup>47</sup> Lalik, "Organizacje sąsiedzkie."

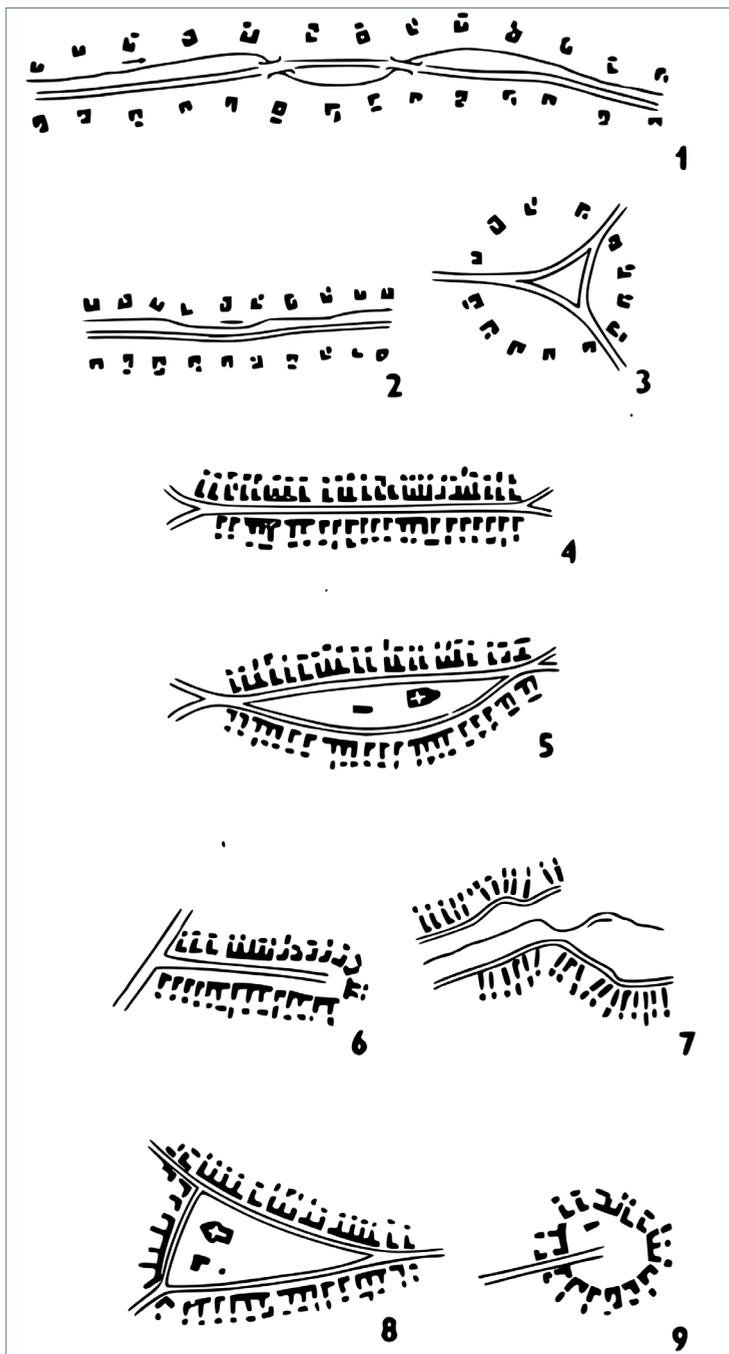


Figure 4. General typology of normative settlement layouts (according to E. Černý): 1 – 3: forest field villages; 4, 6: villages along a road; 5, 8 – 9: villages with a village green; 7: a village along a stream.

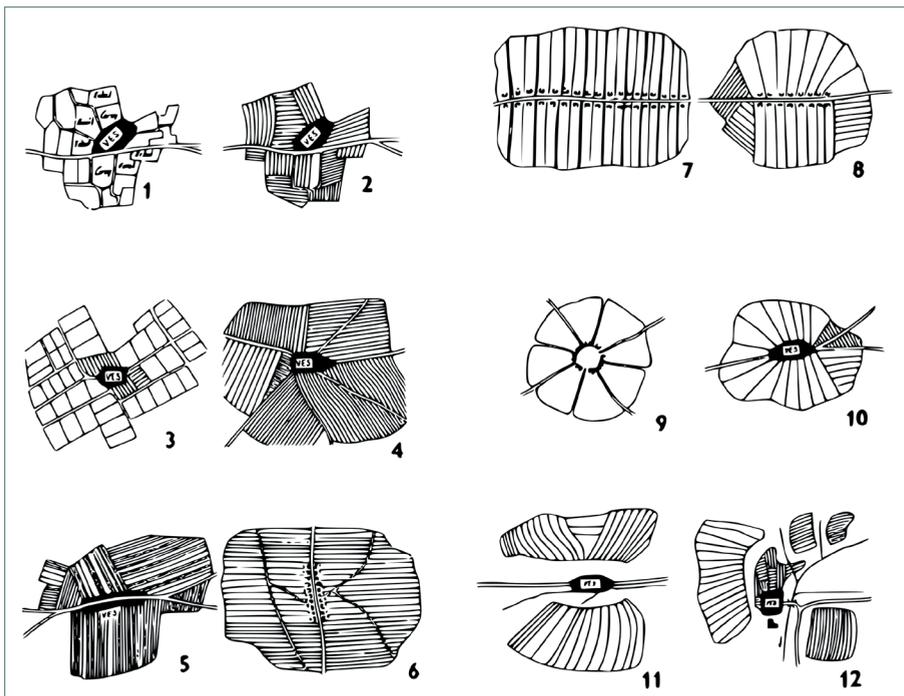


Figure 5. General typology of ploughlands' layouts (according to E. Černý): types mentioned in the text: 4: sectional ploughland; 6 – 10: long strip plots / backyard ploughland.



Figure 6. Illustrations in a Saxon Law Book (Sachsenspiegel) show peasants' diverse actions, rights, and obligations: 1. Landlords hands over the foundation charter to the locator of the village that is being established, 2.-3 Peasants promise the landlord to pay the rent and other obligations, 2. Peasants pay the rent in spring after ploughing and 3. In autumn, after crop harvesting, 4. The watermill, heavy plough and church are part of the village's facilities, 5. Peasants are obliged to build dykes as flood protection, 6. Peasants are obliged to build fences around their farmsteads, and running water from the roof must not fall onto the neighbour plot, 7. Neighbour's trees overhanging the fence of the farmstead may be cut down.

values.<sup>48</sup> Peasants shared a common idea of the village and its surroundings, which was essential for its functioning. Without the cohesion of the rural community, the village could not operate (the disintegration of neighbourly relations is regarded as a factor in abandonment,<sup>49</sup> see below).

##### *5. Formation of the three-compartment residential house and the peasant household*

Alongside the transformations ongoing in villages and the countryside, a three-compartment house was formed and became the predominant peasant dwelling in East Central Europe. This house type existed in various regional forms, constructions, and layouts (longitudinal or hooked), but the concept was analogous throughout the whole area. It typically consists of a smoke or semi-smoke living room with a heating device in the corner (in German: *Rauchstube*, in Czech: *jizba*), an entrance hall, and a storage-room/granary (in Bohemia, and Moravia) or byre (in Germany).<sup>50</sup>

Traditionally it has been assumed (particularly in the works of ethnographers and building historians) that the three-compartment house was imported from Western Europe.<sup>51</sup> However, archaeological excavations of DMVs in Czech lands (notably Bystřec, Mstěnice, and partly also Pfaffenschlag), have revealed its complex origin; the formation of three-compartment house was rather a gradual process, resulting from the merging of originally separate residential dwellings and farm outbuildings.<sup>52</sup>

The appearance of the farmsteads and the architectural and functional differentiation of spaces within peasant houses, even within the same village, provide insight into everyday life and social practises. These practices encompass various activities and routines related to housing, storage, housework, and household maintenance, revealing potential for peasant agency as well.<sup>53</sup>

Agency is manifested in ideas about household functioning and overall appearance, particularly concerning the sharing of space with other household members. Rural households represent social assemblages formed by social relations based on blood kinship as well as a common way of life and hospitality. Under one roof, not only the nuclear biological family lived, but also

<sup>48</sup> Górecki, "Medieval Peasants," 277.

<sup>49</sup> Dyer, "Villages in crisis," 30.

<sup>50</sup> However, one- and two-parts houses of archaic building tradition still existed in some areas, Vařeka, "The Formation of the Three-compartment Rural House," 145.

<sup>51</sup> Frolec, "K interpretaci."

<sup>52</sup> Smetánka, "K problematice trojdílného domu;" Nekuda, "Vývoj trojdílného;" Pálóczi-Horváth, "Development of the Late-Medieval house;" Vařeka, *Archeologie středověkého*, 256-7; Vařeka, "Formation of rural house;" Schreg, "Farmsteads in Early Medieval Germany."

<sup>53</sup> Schreg, "Interaktion und Kommunikation," 485; Gilchrist, *Medieval*, 114-9.

other members such as tenants, lodgers, or servants.<sup>54</sup> Estimates of peasant family size in Central Europe suggest an average of 6 to 9 members.<sup>55</sup> They had to coexist in some manner; the competence of the household and its individual decisions shaped the living space.

Archaeological excavations (Pfaffenschlag and Hard) have revealed that the basic layout of the house was further subdivided internally, resulting in five or even seven distinct spaces. The prevailing interpretation, supported by ethnography, suggest that these additional spaces served as private areas for other household members.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, numerous discrete zones of activity can be identified, including those related to social and gender distribution.

Peasant houses could be utilized, experienced, and perceived in various ways and should not be viewed statically – they had a degree of social ‘flexibility’ and ‘fluidity’. Space, conceptualized in terms of social relation, was ‘inherently dynamic’, and peasants as social actors, attributed them different meanings at different times.<sup>57</sup> Although houses were primarily built for habitation, their form, internal layout, and furnishings were subject to change. The physical and material furnishings of the house can be reconstructed through archaeology or analysis of written sources such as household inventories, property transfers, and wills.<sup>58</sup>

Archaeology reveals objects typically omitted from inventories, such as pottery, agricultural and craft tools, while rural household inventories document more valuable items like metal vessels, textiles, leathers, blankets, pillows and specific types of wooden furnishing, such as tables, beds, chairs, benches, and wooden chests.<sup>59</sup> A typical space, whose function could socially change, was two-storey storage room/granary, which may have served various purposes beyond the primary storage of agricultural products and hand-craft tools.<sup>60</sup>

As a domestic, physically framed space, the peasant house was not a simple binary entity generating and articulating social differences through its spatial and social organization (inside/outside; public/private; male/female). In the traditional view, the peasant household was considered a space for exercising patriarchal authority. However, it also provided opportunities for women’s agency.<sup>61</sup> The gendered division of labour within space, as perceived in the past, with men primarily engaged in productive work outside (mainly

<sup>54</sup> Laslett, “Family and household,” 528; Rösener, “Die bäuerliche Familie des Spätmittelalters,” 139; Jervis, “Examining Temporality.”

<sup>55</sup> Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 275-6.

<sup>56</sup> Dyer, “Living in Peasant Houses.”

<sup>57</sup> Flather, “Space, Place, and Gender,” 345.

<sup>58</sup> Goldberg, “The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity,” Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 115; Jervis, “Examining Temporality;” Petráňová, Vařeka, “Vybavení venkovské.”

<sup>59</sup> Dyer, “Living in peasant houses,” 21-2; Briggs, Forward, Jervis, Tomkpins, “People, possessions and domestic space.”

<sup>60</sup> Vařeka, “Formation of rural house,” 148.

<sup>61</sup> Müller, “Peasant women;” Jervis, “Examining Temporality.”

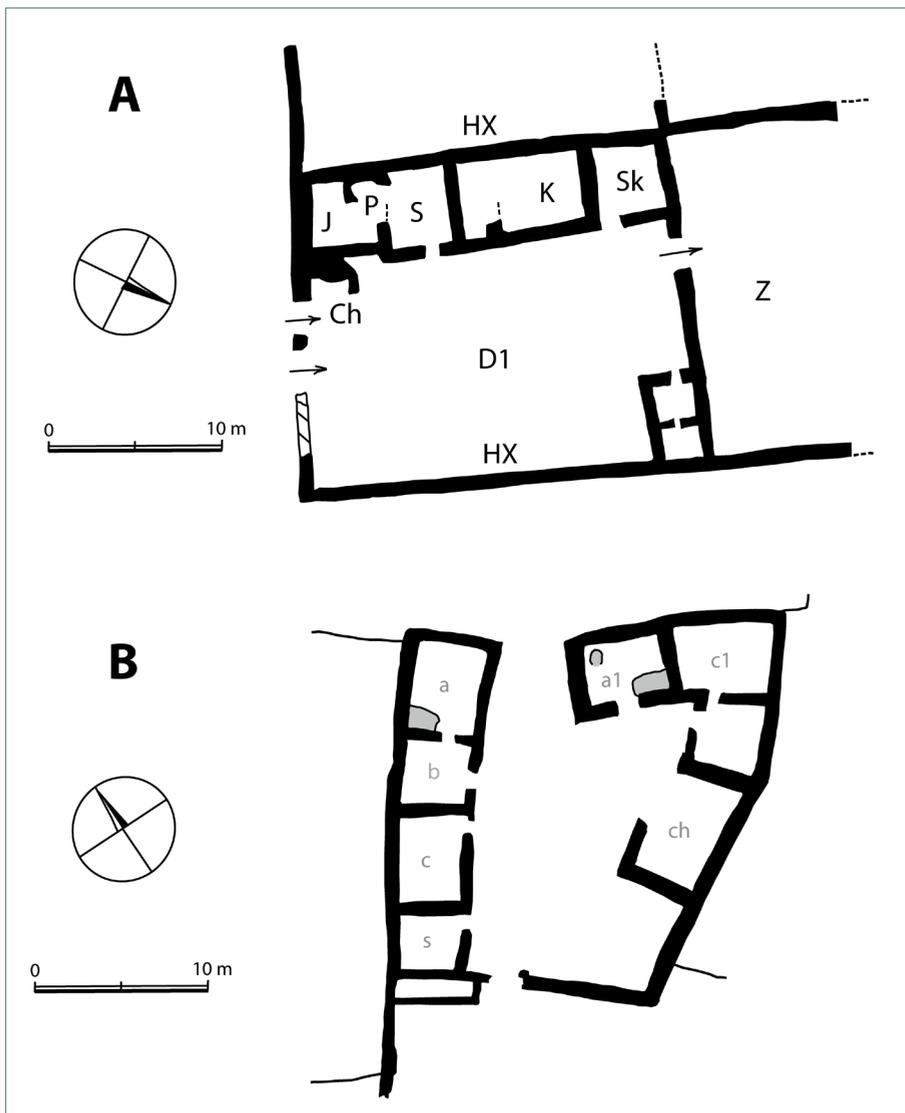


Figure 7. Comparison of two excavated farmsteads with the interpretation of individual objects / functional units: A) farmstead in DMV of Svidna: J – smoke living room, P – stone oven, S – entrance hall, K – storage room, Sk – granary, Ch – bread oven, D – courtyard, Ds – courtyard’s building of indeterminate function, HX – assumed farm building, Z – garden (according to Z. Smetánka); B) farmstead in DMV of Mstěnice: a – smoke living room with stone oven (grey), a1 – a second living space (probably an outhouse – life tenancy, rent-charge house) with stove and a fireplace (grey), b – entrance hall, c – storage room, c1 – probable storage room, s – granary, ch – barn (according to R. Nekuda and V. Nekuda).

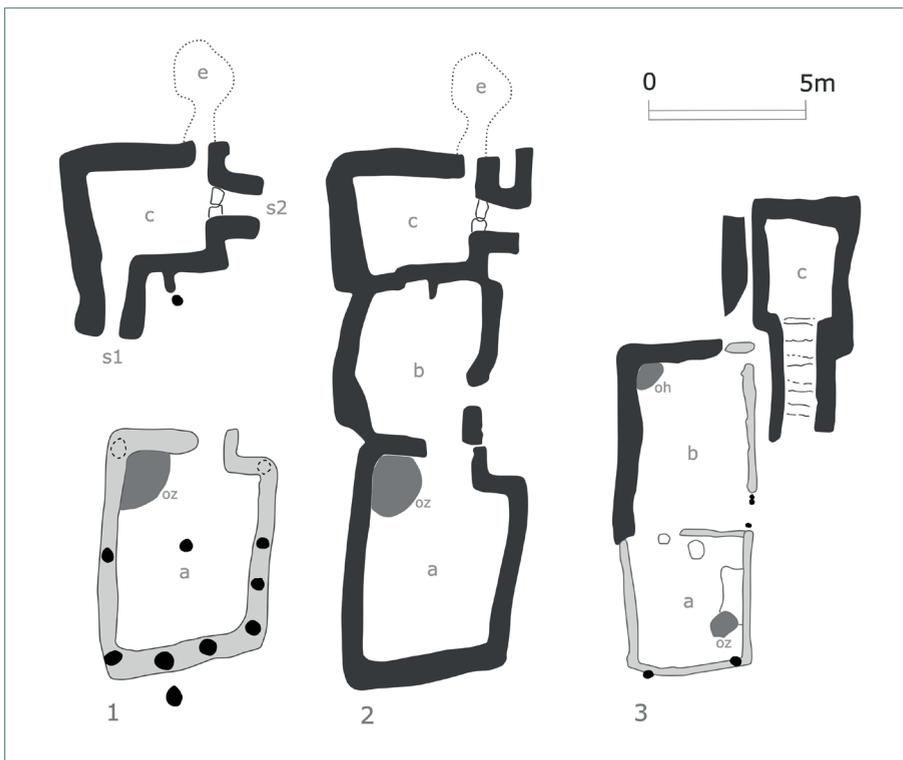


Figure 8. Genesis of a three-part house according to the evidence obtained by archaeological excavation in Mstěnice (according to V. Nekuda): 1: The oldest phase of the house in farmstead II; a – freestanding smoke living room of post-and-beam constructions (oz – oven), c – freestanding stone-built semi-sunken storage room (S1 entrance, entrance from the courtyard), l – cellar ('loch'); 2: the latest phase of the house in farmstead II; a – smoke living-room with oven (oz), b – entrance hall, c – semi-sunken storage room with entrance from the courtyard, l – cellar ('loch'); 3: Farmstead III; a – smoke living-house of post-and-beam constructions (oz – oven), b – attached entrance hall of combined construction with fireplace (oh), c – freestanding stone-build semi-sunken storage room (according to R. Nekuda and V. Nekuda).

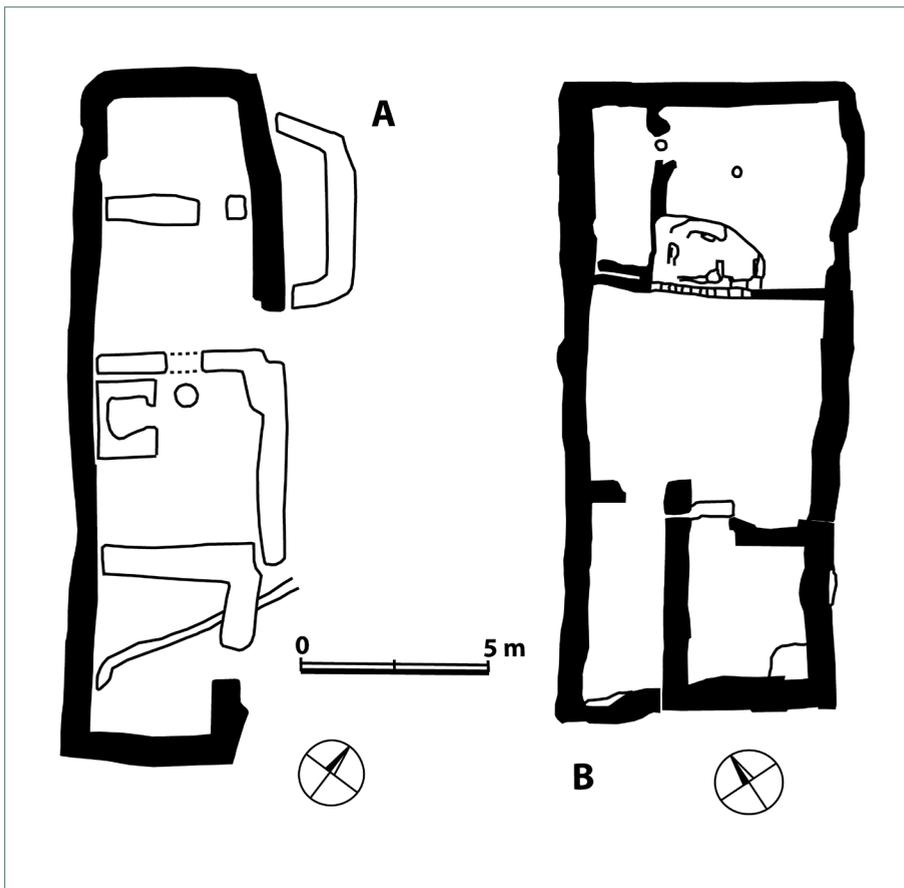


Figure 9. Comparison of a selected three-part house in (A) Svidna (according to Z. Smetánka) and (B) Pfaffenschlag (according to V. Nekuda).

agriculture) and women in small-scale production within the domestic space, is highly simplistic. Women were engaged in a wide range of activities,<sup>62</sup> and they could play leading roles in organization household management or even take control of economic activities in some cases.<sup>63</sup>

## 6. *Production, livelihood, and nutrition of peasants*

The original idea that East Central European peasant communities were engaged in agricultural production still prevails. They grew grain for subsistence and generated surplus for subsequent commercial market exchange. The accompanying activity was the domestic animals breeding.<sup>64</sup> The proportion between arable farming and livestock breeding varied depending on the type of landscape – in mountainous, less agroclimatic favourable areas, the amount of arable land was significantly lower in favour of pastures and more livestock production.<sup>65</sup> The creation of the regulated field system and the transition to the three-field crop farming system during the 13<sup>th</sup> century represented a significant structural change involving new land management and economic decision-making.<sup>66</sup> It led to a more significant intensification of agriculture, which was carried out on a smaller scale but with high inputs, resulting in greater diversification of the crops grown compared to the previous period. A negative consequence of extensive arable farming was the reduction of the area for pastures, which were an integral part of the village ecosystem. Animal housing in byres (cowsheds), which has been well-documented in excavated DMVs, positively affected the production of manure used to fertilize the fields. This is indicated by scattered pottery shards or geochemical analysis of soils.<sup>67</sup> Innovations in farming tools were also emerged during this period (especially a heavy mouldboard plough allowing deep tillage and better cultivation of fields).<sup>68</sup>

In less favourable conditions, such as mountainous and foothills areas with limited availability of arable land the medieval village economy relied more on non-agricultural production. Village communities engaged in craft and proto-industrial production to diversify their economics. Between the ‘lowlands’ oriented on commercial grain production and ‘mountainous’ areas, there were extensive mixed zones – agriculture had a subsistence character accompanied by other sources depending on the local conditions. These dif-

<sup>62</sup> Flather, “Space, Place, and Gender;” Dyer, “Living in peasant houses,” 23.

<sup>63</sup> Rösener, “Die bäuerliche Familie,” 139; Čechura, “Rolnictvo v Čechách,” 479.

<sup>64</sup> Rösener, *Peasantry of Europe*, 122-43; Cerman, “Social structure.”

<sup>65</sup> Schreg, “Feeding the village;” Schreg, “Ecological Approaches,” 96-7.

<sup>66</sup> Schreg, “Ecological Approaches,” 102.

<sup>67</sup> Klápště, *Proměna Českých zemí*, 284; Horák, Klír, “Pedogenesis, Pechochemistry and the Functional Structure;” Janovský, Horák, “Large Scale Geochemical Signatures.”

<sup>68</sup> Klápště, “Změna – středověká transformace,” 22-4; Gringmuth-Dallmer. “Der Wandel der Agrarwirtschaft.”

ferences in production regions are reflected, for example, in the size and arrangement of farmsteads. Large courtyard-type farmsteads situated in compact village were mainly in lowland areas, while small, dispersed farmsteads predominated in mountainous areas.<sup>69</sup>

The peasants had to manage work organisation in different local conditions, with considerable autonomy in decision-making. Within individual households, they had a great deal of latitude to decide which activities to undertake, choose the crops to be sown or animals to breed, or determine the amount of expenditure to be allocated to the farmstead equipment.<sup>70</sup> The rich archaeological, archaeobotanical and archaeozoological evidence demonstrates considerable variation and diversity not only between regions and villages but also between farmsteads within a single village.<sup>71</sup> This is manifested particularly by the different spectrum and proportions of cereals and livestock, as well as by the presence of horticulture, gardening, winemaking and hunting<sup>72</sup> on some farmsteads.

Knowledge of the consumption, nutrition, and diet of rural communities is still very limited. However, there are indications of different dietary preferences in the selection and consumption of plant and animal food, which also vary among village communities.<sup>73</sup>

Archaeology has contributed significantly to the evidence of non-agrarian production, especially in mountain and foothill areas, associated with surface exploitation of iron ores and their primary metallurgical processing (sorting, roasting), as well as forest crafts such as charcoal burning and tar production.<sup>74</sup> There is an absence of references in written sources for such activities as they took place outside of the empytheutical relationship between the serfs and the landlords.<sup>75</sup> Craft industries commonly associated with the urban sphere were abundant in villages, such as blacksmithing (Bystřec, Sarvaly, Hard, Pagram) and pottery workshops (Mstěnice). Almost all excavated villages provided evidence of wood and leather processing and textile production. The question arises whether this evidence of small-scale production represents domestic consumption or could generate alternative economic income.<sup>76</sup>

Overall, the traditional deterministic ideas of a one-sided orientation of rural communities towards agriculture and their insistence on growing grain

<sup>69</sup> Klír, "Die ländliche Besiedlung Böhmens;" Klír, "Zaniklé středověké," 24-5.

<sup>70</sup> Čechura, "Rolnictvo v Čechách," 482; Stone, *Decision-Making*.

<sup>71</sup> Klápště, *Archaeology of Prague*, 34-5.

<sup>72</sup> This contradicts often-reported hunting prohibitions, which was the prerogative of the nobility: Gøbler, "Gedanken zur sozialen Schichtung," 149.

<sup>73</sup> Klápště, *Archaeology of Prague*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Denecke. "Siedlungsentwicklung und wirtschaftliche;" Kenzler, "The Medieval Settlement;" Černá, Klír, "Osídlení Krušných;" Klír, "Die ländliche Besiedlung," 147-60; Klír, "Zaniklé středověké vsi," 24-5.

<sup>75</sup> Nováček, "Nerostné suroviny," 294.

<sup>76</sup> Svensson. "Before a world-system?."

everywhere can thus be challenged.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, we encounter different strategies (and adaptability; cf. resilience theory below), which may have varied flexibly according to external circumstances and local conditions. Economic decision-making – what is or is not profitable to grow and whether it makes sense to focus activities on complementary production – is part of the essential ‘cognitive equipment’ of peasant communities and their capacity for agency.

### 7. *Integration of the rural economy into the market (trade relations)*

Peasant farmsteads were the ‘micro-economy’ units with their own farming practice aimed at securing the subsistence of all members (see above).<sup>78</sup> Additionally, they were obligated to pay a serf’s rent to local authorities (landlords, church). A fifth or a quarter of the harvest had to be set aside for the next sowing season. Any eventual surplus was then used for market exchange to acquire goods and services they lacked or were unavailable in the village, and to obtain cash. It is estimated that around 30% of total production was allocated for market sale in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Alternative sources of income included the sale of livestock, poultry, or other domestic products (cheese, honey, etc.).<sup>79</sup>

The local market played an increasingly important role in the life of peasant communities. In the Late Middle Ages, the demand for market exchange grew alongside the preference for cash as a serf’s rent.<sup>80</sup> The share of commercial grain trade significantly increased during this period. Many peasants became involved in the market economy and trade relations with towns and the countryside, which gradually ensured their relative economic prosperity.<sup>81</sup>

In these circumstances, peasant might invest in purchasing or renting additional land or expanding their herds of livestock.<sup>82</sup> Commercial trade required the storage of agricultural products and food, which was also organised at the level of individual farmsteads, becoming an essential part of the socio-economic system.<sup>83</sup> In the Late Middle Ages, storage capacity for accumulating of large stocks exceptionally increased, as evidenced by archaeological excavations. Above-ground multi-storey granaries (in Mstěníce and Hard) were integrated into the house or situated separately within the farmstead. Additionally, various walled cellars were probably used for storage purposes (as uncovered in Pfaffenschlag and Sarvaly).

<sup>77</sup> Houfková, Horák, Pokorná, Bešta, Pravcová, Novák, Klír, “The dynamics of a non-forested.”

<sup>78</sup> Čechura, “Rolnictvo v Čechách,” 477.

<sup>79</sup> Guzowski, “A Changing Economy,” 14; Míka, *Poddaný lid*, 31-2.

<sup>80</sup> Cerman, “Social structure.”

<sup>81</sup> Čechura, “Rolnictvo v Čechách,” 468-9; Cerman, Maur, “Proměny vesnických;” Klír, “Die ländliche Besiedlung,” 152; Schofield, *Peasant and community*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Guzowski, “Changing economy,” 18; Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*.

<sup>83</sup> Schreg, “Feeding the village,” 305.

Markets offered many opportunities for various forms of peasant agencies. They served as central places with a strong socialising function, where peasants interacted with craftsmen and traders, negotiated prices, and arranged various obligations and transactions.<sup>84</sup>

Peasants also engaged in negotiations with external lenders (trades, officials from outside the village, but also neighbours) with whom they entered into loan agreements (for instance in response to economic stress and environmental crises). The enforcement of such agreements may have influenced the nature of relationships within the rural community.<sup>85</sup> The connection of peasants to the market system and their increasing purchasing power in the Late Middle Ages was positively reflected in farmsteads and their interiors (see below).

### *8. Material culture and living standards of peasants*

Thanks to market-oriented production and reduced taxes and rents in the Late Middle Ages, the overall economic situation of peasants in East Central Europe is generally assessed as favourable. Therefore, it allows them to invest in equipping their farmsteads and improving their living standards. In some cases, they may have accumulated relatively substantial wealth.

Insight into the peasants' standard of living is mainly provided by artefacts (material culture). Archaeological excavations of DMVs have revealed notable differences and varied patterns among farmsteads, sometimes even within the same village. These differences suggest a considerable social hierarchy among peasant households, evidenced by the size of the farmstead, the complexity of the building and architectural structures, and the variety of equipment and material culture. Composition of obtained artefacts and representation of their individual kinds is particularly varied. Although a complete and representative inventory of household furnishings is not always available due to organic material decay, recycling, and the transfer of valuable items, rich evidence of wealthier or more luxurious furnishings in some farmsteads has been obtained. This evidence is diverse, as follows:

- 1) Abundance of iron objects, including various types of tools and equipment, as well as valuable things suggesting greater purchasing power and 'luxury', such as small metal decorative objects as part of the clothing and personal equipment (metal buckles, clasps, rings), equestrian gear (stirrups, spurs), and weapons (long knives and dusacks).
- 2) High-quality tableware such as stoneware, majolica, Loštice goblets, or glass vessels. However, directly associating these objects with higher so-

<sup>84</sup> Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Schofield, "Dealing in Crisis," 254-5.

cial status for peasants can be problematic.<sup>86</sup> The proliferation of valuable objects in the village farmsteads may be directly related to the involvement of peasants in trade relations and their purchasing power. A sensitive indicator of market exchange is the presence of imported pottery.

- 3) Introduction of new heating devices, such as stove tiles<sup>87</sup> and subsequent changes of the living room. Findings of stove tiles in rural milieu appeared earlier in the German-speaking area (at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries). They did not in the Czech lands until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century (they were not found during the DMVs excavations either).<sup>88</sup> However, the two wealthiest farmsteads were equipped with stove tiles in Sarvaly, reflecting trends seen in Hungary during the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>89</sup>

Traditionally, everything more luxurious was associated with members of the lower nobility or clergy, as suggested by Marxist historiography, which argued that peasants could not attain wealth. However, in the medieval villages, there were undoubtedly richly equipped farmsteads of wealthy peasants (in some cases richer than certain members of the lower nobility). Peasants also attempted to imitate urban or aristocratic style (mirrored in their habitus<sup>90</sup>) but in a peculiar, rudimentary rural form. Nevertheless, the social status of the peasants could change several times (it was both fluid and variable), as evidenced by written record indicating that even wealthy farmsteads were vulnerable to social decline. Younger generations, due to the division of property within the family, were often unable to maintain a wealthy farmstead.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, categorizing village household as simply 'poor' or 'rich' based on material culture alone may be misleading.<sup>92</sup>

### 9. *Impacts of human agency on the natural environment (human ecosystem)*

The relationship between peasants and the natural environment was traditionally viewed deterministically as a process of adaptation. In this perspective, the life cycle of peasants was affected by short-term events such as weather changes, as well as long-term processes related to climate change (the Medieval Climatic Optimum vs. the Little Ice Age). A paradigmatic shift occurred with the development of landscape and environmental archaeology, along with human ecology, demonstrating numerous examples of how con-

<sup>86</sup> Gofler, "Gedanken zur sozialen Schichtung;" Kypta, "Das Lebensmilieu des Dorfes."

<sup>87</sup> Kypta, "Das Lebensmilieu des Dorfes," 424.

<sup>88</sup> Ježek, Klápště, Tomášek, "The Medieval Peasant House," 352-3; Kypta, "Das Lebensmilieu des Dorfes," 425.

<sup>89</sup> Pálóczi-Horváth, "Development of house."

<sup>90</sup> Kypta, "Das Lebensmilieu des Dorfes," 320; Gofler, "Gedanken zur sozialen Schichtung;" Ghosh, "Rural Economies," 293.

<sup>91</sup> Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 54-5.

<sup>92</sup> Schmid, "Leben auf der Burg," 218.

scious and unconscious human activities have shaped the landscape. Recently, the focus has moved to studying systemic changes in the landscape and understanding the functioning of past human ecosystems. New theoretical approaches, such as systems or panarchy theory, emphasize the active role of humans, adopt a temporal perspective, and consider interactions among all involved actors.<sup>93</sup> The study of village ecosystems is currently developing, extending beyond past landscape reconstruction to examine changes from a long-term perspective. It highlights complex inter-causal dependencies among various actors, where changes and innovations in social and economic organization play essential roles.<sup>94</sup>

There are numerous examples in archaeology of the active role of peasants in coping with adverse conditions and constraints imposed by natural and climatic factors, as well as other exogenous changes, even in marginal landscapes.<sup>95</sup>

1) Various management strategies, including specific agricultural land use system and non-agricultural production, were implemented under local conditions or adapted to changing circumstances, as mentioned above. 2) Diverse ways of adapting to local hydrological conditions are also documented. Peasants actively influenced and regulated the hydrological regime of local watercourses<sup>96</sup> or constructed embankments for watermills (in Mstěnice).<sup>97</sup> They built water reservoirs and drainage ditches in waterlogged soils (in Bystřec), or retention reservoirs (small ponds for rainwater) during water shortage.<sup>98</sup> In the event of floods, they constructed dykes or dams, alternatively raised the terrain.<sup>99</sup> Frequent floods sometimes necessitated the relocation of farmsteads to another place (for instance to a higher terrace, as is well documented at Bystřec). 3) Another form of flexibility is the innovation in agricultural practices, such as fertilization, which can be traced through the distribution of ceramic sherds or through geochemical (phosphate or multi-element) analysis.<sup>100</sup>

It is still an unanswered question whether the peasants were aware of the long-term negative effects of their actions (soil loss, mineral depletion), whether they noticed when a threshold was crossed, and what their (compelling) response was.<sup>101</sup> For example, it is often stated in the literature that the boundary strips (hedgerows, lynchets) separating individual field plots pre-

<sup>93</sup> Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 107; Dotterweich, Schreg, "Archaeonics," 312-3.

<sup>94</sup> Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 85-6.

<sup>95</sup> Schreg; Klír, "Rural Settlements;" Klír, "Osídlení horských," 380-1; Klír, "Zaniklé středověké vsi."

<sup>96</sup> Takács, "Medieval hydraulic systems in Hungary."

<sup>97</sup> Nekuda, "Archaeological survey."

<sup>98</sup> Petr, Vařeka, "Palynology research."

<sup>99</sup> Felgenhauer-Schmiedt, "Archäologie ländlicher Siedlungen," 82.

<sup>100</sup> Horák and Klír, "Pedogenesis, Pedomorphology," 43-57; Janovský and Horák, "Large Scale Geochemical Signatures," 71-80.

<sup>101</sup> Dotterweich, "The history of soil erosion;" Dreibrodt, Lubos, Terhorst, Damm, Bork, "Historical soil erosion;" Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 103.

vented or reduced soil erosion.<sup>102</sup> However, whether this was a sophisticated measure has yet to be proven by future research.

In sum, peasants were often exposed to stressful situations influenced by external and internal factors, but they had specific internal resilience strategies. They could absorb stress, and minimize risks, enabling them to 'survive'.<sup>103</sup> It was the capacity for agency and the social settings that positively influenced their ability to cope with ecological stress.<sup>104</sup>

## 10. *Late medieval settlement desertion*

DMVs and their abandonment represent a pioneering theme of medieval archaeology in Central Europe,<sup>105</sup> which was also reflected in the perception of peasants. They were seen as victims of: 1) 'Big events' and crisis phenomena (such as wars, famines, epidemics, the vagaries of weather, and crop failures),<sup>106</sup> 2) Adverse long-term processes and changes (especially 'late medieval crisis'<sup>107</sup> and other economic recessions, climate deterioration especially during the Little Ice Age), and 3) Intervention from the landlords and their manorial economy.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, they were victims of their own economic activity and agricultural production. Especially, the high pressure on land and intensive three-field crop farming have frequently been discussed as triggers for ecological crises (erosion, mineral depletion, or drying up of water sources) that could result in the non-profitability of farmsteads and abandonment.<sup>109</sup> Peasants were thus forced to leave their farmsteads and seek opportunities elsewhere (for instance wage labour in towns).

The large-scale archaeological excavations of DMVs have not significantly contributed to explaining the reasons of abandonment. Only two opposite situations have been documented: 1) Destruction horizon manifested by a burnt layer, fire debris, and *de facto* refuse, interpreted as a violent, sudden abandonment (in the case of Msténice, Konůvky, Bystřec, or Sarvaly). This evidence was usually associated with wartime events mentioned in written sources.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Recently Šitnerová, Beneš, Kottová, Bumerl, Majerovičová, Janečková. "Archeologický výzkum plužin," 146.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Daim, Gronenborn, Schreg, *Strategien zum Überleben*, 197-302.

<sup>104</sup> Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 111.

<sup>105</sup> Měřínský, Die "«Villa deserta»;" Klápště, "Investigating Rural Settlement," 102; Klápště, *Archaeology of Prague*, 131-2; Michl, *Wüstungsforschung in Deutschland*.

<sup>106</sup> Graus, *Das Spätmittelalter als Krisenzeit*; Schuster, "Die Krise des Spätmittelalters;" Rösener, "Die Wüstungen des Spätmittelalters;" Kitsikopoulos, *Agrarian change and crisis in Europe*; Schreg, "Die Krisen;" Michl, *Wüstungsforschung in Deutschland*, 70-4.

<sup>107</sup> Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunkturen*; Kriedtke, "Spätmittelalterliche Agrarkrise;" Rösener, "Krisen und Konjunkturen."

<sup>108</sup> Čechura, *Die Struktur der Grundherrschaften*; Maur, *Gutsherrschaft und «zweite Leibeigenschaft»*; Cerman, "Demesne Lordship."

<sup>109</sup> Schreg, "Die Krisen," 202; Schreg, "Eternal Peasant," 63.

<sup>110</sup> A fire was documented also in Pagram but without any connection to the war event, cf. Thelone, «*das dorff pagerem*», 151.

In contrast, 2) archaeological excavations in Svídna and Hard pointed to a planned abandonment of the villages. No destruction horizons were detected, and there is evidence of careful clearance (a voluntary cleaning) of farmsteads before leaving. The quantity of artefacts discovered is much more modest than in the previous case, with only a minimum of valuable items (probably forgotten at the site and not taken away like the other items). No concrete evidence about the motivations of peasants for abandoning the settlement was found. The closer circumstances of abandonment are indicated by the striking disproportion of iron objects both between DMVs and between farmsteads within a single DMV.<sup>111</sup> In addition to the above, environmental constraints (poor soils in Pfaffenschlag) and changes (slope erosion in Bystřec) have been mentioned as reasons for permanent desertion. However, the direct link between negative human ecological impact and settlement abandonment has not yet been adequately supported by evidence. Overall, understanding the abandonment process requires a detailed contextual analysis regarding peasant agency.<sup>112</sup>

Instead of the original view of the village as a static entity, the extraordinary dynamic of the whole process has gradually been emphasized. Linking abandonment to a sudden, single (catastrophic) event and monocausal explanations is misleading.<sup>113</sup> On the contrary, it took many faces, forms, and variations manifested in the long-term perspective. Drawing a sharp line between deserted and inhabited villages is impossible. Abandonment may have involved only several farmsteads and not the entire village; farmsteads could be partially and temporarily abandoned, then reoccupied, and settlements may have survived in a shrunken form until a later period or even the present day.

The vulnerability of rural communities has been anticipated *a priori*. In recent years, however, the issue has been reconsidered. Peasants are no longer perceived as 'passive victims' of external events, processes, or interventions. Instead, their active role is emphasized. Significant importance is given to social factors – the role of peasant agencies that could actively influence their life destinies.<sup>114</sup> Ultimately, the decision to abandon the settlement was that of the village community; often, it was a matter for individual peasant households. Whether 'to stay' or 'leave' should be seen as one of the key factors behind settlement abandonment in the late medieval period. Written sources document considerable peasants' mobility (to other villages or towns).<sup>115</sup> Neighbours often integrated abandoned land into their holdings, or new tenants reoccupied temporarily empty farmsteads.

<sup>111</sup> Klír, Janovský, Hylmarová, "The contextual value."

<sup>112</sup> Schreg, "Ecological Approaches," 104.

<sup>113</sup> Klír, "Procesy pustnutí," 714; Klápště, "Investigating Rural Settlement," 102; Michl, *Wüstungsforschung in Deutschland*, 29-30, 67.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Sreenivasan, "Beyond the Village," 50; Schofield, *Peasant and community*, 5-8; Alfonso, "Comparing National Historiographies," 8-11; Dyer, "Villages in crisis," 28-45; Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 469-73.

<sup>115</sup> Klír, "Procesy pustnutí," 714; Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 473.

Evidence of the flexible response of rural communities and high adaptive capacity is emerging. There is now a consensus that peasants could overcome short-term events (such as war or fire) under certain conditions and were able to cope with economic pressures and poor ecological conditions (cf. resilience theory).<sup>116</sup> The stimulus to abandon farmsteads (and villages) need not only be various exogenous shocks. It can also be a range of endogenous factors that emanate from within the community – such as, disputes, disruption of neighbourly relations, or weak ties within the community.<sup>117</sup> However, the incentive to leave cannot be limited to shocks and crises – leaving may be driven by nothing more than the attractiveness of other places to live, according to the individual preferences of peasant households.

#### 11. *Conclusion and discussion: A rethinking of rural communities' characterization from the peasant agency perspective*

Changes directly related to rural settlement, including the reorganization of settlement patterns, field systems, the emergence of the (nucleated) village, and the development of the peasant house, as well as innovations in agricultural production, human-landscape interaction, market relations, and material culture, have not been widely discussed in the perspective of peasant agency in East Central Europe.

Rural communities were traditionally considered as either as passive actors who subordinated to higher interests or adapted – were forced to adapt – as a whole mass to external conditions and interventions.<sup>118</sup> The active role of peasants and the contribution of peasant agency in influencing historical processes have been significantly underestimated. The reassessment of the existing narrative poses one of the greatest challenges for medieval historiography and archaeology, even more so in Central Europe.

Today, the initiative and individuality of peasants in many aspects of their lives and historical events can be demonstrated through many examples. Peasant communities must be studied without *a priori* social distinction imposed sometimes by the testimony of written sources. On the contrary peasants should be viewed, in general, in terms of the social relations and ties taking place at the level of individual peasant households and within the wider village community. Historians from the English 'peasantological school' have pointed out the complex and overlapping sets of relationships even within a single community, which were often particularly complex.<sup>119</sup> The diversity in the social status of peasants (social inequality) was caused by different dependencies on labour, access to resources (means of production), and goods.

<sup>116</sup> Schreg, "Feeding the village."

<sup>117</sup> Dyer, "Villages in crisis," 28-45.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Svensson, "Before a world-system," 189; Rösener, *Peasantry of Europe*.

<sup>119</sup> E.g., Dyer, "The English Medieval Village," 418; Müller, "A divided class?," 117

However, social status was not fixed, as there were many gradations in land possession, welfare, and frequent vertical and horizontal mobility from one social category to another. The medieval (not only Central European) peasantry was not homogeneous but very diverse and fractured, and not sharply stratified into distinctive social classes, as has been proclaimed in the past.<sup>120</sup> Rural communities developed as distinct social groups maintaining complex social relations among their members. In the Late Middle Ages, village municipalities were established with their competencies and institutions to ensure adherence to the norms of coexistence.<sup>121</sup> The peasants participated not only in agricultural production but also supported each other when needed. These collective practices strengthened neighbourly relations.

The rural community represented an essential domain of social, economic, and demographic interaction. Community members can be seen as ‘neighbours’, born and raised into the same external conditions, gaining similar life experiences, and engaging with each other in a wide range of activities. In such a community, there was no place for anonymity and a strong awareness of interdependence prevailed.<sup>122</sup> They appear very cohesive and often united in their resistance to the local authorities, manifested often in Central Europe.<sup>123</sup>

Peasant communities should be seen as distinctive social groups with internal stratification and social identity manifested by variations in living standards, diverse internal and external ties and interactions, and the ability to withstand stressful situations and effectively shape their life destinies. There is increasing evidence from various places in Europe that peasants were strategic and knowledgeable agents.<sup>124</sup>

Archaeology has an extraordinary potential to reconsider the stereotypical ideas about medieval peasantry imposed by the diction of written sources. However, individual or collective peasant agency is complicated to interpret from archaeological records, which are often fragmentary, ambiguous, and influenced by formative and post-depositional processes. While archaeology can document structured deposits, specific contexts, or forms of ‘materialised record’,<sup>125</sup> it is very difficult to interpret whether this materiality reflects social practice, behaviour, or evidence of deliberate peasant agency. Interpreting these structures against the backdrop of historical processes through the lens of peasant agency represents a non-trivial task.

One direction for future research may be a detailed contextual analysis of material records. This approach may point to some evidence of motivations for social action, decision-making processes, or even peasant agency,

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Schofield, *Peasant and Community*; Aparisi and Royo, “Fractures in the Community;” Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*.

<sup>121</sup> E.g., Rösener, “Leben auf dem Lande,” 71-2.

<sup>122</sup> Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, 5-6; Klír, *Rolnictvo na Chebsku*, 38.

<sup>123</sup> E.g., Blickle, “Peasant Revolts;” Freedman, “Peasant Resistance.”

<sup>124</sup> E.g., Dyer, “Villages in crisis;” Svensson, Pettersson, Nilsson, Boss, Johansson, “Resilience and Medieval Crises.”

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Stevenson, “Toward an understanding.”

manifesting in the abovementioned variations. Some motivations that led to changes to 'existing orders' were undoubtedly individual. Yet archaeology more often encounters objects and contexts that are more likely to be evidence of community agency.

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# **Village formation and peasantry agency. The case study of Gorliz (Bizkaia)\***

by Teresa Campos-Lopez

The study of medieval village formation has generated an intense debate throughout Europe regarding the construction of agricultural landscapes, the initiative of the elites, the weight of the lordships or the importance of the peasantry. To evaluate this task, we will become the analysis of the Early Medieval archaeological contexts documented in the town of Gorliz (Biscay, Spain), where early medieval villages appear as true elements gestated from the peasantry in dialogue with different central and local powers. Also we focus on the need to carry out archaeological and historical analysis with a multifocal perspective, so we can overcome the limitations of unilateral approaches, due to a global and holistic strategy.

Early Middle Ages, 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gorliz, Community, Peasant Agency, Habitat.

## *1. Introduction*

The aim of this paper is to carry out an approach to the emergence of villages during High Middle Ages in parameters of organization of space, forms of socialization, as well as the organization of agricultural landscapes. In this sense, the formation of villages during the high medieval period is one of the most worked on topics in Western Europe in the last 40 years.<sup>1</sup> Actually, the

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<sup>1</sup> Quirós, “Village formation, Social Memories and Archaeology,” 301.

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dense historiographical base created, allows us to approach this issue from archaeological and historical perspectives.

In the post-war period, at the same time as the mechanization of agricultural tasks and the use of plows capable of carrying out deeper work is standardized, non-visible deposits until that date began to emerge. The increase in the number of interventions in this type of archaeological settlements since the 70s, not only helped to carry out the first syntheses and general studies, but also served to lay down general bases of the question, and to address an historical model approach with a theoretical perspective of archaeological documents. Therefore, on the one hand, the study of uninhabited areas and agricultural spaces, and, on the other, the necessary new focus of the studies associated with this type of sites from new perspectives such as the *naissance du village* and the *incastellamento*<sup>2</sup> have allowed analysing the archaeology of the peasantry and the formation of feudalism from new approaches.<sup>3</sup>

A basic reference work is the volume by Robert Fossier and Jean Chapelot (1980),<sup>4</sup> in which textual and material sources come integrated to address the phenomenon of the birth of the village through the notion of *encellulement*. This concept assesses how the implementation of feudal society would have determined a spatial, social and political framework of peasantry under the lord domination. Working on examples and reports from different sites in France, but also including others from Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and Central Europe, these authors established that the emergence of the village as a unit of habitat, as an element of the socioeconomic framework and as an architectural fact, in the European geographical area, occurs around the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries within the context of the consolidation of feudalism.

During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the rising of development-led Archaeology and the development of the archaeology of the villages due to the increase of the number of documented sites, a reformulation and reinterpretation of this model took place under new historiographical traditions.<sup>5</sup> In this context, contradictions between the archaeological records, that were being generated and the hypotheses and models derived from the study of written sources, appeared. This disagreement led Elisabeth Zadora-Rio,<sup>6</sup> for example, to speak of “historians’ villages” versus “archaeologists’ villages”.

Later on, the first syntheses based on archaeological data appeared, processing the results of the numerous projects carried out in previous years. Among the main works, those written by Riccardo Francovich and Richard Hodges, in 2003,<sup>7</sup> or the synthesis carried out by Edith Peytremann<sup>8</sup> (2003)

<sup>2</sup> Toubert, *Les structures du Latium medieval*; Augenti and Galetti, *L'incastellamento*.

<sup>3</sup> Quirós, *Arqueología del campesinado medieval*.

<sup>4</sup> Fossier and Chapelot, *La village et la maison au Moyen Âge*.

<sup>5</sup> Quirós, “Village formation, Social Memories and Archaeology,” 301; Campos-Lopez, *Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Bizkaia*.

<sup>6</sup> Zadora-Rio, “Early medieval villages and estate centers in France.”

<sup>7</sup> Villa to village. *The transformation of the Roman Countryside in Italy, c. 400-1000*.

<sup>8</sup> *Archéologie de l'habitat rural dans le nord de la France du IV<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

are some of the main ones. Therefore, the relation between village formation, nucleation and the introduction of lordships is a more complex process: on the one hand, the ways in which lordships worked inside a system of villages that was already formalized during the Early Medieval times; and, on the other hand, social agency for village formation.

In the last twenty years, we have witnessed the creation of new synthetic works with new perspectives raised from the reading of the different archaeological records. Among them, we can highlight the works of Helena Hamerow (2002)<sup>9</sup> or Chris Wickham (2005),<sup>10</sup> in which, from a social comparative analysis, assess that when aristocracy was powerful enough, they could dominate either dispersed or concentrated peasant societies. More recently, one of the latest publications by Christopher Loveluck (2012),<sup>11</sup> settle on a comparative perspective, assesses the analysis of how the power and the intentions of the elites found resistance in the actions of some groups, such as peasants, artisans and merchants, both in the rural world and in the urban world; these tensions will give rise to intentional and other unintentional social changes. Consequently, over the last few years, a new research agenda is built from a more holistic approach, focusing on rural landscapes understood as a materialization of social practices.<sup>12</sup> In sense, we can address that the major topics which are currently under debate are the study of the sub-regional diversity of landscape transformations, social agency, the chronologies of these transformations and field systems, and the social characterization of rural settlements.

This articulated picture sharply contrasts with the state of studies in Iberia. The underdevelopment of the medieval archaeology in this area has determined that these topics have not been studied until recent times.<sup>13</sup> Actually, the first approach to this problem took place through other territorial markers, such as necropolises or churches.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, social historians have analysed the earliest villages from documentation, focusing more on village communities than on the villages themselves. Later, under the influence of the French medievalism, the debates about the birth of the village or the *incastellamento* were also improved. But, during the 90s, when preventive archaeology first, and new projects (aimed

<sup>9</sup> *Early Medieval Settlements*.

<sup>10</sup> *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe*.

<sup>11</sup> *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, 13: "One of the principal aims of this book is to explain how the power and the intentions of elites were confronted by the aspirations and actions of the diverse rural peasantry, and artisans and merchants in rural and urban settings, producing both intended and unintended social changes. Hence, the past emphasis on the role of elites as catalysts promoting the development of towns, trade and reorganisation of the rural world is placed in the context of stimuli coming from other agents of change from beyond the territories that they ruled".

<sup>12</sup> Quirós, "Village formation, Social Memories and Archaeology," 303.

<sup>13</sup> Quirós, 303.

<sup>14</sup> Quirós, 301; Campos-Lopez, *Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Bizkaia*.

at the analysis of societies and rural landscapes) provided a new scale of research, once solid archaeological records were landed.

In this case, we present a case of study to assess the origin and consolidation process of villages from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in the region of Biscay (North of Spain) through the analysis of the early medieval archaeological levels documented in a development-led rescue archaeological excavation, that took place in the northern area of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, in the town of Gorliz (Biscay), during 2007 and 2008.

In this site was documented an uninterrupted historical sequence from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the present, found in the northern upper part of a hill, in the central area of the Gorliz-Elexalde neighbourhood. Therefore, the documented sequence makes it a reference site, since it is one of the few existing examples in the Basque Country in which this historical continuity and long chronology has been recorded.

Thus, this paper analyses the initial moment of the occupation of this site, which links to a specific and differentiated use – as an area of habitat –, distinct use from other later periods, which are associated with necropolis levels, structures and some other elements.

For too long, archaeology has emphasized questions like when and why of the processes it documents; however, we consider that it would be more necessary – and more difficult also – to respond to how were these processes produced.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, considering all this, this article assesses the formation process of the village of Gorliz during the Early Middle Ages and the development of the village network within the processes of change and reorganization that occurred in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Biscayan geographical context. In addition to this, it raises the examination of the transformation and abandonment of this village: how they occurred, the progressive appropriation of a central space documented by a necropolis, or the configuration of a new model of settlement. Overall, all this will be accompanied by the analysis of the role played by the peasant agency as an active subject in these documented processes.

In the same way, we defend the potentiality of preventive archaeological interventions as generators of scientific knowledge. The role played by this type of projects in the development of the archaeology of the peasantry in recent decades is undeniable.<sup>16</sup> These new perspectives and new archaeological records syntheses have drawn a new panorama. Undoubtedly, the interest aroused by this topic responds, therefore, to the development of preventive archaeology and of paleoenvironmental archaeology as well; research areas around which the archaeology of peasantry and villages is being solidly established. And, when, in cases like the one we have discussed, preventive archae-

<sup>15</sup> Quirós, "Archaeology or early medieval peasantry," 21.

<sup>16</sup> Quirós, "La arquitectura doméstica," 65-84; Campos-Lopez, "¿Para qué sirve la arqueología preventiva? 223-59; Campos-Lopez, "La arqueología de las aldeas en Bizkaia," 225-40.

ology is equipped with tools that allow it to go beyond a fieldwork completion report, it is confirmed that the results and the transmission of knowledge are assured.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, it is intended to highlight the role of the fieldwork methodology used, in order to appraise the quality of the archaeological record. In this way, we will be able to evaluate the possibilities offered by this site within a global and multifocal context, and how they could be improved from the perspective of preventive or rescue archaeology making a critical assessment of the results obtained.

Therefore, this work is structured in the following sections: first, an approach to the sequence and the results obtained it is going to be settled. Second, a series of analysis and discussion topics will be analysed, such as the process of village formation and the appearance of the cemetery space. Finally, a series of contributions will be addressed in order to induce an open debate about the role of the peasant agency and the relevance of its study and analysis.

## *2. A case study: the early medieval village of Gorliz*

### *2.1. The preventive project*

Like many other preventive archaeological interventions, this one, carried out on the north side of the Church of the Immaculate Conception of Gorliz, was determined by the initiative of the City Council to prepare the space next to the church as a parking lot, for which it was necessary to lower the ground level of the area.

Thus, in the first place, stratigraphic drillings were done in order to assess the archaeological potential of this lot, and, considering the results, a more exhaustive intervention was carried out in a total area of 1117.83 m<sup>2</sup>, between the years of 2007 and 2008. This intervention allowed the profiling of the results obtained in the surveys carried out a year earlier, in addition to documenting that the archaeological potential of this area was much greater than originally was estimated.

In general, the intervention has documented the uninterrupted occupation of the upper and northern part of the hill, where the church is located, from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the period that we address in this work, we have testimonies of a habitat area with different phases documented. Towards the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, part of the village is abandoned and a burial space appears above it. Later, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, another cemetery phase is registered, this time located to the south of a small cult structure. With some variations, the space dedicated

<sup>17</sup> Campos-Lopez, ¿Para qué sirve la arqueología preventiva?.

to the cemetery continues in time without interruption until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the current church is built with a new plant and the last of the documented cemeteries is cancelled.

Table I. Periodization table of the Gorliz deposits (Bizkaia).

| <i>Period</i>    | <i>Structures</i>   | <i>Chronology</i>   |
|------------------|---|---|
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  | Structure 1.1<br>Structure 1.2<br>Structure 1.3                 | 7 <sup>th</sup> Century   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | Structure 2.1 phase 1<br>Structure 2.1 phase 2<br>Structure 2.2 | VIII-IX centuries   |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Structure 3.1<br>Structure 3.2                                  | 10 <sup>th</sup> century, 1 <sup>st</sup> half 10 <sup>th</sup> century |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>  | Habitat displacement<br>Country necropolis                      | 10 <sup>th</sup> century-2 <sup>nd</sup> half                           |
| 5 <sup>th</sup>  | Chapel<br>Necropolis<br>Vertical typology bell oven             | 11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> centuries                         |
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Necropolis<br>E-W orientated wall                               | 13 <sup>th</sup> and 14 <sup>th</sup> centuries                         |
| 7 <sup>th</sup>  | Horizontal typology bell oven<br>Ossuary                        | 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries                         |
| 8 <sup>th</sup>  | Cemetery wall<br>Cemetery                                       | 17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> centuries                         |
| 9 <sup>th</sup>  | Cemetery-last period.   | 18 <sup>th</sup> period   |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Contemporary uses   | 20 <sup>th</sup> century  |

Therefore, as we have referenced before, the data and results presented here have to do with a developed-led rescue archaeological activity, even though it is not common for these type of interventions – those that are carried out under the umbrella of preventive archaeological practice – to present certain continuity as far as the research is concerned.<sup>18</sup> However, in this case, once the intervention was completed, some other research works have been developed.

On the first hand, a research project<sup>19</sup> with the anthropological study of some of the individuals from the necropolis and cemeteries,<sup>20</sup> stratigraphy and plans review, absolute dating, and the study of the numismatic material– approaching the monetary circulation in the north of the peninsula.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, we can mention an academic study and some other dissem-

<sup>18</sup> Campos-Lopez, *¿Para qué sirve la arqueología preventiva?*, 223-59.

<sup>19</sup> Campos-Lopez, *Estudio de los datos y materiales obtenidos en el yacimiento*.

<sup>20</sup> Mendizabal, *Las sociedades medievales del País Vasco*.

<sup>21</sup> Martín, Grañeda and Campos-Lopez, “Los Hallazgos Monetarios de la Necrópolis de la Iglesia,” 1155-76.

Martín, Grañeda and Campos-Lopez, “Monedas en el Más Acá y en el Más Allá,” 313-38.

ination texts.<sup>22</sup> All these, have made possible to complete the archaeological and historical sequence of the site with new data and investigations that have addressed the study of the record documented in this archaeological intervention.

## 2.2. *The sequence of Gorliz*

Thus, thanks to these researches, we can stand that in the northern area of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the oldest levels of the city of Gorliz have been documented until now, and, without a doubt, we can identify those with the origin of the current population. Moreover, as we are going to analyse, differences and evolution patterns can be settled, but also some persistence in some of the elements documented.

In this specific case, the documented sequence is penalized by the absence of an abundant archaeological record, a quality biological record and even by the excavated area, aspects that have conditioned the social characterization or functionality of some spaces.<sup>23</sup> In addition, we must indicate the difficulty of documenting and registering these types of linear structures, in which there used to be many reforms and have a weak archaeological footprint.<sup>24</sup>

The recorded sequence begins around the 7<sup>th</sup> century – without evidence of a previous occupation –, with the conditioning of the highest area, creating a kind of artificial plateau in which the different domestic spaces will be located.

Thus, a first phase, which we have called 1st period, is defined by a series of domestic units (4 in total) with a divergent orientation and rectangular plan, made at ground level, and with perimeter posts that delimit the interior space, which has no internal divisions. They present a dispersed spatial grouping, that is, “the domestic units are spread throughout the space without sharing dividing walls or adjoining, remaining isolated and independent from each other”.<sup>25</sup>

We propose, therefore, that during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in this first phase of Gorliz’s early medieval habitat, we can describe this area as a settlement with typological similarity and divergence in their orientations. However, we believe that a very incipient urbanism can be documented, although without the degree of complexity and organization that it will acquire later, as we will see.

<sup>22</sup> Campos-Lopez, *Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Bizkaia*; Campos-Lopez, “La arqueología de las aldeas en Bizkaia,” 225-40.

<sup>23</sup> Campos-Lopez, *Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Bizkaia*

Campos-Lopez, Martínez and Cajigas, “Los orígenes altomedievales de Gorliz,” 457-64.

<sup>24</sup> Quirós, *Arqueología del campesinado medieval*.

<sup>25</sup> Gutiérrez Lloret, “Gramática de la casa,” 156.

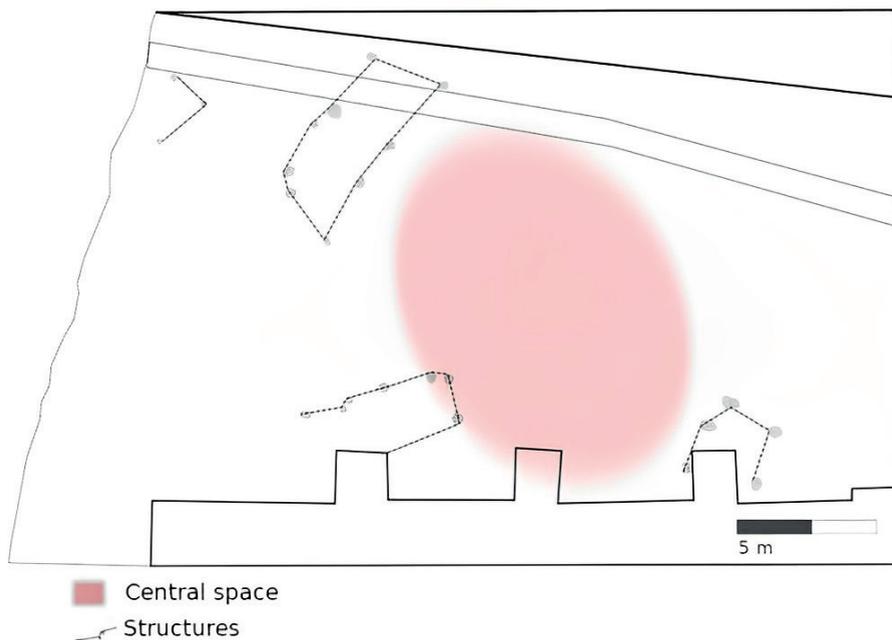


Figure 1. Plan of the structures documented in 1st period (7<sup>th</sup> century).

At the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, there is going to be a change in the constructions models and types. In the following period, the second one, the structures appear with grouped spatial organization,<sup>26</sup> and substantial changes in the morphology of these domestic spaces can be assessed. Therefore, at this time, it has been possible to link certain areas to specific activities like a yard.

It will be, also, at this moment, when an open central space is defined clearly (this element will be analysing in detail later). On the east area of this central area, two structures, which have similarities in their typology and morphology, were defined. They present some characteristics that make them different in relation to the previous occupation units. First, larger diameter post-holes, that are sometimes combined with chases made in the natural base. Also, in one of these structures, an attached area identified as a yard has been documented, showing the subdivision based on specific activities in this domestic space. The second of them has not been able to be fully documented.

<sup>26</sup> Gutiérrez Lloret, 139-64.

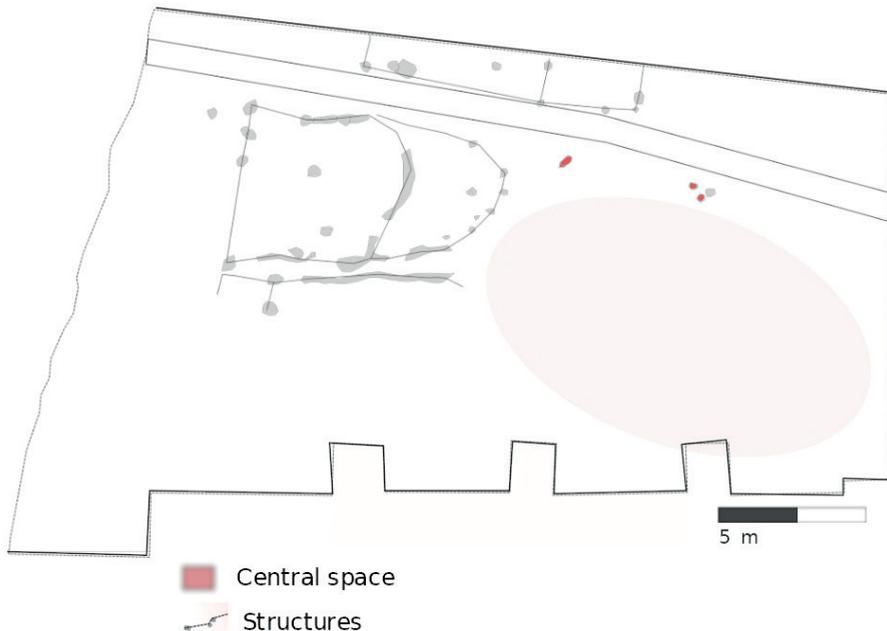


Figure 2. Plan of the structures documented in 2<sup>nd</sup> period (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Along with these two domestic units, there is a third one with the same east-west orientation, but with a very different floor plan, since it is a rectangular one. The constructive elements documented are mostly holes or post-holes, although, at a certain moment, a small fissure is made in the rock to mark an interior compartmentalization. Structures of this type have also been documented in some settlements in Alava, e.g. Aistra, Zaballa and Zornoztegi,<sup>27</sup> and there is another structure of this type documented in the investigation carried out in the Cathedral of Vitoria-Gasteiz.<sup>28</sup> In Bizcay, in Argiñeta's interventions, the remains of an internally compartmentalized rectangular structure also appeared.<sup>29</sup> Associated with this second phase of the domestic space; we must focus on the reuse of a posthole as a perinatal burial. Actually, this is the only burial registered associated with the early medieval habitat of the site.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, the existence of infant burials linked with dwelling structures is an archaeologically widespread fact, both temporally and geographically, being, apparently, an Indo-European tradition extended throughout the entire Mediterranean basin.<sup>31</sup> In relation to the arrangement

<sup>27</sup> Quirós, "La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular," 225-56.

<sup>28</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, *Arqueología e Historia de una ciudad*.

<sup>29</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, "Argiñeta," 173-7; Anibarro and García Camino, "Argiñeta," 210-5; García Camino, "Argiñeta: Un lugar donde," 140-9.

<sup>30</sup> Mendizabal, *Las sociedades medievales del País Vasco*.

<sup>31</sup> Fernández-Crespo, "Los enterramientos infantiles," 199-217.

of the bodies, they are usually buried individually, flexed postures predominate – as is our case – and grave goods are very rare. Other documented examples would be some such as the individual from the depopulated early medieval of Aistra,<sup>32</sup> or Zornoztegi, where the partial remains of a fetus or young child associated with a posthole were documented,<sup>33</sup> although with a chronology between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This type of burials in domestic contexts is associated with children who died naturally and were deposited with intention and care near the domestic spaces, responding to certain spiritual beliefs.<sup>34</sup> Also, could be linked to the believing of preserving the bond between children and adults, between the community of the living and that of their ancestors.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, in this second period, a more clustered spatial pattern is documented: thus, a domestic morphology based on a unicellular model and structures with a more complex plant. Also, a great densification and compaction can be observed, as well as a space organization.

Lastly, in the third of the documented periods, first half of 10<sup>th</sup> century, once again we recorded important changes both in the arrangement of the structures, in their morphology and typology. In the first place, just one single structure has been documented in the excavated area, with a southeast-northwest orientation; that is, marking a difference with the previous structures. It would be a rectangular or longitudinal space – partially excavated – made at ground level and raised with large wooden posts and a central supporting element. Attached to this structure, there are two other elements with a smaller size, two spaces with a square plan, which are accommodated by grains in the rock. These elements would not be dedicated to be used as domestic space, but could be linked to different activities – possibly agricultural ones – that were carried out in the village, or even for storage, such as high barns. In this space, homes and canals made in the rock have been also documented.

Concerning the survivals or elements that we can still documented and evaluate from the previous period, it is clearly seen that the central open space is maintained, since the registered structures are arranged around it. However, it will be in this period when there is a clear use of this element as a circulation space, since a conditioning of the central part is carried out, placing a kind of paving. The centrality and symbolism of this space will be highlighted during this period, but, even more, when, from the central years of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and placed directly on it, a necropolis, a series of burials linked to this community appear. This moment coincides with the abandonment of the inhabited structures, such as we will analyse below.

<sup>32</sup> Fernández-Crespo, 199-217.

<sup>33</sup> Quirós, “La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular,” 225-56; Quirós, *Arqueología de una comunidad campesina medieval*.

<sup>34</sup> Fernández-Crespo, “Los enterramientos infantiles,” 199-217.

<sup>35</sup> Sofield, “Living with the Dead,” 351-88.

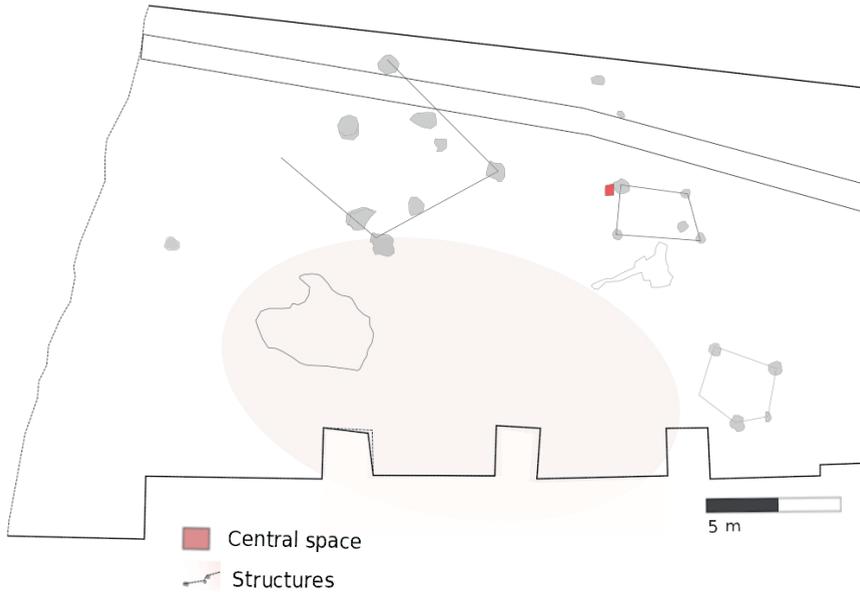


Figure 3. Plan of the structures documented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period (10<sup>th</sup> century).

### *3. Main topics for analysis and discussion: Gorliz's contribution*

Once the documented sequence has been examined, we will carry out the evaluation of a series of topics to analyse if we can elucidate the role played by the peasant community in the process of village formation, as well as in the space management, always based on the contributions and data offered by this settlement.

#### *3.1. The village formation process*

Taking all this data into account, we can establish that the levels of early medieval habitat, according to the records kept in the Basque Country, can be located on areas in where previous low imperial occupation is documented, although with a different functionality and social organization from the one documented at the time – examples of such are of Santa María de Zarautz<sup>36</sup> or other settlements in Alava like Laguardia or Aistra –.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, there are

<sup>36</sup> Ibañez-Extbarria and Sarasola, “El yacimiento arqueológico de Santa María de Zarautz,” 12-85.

<sup>37</sup> Quirós, *The archaeology of Early Medieval Villages*.

also examples in which there is no evidence of that previous occupation, such as the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz or Gorniz itself.<sup>38</sup> That is, these occupation sites, far from being the consequence of a single implantation pattern, are originated from heterogeneous starting contexts.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in the area of the Basque Country, during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the occupation of the territory responds to a reality of small groups of houses (single-family farms) that may be in use for one or two generations and, in which, there is no clear evidence of active elites at local scale. Therefore, we can see a notable difference with some of the contexts documented in other areas, such as the Iberian Plateau.<sup>40</sup> All this shows differences both in social geography and in the different power structures that are articulated in each territory,<sup>41</sup> as we can see in La Erilla (La Puebla de Arganzón, Burgos), the first levels documented in Zaballa (Iruña de Oca, Alava) or in the Zornoztegi site (Salvatierra, Alava), where an occupation of little entity formed by a single house with some annexed construction that has lasted during this period.

For that reason, we could define the first occupation periods as a farm or maybe a group of them, whose structures present a similarity in their typologies and with the beginning of a central space in an embryonic stage. As it happens in the village of Gasteiz when at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century they decide to occupy the hill where the village will be located – occupation that continues until the present time –,<sup>42</sup> in Gorniz, the upper area is conditioned creating an artificial plateau in which the different registered domestic structures will be located.

In other settlements such as Argiñeta (Elorrio, Biscay) during the 8<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>43</sup> or Lendoño de Arriba (Orduña, Biscay),<sup>44</sup> preparation prior to the settlement is also recorded. In fact, in the specific case of Argiñeta, created a flat surface to install three wooden constructions, of which their postholes remain, and slightly separated from each other. In addition, for the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, another series of structures with posts set directly on the ground and one of them with a stone plinth are identified in the northern area. It is interesting to note that the specificity of one of them: one protected a silo<sup>45</sup> and another one, an oven.<sup>46</sup> Associated with one of these enclosures, the researchers define an open space, perhaps a patio (due to fewer postholes). The existence of two agricultural exploitation units formed by different structures

<sup>38</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, *Arqueología e Historia de una ciudad*.

<sup>39</sup> Quirós, "Village formation, Social Memories and the Archaeology," 11-32; Quirós and Santos Salazar, "Territorios sin ciudades," 139-74.

<sup>40</sup> Quirós, "La arquitectura doméstica en los yacimientos rurales," 65-84.

<sup>41</sup> Quirós, "La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular," 225-56; Castillo and Santos Salazar, "Territorios sin ciudades," 139-74; Quirós and Vigil-Escalera, "Networks of peasant villages," 79-128.

<sup>42</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, *Arqueología e Historia de una ciudad*.

<sup>43</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, "Argiñeta" *Arkeoikuska* 14, 204-9.

<sup>44</sup> Solaun Bustinza, "Zedelika y Lendoño de Arriba," 187-210.

<sup>45</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, "Argiñeta" *Arkeoikuska* 12, 173-7.

<sup>46</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, "Argiñeta" *Arkeoikuska* 13, 210-5.

– which underwent repairs over time –, and separated by a palisade, is hypothesized.<sup>47</sup> In the absence of a more definitive study, it cannot be ensured that the cemetery is contemporary with these structures, some post holes seem to indicate that also here the graves were opened on an area previously occupied as a place of habitation.<sup>48</sup>

However, throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> century there is a moment of transformation, with a different nature and meaning depending on the territory to which we approach. These changes appear in different archaeological records such as the structures of power centres or the transformation of production and exchange systems, something that will have to be related to deep changes of social nature.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the most profound transformations are registered in the geographical area that we are studying: being a territory characterized by the absence and weakness of local powers, the 8<sup>th</sup> century supposes the verification of a new balance that will define this area as a structured territory with a political articulation, where the role of rural communities is more than notorious and decisive.

In this sense, taking into account the specific case of Gorniz, we refer to what Agustín Azkarate and José Luis Solaun stated when referring to the productions of “coarse weaves” documented in Gorniz. They high levels of specialization achieved by these productions have called into question the current paradigms among other aspects because “they denounce that these productions were also part of distribution circuits at the regional level”.<sup>50</sup>

Also, at this moment, a restructuring of the site is defined: the type of documented structures, their orientation and morphology are completely different from those of the previous period. This aspect is not only characteristic of this settlement, in other examples such as Zornoztegi, Zaballa,<sup>51</sup> San Andrés (Salinas de Añana) or San Martín de Dulantzi, all of them in Alava; this fact is linked to a process of population densification.<sup>52</sup>

All these transformations cannot and should not be understood on an exclusively urban or typological aspect, not even on a local scale, since all these changes recorded in different archaeological records must be put in relation to deep social changes. In other words, there is a direct relationship between the transformations of this rural landscape – which began around the year 700 A.C. – and the maturation of an active elite at local scale and also with a centralization process in which Gorniz is taking part.

<sup>47</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, “Argiñeta” *Arkeoikuska* 14, 204-9.

<sup>48</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, “Argiñeta” *Arkeoikuska* 14, 208.

<sup>49</sup> Quirós, “La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular,” 225-56.

<sup>50</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, “La cerámica de la Alta Edad Media en el cuadrante noroeste,” 193-228.

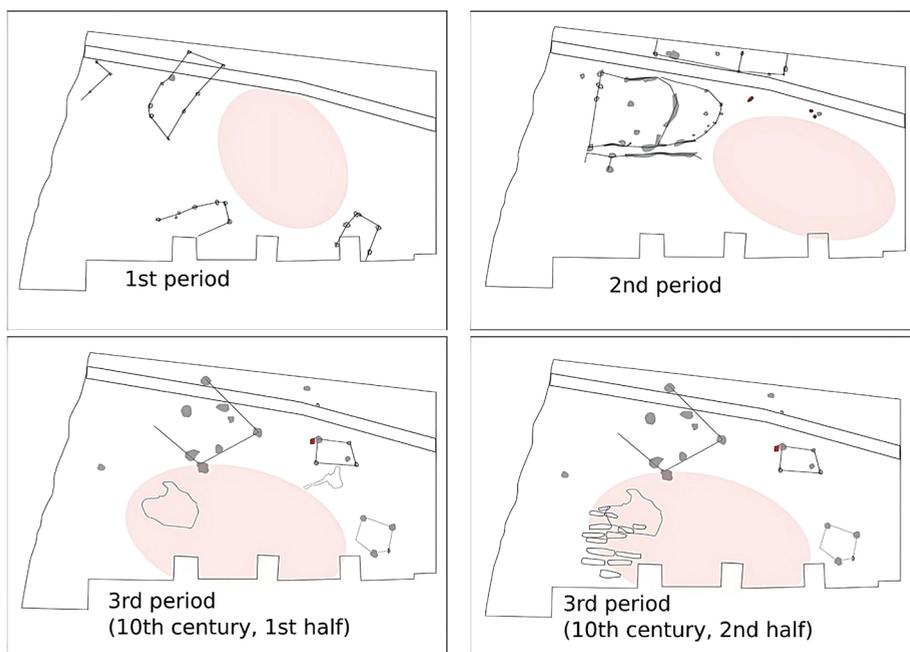
<sup>51</sup> Alfaro, “La arquitectura de Zaballa,” 496-527.

<sup>52</sup> Quirós, Loza and Niso, “Identidades y ajuares de las necrópolis altomedievales,” 215-32.

In the last period documented, period 3, dated to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, once again we record important changes, both in the arrangement of the structures and in their morphology and typology, as we have already seen.

However, despite these documented discontinuities in this settlement, there are elements that will remain, although with variations throughout the entire sequence. The most important finding, without a doubt, has been the central space. This element is documented in an embryonic stage in the initial period of the occupation (7<sup>th</sup> century) and whose evolution has been documented throughout the different subsequent periods. The transformation of the meaning and function of this space in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, after being occupied by a necropolis, therefore, will lead to the abandonment of the habitat site documented in this intervention until that moment.<sup>53</sup>

This area inherited from the first documented period, is in the second much more defined, since we find it framed by a series of structures that have it as a reference, appear also perfectly aligned, which shows us an incipient planning of the settlement area, in addition to greater compaction and density.



<sup>53</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, “La cerámica de la Alta Edad Media,” 193-228; Campos-Lopez, “Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Bizkaia.”

This pattern is repeated in contemporary European settlements;<sup>54</sup> as well as in Visigothic villages<sup>55</sup> and others closer geographically such as Zaballa (Iruña de Oca, Alava)<sup>56</sup> or in the Cathedral of Santa María de Gasteiz (Vitoria, Alava) where the structures are organized around two open areas.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, the fossilization of this 'central space' is not exclusively documented in Gorniz. In the case of Gózquez (Madrid), it has been found that, during the 225 years of occupation of the site, the housing units and attached structures change and are relocated, giving rise to three different phases of occupation. However, the boundaries between these constructions remained stable, as well as these empty spaces between them, identified as cultivation spaces.<sup>58</sup>

During the last moment of occupation, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to documenting an important restructuring of the urban plan, in this central space the surface is conditioning by placing a pavement in different points.

However, when defining its uses, we see that it is undoubtedly an element that is difficult to characterize. Even so, the change in its functionality is clearly observed in the different documented periods: while during the periods 1 and 2 we could speak of a possible use of cultivation or circulation; but, in period 3, the use as a circulation space or with an external use of a construction is definitely clear. This would indicate that, on the one hand, there is a clear intention in the definition of this space, and, on the other hand, of the existence of an organization in the arrangement of the community's habitat structures in a clear way. Domestic units and some other minor ones will be placed having this space as the axis or central element. In our opinion, it is, consequently, a circulation space in which a community use would have to be taken into account, since the original nucleus of the necropolis will be installed in this space in the central years of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>54</sup> Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*.

<sup>55</sup> Vigil-Escalera, "Primeros pasos hacia el análisis," 367-76; Vigil-Escalera, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*.

<sup>56</sup> Quirós, *Arqueología del campesinado medieval*.

<sup>57</sup> Azkarate and Solaun, *Arqueología e Historia de una ciudad*.

<sup>58</sup> Vigil-Escalera, "Primeros pasos hacia el análisis," 367-76.

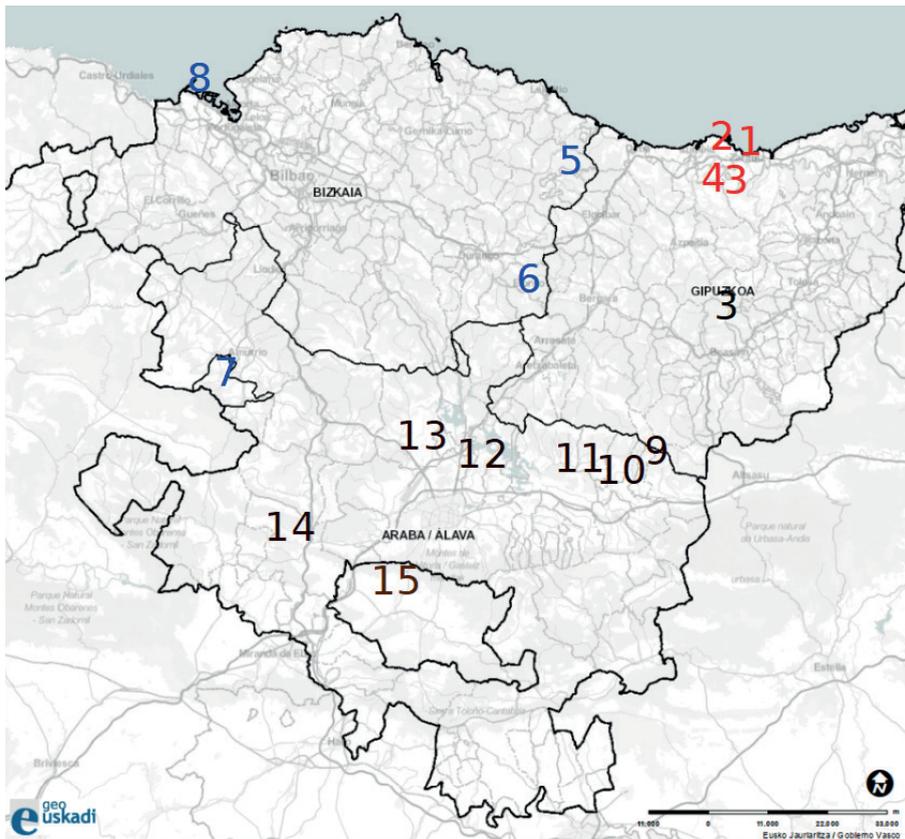


Figure 5. Geographical location of the different archaeological sites.

### 3.2. *The appearance of the necropolis*

In the case of the settlement of Gorliz, one of the most interesting documented moments takes place, as we have commented previously, in the mid years of the 10<sup>th</sup> century when, directly above that central open space, a series of burials associated with this community appear. The appearance of the necropolis implies the abandonment of other documented structures, so that is, located occupying an area for community use, as we have referred.

This change of use in a given space is verified: from a habitat area to a necropolis area. Nevertheless, this new function must be understood as the original nucleus of different necropolises and later cemeteries, which will continue until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This first documented necropolis is not associated with any religious structure, being one of the few places of this characteristic documented in the Basque Country till the date. However, a small hermitage associated with a

second period of burials with an 11<sup>th</sup> century chronology has been documented. The tradition of building different temples one on top of the other has already been abundantly collected in the bibliography (San Salvador de Getaria, San Miguel de Irura, San Pedro de Iromendi all of them in Gipuzkoa, or San Jorge in Santurtzi and Santa Lucia de Gerrika in Bizkaia ...),<sup>59</sup> so we would be inclined to think that, if there was an older temple, the remains of it should have been documented (as well as it happens with the hermitage from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and others from later cult structures). Therefore, all this would indicate us a “management and care of the memory of the tombs” and that it always “demonstrates the respect of a minimum distance between the most peripheral graves of the community necropolis and the nearest structures of use”.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to this, the documented graves – of varied typology, organized in rows and without reuse – aligned and no intersections among each other, will suggest that the living community kept the physical memory of the place of deposition or that perhaps they were marked, such as it happens in the necropolis of San Martin de Dulantzi in Alava. In fact, in this case, although for chronologies of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the new location of the necropolis located outside the basilica building causes the amortization of some of the habitat structures, that is, they are moved to some other place, which is indicative of a strong functional division between the funeral area or sector and the residential sector.<sup>61</sup>

From this moment, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, a much more complex and articulated context is going to take place. During this period, the existence of a village network is verified, since these differentiation processes will develop into the appearance of clearly differentiated elites groups.

Other elements that have a relevant influence in this reorganization, elements that will be consider like ‘most visible’ ones will be churches, seen as a effective record of the Christianization of the territory. For instance, in the specific case of Zaballa (Iruña de Oca, Alava), it is at this moment when the church of San Julian is built in the nuclear area of the village, so that the houses are moved down to the valley.<sup>62</sup> Also in Argiñeta (Elorrio, Bizkaia, at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the populated area was abandoned, it is probable that the inhabitants moved to another space, since the cemetery is still active –until the 12<sup>th</sup> century – and even expanded, occupying the old habitat area.<sup>63</sup> These are not isolated examples, since in Santa María de Zarautz (Guipuzcoa), an old church and an associated necropolis are documented as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, reusing old Roman structures.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ibañez-Extelbarria and Sarasola, “El yacimiento arqueológico de Santa María de Zarautz.”

<sup>60</sup> Vigil-Escalera, “Comunidad política aldeana y exclusión,” 12-3.

<sup>61</sup> Quirós, Loza and Niso, “Identidades y ajuares de las necrópolis altomedievales,” 215-32.

<sup>62</sup> Quirós, *Arqueología del campesinado*.

<sup>63</sup> Anibarro and García Camino, “Argiñeta.” *Arkeoikuska* 2014, 208.

<sup>64</sup> Ibañez-Extelbarria and Sarasola, “El yacimiento arqueológico de Santa María de Zarautz.”

#### 4. *Contributions to a (open) debate*

Once the sequence has been examined, and several analysis issues have been developed, we propose different points on which we would like to build an open debate around the role of the peasant agency and the relevance of its study and analysis:

- 1) The study of medieval village formation has generated an intense debate throughout Europe. It is – indeed – a very complex issue regarding the construction of agricultural landscapes, the initiative of the elites, the weight of lordships or the centrality (or not) of the peasantry. Regarding to the Basque Country, the first approach to this problem took place through other territorial markers, such as necropolises or churches. However, it is a subject in which, little by little, progress is being made, but we still lack a synthesis of the whole set.<sup>65</sup> For this reason, cases like the one that concerns us here, together with other ones such as Argiñeta, become fundamental. In them, one can glimpse the presence of the peasant agency, of groups not defined as elites.
- 2) In the area of the Basque Country, for chronologies of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the existence of farm-type settlements is documented. But, on the contrary, there is no clear evidence of active elites at a local scale,<sup>66</sup> something that makes a notable difference with the contexts documented in the Iberian Plateau, for example.

For instance, during the first of the periods investigated in our intervention, no spatial organization or elements documented may indicate the presence of elites groups. Nevertheless, the data about villages during the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries reinforce this idea of social change and the emergence of elites on a local scale, although it will be in the 10<sup>th</sup> century when the existence and presence of these village elites is clearly recognized and hierarchies will be defined in settlements. A circumstance that we see again in Gorliz, through a new spatial reorganization and the urban plan, and the use of more complex types of room units.

In fact, there is a reuse of the space, which is significant when it comes to understand domestic structures as the main units of production and reproduction and their importance in the construction and transformation of these villages.<sup>67</sup>

- 3) Gorliz, understood as an early medieval village, is part of a type of rural occupation whose general characteristic could be total invisibility on the surface due to the nature of its constructive forms and the type of its structures, that is, the domestic architecture that characterizes them.<sup>68</sup> These settlements, usually, occupy very wide areas, in which the exist-

<sup>65</sup> Quirós, "Village formation, Social Memories and Archaeology," 304.

<sup>66</sup> Quirós, "La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular," 225-56.

<sup>67</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo-García, "Filling the gap," 1-19.

<sup>68</sup> Quirós Castillo, "La arqueología de las aldeas en el noroeste peninsular," 225-56.

ence of large empty spaces, in some cases dedicated to cops, and in which archaeological remains are not usually found, are part of their definition. Therefore, the archaeological methodology to be used should be in accordance with these characteristics, so the development of extension excavation protocols is vital in order to improve data.

- 4) The existence of community spaces – as is the case of Gorniz –, which are difficult to recognize in the archaeological record, can suggest a communitarian exploitation of resources, and their existence is critical in the construction of identities and in the negotiation of new forms of social interaction, often not visible in a domestic scale.<sup>69</sup> Even so, the archaeological record suggests the existence of a complex relationship between the individual or family and the community, all linked to a specific economic and social practice.<sup>70</sup>

In our case, these tensions can be seen at the specific moment in which the community space is occupied by a necropolis, which also marks the abandonment of that habitat space, maybe moving to another near place, as the presence of the necropolis in the next phase could indicate. Although, this kind of replacements (habitat that becomes necropolis or necropolis that becomes church...) are well documented in this area.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, the question is obvious: which is the meaning behind this type of performance. Until the appearance of the hermitages or churches, other factors such as the Christianization of local elites or the territory will not come into discussion. But, until then, these burial places in habitat contexts may be somehow reinforcing land rights, in this case, the settlement land. In addition to this, the fact of placing these burials in inhabited spaces can mean an important point in the very existence of the settlement;<sup>72</sup> in the present case, it implies the transformation of this specific space. We believe that it could be suggested, as we pointed out previously, at this very moment is when the memory of the village community is formalized through the creation of a community cemetery. This could be the result of internal transformations of the village community in political terms, as well as the modification of the village social ties.

- 5) Along with all this, if we understand the active role of the peasant community and its capacity to process this social experience and perpetuate it, we can also propose that approaching these issues through concepts such as peasant agency, understood as a platform in which to incorporate both the historical past and the archaeological record of the peasantry together with the dialogue between different disciplines,<sup>73</sup> can be under-

<sup>69</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo-García, “Filling the gap,” 1-19.

<sup>70</sup> Quirós, “Archaeology or early medieval peasantry.”

<sup>71</sup> Different examples are documented in the *Arkeoikuska* 2021 volume.

<sup>72</sup> Sofield, “Living with the Dead.”

<sup>73</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo-García, “Filling the gap,” 1-19.

stood as a common place of work and analysis, although there may be more sceptical opinions in this regard.

In this sense, we figure necessary to carry out a re-reading of different historical sequences as early medieval landscapes can be considered now in order to analyze the social foundation of community life.<sup>74</sup> Regarding the village formation, it would be interesting to advance in the study of the settlement model in which different nature realities must be articulated: farms and also villages (the appearance bases of the *villas* are settled now, heirs of the reorganizations and changes documented in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), and also to figure how to fit this model into the oldest levels documented in the Basque farmhouses (levels that show structures that predate the 16<sup>th</sup> century buildings).<sup>75</sup>

- 6) Finally, we want to raise the need of the study of these peasant communities. Far from the idea of being an issue with no future in medium or long term, now that the peasant world is being engulfed by a supposed modernization, the validity of the study of its dynamics, relationships, formation and development becomes fundamental. Not only to be able to understand what came after, but also to be able to apprehend a memory and the inheriting identity of these processes. Actually, our peasant history is what is particular to all human been, and it is where we are able to build identity and common places.

In this sense, from an archaeological and historical point of view, the challenge is enormous, since we are faced with processes of a different nature, complexity, with archaeological records with great historical value, but not monumental – and, therefore, not attractive – and that will need a multifocal historical development, far from teleological, one-sided and conscious approaches in terms of dissemination strategies.

Thus, in this new post-COVID world, we must take into account the new meanings of social relationships, the role of communities and the centrality of the peripheral, of the local,<sup>76</sup> building common places as we have in the peasant agency. Therefore, the study of the peasant world and its agency is a powerful tool for the evaluation of social practices and dynamics in the past, overcoming partial and unilinear approaches, and shedding light on the interaction between the different participating agents and the internal articulation of groups.<sup>77</sup> All this will allow the understanding of local political systems, especially in the areas where the cohesion and identity of the local communities were stronger, being the Iberian Peninsula, and, we believe that the example we are dealing with here, is especially significant in this sense.

<sup>74</sup> Quirós, “Village formation, Social Memories and Archaeology,” 304.

<sup>75</sup> Campos-Lopez, “Los caseríos en el País Vasco.”

<sup>76</sup> Escribano-Ruiz, “The centrality of the margins,” 273-90.

<sup>77</sup> Quirós, “Archaeology or early medieval peasantry.”

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# **Considering peasant agency in the Early Middle Ages. A diachronic analysis of the archaeological record in Central Portugal\***

by Catarina Tente, Sara Prata

This paper analyses archaeological data on early medieval rural communities through the lens of peasant agency. Over the last 15 years systematic research has been carried out in different territories of the Portuguese inland, mainly in the centre-north of the country. Here we will be focusing on the areas for which we currently have more detailed evidence, Alto Alentejo and Beira Alta, and consider a broad chronological frame, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the information available for the two territories is uneven, and it is not yet possible to offer a continuous chronological sequence in either of these areas. For this reason, we will analyse the available data collectively and from a comparative perspective. In both cases we will start by considering the new rural settlement networks that emerged from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Evidence of peasant communities in Alto Alentejo is clearer for the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries, and in Beira Alta for the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>. Both are critical moments in the political sphere, coinciding with the emergence and affirmation of new administrative structures, but also necessary power vacuums where local powers emerge. By comparing the material record of peasant groups, we will reassess agricultural production, management of natural resources, artefact production, trade networks, and funerary areas, as arenas to discuss the notion of peasant agency.

Early Middle Ages, Alto Alentejo, Beira Alta, social peasant agency, archaeology, conflict, rural communities.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last 15 years a group of archaeologists from *Instituto de Estudos Medievais* (IEM – NOVA FCSH) has been carrying out research focused on the early medieval period. We have mainly worked on the inland regions of central-northern Portugal, a territory that spans from the northeast of the Trás-os-Montes region to the Alto Alentejo in the south, carrying out research projects, MA and PhD thesis. Through a combined approach which takes into consideration data from surface field surveys, excavations, material culture analysis, radiocarbon dating and comparative approaches, we have documented evidence of the progressive transformations that took place between the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of the Portuguese kingdom (12<sup>th</sup> century), in both rural and urban settings. The gathered data are diverse, and each micro-territory presents its own chronological sequence and specificities. Nevertheless, the images defined for specific moments of these intervals expand our understanding of early medieval societies, which remain one of the least known periods in Portuguese research.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we consider the available evidence through the lens of peasant agency. Agency, understood as the capacity of agents to act within a social structure,<sup>2</sup> is an established subject in social sciences, with significance for archaeology and past societies.<sup>3</sup> However, agency has not yet been fully explored in regards to peasant communities, particularly in the early medieval period. There are several reasons for this, top-down approaches to peasant societies have promoted their view as passive social agents,<sup>4</sup> and for early medieval times this is perhaps a result of historical narratives exceedingly focused on the role of aristocracies in social processes, combined with lasting primitivistic views of peasant communities.<sup>5</sup> It has recently been argued that by focusing on archaeological evidence, agency can work as a common field in which different disciplines can analyse the dynamics of peasant societies in greater detail,<sup>6</sup> while also promoting a specific conceptual framework for peasant archaeology.

We agree that we must work towards the understanding of peasant groups as active voices in the configuration of past societies, but we also need to recognize the limits of the archaeological record in this regard. Written sources which concern early medieval peasant communities are scarce, and there is a whole range of characteristics specific to the day-to-day of this social category that can only be grasped through archaeology. But we need to avoid oversimplifications, and as we will see, interpreting the material evidence of peasant

<sup>1</sup> Tente, “Os últimos 30 anos da Arqueologia.”

<sup>2</sup> Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*.

<sup>3</sup> Dobres and Robb, *Agency in archaeology*.

<sup>4</sup> Van der Ploeg, *The new peasantries*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Quirós, “Inequality and social complexity.”

<sup>6</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo, “Filling the gap,” 8.

communities through this lens is not always a linear process. In this paper, we will be focusing on which aspects of peasant agency might be seen through the material record, and the problems that can arise from this analysis.

We will be doing so by presenting archaeological data from inland Portugal inland through a global approach, analysing rural transformations from a diachronic perspective, comparing settlement patterns, local economic strategies, and political frameworks. Burial grounds, as privileged areas for building and representing identities, will also be considered. For this, we will focus on the territories and specific timeframes for which the available evidence is clearer due to our ongoing research projects: Alto Alentejo during the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and Beira Alta during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. These represent two critical moments. In Central Portugal, the first interval encompasses the transition between the Suevic and the Visigoth kingdoms, and the growing impact of the ecclesiastical structure in terms of territorial reconfiguration. The second timeframe sees Beira Alta as a frontier land between the north controlled by Asturians and the south by Muslims. These shifts also meant at times the existence of power vacuums, which might have promoted on the one hand the emergence of local powers, and on the other, some degree of isolation, and perhaps autonomy, for peasant communities.

In the context of this paper, we will use the term “peasants” to refer to families and communities who lived in rural areas and for whom farming was the main economic activity and a focal point in their social organization and interaction with their environment. Our analysis covers different geographies and an extended timeframe, a sequence of rural landscapes built by different peasant families and communities that must not be taken as an undifferentiated whole. Our goal is to compare the available evidence while recognizing the specificities of each territory.

In this context, it is important to stress that Alto Alentejo and Beira Alta are distinct geomorphologically. Beira Alta is located in the highlands of central-northern Portugal, between the Douro and the Mondego River basins. This results in a vast plateau, bordered by several mountain ranges: the Estrela to the east (the highest summit at 1,993 metres a.s.l.), and the Montemuro and Caramulo mountain chains to west, separating the region from the Atlantic seaboard. Due to anthropic deforestation (documented since the Neolithic period), fertile lands are located mainly in the lowest areas, in the foothills and in the river valleys.

Alto Alentejo is separated from Beira Baixa to the North by the Tagus River and bordered by Spanish Extremadura to the East. It can be considered a transition landscape between the southern plains and the mountain ranges of the Beira region. Here we have worked mainly on the norther territories, around São Mamede Mountain range which separates the drainage basin of the Tagus River to the north from the basin of the Guadiana to the south. In its highest point, São Mamede reaches 1,025 metres a.s.l., but agricultural areas are mainly situated in the lower penepains, crossed by seasonal streams.

Naturally, in both territories the geographic characteristics have played a role in the evolution of human settlement networks through time, and when comparing both sets of data, we must be aware of the differences between regions (Fig. 1).

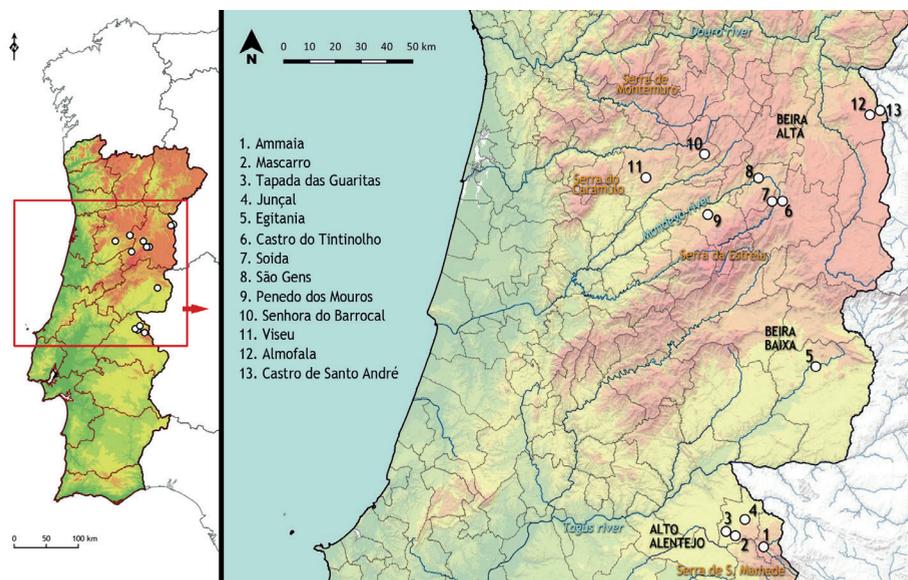


Figure 1. Map of the main places mentioned in the text.

## 2. A diachronic analysis of the peasant record

To adequately frame early medieval rural settlements, we must start by recognizing, even if briefly, the pre-existing Roman occupation models documented in both territories and the ways in which they were transformed during post-Roman times.

In Alto Alentejo there is evidence of medium and large villa estates, which seem to have been built around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Most of these villas were closely linked to this territory's single urban centre: *Ammaia* (S. Salvador de Aramenha, Marvão), a small-size town, probably funded during the Augustan age, and granted *civitas* status under Emperor Claudius, becoming a *municipium* during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>8</sup> While there is evidence of post-Roman phases in *Ammaia*, the abrupt reduction in imported fine wares suggests that it became isolated from long-distance trade early on (mid-5<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> Carneiro, *Lugares, tempos e pessoas*.

<sup>8</sup> Corsi et al., "The Roman town of Ammaia (Portugal)."

<sup>9</sup> Quaresma, "The fine wares."

fact that there is no further mention of this town in written sources from the Suevic-Visigothic period also indicates that it likely lost its position as an inland urban enclave, unlike other cities that developed into ecclesiastic centres.<sup>10</sup>

The villas that have been excavated in this area also present evidence of transformations at an early stage. In some villas we see the abandonment and reuse of former opulent reception rooms, in others, the emergence of religious buildings and associated privileged burial<sup>11</sup> areas,<sup>12</sup> suggesting different types of processes that might be occurring simultaneously. We have recently started to explore the possibility that some of the former Roman estates, in places like Mascarro (Castelo de Vide), might have maintained a local importance during the early medieval period.

While these profound changes are documented in the villas, during a still imprecise moment between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, there is ample evidence of a new dispersed settlement pattern, characterized by a large number of small farmsteads which were built *ex novo*, but spatially associated with Roman infrastructures (previous estates and road system).<sup>13</sup> New peasant settlements such as Tapada das Guaritas I (Castelo de Vide) contain simple rectangular houses built in stone and covered by rooftiles, which preserve the remains of pottery produced locally, a small number of iron tools, spindle whorls for spinning animal or vegetable fibres, and manual stone mills for grain and/or cereal grinding.<sup>14</sup> Evidence for cattle farming can be perceived by the presence of large stone pens and the location of most settlements in shallow, well irrigated small valleys where pasture would be permanently available. Settlement layout indicates that the funerary areas (usually marked by one to three rock-cut graves) were created in close connection to the areas of the living and would possibly function as part of a land claiming discourse within the peasant sphere, as it has been suggested for other territories.<sup>15</sup> Amid this peasant landscape we have press buildings and rock-cut facilities for olive oil and wine production. Large built complexes such as Junçal and Tapada das Guaritas II (Castelo de Vide), reflect a considerable investment in these facilities and a capacity for surplus production, and are perhaps the clearest indicator that these early medieval farmsteads were integrated in regional trade dynamics and possibly broader scales of power that transcend their mere local sphere.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, the known settlements show rather horizontal material records, with an almost complete absence of prestige goods or prominent buildings. One of the ques-

<sup>10</sup> Cordero, "La organización de la diócesis."

<sup>11</sup> Carneiro, "O final das villae."

<sup>12</sup> Maloney and Hale, "The villa of Torre de Palma." Cuesta-Gómez et al., "Una nueva lectura."

<sup>13</sup> Prata, "Post-Roman land-use."

<sup>14</sup> Prata, "Objectos arqueológicos;" Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, "Farming and local economy."

<sup>15</sup> Martín Viso, "Enterramientos, memoria social."

<sup>16</sup> Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, "Oil and wine."

tions we should consider is whether these farmsteads would somehow be able to function together as a self-recognized group, or if each household would be managed individually.

For now, detailed evidence of these types of peasant settlements is mostly circumscribed to the territory of the municipality of Castelo de Vide. But at least some of the territories neighbouring of Alto Alentejo, such as the municipalities of Nisa and Marvão, exhibit coherent surface finds (rock-cut graves, remains of double-walled structures, press facilities...) suggesting a similar pattern. A critical review of these data is among our current research priorities.

We should also mention that there is currently little evidence to indicate that the excavated farmsteads were in use after the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The excavated buildings, six so far, show no structural reforms, overlapping use sequences or accumulations of discarded pottery that might suggest otherwise.

On the contrary, they exhibit what can be described as a single short-lived level of use, no evidence for destructive or violent episodes and processes of structural decay that appears to have been rather slow. Careful consideration is necessary to adequately frame this abandonment process, but our current hypothesis is that this settlement network stopped functioning in Alto Alentejo due to the progressive administrative changes brought about by the Islamic conquest.

Likewise, we still lack a satisfactory explanation for where the former inhabitants of these farmsteads might have relocated. The next well documented phase is represented by the High Medieval castles and villages; a centralized settlement process that in the territories south of the Tagus River is dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards and closely related to the direct actions of the Portuguese monarchs and the military orders. While a widespread migration to distant regions seems unlikely, for the moment there is still no conclusive evidence for the Islamic period in this territory.

To understand what might have been happening in Portuguese inland rural areas directly before the formation of the Portuguese kingdom we must now turn to the archaeological data from Beira Alta. As will be explained, the documented chronological sequence for this region is different from what we have seen in Alto Alentejo. Several aspects might help to understand these disparities, from the obvious geographic and morphological characteristics of each territory to separate research backgrounds and approaches. Although we are aware that the key to understand the separate evolution of each territory might stem further back, we will once again start from the Roman settlement model.

Roman rural settlements documented in Beira Alta were smaller estates, mainly farmsteads. Places that were classified as villas seem scarce and small when compared with the southern territories. Viseu (*Vissaium*) was the larger city of Beira Alta. There were other capitals of *civitas*, but probably most of them were *civitas sine urbe*, like the capital of *Interminienses*, presumably

located in Guarda,<sup>17</sup> *civitas Cobelcorum*<sup>18</sup> or Bobadela (Oliveira do Hospital). These were places where the main urban functions (religious, fiscal, commercial, and administrative) were guaranteed, but where no significant population resided. Apparently, most of the Roman residents lived in small rural units, dispersed in the mountainous territory.

Although the archaeological data is scarce (mainly surface surveys and test-pits), the available information shows that rural farmsteads in Beira Alta were systematically abandoned between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Examples of these can be seen in the small villa of Monte Aljão (Gouveia) where the latest use sequence was dated between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>19</sup> in the small agricultural settlement of Torre (Fornos de Algodres), where the last use phase was placed in the 3<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries;<sup>20</sup> and in the farmstead of São Gens (Celorico da Beira), where the occupation sequence is framed between the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

This apparently early decline of the Roman rural system likely resulted in the emergence of a new settlement pattern that has not yet been documented. Information about the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards is rather limited, mainly data from the episcopal city of Viseu and from ancient *civitas* capitals that continued to mint *tremisses* during the Visigothic period. We also witness the return to hillfort occupation, a process that has been linked to emergence of local elites who used those places to manifest power in the territories dominated by them,<sup>22</sup> as illustrated by Castro do Tintinholo (Guarda)<sup>23</sup> or perhaps in Castro de Santo André (Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo) and Caliabria.<sup>24</sup> If the elites (local or episcopal) can be seen in the archaeological record and written record, the same cannot be said of the peasants. Rural settlements from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries have not yet been documented in Beira Alta. It is possible that some of the sites identified in field surveys as late Roman farmsteads could in fact be early medieval, particularly in those cases where rock-cut graves are also present. But excavations are needed to validate this hypothesis.

Nerveless, an important change occurred in Beira Alta between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and then again in the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century/ beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Conclusive remains for the 8<sup>th</sup> century have not been identified so far, but we know that somewhere between the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, new peasant settlements were estab-

<sup>17</sup> Pereira and Ramos, "Sequência estratigráfica."

<sup>18</sup> Frade and Caetano, "Os Cultos na *Civitas Cobelcorum*;" Tente et al., "As placas de xisto numéricas."

<sup>19</sup> Tente and Pereira, "Monte Aljão."

<sup>20</sup> Antunes, "Figueiró da Granja."

<sup>21</sup> Marques, *A ocupação romana*; Marques et alii. *S. Gens ao longo do Tempo*.

<sup>22</sup> Martín Viso, "La ordenación del territorio."

<sup>23</sup> Tente and Martín Viso, "O Castro do Tintinholo;" Tente, Martín Viso. "El castro de Tintinholo."

<sup>24</sup> Tente et al., "As placas de xisto numéricas."

lished. Some of them, like São Gens (Celorico da Beira), were built near the ruins of a previous Roman farm, whereas others, chose instead new locations with no previous occupations, cases such as at Senhora do Barrocal (Sátão), Soida (Celorico da Beira) and Penedo dos Mouros (Gouveia).

These new settlements occupy subtle positions in the landscape, aiming in most cases to obtain visual control over the territory whilst remaining unseen. Some of these settlements were surrounded by palisades, less frequently combined with stone walls. Inside the enclosures the domestic units were simple huts made of wood and branches. Usually, each hut had a central hearth around which the domestic space was organized. All the excavated sites revealed homogeneous pottery assemblages, and was also evidence for iron tools produced locally. Archaeological evidence suggests these were pluri-familiar settlements, but small in area; the number of families should be between three and six.<sup>25</sup> This would be consistent with a more centralised occupation pattern, especially when compared with the late Roman period.

All the excavated peasant settlements were destroyed by fires dated via radiocarbon between the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Due to these fires, the dense combustion layers promoted the preservation of organic matter (animal bones and plant remains) which testified to the diverse economic activities of these rural communities.

Most of the sites were abandoned after these destructive events<sup>26</sup> and we do not know where the population from the burned settlements would have been re-located. Some of them probably went displaced to establish the medieval villages, where castles would be built during the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. These fires and subsequent changes in settlement can be interpreted as a consequence of local struggles to control territories, in which peasant communities seem to have played a relevant part.

### 3. *Discussion*

As made clear in the above overview, for Portuguese inland territories, even those such as Beira Alta and Alto Alentejo for which comprehensive data is currently available, it is still not possible to trace a continuous use sequence from the end of the Roman Era to the formation of the Kingdom of Portugal. Likewise, each territory presents its own knowledge gaps. In both cases, early medieval rural landscapes stem from transformations resulting from the dismantlement of the previous Roman land-use model (estates, infrastructures, road network...), but only in Alto Alentejo do we see a new kind of rural settlement pattern that emerges and thrives between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on single family farmsteads. In Beira Alta, we have evidence of 5<sup>th</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Tente, "Social Complexity."

<sup>26</sup> Tente, "No smoke without fire."

to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries hillfort occupations, places that would be controlled by local elites and used in power dynamics, which for now appear to be absent in Alto Alentejo. In both territories, conclusive evidence for the 8<sup>th</sup> century is still lacking, a complex issue that will need to be fully addressed elsewhere. The first well documented evidence for the early medieval countryside in Beira Alta is related to concentrated multi-family settlements which appear in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, all of which were destroyed by violent fires dated between the end of 10<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This was probably the result of an emerging political control system, and these settlements would have been destroyed as part of a local struggle to control territories and communities. It seems reasonable to assume that the population displaced from the burned villages would eventually incorporate newly established settlements, locations where castles would be built after the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, in Alto Alentejo, further south, medieval villages and castles are quite late, founded only from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and it is still not clear if they reflect the incorporation of outside population, a re-arrangement of current inhabitants, or perhaps a combination of both. Here, evidence for what might have happened in rural areas between the end of the early medieval settlement network and the development of the first High Medieval castles and villages is very limited.

Before continuing, we wish to emphasize that the takeaway from this comparative overview should be the presence of significant territorial reconfiguration processes which took place throughout the early medieval centuries. Both territories in which we have carried out our research lack a comprehensive diachronic sequence, however, in each case we have enough evidence to determine in which key moments the countryside was clearly restructured. In doing so the natural tendency is to frame these processes in light of larger historical events and interpret local changes as direct or indirect consequence of broader political changes. But how can we shift the focus in order to consider peasant agency in this context?

It seems apparent that at least some of these events express the direct action of outside powers with strategic interests in rural areas. But peasant communities surely played their own role in these dynamics. Considering the evidence available so far, it might be difficult to visualize the ways in which these tensions and negotiations between peasant communities and other social groups took place. However, for now, we are interested in focusing directly on the material record of these peasant communities, and will analyse which pieces of evidence can be interpreted in order to consider peasant agency.

### *3.1. Settlements and households*

Archaeologically, the first aspect we will be exploring is settlement layout and landscape use, and perhaps the first question we should keep in mind is whether or not early medieval peasants were able to decide where and how to

build their houses, and the investment they entailed. As we have seen, the early medieval settlements excavated in Castelo de Vide consist of small farmsteads managed by single family units (Fig. 2). From surface field data, it is clear that at least a part of these settlements was built near previous Roman estates. The reasons for this may vary, but among the frequent arguments is the well-documented reuse of Roman construction materials in early medieval buildings.<sup>27</sup> However, as recently suggested, the reuse of Roman olive groves might have also played an important role.<sup>28</sup> Another important aspect of this spatial relation to previous infrastructures is the likelihood that the Roman road system was still in use, even if only partially and at a regional or even local scale. Concerning architectural features, it is important to note that these farmsteads were built entirely out of locally available granite stones and covered with roof tiles. Some of these buildings are quite large, particularly the press facilities and associated storage buildings, so their construction was certainly a considerable investment. Regarding the relationship established between different farmsteads, we have described this type of settlement network as a dispersed but connected pattern,<sup>29</sup> in the sense that even if they consist of individual peasant households, they were visibly built in close proximity to one another which must imply close social and economic contacts. One of the concepts that deserves to be further explored to understand the different ways in which these peasants were conceptualizing their environment and particularly social relations, is the degree of autonomy each farmstead would enjoy, or if there was some sense of community shared among different families. This would be particularly relevant when considering their interactions with outside social groups.

The early medieval settlements in Beira Alta from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century were, instead, small enclosures where several families lived. From the settlement the community had restrict visual control, mainly covering the adjoining agricultural areas. This might suggest some degree of peasant autonomy in selecting the areas where settlements were built. All sites were surrounded by a wall/palisade that defined very clearly the interior and exterior of the living areas. Inside we find the domestic structures and some labour spaces such as the one identified at São Gens for tanning animal hides.<sup>30</sup> Different huts with hearths suggest individual domestic units, but some activities and spaces were certainly communal.

Additionally, we can assume that other processes such as the construction of the settlement outer walls was carried out by several members of the community.

As previously stated, buildings were made mostly of readily available materials, mainly wood and branches, but also local granite stone. Remains of

<sup>27</sup> Prata, "Articulação da paisagem."

<sup>28</sup> Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, "Oil and wine."

<sup>29</sup> Cuesta-Gómez and Prata, "Se hace camino al andar."

<sup>30</sup> Tente et al., "Povoamento e modos de vida."



Figure 2. Remains of the early medieval farmstead of Tapada das Guaritas (Castelo de Vide).

these palisades, huts, and other fixtures (such as the oak bench identified at Penedo dos Mouros, in Gouveia, were preserved as charcoal, due the fires that destroyed these settlements.

The possible relation between the settlements is difficult to assess since they were not built in close spatial proximity. However, the economic activities recorded in some of these settlements might suggest some degree of complementarity between different communities.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2. *Gravesites*

Another issue where there is ample evidence to examine peasant agency is the configuration of burial areas. In both Beira Alta and Alto Alentejo the most widely-documented funerary structure are rock-cut grave. It is currently accepted that this type of graves was used within the peasant landscape as part of a legitimizing discourse, within a complex process to claim land use rights among local communities.<sup>32</sup> But their meaning and purpose was specific in each territory, and certainly varied through time.

In Alto Alentejo, the funerary areas are small, usually made of only up to three rock-cut graves, carved in granite outcrops. There is a clear correlation

<sup>31</sup> Tente, “Social inequality.”

<sup>32</sup> Martín Viso, “Enterramientos, memoria social;” Martín Viso. “A place for the ancestors.”

between the graves and the buildings, as spatial data reveals that most farmsteads had associated grave sites in about a 50 or 100 m radius.<sup>33</sup> These are clearly the remains of family cemeteries, and even if we assume the existence of additional types of funerary structures – such as cist graves and simple holes – which were less likely to be preserved, the systematic link between households and gravesites is plain.

In Beira Alta the very high number of places with rock-cut graves that have been documented were, mainly organized in scattered groups of fewer than ten graves. While the total number of sites with graves currently exceeds 550 (more than 2300 graves), it is impossible to establish accurate chronologies for all these sites based solely on surface data. They might not all have been in use simultaneously, but rather represent several moments in a changing rural landscape.

Apart from the small groups of graves, Beira Alta also presents evidence of slightly larger necropolises formed by scattered graves (in less than 4% of the known sites). The tombs do not follow a canonical orientation, nor a linear organization, but reflect what seems to be a family logic. In this context, the enclosure and necropolis of São Gens (Celorico da Beira) stand out. The necropolis, with at least 56 graves, was built around an ancient Roman farm and near the medieval settlement (Fig. 3). While the small enclosure comprised a mere 0.5ha, the graves were scattered over an area close to 6ha.

The spatial syntax analysis of the cemetery layout, estimations about grave reuse, and the archaeological data from the excavations inside the enclosure suggest that early medieval São Gens was used by a community of three to four families (i.e. self-identifying groups), over a period of about four generations. The general lack of spatial differentiation may suggest these were the graves of relatively equally ranked members of the community, albeit reflecting a household organization.<sup>34</sup> Considering this interpretation for São Gens, and the similar type of spatial organization seen in the smaller groups of graves, it is possible to propose that these burial grounds reflect the direct management of families and communities, and that the spatial organization seen in small gravesites or necropolis, would be a display of kinship relations. A more detailed spatial analysis of these graves might offer further insights into the relative importance of different settlements, distinct families within the same enclosure, and overall, how territoriality and social relations were conceptualized in funerary areas.

Early medieval gravesites in Beira Alta can also be interpreted as a reflection of the relative isolation of rural communities from dominating powers. It is interesting to note that most early medieval rock-cut graves are found around the foothills of Estrela Mountain Range, farther away from Viseu and Lafões, respectively the urban and diocesan centre and an aristocratic do-

<sup>33</sup> Cuesta-Gómez and Prata, “Se hace camino al andar.”

<sup>34</sup> Brooks et al., “Interpreting Rock-Cut Graves.”

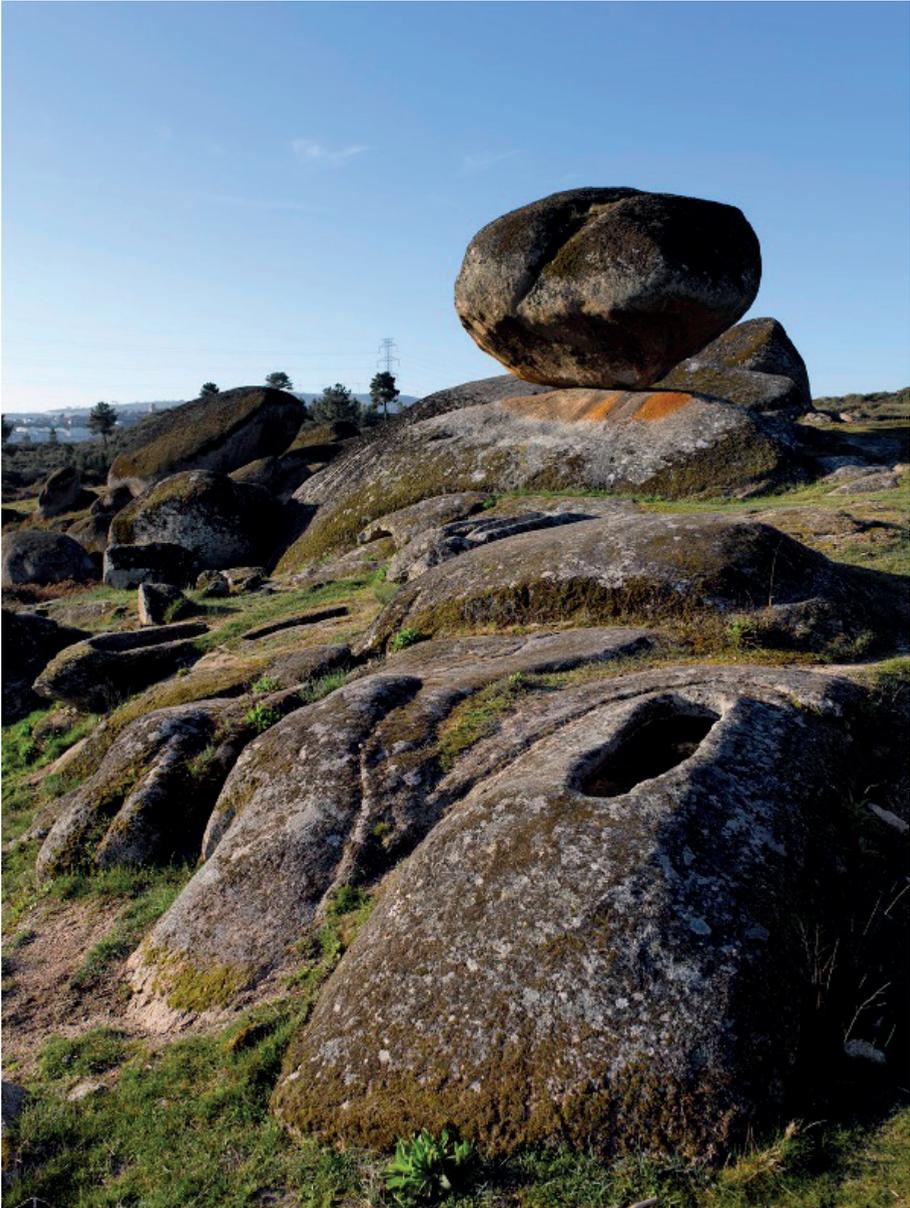


Figure 3. São Gens rock-cut graves necropolis (©Danilo Pavone Câmara Municipal de Celorico da Beira).

minium.<sup>35</sup> The material record and written sources show that churches were also scarce in these peripheral territories, certainly giving peasant communities more leeway to organize their own gravesites. This would change after the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when the emergence of parish cemeteries put an end to burial grounds managed by peasant families and communities.

### 3.3. *Material culture and consumption patterns*

Both in Alto Alentejo and Beira Alta it is quite evident that most of the analysed material culture was produced inside the early medieval peasant sphere. In Alto Alentejo, this is especially visible in domestic pottery, which was likely produced periodically by each farmstead and would sometimes be used in limited trade with other households<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 4). However, the technical requirements behind some objects such as ironwork, stonemasonry, and woodwork suggest the presence of specialized, or semi-specialized, workers. Likewise, in all the analysed settlements we have recorded exceptionally large quantities of rooftiles, probably resulting from a locally distributed centralized manufacture.<sup>37</sup> In turn, the occasional presence of what could be described as prestige goods, such as glassware and bronze pieces is indicative of interaction between peasant communities and elite groups, as suggested for the early medieval villages and farms in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>38</sup>

In Beira Alta, pottery production was remarkably similar between the 10<sup>th</sup> century settlements. It is possible to identify some variability, but results of clay petrographic and chemical analyses showed that the ceramics were produced locally, although it is not possible to confirm if this was carried out at a household level or if there were specialized productions inside the community.<sup>39</sup> Despite their small number, metal artefacts are found in every settlement and show diversified morphologies. Knives, axes, nails, links, buttons, and needles are the most common items. Recurrent finds of iron slags also indicate that ironworking was taking place in several settlements, rather than a centralised production of iron tools (Fig. 5).

Findings from the settlement of Senhora do Barrocal (Sátão) reflect a slightly different reality. Everyday pottery is quite similar to that seen in other sites, but a small number of sherds of Islamic pottery was also recovered there.<sup>40</sup> Besides being exogenous to the region, these are fragments from six high-quality, glazed and painted vessels. These products express the capacity to establish links with outside social groups and were most likely social

<sup>35</sup> Tente, "Rock-cut graves and cemeteries."

<sup>36</sup> Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, "Farming and local economy."

<sup>37</sup> Cuesta-Gómez et al., "Empezar la casa por el tejado."

<sup>38</sup> Vigil-Escalera and Quirós, "Un ensayo de interpretación."

<sup>39</sup> Tente et al., "A produção cerâmica."

<sup>40</sup> Souza et al., "The islamic pottery."



Figure 4. Early medieval local pottery from Castelo de Vide.



Figure 5. Metal artefacts from the early medieval enclosure of São Gens (Celorico da Beira).

markers of local elites. Additional evidence supports this hypothesis: an inscription carved in stone, mentioning a church dated from 972, and an iron spur, the first to be found in the region at such an early chronology. Finally, Senhora do Barrocal is the only settlement to preserve rooftiles; in all the other settlements only perishable materials would have been used to cover domestic structures. While the majority of the material evidence from Senhora do Barrocal is similar to that found in coeval settlements, these particular finds reveal a distinct community. It is possible then that Senhora do Barrocal was occupied by local elites, even though we do not know the exact role they played.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.4. *Farming activities*

Due to the acidity of granite bedrock soils, and the archaeological formation processes at the early medieval farmsteads in Castelo de Vide, botanical and faunal remains are almost inexistent, and thus, the analysis of agropastoral practices is difficult. The presence of cattle pens and the setting of the farmsteads in areas suitable for grazing, suggests stock keeping, while quern stones indicate cereal or grain grinding. This alone might lead us to propose diverse agricultural practices mainly focused on subsistence farming. However, excavation and surface data revealed a considerable number of press facilities (lever and screw presses and rock-cut tanks) from the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> The fact that several new presses were being built and used during this period points to a demand for transformed products (olive oil and wine), that exceeded the local needs in this specific territory. This in turn indicates a surplus production, intended for supra-local trade, or perhaps even tax or rent payments, which integrated peasant groups in complex vertical relations.<sup>43</sup>

In Beira Alta, the 10<sup>th</sup> century communities exploited many of the locally available resources. There is direct evidence for agriculture, herding of sheep and goats, hunting of cervids and wild boar, and gathering of wild plant foods. These communities were also able to produce most of their utensils, such as pottery, iron tools and wooden items, using local resources. Some of their daily activities were carried out collectively. However, we can also see regional complementariness in some economic activities. The specialisation in hunting and tanning, as observed at São Gens – and the probability of a transhumance system, documented in places such Soida (Celorico da Beira) and Lameiros Tapados (Vouzela) – are signs of economic complementariness between settlements which reflect a complex social organization at this level. At the local level, subsistence practices ensured the survival of community

<sup>41</sup> Tente et al., “O sítio da Senhora do Barrocal.”

<sup>42</sup> Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, “Oil and wine.”

<sup>43</sup> Prata and Cuesta-Gómez, “Farming and local economy.”

members but, at the same time, they engaged in more specialized activities allowing them to integrate in complex networks external to the community.<sup>44</sup> Although at first glance these communities might seem to be similar in terms of economy and social standing, the archaeological evidence from Senhora do Barrocal showed the presence of local rural elites that were operating on differentiated social levels, distinct from the remaining local communities.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4. *Conclusion*

Despite being much more abundant than 15 years ago and having revealed previously unknown realities, the available archaeological record for Portuguese inland territories is still limited when it comes to finds that might help us determine the scope of peasant agency during the early medieval period. As a theoretical framework, we agree that this can be a fruitful approach to grasp the complexity of past societies, particularly since it invites us to articulate our discourse around peasant groups and to consider material evidence in a more eloquent manner.

But the approach to peasant agency through the archaeological record is not unambiguous; in fact, the same set of material evidence can be interpreted in contrasting ways. 1) Peasant communities are autonomous and capable of choosing how they adapt to both socio-political and environmental circumstances. These communities would have gained autonomy in certain regions after the disappearance of the Roman administrative system and the subsequent inexistence of an equally comprehensive system, leaving room for peasants in certain regions farther from the new centres of power to effectively possess the autonomy to design their own socio-political agenda. At a later moment, in the case of Beira Alta, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these communities would not have been able to resist more encompassing powers and succumbed to pressure through force.<sup>46</sup> Or 2) the changes detected in the archaeological record of rural communities result from the intervention of more centralizing powers, eventually operating at different scales and times in the territories discussed here, but that influenced the way peasant families occupied the territory, used local resources, and socially interacted. This could be seen, for example, in the regular settlement layout in Alto Alentejo from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards and the need for these peasant families to produce surpluses of certain products. It appears that this land-use system and associated settlement network were abandoned in the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and latter evidence has not yet been recorded. For now, we are still

<sup>44</sup> Quirós, "Inequality and social complexity;" Tente, "Social inequality."

<sup>45</sup> Tente et al., "O sítio da Senhora do Barrocal;" Souza et al., "The Islamic pottery."

<sup>46</sup> Tente, "No smoke without fire;" Tente, "Social Complexity."

unable to determine if this was due to an external imposition, or if on the contrary it would reflect peasant agency in deciding a new course of action.

It is our opinion that some aspects of the peasant sphere are particularly valuable areas to inquire for agency. This is the case of material culture production, especially when concerning local and domestic manufactures; the layout and configuration of living areas; the selection of plant and animal species; and the burial grounds, as privileged areas for the expression of social dynamics. However, we must be careful to avoid overly predisposed approaches as almost any set of evidence can be used to suggest peasant agency to a certain extent.

Peasants with capacity to control their destiny and determine the essential issues in their lives could coexist with families subjected to more encompassing powers, while retaining some control over daily activities. Early medieval social dynamics were certainly much more tangled, a combination of agency and inaction, submission, and negotiation. But our interpretations and hypotheses can be improved when framed through the lens of peasant agency, which places peasant communities front and centre in the historical and social debate.

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# Unveiling a hidden subject: peasant agency in the Douro river basin (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries)\*

by Eduardo Cardoso Daflon

The peasantry formed the most numerous group in the vast course of history in its dialectical diversity and specificity. However, the peasants' importance was not matched by an equal research effort from historians. Something especially true during any pre-capitalist context in which the absolute relevance of this social class is shaded by the historiographical fascination about the ruling classes of yore. Hence, the present paper aims to contribute for understanding the protagonism of the "hidden subject" that was the early medieval Iberian peasantry between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. This class is frequently seem as static or – at most – passive. To frame a clearer picture of such an elusive social group this text presents a regional analysis with the articulation of written and archaeological sources in order to capture the peasant agency in the process of struggle with the aristocratic powers. The main hypothesis is that the process of aristocratic weakening in the Douro river basin during the 5<sup>th</sup> century ensured greater autonomy for this region peasants and that between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries there is a new onslaught of a renewed aristocracy articulated with the Visigoth state. There was, without a doubt, a partially successful aristocratic advance, however, I would like to emphasize precisely the resistance imposed by the peasantry in a long-lasting effort to preserve their living conditions.

Early Middle Ages, Iberian Peninsula, Peasantry, Class struggle.

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## 1. *Hidden Subject*

Although there are classic works and manuals that pointed to the centrality of rural areas in Middle Ages societies, the historiography in general disregards its importance.<sup>1</sup> The medievalists focus regularly falls on aristocratic, ecclesiastical, or monarchical elements. This is often justified by the lack of sources about the peasantry.<sup>2</sup> Even when there are sources, they are mobilized to express the peasant's domination by the aristocracy. More than eighty years ago, Marc Bloch synthesized: "fields without lords are fields without a history."<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the historical discipline was since its birth – and even after the *Annales* renewal – very dependent on the texts. As a result, we have a double erasure of the peasantry from History. First, in the past for not leaving their own written traces and because aristocratic documentation register (if at all) their exploitation. The second erasure takes place in the present and is the result of the medievalists relative disinterest towards the medieval peasant.<sup>4</sup> This continues to perpetuate yesterday's inequalities today. This becomes even more dramatic when we specifically consider the early medieval centuries.

Fortunately, the last few decades have offered a real renewal of the possibilities of studying the agrarian space and the European Early Middle Ages peasantry. Movement made possible through archaeology, being referred to as an archaeological turn.<sup>5</sup> Something we can see as well for the Iberian, a context on which I will focus on this paper.<sup>6</sup> This discipline has been revealing a series of direct records of material peasant life that are indispensable to understand these hidden subjects. However, another problem is posed even with this remarkable development.

## 2. *Iberian Early Middle Ages: two versions of the same reality*

Before proceeding, it is worth to establish the main narratives built about the Iberian peasantry during the so-called Visigothic Period. The initial point

<sup>1</sup> Baschet, *A Civilização Feudal*, 96; Bloch, *Historia Rural Francesa*; Le Goff, *Civilização do Ocidente Medieval*, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Daflon and Magela, "Porquê de uma História," 42-62. The concept of peasantry is quite controversial and it is not the main objective of this text. For a balance see Sevilla Gusmán and González De Molina, *Sobre a evolução*. I would also like to point out that recently I made a theoretical effort to apply the concept of peasant to understand the Early Medieval period Daflon, "Considerações sobre o conceito."

<sup>3</sup> Bloch, *Feudal society*, 242.

<sup>4</sup> Cardoso, "Camponês, campesinato," 24-9.

<sup>5</sup> Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 156-94; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 383-588; Escalona, "Early Castilian peasantry," 119-45.

<sup>6</sup> Quirós Castillo, "Early Medieval Villages," 13-26; Tejerizo García, "Unearthing Peasant Societies," 75-108.

I would like to make is that these social agents are apprehended differently when studied by historians and archaeologists. Thus, it is necessary to know the interpretation advanced by each of these disciplines.

Apart from some specific studies, among historians, the peasantry is rarely the central focus of analysis.<sup>7</sup> In general, peasants are mobilized as part of broader discussions. For example, one could highlight the debates on Visigothic (proto)feudalism, in which peasants appear as dependents on the aristocracy.<sup>8</sup> Or this can even be seen the discussions about the prevalence of slavery during the Early Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup>

The historiography approaches these topics basically through textual documentation and historians tend to look at the whole peninsula in order to incorporate as many sources as possible. This would be methodologically justified by the relatively precarious peasant records. Consequently, it also blurs regional and chronological specificities, mainly because some of the main sources used are normative.<sup>10</sup> In other words, sources that lack a precise geographic insertion and sometimes uncertain dating.

This blurred image of the history of the Early Medieval Iberian peasantry is evidently problematic and it does not allow a more complete understanding of that society. In addition, it ends up reinforcing a current view of the peasantry as an ahistorical being. In other words, a group that tends to be miserable and practically does not experience changes over time and space.<sup>11</sup>

Besides that, little importance was given to material culture during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is related to the nature of the archaeological knowledge available about Visigothic society. Until then, archaeology was largely influenced by Francoism and focused on artistic or architectural aspects.<sup>12</sup> That is, until the rural archaeology boom of the 2000s, the available research had little potential to contribute to the understanding of the peasantry.

During the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was an increase in university research and especially in commercial archaeology, which accompanied the major infrastructure works in Spain and Portugal. This led to an undeniable increase in the number of published data.<sup>13</sup> In archaeology, peasants have been studied based on specific excavations. This is done by avoiding drawing generalizations from a clear-cut archaeological context. Even so, a crucial result of this “archaeological turn” was the recent publication of re-

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, “Peasant Revolts,” 11-23; García Moreno, “Campesino hispanovisigodo,” 171-87.

<sup>8</sup> Barbero, and Vigil, *Formación del feudalismo*, 155-200; García Moreno, *Historia de España Visigoda*, 247-54; Manzano Moreno, *Historia de España*, vol. 2, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Bonnassie, “Supervivencia y Extinción,” 13-75.

<sup>10</sup> Bastos, “Escravo, servo ou camponês?,” 79-82.

<sup>11</sup> Handy, “Almost idiotic wretchedness,” 335-42.

<sup>12</sup> Olmo Enciso, “Ideología y Arqueología,” 157-60; Tejerizo García, “Arqueología y nacionalismo,” 150-6; Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique*, XII-XV.

<sup>13</sup> Vigil-Escalera Guirado, “Últimos 30 años,” 271-94; Tente, “Últimos 30 anos,” 49-94; Quirós Castillo, “Early Medieval Villages,” 13-26.

gional syntheses on the Iberian rural world that tend to point to a spread of villages and farms in the Iberian Early Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup>

These syntheses have sparked an important debate among archaeologists dedicated to this period. On one hand, some argue that the archaeological data reinforces what is shown by the texts and attributes this new landscape marked by village contexts as a product of aristocratic action.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, several authors point out that there was a rupture of aristocratic power in vast parts of the Iberian Peninsula leading to a reality of greater peasant autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

These two frames tend not to converge on the role that peasants played between the 6th and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Symptomatic of the current status of our understanding is the section entitled “The peasantry and the subjugated” in Santiago Castellanos’ recent manual on Visigoths.<sup>17</sup> Castellanos had to write two different sections to discuss the peasantry: one derived from written sources and the other from archaeology. Therefore, there is a difficulty in combining textual and archaeological references to understand past peasant societies.<sup>18</sup> However, the peasantry and their villages in the Visigothic past “existed regardless of today’s research, and it would be a costly failure if both perspectives should not converge on their shared object”.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the present text consists of an effort to combine these sources that have different approaches for the construction of a more complete picture of the peasants and their agency in the historical transformations of the Iberian Peninsula during the Early Middle Ages.

To carry out this proposition, it will be necessary to adjust the scale of the analysis, which marks another difference between the works of historians and archaeologists. In general, the former start from a broad spatial-temporal perspective while the latter focus on the specific details of each context. So, to try to integrate texts and material culture, I will work from the point of view of an intermediate region. My focus will be a case study that has well

<sup>14</sup> For example, we have synthesis works on the rural world for the Guadalquivir basin García Vargas et al. “El bajo Guadalquivir”; peninsular northwest Sánchez Prado, “Power and rural landscapes,” 140-68; López Quiroga, “Hábitat, poblamiento y territorio,” 163-79; Ebro basin Laliena Corbera, “Acerca de la Articulación Social,” 149-63, some areas of Portugal Tente, “Arqueología Medieval Cristã,” Carvalho, “O final do mundo romano,” 397-435; and the surroundings of Mérida Cordero Ruiz, *Territorio emeritense durante*. In addition, we have works of a more regional scope with a peasant archaeology perspective, that is, that treat peasants as fundamental agents of landscape organization. This is the case for the Douro basin Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*; for the Catalonia region Roig Buxó, “Asentamientos rurales y poblados,” 207-52; the Madrid region Vigil-Escalera Guirado, “Granjas y Aldeas Altomedievales,” 239-84; and the Basque Country Quirós Castillo, “Arqueología del campesinado altomedieval,” 385-403.

<sup>15</sup> Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 62; Olmo Enciso, “Materiality of Complex Landscapes,” 15-42; Ariño, “Habitat rural en Península,” 104-6.

<sup>16</sup> Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 193; Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós Castillo, “Ensayo de interpretación,” 388-98.

<sup>17</sup> Castellanos, *Los Visigodos*, 169-77. More recently the same author has made a similar volume, with some differences, in English, see Castellanos, *Visigothic Kingdom*.

<sup>18</sup> Martín Viso, *Asentamientos y paisajes rurales*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Escalona, “Early Castilian peasantry,” 138.

systematized archaeological data and that has written documentation that is geographically contextualized and able to shed some light on rural realities. Therefore, I will focus my attention in the following pages especially on the region of the Douro river basin between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

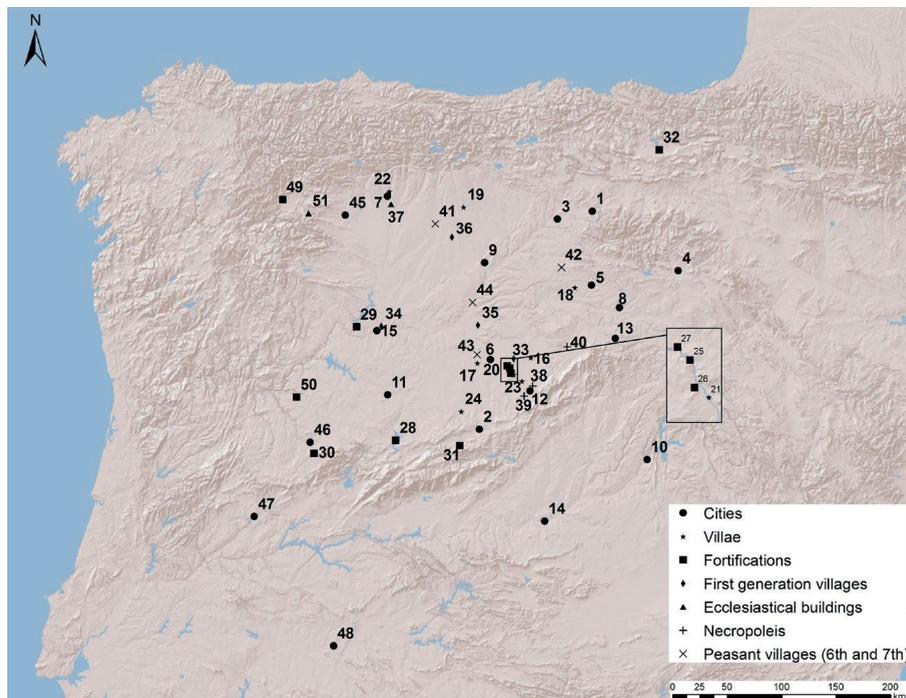


Figure 1. Map with the locations mentioned in this work. Cities: 45. Astorga 1. Auca 2. Avila 3. Burgos 4. Buitrago 46. Caliabria (Ciudad Rodrigo?) 5. Clunia, 6. Coca 47. Idanha 7. León 48. Mérida 8. Osma 9. Palencia 10. Reccopolis 11. Salamanca 12. Segovia 13. Tiermes 14. Toledo 15. Zamora; *Villae*: 16. Aguilafuente 17. Almenara-Puras 18. Baño de Valdearados 19. La Olmeda 20. Las Pizarras 21. Los Casares 22. Navatejera 23. Roda de Eresma 24. San Pedro del Arroyo; Fortifications: 25. Bernardos 49. Castro Ventosa 26. Cerro de la Virgen del Tormeón 27. Constanzana 28. El Cortinal de San Juan 29. El Cristo de San Esteban 50. Las Merchanas 30. Lerilla 31. Navasangil 32. San Pelayo; First Generation Villages: 33. Carratejera 34. El Judío 35. Las Lagunillas 36. Villafilar; Ecclesiastical Buildings: 37. Rural Church Marialba 51. Monastery in Compludo; Necropolis: 38. Espirido-Veladiez 39. Madrona 40. Duratón; Peasant Villages (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) 41. Canto Blanco 42. El Ventorro 43. Ladera de los Prados 44. Santovenia.

### *3. The emergence of a new reality in the 5<sup>th</sup> century*

The area analyzed here through the combination of written and archaeological sources corresponds approximately to the territory of the North Plateau of the Iberian Peninsula. The information available to us so far points to deep changes in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century after the breakdown of the Western Roman Empire, with regionalization and evident changes in material culture.

In urban spaces, for example, we see monumental areas becoming productive zones or necropolises, with the loss of prestige linked to those spaces.<sup>20</sup> Thus, cities like Clunia, Tiermes, Ávila, Salamanca, Segovia, Coca or Osma maintained an occupation between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and principles of the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, they go through a process of de-urbanization and cannot be seen as an extension of the Late Roman Empire. In this sense, cities tended to become a fortified nucleus with few effective capacities to organize the territory.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to this shrinking relevance of urban centers, the ceramic record points, based on TSHT analysis, to more local dynamics that are linked to more restricted exchange networks.<sup>22</sup> In turn, imported ceramics disappear from the archaeological record, indicating that they are not arriving from the coast to the interior of the peninsula.<sup>23</sup> This expresses a disarticulation of this area of Mediterranean dynamics and the emergence of much more localized ceramic productions.

In the countryside, there are also changes with practically all *uillae* from the Late Roman period. All of them show signs of a profound transformation. Unfortunately, it is a process that archaeologists struggle to determine a more accurate date.<sup>24</sup> Anyway, it seems possible to say that the *uillae* suddenly started to lose the functionality they had during the Roman period around 450 and the whole transformation was complete in less than one generation.<sup>25</sup>

In *uillae* like La Olmeda, the old prestigious spaces started to be occupied by production environments and the building materials were reused for new structures at the same time as the register of local greyish ceramics appears. Some similar processes take place at other points such as Aguilafuente, Almenara-Puras, Los Casares, Las Pizarras and Baño de Valdearados.<sup>26</sup>

In turn, we also see that necropolises developed within some of these ancient *uillae* around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. La Olmeda and Almenara-Puras are two places already mentioned where these burials took place, but there are other places with similar histories, such as San Pedro del Arroyo and Roda de Eresma. In the tombs, we find elements linked to a Roman past – such as *cingula militae*, “Simancas type” daggers, glass, TSHT ceramics – mixed with agricultural tools.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Chavarriá Arnau, “Romanos y Visigodos,” 188; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 77-80.

<sup>21</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 92-3.

<sup>22</sup> Diarte Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 50; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 87-8.

<sup>23</sup> Vigil-Escalera Guirado, and Quirós Castillo, “Ensayo de interpretación,” 380-1; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Vigil-Escalera Guirado, and Quirós Castillo, “Ensayo de interpretación,” 362.

<sup>25</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 110.

<sup>27</sup> TSHT or Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía is a Late Roman hispanic slip production. Tejerizo García, 110.

In other words, this mixture present in the funerary sphere presents us with the agency of new social groups that experienced a process of rapid transformation.<sup>28</sup> The elements linked to this Roman past progressively become rarer and ultimately disappear at the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the functional changes added to these new burials form a picture of a permanent occupation. An occupation linked to new social agents, strongly anchored in a Roman space, but with a quite different form of existence.

In conjunction with the *uillae*'s disintegration, we have the appearance of fortified settlements called "first generation fortifications", such as El Cristo de San Esteban, Bernardos, Cerro de la Virgen del Tormejón, Las Merchanas, Navasangil or Constanzana.<sup>30</sup> These fortifications in the Douro formed an elaborate landscape and were occupied steadily between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>31</sup> In turn, the architecture, location and findings inside – such as weapons, jewelery, glass and numerical *pizarras* – suggest that they were complex and elite spaces. The formation of these fortifications is part of the same process of de-urbanization, *uillae* crisis and reorganization of the local dominant class.<sup>32</sup>

Another major transformation is not related to changes in existing settlements, but to the genesis of another type of occupation, the so-called "first generation villages".<sup>33</sup> They receive such denomination because they differ mainly in the degree of complexity from those that will emerge from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards with the expansion of the networks that interconnected villages and farms, which I will address later on. There are only four cases of these new 5<sup>th</sup> century villages excavated in the Douro basin – Carratejera, Las Lagunillas, El Judío and Villafilar – and even in these cases, the data we have is partial. Still, we can indicate some general characterizations.

Among them are low-floor constructions and storage silos that break with the Roman *horrea* storage method. This signals in a very direct way the profound changes in the scope of management, production and, therefore, of the social relations of the villages in the North Plateau of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. These 5<sup>th</sup> century silos are small, especially when compared with their 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century counterparts. Thus, the capacity of these storage sites in the 5<sup>th</sup> century North Plateau varied between 1,200 and 1,500 liters, in no case exceeding 2,000 liters.

It is possible to observe a functional organizational logic of the space, with similar typological structures that are relatively concentrated.<sup>34</sup> This signals the existence of communities that were far from having a spontaneous and

<sup>28</sup> Tejerizo García, 111-2.

<sup>29</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas en la cuenca del Duero durante la Primera Alta Edad Media*, 114-5.

<sup>30</sup> Quirós Castillo, "Castillos altomedievales," 17-27.

<sup>31</sup> Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 195-200.

<sup>32</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 108-9.

<sup>33</sup> Tejerizo García, 117.

<sup>34</sup> Tejerizo García, 120.

disorderly character in their forms of settlement. On the contrary, they were aware of a common territory and its spatial distribution. In addition, the analysis of stratigraphy, ceramics, funerary record and domestic architecture points to the presence of communities that have continuously inhabited the space for at least two generations.<sup>35</sup>

Taking this into account, it is possible to say that the development of the North Plateau was marked by a very sharp disarticulation in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It was a space that was no longer linked to the Mediterranean, nor was it incorporated by the new and incipient Suebi or Visigoth powers that were under formation.

We see a process of weakening aristocracies in that area, which sought to constitute new spaces of power through the fortified settlements. These were nodal points in the territory, but with a much lower convergence capacity than the ancient Roman cities. Even so, it is in these places that we see prestigious objects suggesting some ability to control the surpluses produced.

In any case, it seems clear that there was a prevalence of a peasant agency, signalled by the development of a domestic architecture vastly different from the one that existed during the Roman period. Villages developed over the ancient Roman *uillae* that point to a marked structural change in the landscape. Through archaeology, we can see in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the advent of village communities with a relatively small degree of internal differentiation.

Thus, it seems plausible to imagine that the disappearance of Roman imperial society had dramatic consequences for land ownership in the Douro basin. For example, through the case present in the *uita* of Melania the Younger, a noble woman that we know had difficulties selling her lands in Hispania at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> Although this source does not refer to the North Plateau, considering the set of information presented, it would not be surprising that this disruption would be felt in a similar way. So, it is possible that many absentee lords – who were members of a Mediterranean scope aristocracy – completely lost control over their lands and dependents with the disappearance of the Roman imperial system. This power vacuum may have been one of the fundamental elements in the temporary favouring of peasants in their confrontation with local aristocratic groups that seems to have been concentrated in fortified places.

Despite this trend, it is possible to observe in the most western portions of this territory a greater capacity for aristocratic articulation. Signs of this can be seen in Astorga, which experienced an increase in its ceramic production during the 5<sup>th</sup> century and played a relatively broad role in the regional supply of this product.<sup>37</sup> Or in Castro Ventosa, which was a qualitatively distinct for-

<sup>35</sup> Tejerizo García, 120-1.

<sup>36</sup> Clark, *Life of Melania*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 92; Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 233.

tification with findings that indicate high social status and powerful political activity.<sup>38</sup>

We also know of the contrasting capacity for supralocal articulation that the aristocracy of the western portions of the North Plateau possessed through some written sources. The letters from Bishop Montano attached to the Council of Toledo II indicate that Toribio – Bishop of Astorga in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – would have sent a set of books to the prelate of Rome against Priscillian heresy.<sup>39</sup> In addition, we are aware that at least one of León's aristocrats in the 460s was able to access the Roman bishopric by mail to intercede in favour of one bishop in the north of the Ebro basin.<sup>40</sup> Both signs of an aristocracy connected and structured by long-distance ties, absent in other parts of the North Plateau.

This distinct development is explained by the fact that León and Astorga were places that were linked to the strategies of power and domination promoted by the articulated aristocracy in the Suebi State.<sup>41</sup> It is not impossible that this was also the case with Castro Ventosa.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the development of *uillae* in this part of the studied area follows a different path. Next to León, we have the case of the *uilla* of Navatejera, where the construction of a church potentially indicates a certain continuity as a space for post-imperial elites beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> Also, in the vicinity of León, we have another example of greater continuity of aristocratic control of space: the rural church of Marialba, built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and expanded during the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, we see that around 450 there is a profound disruption in much of the North Plateau that leads to a peasant agency ascendancy in the face of the relative aristocratic weakening. However, at least in the western part of that territory, we see the presence of an aristocracy more articulated with the Suebi state constitution and which maintains, at least partially, its Mediterranean ties. This aristocracy, that in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century signals a projection over the area of greater peasant autonomy, seems to suggest the dispersion of the ceramic record coming from Astorga.

#### 4. *Panorama of peasant villages and farms in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries*

From this context of the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, an original reality emerges at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, in which peasant villages and farms were

<sup>38</sup> Fernández, *Aristocrats and Statehood*, 45; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 107-9.

<sup>39</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> Tejada y Ramiro, *Colección de cánones*, 962.

<sup>41</sup> Díaz, *El Reino Suevo*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Diarte Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 118.

developed in the North Plateau.<sup>45</sup> Although only a relatively small number of these peasant spaces have been excavated, we know that the landscape of the Douro basin was densely populated by these settlements. Something evidenced by surveys such as the one carried out between the Voltoya and Eresma rivers that shows an average distance between the settlements of only 2 km.<sup>46</sup>

These peasant sites were quite stable in time as indicated by the funeral records of places like Espirido-Veladiez, Madrona or Duratón. Places that have been in use for about 300 years, according to studies of materials buried next to bodies in cemeteries, represent a collective memory of the community.<sup>47</sup> In addition, its spatial location is quite interesting. Always being a few tens of meters away from water sources suggests a spatiality aimed at serving community interests.<sup>48</sup>

Today, the data provided by archaeology allows us to build a general picture of these peasant spaces that were so central to the agrarian dynamics of that period. For this region, each of the domestic units in the documented settlements would consist of one or two vertical structures, between three and five low-floor huts and, perhaps, a well.<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that there is a certain homogeneity in domestic architecture and that it does not have prestigious markers. Therefore, the construction of these habitats was probably the product of collective action, that is, it did not serve as an indicator of inequality within the village context.<sup>50</sup>

The concentration of silos is often large. As an example, the Ladera de los Prados settlement concentrates a dozen of them in its central area and almost 30 in its southeastern zone and, in turn, Canto Blanco has in its central zone almost 40 storage silos.<sup>51</sup> These concentrations could be explained by a domestic unit trying to enhance the cultivated agricultural space, but it can also indicate the presence of community logic, with the construction of this type of structure involving the community.<sup>52</sup> These silos demonstrate the levels of complexity of these communities in the Douro basin and their ability to adapt. This is because we see a heterogeneity of the solutions adopted, which seem to be fundamentally correlated to the interests of domestic units in the short or medium-term.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> For further readings on these classifications Vigil-Escalera Guirado, "Granjas y Aldeas Altomedievales," 243-4.

<sup>46</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 204-7.

<sup>47</sup> Tejerizo García, 185.

<sup>48</sup> Tejerizo García, 197-8.

<sup>49</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 152; Vigil-Escalera Guirado, and Quirós Castillo, "Ensayo de interpretación," 373.

<sup>50</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 131; Quirós Castillo, "Castillos altomedievales," 135.

<sup>51</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 152-3.

<sup>52</sup> Tejerizo García, 152-3.

<sup>53</sup> Tejerizo García, 156.

In addition to the constructive solutions of these villages and farms being quite adapted to a local reality, the productive strategies also indicate the type of life that these communities experienced during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Until recently, we only relied on data collected from written sources to imagine what rural production would be. More recently, bioarchaeological data applied to peasant communities has brought new perspectives for analysis.<sup>54</sup>

What can be said with some certainty, according to the current state of research, is that the predominant animals in the Douro basin are cattle, goats and (to a lesser extent) pigs. The cattle, due to the marks of intense work, was used during heavy tasks as well as a source of milk. Goats were used mainly for wool, being sacrificed at a later age, and the pigs would have a more direct relationship with food, considering that they were sacrificed in general quite young. But bone records are found in apparently variable proportions in each location according to what we know.

In view of material culture on peasant production, it is necessary to contrast the information obtained with that which we can obtain from the written sources available to us. Contrast that more than just giving solidity to what we know from that past, it also allows us to have a better understanding. For example, in the life of Saint Fructuosus, written at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, we have the reference that during childhood the saint went with his father – a *dux exercitus Spaniae* – to a region bordering the Douro basin, the mountainous territory of Bierzo. At that time, Fructuosus' father was going to list his flocks and hear from his shepherds, reinforcing the importance of animal husbandry in the region.<sup>55</sup> Most likely, this area corresponded to the region where he later founded his first monastery in Compludo, a few kilometers west from Astorga.

There are other cases in Fructuosus life that speak of the saint's relationship with a goat that followed him everywhere after being saved from a hunt and that is later killed by a young man, generating great anger in the saint's heart.<sup>56</sup> These cases highlight the importance of this animal in the territory considered here. In turn, Valerio of Bierzo's Autobiography talks about the retribution that the religious man receives in the form of a goatskin blanket.<sup>57</sup>

The woman who sewed this blanket made a pilgrimage to the Saint Felix Church<sup>58</sup> and on the way she came across a group of men leading several oxen together. An ox accidentally ended up burying its horn in her without anyone being able to extract it, leaving her almost dead. Finally, a man – called by the title *dominus* – leaves the opposite side of Saint Felix Church and miraculous-

<sup>54</sup> Peña-Chocarro, "La arqueobotánica," 83-98.

<sup>55</sup> Nock, *Vita Sancti Fructuosi*, 88-9.

<sup>56</sup> Nock, 100-5.

<sup>57</sup> Aherne, *Valerio of Bierzo*, 118-26.

<sup>58</sup> The exact location of this church is unknown, but it would not be unlikely that it was close to the Compludo monastery – founded by Fructuosus – and therefore just a few kilometers from Astorga.

ly restores her health. Here we have the reinforcement of the idea of animal husbandry as a central point of peasant activities and the primordial use of cattle as draft animals in this context.

Still, in Valerio's autobiography, we have the report that the religious received two horses from a "most illustrious man" to help in the activities of the religious man.<sup>59</sup> It is an animal that also appears sometimes in the fauna record of the settlements with marks of intense work. It was a gift that aroused such envy in the other monks with whom he lived that the prior of the monastery even ordered people to steal them.<sup>60</sup> Thieves were unsuccessful and return empty-handed to find divine punishment with their lands destroyed and their oxen stolen.<sup>61</sup> Thus, horses seem to have been highly valued animals to the point of arousing such revolt on the part of the other monks.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps it is even an animal linked to elite elements since the one who gives the horses to Valerio is a man from the aristocracy.

Pigs appear in just two *pizarras* and their use is not mentioned in any of the other written documents in the Douro basin.<sup>63</sup> This reaffirms what is apparent in the material record, which has a minimal swine presence. Thus, the pig was not a central element in the peasant resource management strategies, nonetheless, they were raised in order to diversify production and minimize risks. This animal's secondary role in peasant production is possibly linked to the fact that only its meat was used, while the others brought other benefits, such as wool, milk or enhanced the capacity for human effort in agricultural and transport work.

Regarding the crops, it is difficult to compare the written sources and materials since we are very much in need of studies on the seeds found in the excavated settlements in the North Plateau. But, through the texts of the *pizarras* we know about cereal crops – such as wheat and barley – as well as specific references to olives and mention of olive oil production and even the cultivation of vineyards.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps at least some of these cultivated vineyards supplied the monasteries linked to Saint Fructuosus' monastic rule.<sup>65</sup> Finally, the agricultural production of these villages and farms was supplemented with the consumption of vegetables and, to a lesser extent, chickens, and seafood, which had a minimal bone register in the settlements.<sup>66</sup>

These peasant villages and farms were far from being autonomous. Considering some elements of material culture as indicators – such as metal ob-

<sup>59</sup> Aherne, *Valerio of Bierzo*, 101-3.

<sup>60</sup> Aherne, 103.

<sup>61</sup> Aherne, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Such appreciation is also suggested by the slate number 42. All references to the *pizarras* are found in Velázquez Soriano, *Pizarras Visigodas*.

<sup>63</sup> *PizVis* 54, 92.

<sup>64</sup> Wheat (*PizVis* 34, 54, 93, 95); barley (*PizVis* 31, 78, 79, 96); olive (*PizVis* 103); olive oil (*PizVis* 95); and wine (*PizVis* 116, 124, 149).

<sup>65</sup> Campos Ruiz and Roca Melia, *Santos Padres Espanholes*, 142-3.

<sup>66</sup> Campos Ruiz and Roca Melia, 142-3; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 171.

jects, ceramics, glass, and toreutics – it is possible to observe the complexity of these settlements in the Douro basin, as they demonstrate various forms of circulation and integration.<sup>67</sup>

The types of ceramics consumed indicate production and distribution at local and regional scales. On the other hand, we can perceive heterarchical forms between different settlements, with a micro-regional exchange of specialist artisans and, to a certain extent, an inter-village division of tasks. In turn, findings in bronze, glass or more refined metals express the relationship of Douro villages with productive and technological chains through vertical circulation and signal inequalities within the village contexts.

In other words, the material record points in the opposite direction to a very traditional view of rural communities basically focused on self-supply. It must therefore be understood that there is a complex network of production and distribution of many objects in the Douro basin, which met the daily needs of peasant life.<sup>68</sup>

Having established this panorama of villages and farms, it really seems that we have a fractured reading. The spatial location of the villages near to water sources, the construction techniques, the organization of production and the forms of storage are material elements that suggest communities with high degrees of autonomy. On the other hand, in the written sources they register the presence of noblemen – *dux*, *dominus* and *uir illustrissimus* – with the capacity to subject dependents and some level of concentration of wealth.

However, I would like to reinforce here that we must be careful about regionalization and chronology of the historical processes. The sources that most clearly establish levels of hierarchy and social domination are late and concentrated in the western portions of the Northern Plateau. In other words, it was precisely those that since the 5<sup>th</sup> century had preserved an aristocratic class that ended up much more powerful than in the other parts of this zone. So, we need to understand this development process and how the peasantry is related to it.

##### 5. *Transformations in villages and farms in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries*

Due to the limits in the establishment of clear chronological sequences in the villages and farms in the Douro basin, it is often difficult to understand the details of the historical transformations that these spaces went through. However, some clues are noticeable through careful analysis of two elements: silos and cemeteries.

<sup>67</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 159-68; Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós Castillo, “Ensayo de interpretación del registro arqueológico,” 376-81.

<sup>68</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 167-8.

About silos, these changes can be seen through their dimensions. About 75% of the silos in the North Plateau can be classified as small, that is, with a capacity between 500 and 1,500 liters. Around 20% would be average, with a volume ranging between 1,500 and 3,000 liters. In other words, around 95% of the silos would correspond to small or medium structures linked to the immediate consumption needs of the peasant families who managed the surplus.

Only about 5% of the silos could be classified as large, that is, with a capacity greater than 3,000 liters and an insignificant number of these silos would have had a capacity greater than 5,000 liters. It is interesting to note that these higher capacity silos are associated with late settlement phases, dated between the end of the VII and the beginning of the VIII, as in the case of El Ventorro, Ladera de los Prados, Santoventia or Canto Blanco. This allows us to raise the proposition that in these later moments there was an increase in the storage capacity in the silos.<sup>69</sup> This could perhaps be read both as a possible concentration of wealth on the part of some domestic units in late periods or the need to produce a larger surplus in order to meet external demands.

In turn, changes in burials follow a chronology like that of silos. Let us start with those that are undoubtedly the predominant funerary disposition in the Douro basin: the community necropolises.<sup>70</sup> As already mentioned, there is in general a prolonged use of these spaces and the data available to us allows us to perceive that there is a change in the logic of appropriation of space that takes place between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>71</sup> Thus, it represents a second moment of rupture with the transformation that took place in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

These burials in necropolises were for a long time seen as products of ethnic, Visigoth or Hispanic-Roman identities depending on the elements found in the graves. An interpretation that, despite not being totally outdated, finds much less support in historiography than a few decades ago.<sup>72</sup> One of the most relevant findings in these cemeteries for this “ethnic” attribution by archaeologists were elements of dress, such as brooches.

However, these objects had a technological and specialized production chain linked to aristocratic production centers. Therefore, they refer less to an ethnic element and more to elements of social distinction within the com-

<sup>69</sup> Quirós Castillo, “Silos y sistemas,” 171-92; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 156;

<sup>70</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 184.

<sup>71</sup> Tejerizo García, 186-7.

<sup>72</sup> This is a very problematic position since the number of these brooches are found in just a few tombs and even less frequent when considering the total number of burials. Quantification that is nuclear, since the tombs were reused. Furthermore, in addition to burials, the findings linked to specific “ethnicities” are practically null in other spaces – such as the Toledo or Reccopolis region – where we know that the Visigoth aristocracy was concentrated. The ethnic explanation generates more problems than it solves. Thus, it may be more productive to think that through these burials we can find a difference in status due to the presence of this type of object. Diarte Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 131-2; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 184.

munity. In this way, we could interpret these findings as signs of the different scales of power within the community, as well as their internal tensions. After all, there were concrete characters within rural areas capable of accessing these luxury goods, even when importing medium and long-range goods – such as ceramics or glass – was quite restricted or null.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, both the changes in personal objects at burials and the appearance of brooches from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards are part of this dispute process in the communities. In turn, the brooches perhaps represented the use of strategies for domination of the individual or articulated aristocracy in the state for peasant domination.<sup>74</sup> After all, these objects had production processes that made them very restrictive. They enabled paths of social control carried out through the creation, consolidation or subsumption of local leaders through the granting of gifts.<sup>75</sup>

We also have the appearance of isolated burials within the villages. In them, we also have objects deposited with the dead (such as knives, sickles, and ceramics), which are often similar and contemporary to those of the community necropolises. This is something that could indicate that this funerary typology was a type of prestige, translating to a greater competitiveness among the various domestic units during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, these types of isolated burials could indicate a greater autonomy of the domestic unit in relation to the community when it comes to disposing of the dead. This could indicate an internal dispute for memory and even for property, which would explain the proximity of these burials to housing.<sup>76</sup>

The combination of information from silos and funerary spaces is a window for us to glimpse the changes that were taking place in the peasant communities of the Douro between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. That is, they indicate new relations and internal tensions in the communities that were absent in previous periods.

So, through the archaeological data, there is almost no evidence for asymmetric social relations of any kind among peasants in the villages. Even when we can verify some material differentiation, we cannot speak of inequality in the strict sense. In other words, it is not possible to find any capacity for significant wealth concentration by some village members. However, a careful analysis allows us to glimpse the social “micro-stratification” that is reflected in differences in status and class. However, even though these inequalities exist between social groups in the peasant communities of the Douro, they are

<sup>73</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 190-1.

<sup>74</sup> A detailed discussion on the historiography produced regarding the Visigothic state would escape the objectives of this text. For a valuable critical balance see Pachá, “Estado e Relações,” specially the first chapter. Here I understand the state as a social relationship. Some general reflections on this idea can be found in Bastos, “Os ‘Reinos Bárbaros,’” 1-11. I applied this conceptualization on another paper: Daflon, “Tumultos e Clamores,” 132-67.

<sup>75</sup> Carvajal Castro and Tejerizo García, “Teorizar el estado”; Godelier, *O enigma do dom*.

<sup>76</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades* 181-4.

quite opaque. Despite this opacity, we can say that these differences and inequalities become more and more evident as we move through the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. *Fronts under aristocratic pressure*

Having established the villages' and farms' social structure in the Douro basin and their historical transformations, we still need to consider the processes that interfered with them and how they affected the class struggle and the condition of peasant existence. As argued in the previous sections, these transformations begin in the region of the Douro basin with the final disarticulation of the Roman Empire, which resulted in an adaptation of the elites. These elites started to occupy different spaces from the old Roman *uillae* with the construction of fortifications. The cities also showed signs of weakening aristocratic powers in much of the Douro basin. The exception seems to have been the western parts of the Douro, close to cities like León and Astorga where the ceramic distribution and the presence of rural churches dated between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries would indicate a certain continuity of the aristocratic powers.

In this item, I want to try to understand how the aristocracy rearticulation process took place in the North Plateau and its consequent greater capacity to exploit the peasantry. Thus, the first important point concerns the broader processes of aristocratic rearticulations in the Iberian Peninsula, which were already happening in some form by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and beginnings of the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As stated before, it is especially true for the regions of the peninsular north. This is something that could be related with the process of consolidating the Suebi state. However, it also showed its first signs in the areas of the Ebro valley, Catalonia, the Tagus valley, and Mérida with the formation of the Visigoth state in Hispania.<sup>77</sup>

The state formation only gained well-defined contours after the reigns of Leovigild and Reccared.<sup>78</sup> Not because these were two "strong" monarchs, but because during the period they occupied the throne they were able to bring the aristocracy together through negotiation and violence. It is with these two kings that a more structured control over the peninsular territory is established, which translates into the materialization of constructive projects. These constructions were expressed on a smaller scale in rural churches and Christianization of the urban environment and within the scope of royal power with the foundation of Reccopolis and the monumentalization of Vega Baja de Toledo between mid-6<sup>th</sup> and mid-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were projects that

<sup>77</sup> Daflon, "Desvelando um Sujeito Oculto," 293.

<sup>78</sup> There is abundant bibliography that points out these reigns as turning points in the process of state formation and consolidation. For an overview, see Castellanos, *Los Godos y la Cruz*.

voraciously demanded peasant expropriation on a much larger scale than during the 5<sup>th</sup> or the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, even though there was a shaking in Roman forms of domination, it was relatively brief in several parts of the peninsula and each of them had a particular development. Thus, we must consider the evolution of the aristocratic articulation in the North Plateau with the state powers that began to integrate the entire peninsula during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. That is essential for us to have a better idea of the degree of peasant autonomy and of the historical transformations underway. It will also help us to have a better understanding of the peasantry's relative resilience and of the aristocracy's ability to extract surplus.

In order to do so, let us return to the previously mentioned letters of Bishop Montano of Toledo attached to the minutes of the Second Council of Toledo of 531.<sup>79</sup> These are references from the end of the first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century that can shed light on the configuration of social relations in the North Plateau. The first letter is addressed "to you, dearest brothers and sons of the Palentine territory". The second is addressed to a figure called Toribio that we should not confuse with the one that corresponded with Bishop Leo of Rome in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup>

The center of the dispute recorded in these texts is the fact that there was a disregard for the authority of Toledo's metropolitan bishop. That is because the clergy of Palencia called a bishop from another region to consecrate churches in the city. The other region to which they refer probably corresponded to the Suebi Kingdom because Montano said that this action was against the interests of the Visigoth monarch.<sup>81</sup>

After admonishing the Palentine clergy for their attitudes, we have the text addressed to Toribio. It is not clear who this individual would be, this being a heated debate that goes back decades in the past.<sup>82</sup> A first possibility that we can quickly exclude is that he was the bishop of Palencia since this was a vacant seat for a long time at the time of writing these correspondences.

Much of the difficulty we face concerns the terms that Montano uses to refer to Toribio, calling him "*domino et filio*" first and then "*sacerdotis*".<sup>83</sup> The term "son" is generally used to refer to a layperson or member of the lowest rank in the clergy. As we know from the letter that Toribio is no longer in secular life, we could assume that he was someone of relevance as an abbot. However, the complicating element comes next when Montano calls him "co-bishop".<sup>84</sup> Thus, there is a direct mention of an episcopal dignity related to the

<sup>79</sup> Isla Frez, "Desde el Reino," 41-52; Martin, "Las cartas de Montano," 403-426; Martin, "Montanus et les schismatiques," 9-20.

<sup>80</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 46.

<sup>81</sup> Vives et al., 49.

<sup>82</sup> Thompson, *Los Godos en España*, 406; Castellanos, and Martín Viso, "Local articulation," 12-3.

<sup>83</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 50-1.

<sup>84</sup> Vives et al., 51.

figure of Toribio, reinforced by some other terms such as *celsitudo uestra* and *caritas uestra*, which in the period could also be used to refer to bishops.<sup>85</sup>

In this sense, an interesting hypothesis is that Toribio could have been a bishop who served in the Suebi Kingdom, perhaps even in Astorga. In fact, it is possible that his name would indicate a potential kinship or the desire to claim the memory of the former bishop of the same name from the 5<sup>th</sup> century famous for having fought priscilianism. This kinship would not be impossible given the history of episcopal families in the Iberian Early Middle Ages.<sup>86</sup> Thus, these letters were meant to warn (threaten?) the alleged bishop of Astorga that the solution of the crisis in Palencia was in his interest. After all, it would avoid a Visigoth-Suebi conflict that had its main stage in the dispute for the North Plateau.

This interpretation seems adequate and in accordance with the picture offered by the dispersion of ceramics from Astorga. In other words, the western region of the Douro basin was linked to aristocratic dynamics, perhaps linked to the Suebi state, and it was making efforts to project its influence and capacity for domination towards the North Plateau. It was in a western portion in which the maintenance of aristocratic powers was much more vigorous than in other parts of the area considered here.

When Toledo began to assert itself as a central articulation pole for the Visigoth state from the Southern Meseta, in the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the dispute grew between the Suebic and Visigothic aristocratic factions for the central zones of the Douro Basin. If we accept that Toribio was bishop of Astorga, it makes more sense to mention a certain privilege mentioned by the co-bishop of Astorga and agreed with Montano's predecessor at the Toledo see. According to the letters, the territories of Segovia, Buitrago and Coca were granted, this being done not by right, but in view of the dignity of the episcopal office and to curb "vile" interests. And, adds Montano, "(...) bear in mind it was granted to him only as long as it could help him. We wanted to take these measures so that in no way you omit the old customs[.]"<sup>87</sup>

Within this line of interpretation, the reference to an agreement between the potential co-bishop of the Astorga See and the former Toledan prelate would expose distinct phases of the tensions between the Visigoth and Suebi powers throughout the North Plateau. The idea is that these letters reveal intense disputes to the point that there is the cession of the ecclesiastical territory of three municipalities to break and stabilize tension. The relations became unbalanced again when the representatives from the bishopric of Astorga went to consecrate basilicas in Palencia, a city that would be officially outside the established pact and, therefore, under the authority of Toledo.

<sup>85</sup> Isla Frez, "Desde el Reino," 46.

<sup>86</sup> Orlandis, *Historia del Reino Visigodo*, 31-2.

<sup>87</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 51.

These letters allow us to talk about the beginnings of Christianization in the Douro basin region since the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, with the construction of basilicas in Palentine territory. The churches appear in the archaeological record of rural areas just in more advanced periods. This is what makes us think that these documents signal the construction of churches within cities and their suburbs. However, this is something that the archaeological reality at the moment still eludes us. Anyway, we can read these church buildings – the consecration of which generated so much tension – within a process of rearticulation of the aristocracy that is now able to build places of worship where there were none before.

Thus, the written sources testify to a process of revitalization of the old urban environments. Somewhat like what archaeology informs us from the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and that is consistent with the peninsular process of resuming the development of cities in the period between the years 550 and 650.<sup>88</sup> This period was marked by an aristocratic articulation through of the Visigoth state and potentially by expanding the peasantry's submission capacity.<sup>89</sup> However, despite this urban renewal, the absence of Mediterranean ceramics in the Douro basin from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards demonstrates its isolation from long-distance circuits.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, the autonomy achieved by the North Plateau peasantry with the end of the Roman Empire started to change in the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, we have the rearticulation of the local aristocracy and the incorporation of this region within the broader logic that began to be formed from two nodal points, the Suebi and Visigoth states. Evidently, after the conquest of the Suebi Kingdom in 585, the fundamental link was Toledo, but without discarding the importance of local aristocracies and *Gallaecia*.

Perhaps it is even possible to map the progressive advances being made by the aristocracy through the creation of the few bishoprics in the Douro basin region. For example, we know that there was an episcopal see active in Palencia when the signature of Murila, prelate of that city, was registered at the Council of Toledo III in 589.<sup>91</sup> He is one of the bishops who abhors Arianism during the conversion of King Reccared to Nicene Christianity.<sup>92</sup> It is a significant fact that the person responsible for the Palentine see had until then been an Arian, given the closer ties that would link him to the Visigothic monarchy. This reinforces the thesis that control over a disputed region must have been the keynote throughout the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is known that the tradition of the order of signature of the conciliar minutes is based on

<sup>88</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 233.

<sup>89</sup> Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 154-78; Martínez Jiménez, "Crisis or Crises?" 81-5.

<sup>90</sup> Diarte Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 76, 79.

<sup>91</sup> Here we have a transmission error in the documents, Murila having been registered for the city of Valencia. Certainly, Murila is from the Palencia see, being mentioned in other documents linked to that city, see García Moreno, *Prosopografía del Reino Visigodo*, 139-40.

<sup>92</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 122.

the antiquity of cathedra. So, we can safely assume that Murila was already the bishop of Palencia around 579.

By this same logic, Proculus of Segovia must have started his episcopate around 580.<sup>93</sup> With regard to the Salamanca bishopric, we could establish its ordination between 585 and 586 due to its position in relation to the signatures of other bishops whose dates are clearer in the minutes of the Third Council of Toledo.<sup>94</sup> Another bishopric that points us towards the consolidation of aristocratic powers is Osma. This last one must have been founded in the last years of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>95</sup> The see of Ávila is mentioned for the first time in 610, with Bishop Justinian signing the decree of King Gundemaro and, finally, we have the diocese of Caliabria that was probably consecrated around 625.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, we see that the oldest bishopric in the Douro basin after Astorga is the Palencia. It may have emerged precisely from this dispute previously narrated as a kind of projection of the Toledan aristocracy. Then we would have a movement of aristocratic inflection starting from the southeastern sectors of the Douro basin with the creation of the bishoprics of Segovia and Osma. This was perhaps related to an expansion of episcopal powers in the western zone of the high Ebro valley, with the development of see-like places as Auca within a similar chronology.<sup>97</sup> Only at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century did we have any inflection of the aristocratic powers through the bishoprics in the southwest area of North Plateau, through the creation of the dioceses of Ávila and Caliabria.

A notable sign of the consolidation of these episcopal powers that form in the Douro can be seen through a reference registered in the eighth canon of the Council of Mérida celebrated in 666. In it, we see that Bishop Sclua from Idanha complains before the episcopal assembly against Justo who was the prelate of Salamanca. The reason for this action was because the Salmantine bishopric had come to exercise control over a territory that would belong to the see of Idanha.<sup>98</sup>

Even though the conciliar assembly fulfilled the function of exercising collective control over the individual voracity of the Salmantine bishop, this does not change the fact of the tension that existed. So, the fundamental thing I wanted to highlight is that throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century the North Plateau ecclesiastical powers were no longer timid. On the contrary, they were able to

<sup>93</sup> Vives et al., 137.

<sup>94</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 137; García Moreno, "Campesino hispanovisigodo entre bajos," 185.

<sup>95</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 157.

<sup>96</sup> Vives et al., 137. Its exact location is uncertain, but apparently it was close to Ciudad Rodrigo as proposed by García Moreno, *Prosopografía del Reino Visigodo*, 174.

<sup>97</sup> Castellanos and Martín Viso, "Local articulation," 12-4.

<sup>98</sup> Vives et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 330-2. These conflicts possibly date back to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century with the redrawing of ecclesiastical borders after the conquest of the Suebi Kingdom in 585.

project themselves several tens of kilometers towards the Southern Plateau. A process that would only be imaginable if we understand this data in the sense of episcopal powers consolidation – i.e., aristocratic powers – in the region of the Douro river basin.

The fortifications are another aspect we need to consider if we want to understand the evolution of the peasant condition. As previously presented, the fortifications began to emerge with the collapse of the Roman system in the peninsula and remained active and occupied until around 550.<sup>99</sup> We need to reflect on its historical development in order to comprehend the aristocratic conditions and their potential capacities for peasantry exploitation.

This interval in the fortress's activities in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century has a curious temporal correspondence with the bishoprics formative process. We lack data to state with certainty that there was a correlation between these two factors, but as a hypothesis, it could be proposed that the Douro aristocratic powers articulation was favoured by the approximation with state powers that were advancing on three fronts. From the south, we have the projection from Toledo (front 1), whose Montano's letters would be an interesting and early indication. There were inflections from the Ebro valley (front 2) during the 6<sup>th</sup> century where a network of important rural churches was being created. In this eastern sector, there is also the bishopric of Auca and the presence of aristocratic powers strong enough to be called senators.<sup>100</sup> To the West (front 3) we have the potential movements from Astorga at first under the Suebi and later under the Visigoths.

Bearing this information in mind, the reference that Leovigild did not need to militarily conquer the North Plateau unlike other parts of the peninsula is truly relevant.<sup>101</sup> The exception would be the zones of Zamora or Burgos that offered resistance. This could indicate that the Douro was a space relatively well integrated with the Visigoth power in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. However, this perspective would be incongruous with what was presented in the previous pages.

There is an alternative explanation more consistent with what has been presented so far. The lack of conquest on the part of Leovigild may perhaps be understood as the comparatively fragile and disaggregated Douro local aristocracy quickly embracing integration with supra-local powers. An interpretation that makes clear a strategy that could strengthen local aristocracies and their capacities for action beyond the limited spaces that were able dur-

<sup>99</sup> Diarte Blasco, *Late Antique and Early*, 71; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 100-9.

<sup>100</sup> The life of St. Milan records this process, which portrays a rural world in the process of Christianization with mention to a religious named Felix who worked at *Castellum Bilibium*. See: Vazquez e Praga, *Vita S. Emiliani*, 14-5 and 24-7. Another interesting fact is that rural churches are being found refer to a chronology of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, but until now we cannot discard that they might be older. See: Martínez Jiménez, Sastre De Diego, and Tejerizo García, *Iberian Peninsula*, 225.

<sup>101</sup> Fernández, *Aristocrats and Statehood*, 186-7.

ing the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>102</sup> This would have caused the North Plateau aristocracy to abandon the settlements on higher grounds and to articulate again from ground level points through the bishoprics in formation throughout the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Bishoprics were guaranteed and strengthened by their relationship with the monarchy and participation in councils.

This perspective even offers another interpretation for the Leovigild bellicose exceptions against Burgos and Zamora. This may have happened in this way because these are the spaces closest to more articulated and vigorous areas. Spaces with potential associations with other powers such as the Suebi or the aristocracies in the northwest of the Ebro valley. Therefore, these aristocracies yearned for greater autonomy in relation to the monarchic powers.

Thus, it can be argued that it would be an effective link with Toledo, which allowed an expansion of the aristocracy's capacity to advance peasant communities from the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, following different historical rhythms in each of the sub-regions. In other words, the association with the powers that were projected from Toledo was a strategy that had the potential to expand the local powers' authority over the peasant communities that maintained their autonomy in relation to the Douro aristocracy.

In this sense, it is a proposition that is in line with what Martín Viso suggests in his analysis of the Visigothic *pizarras* as a product of state action. He reviews data from well-contextualized places in order to better comprehend these documents of such arid interpretation. These places include the fortifications of Lerilla, El Cortinal de San Juan and Cerro de la Virgen del Castillo.<sup>103</sup> Due to the enormous distance that separates these fortified spaces, it would be more rational to point out that the *pizarras* were the product of social groups that had access to standardized forms of accounting. The reference to payments made by people with the title of "*domnus*" gives strength to this thesis of taxation over an area or contrast between those who pay *per mano sua* and those who pay *per sui domni mandate*. In addition, the number of names exceeds what would be expected for the inhabitants of a single village.<sup>104</sup>

Therefore, the thesis that this type of accounting had a state origin seems to be reasonable.<sup>105</sup> This idea could be reinforced by the fact that this type of record has existed since the Roman period, as indicated by the rare finding of a *pizarra* in the stratigraphic context at San Pelayo.<sup>106</sup> That is, standardization and generalization would be related to taxes collected by the state, understood here with a supra-regional articulation of aristocratic powers.

<sup>102</sup> Castellanos and Martín Viso, "Local articulation," 12-4.

<sup>103</sup> Martín Viso, "Tributación y escenarios," 273-5, 297.

<sup>104</sup> Martín Viso, 270.

<sup>105</sup> Martín Viso, 276.

<sup>106</sup> Dahí Elena, "Contexto cerámico," 79-104.

The findings of *pizarras* in large numbers would lead us to believe that it was something very widespread throughout the peninsular center. However, it is noteworthy that they are concentrated on some key points and their surroundings. Thus, the *pizarras* would be an indication of local powers in the Douro basin that, at some level, exercised control over the peasantry and were part of a broader social system that projected itself from Toledo.<sup>107</sup> This is what ultimately expanded the capacity of the local aristocracy to submit peasant communities.<sup>108</sup>

Interpreted within this perspective, the *pizarras* give more elements to confirm that an articulation with the Visigothic state was a strategy of the Douro local aristocracies to expand their domination over the peasantry. A projection that seems to accompany the process described through the other sources that go back to the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century with Montano's letters. The *pizarras* concentrated in the southwest region of the Douro basin correspond exactly with the area of bishoprics formation in the late 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

However, it is noteworthy that these local powers – aristocrats, bishops, or members of the church in general – systematically negotiated these relations. For example, in the Autobiography of Valerio of Bierzo we see the need that the bishop of Astorga had to instrumentalize the actions of the Bercian monk.<sup>109</sup> Martín Viso also goes so far as to propose that the reference to Fructuosus' father at the beginning of his *uita* is describing an officer, a *dux*, going to collect taxes in the region.<sup>110</sup> These constant renegotiations “would probably prevent the existence of continuous taxation, since its main goal was to symbolize the implementation of the Visigoth political authority, rather than obtaining a great revenue”.<sup>111</sup>

It is also worth saying that in the Life of Saint Fructuosus we may have another clue to the process of local powers articulation with the *social relationship* that was the state. This is something that emerges when the hagiographer tells us that the saint was sought even by members of the Royal Palace.<sup>112</sup> Thus, we have one more testimony that would reinforce the hypothesis defended here.

It is also remarkable that there is an overlap between the *pizarras* concentration zone and the place of formation of episcopal powers in the Douro. Besides that, there is yet another expressive correspondence in the data. After all, it is in this same area that the aforementioned brooches were found in burials at the North Plateau.<sup>113</sup> As we have seen, these items are characterized

<sup>107</sup> Martín Viso, “Tributación y escenarios,” 276.

<sup>108</sup> Martín Viso, “Prácticas locales,” 72-7.

<sup>109</sup> Martín Viso, 78.

<sup>110</sup> Martín Viso, 78.

<sup>111</sup> Martín Viso, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Nock, *Vita Sancti Fructuosi*. 96-9.

<sup>113</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades*, 228.

by being luxury objects and with complex production processes, and for that reason, their manufacturing was linked up to contexts of enormous political prestige such as the specialized production sites excavated in Reccopolis.<sup>114</sup>

In other words, we see the aristocratic powers converging strategies that were progressively consolidating their strength in the Douro basin between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. This consolidation was only possible through the ties between the local aristocracy – weak at first – and the *social relation* formed by the Visigoth state projected from Toledo. This articulation was necessary to reduce the internal cohesion of the villagers and increase domination over peasants by submitting the peasantry upper layers in favour of the aristocratic class interests. This can be perfectly understood if we take these brooches as gifts that not only demarcated a social hierarchy in peasant communities but also as objects used to reinforce it.<sup>115</sup>

### 7. Conclusion: peasant agency in the North Plateau

The proposed interpretation might at first seem like a contradiction between written and archaeological sources. However, it reveals itself to be different moments and territorialities of the same historical transformation. Its process signals the emergence of peasant communities in the Iberian Peninsula North Plateau. These communities achieved high levels of autonomy in the context of the Roman Empire's disarticulation and the consequent aristocratic weakening. After this fragile moment, we followed about 250 years of aristocratic attacks on these peasant communities promoted by both local and external aristocrats.

Throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the written documentation produced in the North Plateau signalled the clear presence of a diversity of peasants subjected to domination. This reality was expressed in words like *libertus*, *conllibertas*, *mancipia*, *ancilla* and *serui*. From these sources, we could suspect a scenario of "widespread dependency". Nevertheless, the late 7<sup>th</sup> century archaeological record shows that the degree of stratification was still quite simple.

However, these micro stratifications are the elements that the aristocracy – articulated through the state – sought to exploit in order to fracture communities and expand its possibilities for extracting surplus. These actions certainly faced high community cohesion since there was a peasant agency capable to resist several aristocratic attacks for more than two centuries.

<sup>114</sup> Olmo Enciso et al., "Construction and dynamics," 111.

<sup>115</sup> Pachá, "Gift and conflict," 251-77.

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# **La práctica del caleado como marcador material de agencia campesina durante la revolución agraria de la Edad Moderna en el Cantábrico oriental**

por Josu Narbarte, Mattin Aiestaran

Las transformaciones agrarias ocurridas durante la Edad Moderna (siglos XVI-XIX) en el Cantábrico oriental ofrecen un marco óptimo para analizar la agencia campesina a través de sus huellas materiales. Estos cambios, tradicionalmente explicados desde la narrativa de la 'revolución del maíz', supusieron una importante reorganización de los paisajes rurales de la región, dando lugar a los modelos de agricultura 'tradicional' que pervivieron hasta comienzos del siglo XX. Sin embargo, la complejidad de esos procesos, así como los agentes sociales que intervinieron en ellos y las relaciones que se establecieron entre los mismos, no han sido todavía estudiados en profundidad. Este trabajo propone una aproximación a distintos registros (documentales, orales, toponímicos, arqueológicos y geoarqueológicos) relacionados con el caleado como práctica de gestión agraria en este periodo, con el fin de analizar las relaciones sociales y ecológicas que subyacen a su desarrollo y expansión. Para ello, se toman en consideración varios casos de estudio en Gipuzkoa y Navarra, en los que se viene interviniendo en los últimos años desde una perspectiva de Arqueología Agraria. Estos registros muestran el importante nivel de penetración que alcanzó esta práctica como un componente fundamental de los regímenes agrarios que se establecieron tras la introducción del maíz. Además, se constata cómo este tipo de prácticas se llevaban a cabo de un modo relativamente informal y descentralizado, lo que explica su escasa visibilidad en las formas de acción social más institucionalizadas. Se observa, así, la importancia de aproximarse a las prácticas concretas y cotidianas del campesinado en su relación con la tierra y el trabajo, como única vía para descodificar la complejidad de procesos que convergen en la transformación histórica de los paisajes rurales preindustriales.

Edad Moderna, Cantábrico oriental, Sociedades locales, Caserío vasco, *Zea mays*, Arqueología Agraria, Geoarqueología.

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Abreviaturas

AD64 = Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Atlantiques

AMA = Archivo Municipal de Ataun;

AMH = Archivo Municipal de Hernani

AMZ = Archivo Municipal de Zestoa

APNB = Archivo de Protocolos Notariales de Bera

KM = Koldo Mitxelena liburutegia (Donostia)

RSBAP = Real Sociedad Bascongadas de Amigos del País.

## 1. Introducción

La Edad Moderna (siglos XVI-XVIII) está marcada por el auge de intercambios de personas, ideas y bienes que, sobre la base de una relación colonial, conectaron Europa con los continentes americano, africano y asiático; proceso que algunos autores han calificado como “proto-globalización”.<sup>1</sup> La activación de estos intercambios no solo incentivó la concentración de capitales comerciales en los centros urbanos de muchas regiones atlánticas de Europa, sino que también promovió una fuerte reorganización de la estructura social, económica, ecológica y cultural de sus respectivos territorios.<sup>2</sup> Este hecho incluyó cambios radicales en las prácticas de gestión agraria que desarrollaban las sociedades europeas;<sup>3</sup> cambios que fueron acompañados de la codificación de una superestructura teórica e ideológica por parte de una incipiente agronomía moderna. Aunque el carácter revolucionario, o no, de estas transformaciones es todavía objeto de controversia,<sup>4</sup> resulta evidente que, al menos en algunas regiones, su desarrollo permitió aumentar de manera considerable las superficies cultivadas y, potencialmente, también su productividad, y que en cualquier caso su desarrollo supuso el inicio de los grandes cambios que atravesarían las sociedades europeas en vísperas de la Revolución Industrial.

El objetivo de la presente contribución consiste en reflexionar, desde una perspectiva arqueológica, sobre el papel que jugó la agencia campesina en el desarrollo de la revolución agraria de la Edad Moderna en los territorios del Cantábrico oriental. Para ello, nos centraremos en el análisis de uno de los principales marcadores de tales cambios: la generalización de la práctica del caleado. La cal se ha empleado desde antiguo como enmienda para combatir

<sup>1</sup> Hopkins, *Globalization*.

<sup>2</sup> Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*.

<sup>3</sup> Entre estos cambios, destacan la introducción de nuevos cultivos, especialmente del maíz (Fassina, “L’introduzione della coltura del mais;” Cazzola, “L’introduzione del mais;” Fornasin, “Diffusione del mais;” Contis, “Ecclesiastiques et agriculture”); el cerramiento de terrenos comunales (Yelling, *Common Field*; Wordie, “The chronology of English enclosure;” Sylvestre, *La «révolution agraire»*; O’Donnell, “Conflict, agreement and landscape”); la desecación y puesta en cultivo de marismas y pantanos (Williams, *The draining of the Somerset Levels*; Van der Ven, *Man-made Lowlands*; Ciriaco, *Acque e agricoltura*; Morera, “Environmental Change;” Narbarte, Iriarte, Díez Oronoz, Quirós Castillo, “Landscapes of agrarian expansion”); o la adopción de innovaciones ergológicas (Delleaux, “Progrès agricoles;” Barnebeck Andersen, Jensen, Skovsgaard, “The heavy plow”).

<sup>4</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, Moriceau, “Au rendez-vous de la ‘Révolution agricole;” Morineau, *Les faux-semblants d’un démarrage économique*.

la acidez de los suelos, como la que produce el uso de abonos orgánicos.<sup>5</sup> Se trata de una sustancia relativamente fácil de producir a partir de materia prima presente en el medio rural de muchas regiones – roca caliza y vegetación arbustiva susceptible de ser usada como combustible –, pero cuya producción requiere de una serie de recursos y conocimientos que forman una cadena operativa cuya huella material puede rastrearse en una variedad de registros susceptibles de ser comparados entre sí.

En las páginas que siguen, marcaremos en primer lugar los rasgos fundamentales de la transformación agraria de la Edad Moderna en el contexto del Cantábrico oriental. A continuación, presentaremos una breve síntesis de los resultados obtenidos en una serie de trabajos que venimos desarrollando, en los últimos años, en varias localidades de Gipuzkoa y Navarra. Estos estudios han permitido recuperar diversas evidencias documentales, arqueológicas y sedimentológicas de la práctica del caleado, lo que permite elaborar un cuadro general de su extensión e impacto sobre los sistemas agrarios locales en este periodo. Una vez presentadas estas evidencias, plantearemos una serie de reflexiones que, a nuestro juicio, pueden resultar de interés a la hora de analizar las pautas de acción social que refleja este proceso, poniendo el acento en las formas de cooperación y agencia colectiva, la multiplicidad de escalas a las que éstas se manifiestan, y su notable dinamismo y flexibilidad.

## 2. *Un nuevo modelo agrario*

Los territorios situados en torno al Cantábrico oriental, encuadrados entre el Pirineo y el valle del Ebro, ofrecen un entorno privilegiado para el estudio de estas cuestiones. Tratándose de un área geográfica de extensión reducida, pero en la que convergen tres de las grandes regiones biogeográficas europeas – atlántica, mediterránea y alpina –<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 1), los sistemas de producción agraria en estos territorios han tendido históricamente a la diversificación. Por ello, la introducción de innovaciones agronómicas en el marco del intercambio atlántico de la Edad Moderna afectó de manera decisiva a parte de estos territorios, mientras que otros se mantuvieron relativamente impermeables.

Precisamente, existe un amplio consenso historiográfico sobre la importancia que revistió, para la evolución social y económica de las comarcas atlánticas de este territorio, la conocida como *revolución del maíz*. Este consenso asume que la introducción de cultivos de origen americano, y especialmente del maíz (*Zea mays*), en el curso del siglo XVI, y su expansión generalizada en el XVII,<sup>7</sup> fue el factor decisivo que permitió la puesta en cultivo de muchas tierras que, hasta entonces, habrían sido impracticables debido a

<sup>5</sup> Connor, Loomis, Cassman, *Crop ecology*.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/biogeographical-regions-in-europe-2> (fecha de la consulta: 06/08/2024).

<sup>7</sup> Aragón Ruano, “The diffusion of maize.”

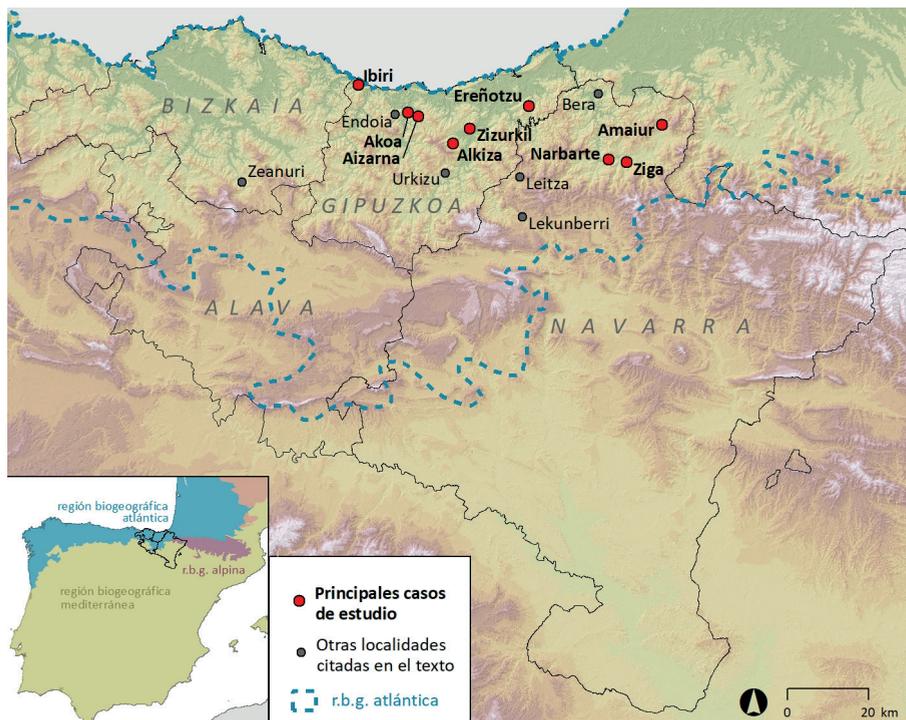


Figura 1. Ubicación de las principales localidades citadas en el texto, en su contexto administrativo y biogeográfico. Fuentes: GeoEuskadi / Sitna / EEA European Environmental Agency.

su topografía, altitud o suelos. De este modo, la roturación de terrenos hasta entonces comunales y destinados, principalmente, a pasto y bosque, y la consiguiente expansión generalizada de las superficies cultivadas, quedaría explicada por el establecimiento de un nuevo régimen agrario, más intensivo que el anterior.<sup>8</sup> En las comarcas mediterráneas y alpinas de la región, por el contrario, estos cambios no llegaron a asentarse o lo hicieron sólo de manera parcial, lo que influyó a su vez en una evolución totalmente diferente de los sistemas agrarios en estas zonas.<sup>9</sup>

La dicotomía entre las zonas afectadas por la *revolución del maíz*, por un lado, y aquéllas donde ésta no llegó, por el otro, se hace evidente al estudiar con detalle los primeros datos sistemáticos con los que contamos para el conjunto de la región, recogidos en el *Diccionario Geográfico-Histórico de España*. Esta obra, publicada por la Real Academia de la Historia en 1802, fue elaborada sobre la base de informaciones proporcionadas, durante las dé-

<sup>8</sup> Caro Baroja, *Etnografía histórica de Navarra*; Bilbao, Fernández de Pinedo, “La producción agraria en el País Vasco peninsular;” Goyhenetche, *Histoire générale du Pays Basque*; Aragón Ruano, “El sector agrario guipuzcoano.”

<sup>9</sup> Bilbao, Fernández de Pinedo, “La producción agraria en el País Vasco peninsular.”

cadass finales del siglo XVIII, por informantes de primera mano – clérigos, secretarios municipales y miembros de las élites locales – a los que se había remitido un formulario estandarizado.<sup>10</sup> El primer volumen del *Diccionario* abarca los territorios de Álava, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa y Navarra, ofreciendo gran profusión de datos sociales, económicos y etnobotánicos para más de dos mil localidades.<sup>11</sup> La base de tales agroecosistemas y su principal producto era, en prácticamente todos los casos, el trigo (*Triticum* spp.), que el *Diccionario* cita por igual en todos los territorios y en todas las áreas biogeográficas (Fig. 2a). Ahora bien, el cultivo del trigo se complementaba con otros cereales, cuya distribución espacial es reveladora. Por un lado, en las comarcas encuadradas en las regiones biogeográficas mediterránea y alpina, el trigo rotaba con la cebada (*Hordeum vulgare*) (Fig. 2b) – o, más raramente, con la avena (*Avena sativa*) o el centeno (*Secale cereale*) –, dejando después la tierra en barbecho; es decir, según un modelo de rotación trienal vigente desde la Edad Media. Por otro lado, en las áreas atlánticas, el trigo alternaba con el maíz (*Zea mays*), un cereal de origen mesoamericano que se adaptaba adecuadamente a las condiciones bioclimáticas locales (Fig. 2c). En estas comarcas, el trigo y el maíz formaban un ciclo de rotación sin barbecho, completado con otros cultivos menores, fundamentalmente el nabo (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *rapa*) (Fig. 2d), que se empleaba para alimentar el ganado con el que, después, se producía estiércol para abonar los campos, y poder mantener así un ciclo de cultivo intensivo sin barbecho.

Parece por tanto evidente que, tras la introducción de cultivos americanos, las rotaciones trienales vigentes desde el periodo medieval fueron dejando paso a un nuevo sistema basado, sobre todo, en los altos rendimientos proporcionados por el maíz. Este nuevo sistema se afianzó, en primer lugar, a lo largo del litoral de Gipuzkoa y Bizkaia, expandiéndose después por los valles atlánticos de los cuatro territorios. A partir de aquí, el nuevo sistema pudo llegar, a través de las principales vías de comunicación, hasta algunos puntos de la Llanada Alavesa, de la Cuenca de Pamplona y de los valles submontanos adyacentes, pero no más allá, ni al Pirineo ni al valle del Ebro. En cualquier caso, la sustitución de los antiguos ciclos sólo parece haberse producido de manera completa en la vertiente estrictamente cantábrica del territorio, tal y como atestigua la casi total ausencia de menciones al cultivo de cebada o avena y la presencia de cultivos de nabo sólo en dichas áreas. Por ello, el análisis que desarrollaremos en las páginas que siguen se centrará, de manera preferente, en estos territorios propiamente cantábricos.

<sup>10</sup> La documentación relativa a los cuestionarios y los informes enviados por los informantes se conservan en varios archivos locales. P.ej.: AMZ, B/4, Bib.1.1 (1784-5): *Correspondencia con motivo de reunir información sobre la villa para la elaboración de una obra titulada "Diccionario Geográfico de España" y que será realizada por la Academia de la Historia. Acompaña a esta documentación el informe que envía el secretario del ayuntamiento, Ignacio de Errasti, acerca de esta villa.*

<sup>11</sup> El documento puede consultarse en KM, FG 5501: *Diccionario geográfico-histórico de España. Sección I / por la Real Academia de la Historia.*

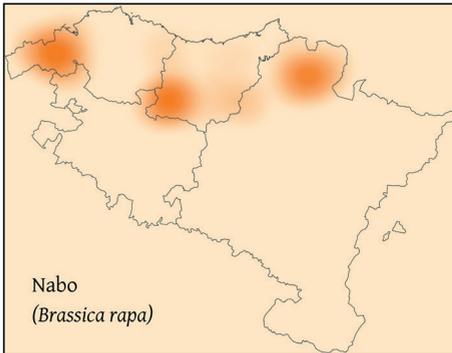
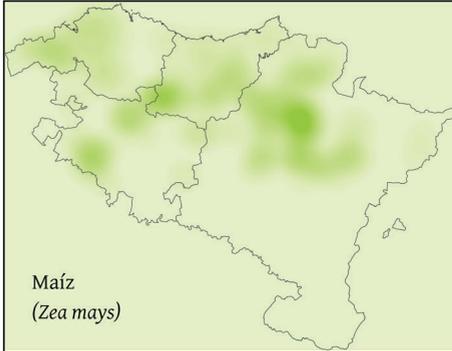
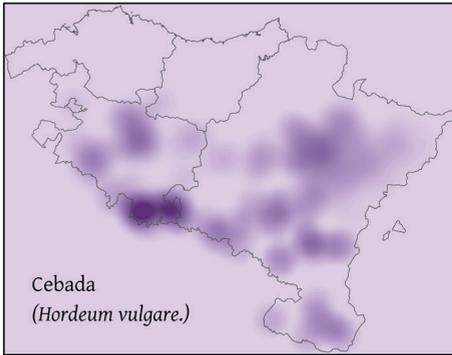
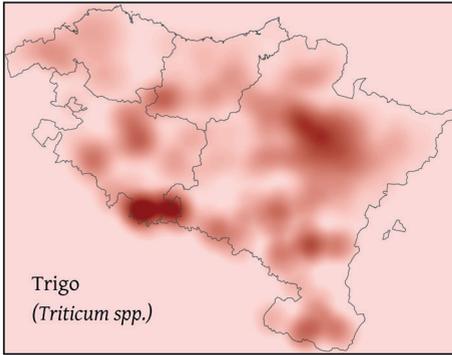


Figura 2. Pautas de distribución de las principales plantas cultivadas en Álava, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa y Navarra a finales del siglo XVIII, según el *Diccionario Geográfico-Histórico de España* (1802).

### 3. *La práctica del caleado como marcador de intensificación: fuentes*

La introducción de cultivos americanos y la implementación de una rotación bienal sin barbecho no sólo implicó una expansión de la superficie cultivada – tal y como ha sido ya puesto de relieve por la historiografía citada más arriba –, sino que supuso, sobre todo, un cambio radical en la intensidad con la que el suelo era explotado. Esto implicó, como se ha visto, regulares aportes de estiércol, producido con las deyecciones de un ganado estabulado que era, al menos parcialmente, alimentado con los propios cultivos forrajeros que complementaban el ciclo. Dado que estas prácticas de abonado podían también provocar, junto con otros factores, una progresiva acidificación del suelo,<sup>12</sup> su implementación fue acompañada de otro tipo de prácticas orientadas a equilibrar dicho proceso; prácticas entre las que destaca, por su gran visibilidad y efectos a largo plazo, la adición de cal (CaO) en grandes cantidades.<sup>13</sup>

En los últimos años, el Grupo de Investigación en Patrimonio y Paisajes Culturales (GIPyPAC) de la UPV/EHU y la Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi han venido desarrollando varios proyectos de investigación que, desde la perspectiva de una arqueología agraria,<sup>14</sup> han podido confirmar y estudiar en detalle la generalización de la práctica del caleado, a lo largo de la Edad Moderna, en varios contextos de Gipuzkoa y la Navarra cantábrica. Las evidencias recabadas en este sentido abarcan tanto las fuentes documentales y etnográficas como las propias huellas materiales del caleado, que han sido registradas mediante prospecciones superficiales, excavaciones arqueológicas y también mediante la realización de sondeos geoarqueológicos en columna.

#### 3.1. *Fuentes documentales y etnográficas*

Las fuentes documentales disponibles sitúan en plena Edad Moderna el inicio de la expansión del caleado como práctica agraria consolidada. Las menciones más antiguas de su uso datan de principios del siglo XVIII en la Navarra cantábrica, concretamente de 1704 en el valle de Baigorri<sup>15</sup> y en la localidad de Bera,<sup>16</sup> y entre 1705 y 1709 en Leitza y Lekunberri (valle de Larraun).<sup>17</sup> Esta cronología aparece corroborada en las actas de varias reuniones

<sup>12</sup> Bolan, Hedley, “Role of carbon, nitrogen, and sulfur.”

<sup>13</sup> Narbarte-Hernández, Iriarte, Carrancho-Alonso, Olazabal-Uzkudun, Rad, Arriolabengoa, Aranburu, Quirós-Castillo, “Geochemical fingerprint of agricultural liming.”

<sup>14</sup> Kirchner, *Por una arqueología agraria*; Fernández Mier, “Arqueología agraria del norte peninsular.”

<sup>15</sup> AD64, C 21 (1704): *Statuts de la Vallée de Baigorri*.

<sup>16</sup> APNB, 23/43 (actualmente em el Archivo General de Navarra); citado por Mikelarena Peña, “Demografía y economía.”

<sup>17</sup> Citado por Caro Baroja, *Etnografía histórica*, III/35, según informaciones extraídas de la documentación obrante en los Archivos de la Real Academia de la Historia para la elaboración del *Diccionario Histórico-Geográfico de España*, I, 151v.

celebradas por la Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII, en las que se indica que la cal había comenzado a emplearse como enmienda, aproximadamente, cien años antes, y que el éxito de los experimentos iniciales había incentivado la expansión de dicha práctica al conjunto del país.<sup>18</sup> Pese a su carácter fragmentario, estas fuentes sugieren que la práctica del caleado tuvo amplia difusión desde una fecha relativamente temprana, al menos desde principios del siglo XVIII.

No hay constancia de que la introducción de esta práctica respondiera a un programa agronómico planificado e impulsado por las autoridades políticas o científicas del territorio. La *Bascongada* podría haberlo hecho, ya que sus miembros estaban perfectamente informados de las innovaciones agronómicas en boga en Europa por aquella época.<sup>19</sup> Sin embargo, las actas de sus reuniones se limitan a glosar la “sabiduría” con la que el campesinado local había desarrollado los sistemas de cultivo de la región, hasta convertirla en un “jardín” del que difícilmente sería posible obtener una mayor productividad.<sup>20</sup> Por tanto, la expansión de esta práctica debió responder a la adquisición de un conocimiento de tipo empírico por parte del campesinado, al comprobar su utilidad como enmienda agraria en un contexto de cultivo intensivo con un gran aporte de abonos orgánicos. Así, la *Corografía* de Manuel Larramendi, redactada a mediados del siglo XVIII, aunque publicada a finales del XIX, explica que

la experiencia ha mostrado que aún con todo este abono y fomento flaquean las tierras dentro de algunos años, como que se enfrían y desvirtúan. Para ocurrir á esto de nueve á nueve años por lo común abonan las tierras con cal viva, y por eso apenas hay casería que no tenga su calera para hacer cal, con mucho trabajo y mucho gasto de leña.<sup>21</sup>

Las fuentes documentales de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y primera del XX, mucho más abundantes, sostienen la idea de que el caleado se convirtió en una de las prácticas más relevantes en el modelo agrario que siguió a la introducción del maíz. En el Archivo Municipal de Hernani, por ejemplo, se conservan numerosas referencias en este sentido, datadas entre 1840 y 1884. Se trata normalmente de solicitudes de corta de broza presentadas ante el alcalde por varios vecinos del barrio rural de Ereñotzu. Muchos de ellos indicaban encontrarse en la necesidad de fabricar cal para “fomentar sus tierras”, “beneficiar las tierras de su respectivo caserío”, “destinarla á las tierras de labranza, que tienen arrendadas”, o “para alimentarse sus tierras, con objeto de conseguir en lo subsiguiente cosechas más copiosas.” Estos labradores establecían una relación directa entre el empleo de cal y la productividad de las cosechas; así lo explicitó Nicolás Arbelaitz en 1840, al declarar “que mediante

<sup>18</sup> Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País, *Ensayo de la Sociedad Bascongada*.

<sup>19</sup> Berriochoa Azcárate, *Como un jardín*.

<sup>20</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, los *Extractos* de la Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País, correspondientes a los años 1777-82 y 1791; KM, Fondo Gordeak, J.U. 3378.

<sup>21</sup> Larramendi, *Corografía*.

las desgraciadas circunstancias que se han transcurrido estos seis años continuos, se le ha desmerecido muchísimo su jurisdicción, por la suma necesidad de cal en que se le halla, como aparece de las cosechas recogidas particularmente estos dos últimos años”. También Francisco Olaskoaga hacía referencia, en el mismo año, a esta cuestión, al considerar “una cosa tan saludable, el que mediante sus trabajos [se refiere al caleado] consigan ventajas los pobres labradores, á cuenta de sus sudores, recogiendo cosechas más abundantes”.<sup>22</sup>

La fabricación de cal requería disponer en los caseríos de una cantidad notable de recursos. El primero de ellos era, naturalmente, la propia materia prima: la piedra caliza que se iba a calcinar. Tratándose de una región cuyo substrato está compuesto en gran medida por este tipo de material,<sup>23</sup> su disponibilidad estaba asegurada en muchas comarcas, lo que facilitaba una explotación generalizada. Así lo recoge, por ejemplo, el manuscrito *Guipuzcoaco provinciaren condaira*, redactado por José Ignacio Iztueta en 1875. Hablando de la localidad de Zizurkil, este texto explica que “la piedra caliza es tan fácil de encontrar en los montes de este pueblo, que en cualquier lugar se puede excavar una calera junto a un campo para quemar tanta cal como hace falta para fertilizarlo”.<sup>24</sup>

Un segundo recurso fundamental era el combustible necesario para mantener encendidos los caleros durante el tiempo que duraba la calcinación. Las fuentes etnográficas recogen el empleo de una cierta variedad de materias vegetales para este fin, como las ramas de haya (*Fagus sylvatica*) y avellano (*Corylus avellana*) en Urkizu,<sup>25</sup> o el árgoma (*Ulex europaeus*) en Bera.<sup>26</sup> Éste último arbusto, muy común en las áreas de media montaña de la región, parece haber sido con diferencia el material más extendido para este uso, tal y como refieren también las fuentes orales.

Hay evidencias de que, al menos en algunos contextos, los recursos comunales jugaron un papel relevante en la provisión de combustible para las caleras. Ya en 1704, los Estatutos del valle de Baigorri estipulan, en su artículo 24, la prohibición de que ningún habitante cortara en los “bois communs aucun arbre ny de branchage pour faire cuire de la chaux pour bonifier les terres”,<sup>27</sup> lo que indica una importante presión de esta actividad sobre los bienes comunales del valle, radicados en el macizo de Aldude. En el siglo XIX,

<sup>22</sup> AMH, H 580/8 (1668-1886): *Aprovechamiento de brozas, helecho y argoma*.

<sup>23</sup> Ver el *Mapa Geológico del País Vasco a escala 1:25.000* publicado por EVE (Gobierno Vasco) ([https://www.eve.eus/Conoce-la-Energia/La-energia-en-Euskadi/Publicaciones/Geologia/Mapa-Geologico-del-Pais-Vasco-a-escala-1-25-00-\(1\)](https://www.eve.eus/Conoce-la-Energia/La-energia-en-Euskadi/Publicaciones/Geologia/Mapa-Geologico-del-Pais-Vasco-a-escala-1-25-00-(1))), fecha de la consulta: 21/01/2021) y el *Mapa Geológico 1:25.000* disponible en la infraestructura de datos geográficos de Navarra (<http://geologia.navarra.es/>), fecha de la consulta: 21/01/2021).

<sup>24</sup> KM, Fondo Gordeak, 091 IZT gui (1875): *Guipuzcoaco provinciaren condaira edo historia: ceñetan jarritzen diradaen arguiro beraren asieratic orain-arte dagozquion barri gogoangarriac / eguin eta zucendu cebana* Juan Ignacio de Iztueta.

<sup>25</sup> Garmendia Larrañaga, “La vida en el medio rural.”

<sup>26</sup> Caro Baroja, *La vida rural*.

<sup>27</sup> AD64, C 21 (1704): *Statuts de la Vallée de Baigorri*.

las ya citadas solicitudes al alcalde de Hernani<sup>28</sup> fueron presentadas, muchas veces, por habitantes de caseríos periféricos, como Juan Esteban Lujanbio, “habitante en el caserío de Acola” (1844 y 1858), o Juan Felipe Oiartzabal, “habitante del caserío Errotarán” (1864); o bien por labradores arrendatarios, como Francisco Olaskoaga, “inclino habitante en el caserío llamado Ereñozuco Echeverri”, o Juan Cruz Etxeberria, “inclino habitante en el caserío llamado Basterrola” (ambos en 1840). Estos particulares solicitaban autorización para cortar “broza” y “argoma” en terrenos de propiedad concejil, “pagando el reconocimiento acostumbrado” que se situaba en un real por carro. Entre los motivos alegados para esta petición, destacan la indisponibilidad de carbón mineral – “puesto que el carbón de piedra le cuesta mucho en razón a que se halla á bastante distancia de dicho caserío [Errotaran] el parage de donde se extrae”, 1864– y, sobre todo, la escasez de recursos propios; p.ej., “para este fin carece de broza”; “careciendo de los elementos necesarios para obtenerla en su jurisdicción”, etcétera. Este hecho permite suponer que otros segmentos más acomodados del campesinado podían estar proveyéndose de este tipo de recursos en montes de propiedad privada, especialmente tras la privatización de gran parte de los comunales, en Gipuzkoa y Bizkaia – no así en Navarra –, a comienzos del siglo XIX.<sup>29</sup>

Un tercer recurso que los caseríos debían movilizar para la fabricación de cal era la propia fuerza de trabajo necesaria para encender el calero y mantenerlo en combustión durante varios días. Larramendi menciona que cada caserío poseía, idealmente, su calera; extremo que retoma, siglo y medio después, Laffite.<sup>30</sup> La fabricación y aplicación de cal era una cláusula común en los contratos de arrendamiento de muchos caseríos, como recoge, por ejemplo, Caro Baroja en el caso del caserío Iparragirre de Bera, a principios del siglo XIX:

*Cada año harán los 4 Ynquilinos una calera de cal de 60 carros, de los cuales darán*

<sup>28</sup> AMH, H 580/8 (1668-886): *Aprovechamiento de brozas, helecho y argoma*.

<sup>29</sup> Aunque las tensiones en torno a la gestión forestal venían repitiéndose desde antiguo (Aragón Ruano, *El bosque guipuzcoano*), la mayoría de las comunidades guipuzcoanas enajenaron sus bienes propios, de manera generalizada, en el curso de la Guerra de Independencia (1808-814), por lo que los procesos desamortizadores de mediados del siglo XIX apenas tuvieron impacto sobre el territorio. Sobre esta cuestión, ver Otaegui Arizmendi, *Gerra eta azienda*.

<sup>30</sup> Laffite, *Agricultura y ganadería*. Lo que entronca con la idea, que después desarrollarían los apologistas y los etnógrafos, del caserío como unidad social y económica autosuficiente, que contaba individualmente con todos los recursos necesarios para su reproducción. Esta noción, presente ya en los trabajos del geógrafo Leoncio Urabayen (Urabayen, *Geografía humana; La casa; Atlas geográfico; Geografía humana II*), fue profusamente estudiada por Julio Caro Baroja en muchos de sus trabajos sobre la historia y la etnografía de estas comarcas (Caro Baroja, “Las bases económicas;” “Sobre la casa;” *Etnografía histórica de Navarra; La casa en Navarra*), siendo posteriormente ampliada y desarrollada por otros investigadores que han incidido en su papel como eje vertebrador de relaciones sociales a escala local (por ejemplo, Douglass, *Echalar and Murelaga*; Floristán Imízcoz, Imízcoz Beunza, *La comunidad rural*; Imízcoz Beunza, *Tierra y sociedad; Comunidad de valle; Voisinage et habitat*).

*al amo 10 carros y lo demás lo echarán sin falta a sus tierras; y para esto les dará el amo 20 pesos y dos libras de pólvora.*<sup>31</sup>

Ahora bien, tampoco eran raras las formas de cooperación de carácter más o menos formalizada, operadas sobre diversos vínculos de parentesco o vecindad.<sup>32</sup> Fueron habituales las asociaciones entre dos o más unidades domésticas para explotar en común una calera. Así consta, por ejemplo, en un deslinde realizado en 1934 entre las casas Akoarretxe y Goikoetxea de Akoa (Fig. 3), donde se hace constar la existencia de un

*Calero del caserío Goikoetxea que, a cambio de sacar los residuos de la calcinación, o sean las cenizas, sobre terreno contiguo del caserío "Akua-arétxe, le reconocerá a este el derecho a usar de este calero.*<sup>33</sup>

Otro ejemplo es el gran calero construido entre las casas Albirenea, Bordakoa y Altzateberea de Narbarte (valle de Bertiz), en cuyo frontispicio se lee una inscripción en la que consta que fue construida por seis socios en el año 1905 (Fig. 4).

La cooperación entre dos o tres caseríos en la explotación de un calero se documenta etnográficamente en otras localidades guipuzcoanas como Urki-zu<sup>34</sup> o Endoia.<sup>35</sup> En otros lugares se documentan asociaciones más amplias, a escala de barrio, como en Bera<sup>36</sup> o Zeanuri.<sup>37</sup>

Una vez implementada, la práctica del caleado pervivió hasta mediados del siglo XX. Así ha quedado reflejado en la abundante literatura etnográfica producida durante la primera mitad del mismo, con informaciones provenientes de diversas comarcas.<sup>38</sup> De hecho, su recuerdo todavía está muy presente entre las comunidades rurales del territorio. Diversos informantes nacidos en la primera mitad del siglo XX aún recuerdan la fabricación y aplicación de cal como uno de los elementos más importantes del ciclo agrario asociado al caserío. Así, pese a tratarse de una práctica actualmente obsoleta, debido tanto a la introducción de enmiendas industriales como al cambio de la funcionalidad de los espacios agrarios, aún se practica de manera recreativa o con fines educativos, tal y como se observa en la Fig. 5, tomada en Aizarna en 2005.

<sup>31</sup> *Papeles de la reedificaz.* de Yparraquirre y otros muchos gastos pagados que pueden servir de noticia, archivo privado de la casa Aroztegia de Bera; citado por Caro Baroja, *La vida rural*.

<sup>32</sup> Como, por otra parte, sucedía en muchos otros aspectos de la vida social en los caseríos; ver, por ejemplo, Lizarralde, "Villa de Oñate;" Douglass, *Echalar and Murelaga*.

<sup>33</sup> Plano obrante en el archivo privado de la casa Akoarretxe de Akoa (Zestoa, Gipuzkoa).

<sup>34</sup> Garmendia Larrañaga, "La vida en el medio rural."

<sup>35</sup> Comunicación personal de Josefa Olaizola, del caserío Akain de dicha localidad, que compartía con el vecino caserío Urtain la propiedad del calero.

<sup>36</sup> Caro Baroja, *La vida rural*.

<sup>37</sup> Llanos, "El calero de San Justo."

<sup>38</sup> Laffite, *Agricultura y ganadería*; Lefebvre, *Les modes de vie*; Caro Baroja, *La vida rural*; "Las bases económicas;" Douglass, *Echalar y Murelaga*; Greenwood, *Unrewarding Wealth*.

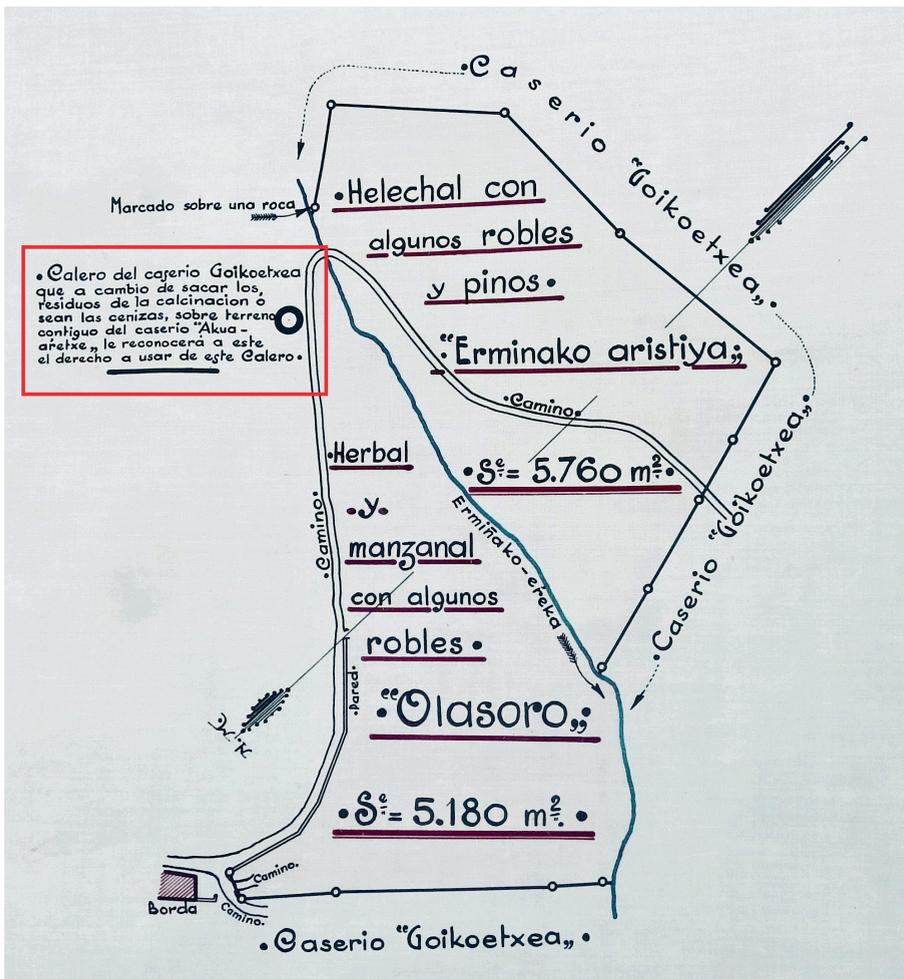


Figura 3. Plano de 1934 conservado en el caserío Akoarretxe de Akoa (Gipuzkoa), en el que se recoge el régimen de cooperación en el que se gestionaba un horno calero.



Figura 4. Calero situado entre los caseríos Albirenea, Bordakoa y Altzatebera de Narbarte (valle de Bertizarana, Navarra).



Figura 5. Demostración de caleado en las fiestas de Aizarna (Gipuzkoa), 2005. Fotografía: Asier Olazabal Uzkudun.

### 3.2. *Marcadores del paisaje: los caleros*

Sobre el terreno, la relevancia que antiguamente tuvo la práctica del caleado dentro de los sistemas de producción agraria del Cantábrico oriental queda atestiguada por la presencia de numerosos caleros salpicando los paisajes de la región durante toda la Edad Moderna. Las referencias documentales más antiguas en este sentido provienen de Aizarna, donde se mencionan varios caleros en una serie de deslindes realizados en 1706, extendiéndose después a otros contextos. Su uso como referencias espaciales de primera magnitud –equivalentes a casas, caminos o mojones– da una idea de la prominencia que estas estructuras habían alcanzado dentro del paisaje local; y, en efecto, distintas prospecciones realizadas entre 2017 y 2020 han permitido detectar un gran número de estas estructuras en el paisaje actual de varias localidades (Tabla I; Fig. 6).

Tipológicamente, las estructuras siguen el modelo constructivo francés, descrito en ese país en varios tratados del siglo XVIII.<sup>39</sup> Se trata de hornos de combustión de forma cilíndrica y dimensiones considerables – entre 1,5 y 2,5 metros de diámetro interior y hasta 2,5 metros de altura –, destinadas a quemar la piedra caliza hasta reducirla a óxido de calcio. Muchos de estos caleros presentan en la actualidad un precario estado de conservación, con numerosas estructuras reconvertidas en silos o basureros o incluso reducidas a escombros (Fig. 6). A pesar de ello, conservan su referencialidad como marcadores del paisaje, tal y como se deduce, por ejemplo, de la pervivencia de microtopónimos contruidos a partir de la palabra vasca para “calero”: *karobi* en dialecto guipuzcoano – Ka(ro)bialde y Ka(ro)bieta en Aizarna, y sendos Karobialdea en Ibiri y Zizurkil –, y *kisu-labe* en dialecto navarro –Kisua/Kisualdea en Amaiur, Kisulabe en Narbarte.

Dada la ausencia de diferencias tipológicas reseñables, resulta prácticamente imposible determinar si la cal producida en estas estructuras se empleaba con fines agrarios o bien para la fabricación de argamasa.<sup>40</sup> En líneas generales, se asume que aquellos caleros situados junto a las casas –la mayoría– responderían principalmente al primer uso, mientras que las unidades aisladas en las zonas más periféricas de las respectivas localidades, en torno a cursos de agua y caminos, podrían haber respondido sobre todo al segundo. En cualquier caso, y considerando que nos hallamos ante unos paisajes caracterizados por su multifuncionalidad,<sup>41</sup> hay que pensar que unos y otros usos debieron de superponerse en función de las necesidades coyunturales de cada momento.

<sup>39</sup> Diderot, D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie*; Fourcroy de Ramecourt, *Art du chaufonnier*; Vicat, *Résumé des connaissances positives*.

<sup>40</sup> Un uso registrado en las fuentes documentales, al menos, desde principios del siglo XVI: p.ej. AMA, 188-02 (1505): *Poder otorgado por la universidad de Ataun*.

<sup>41</sup> Fernández Mier, “Arqueología agraria del norte peninsular.”

Tabla I. Relación de hornos caleros identificados en Aizarna, Alkiza, Ibiri y Zizurkil.

| <i>Localidad</i>     | <i>Topónimo</i>        | <i>Estado</i>            |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Aizarna (Total: 19)  | Aginaga                | Sin estructuras visibles |
|                      | Aizpuru                | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Apategi                | Erosionado               |
|                      | Aranguren              | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Arano                  | Sin estructuras visibles |
|                      | Arrasate Santubarrutia | Erosionado               |
|                      | Egañazpi               | Erosionado               |
|                      | Ezenarroazpi           | Buen estado              |
|                      | Ezenarrogoikoa         | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Ibarre                 | Erosionado               |
|                      | Kalbarioaldeko sakona  | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Ka(ro)bialde           | Sin estructuras visibles |
|                      | Karobieta 1            | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Karobieta 2            | Buen estado              |
|                      | Kontzejusoroa          | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Listorritzaga          | Restaurado               |
|                      | Santa Engrazia         | Buen estado              |
|                      | Sorabil 1              | Buen estado              |
|                      | Sorabil 2              | Sin estructuras visibles |
| Alkiza (Total: 8)    | Antzieta               | Buen estado              |
|                      | Aritzategiko borda     | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Arpidetxeberri         | Erosionado               |
|                      | Basazabal              | Buen estado              |
|                      | Igaranzabal            | Erosionado               |
|                      | Intxaurreandiaga       | Restaurado               |
|                      | Sorginzulo             | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Zumitza                | Buen estado              |
| Zizurkil (Total: 16) | Andolako borda         | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Andrezketa             | Buen estado              |
|                      | Azarolatxiki           | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Garetza                | Erosionado               |
|                      | Ipidegi                | Buen estado              |
|                      | Irazibar               | Restaurado               |
|                      | Irazu                  | Erosionado               |

*segue*

| <i>Localidad</i>     | <i>Topónimo</i> | <i>Estado</i>            |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Zizurkil (Total: 16) | Lizardi         | Buen estado              |
|                      | Legarralde      | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Luzuriaga       | Erosionado               |
|                      | Nekola          | Erosionado               |
|                      | Otatzu          | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Saratxoeta      | Muy erosionado           |
|                      | Ugartetxeberri  | Sin estructuras visibles |
|                      | Zarate 1        | Erosionado               |
|                      | Zarate 2        | Muy erosionado           |
| Ibiri (Total: 6)     | Abeletxe 1      | Erosionado               |
|                      | Abeletxe 2      | Erosionado               |
|                      | Arrigorrieta    | Erosionado               |
|                      | Arrigorrieta    | Erosionado               |
|                      | Arrigorrieta    | Erosionado               |
|                      | Sanblasaldea    | Erosionado               |

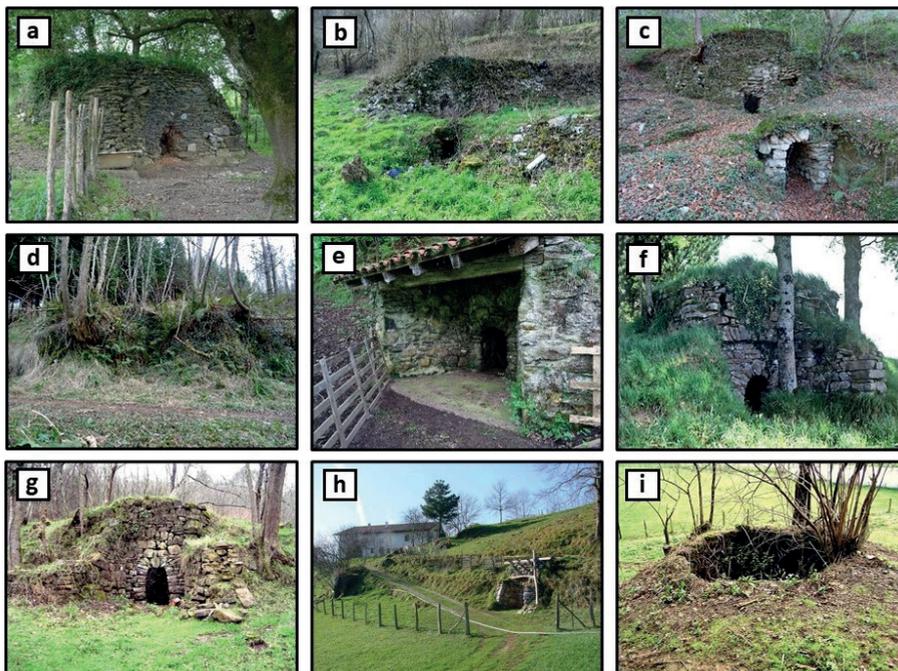


Figura 6. Ejemplos de caleros. (a) Ezenarro-azpi, Aizarna. (b) Ibarre, Aizarna. (c) Karobieta, Aizarna. (d) San Pelaio, Aizarna. (e) Intxaurrandieta, Alkiza. (f) Ipiidegi, Zizurkil. (g) Lizardi, Zizurkil. (h) Andrezketa, Zizurkil. (i) Luzuriaga, Zizurkil.

### 3.3. *Los suelos como archivo*

Las adiciones de cal con fines agrarios también han dejado una notable huella material en los propios suelos cultivados, que han actuado como un archivo de las prácticas productivas del pasado. Esta huella se ha venido documentando de manera recurrente en el curso de los trabajos desarrollados por el GIPyPAC y la Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi, tanto mediante la realización de sondeos arqueológicos de pequeña extensión como de la toma de muestras mediante sondeos geoarqueológicos en columna. Los resultados de unas y otras intervenciones han corroborado la relevancia del caleado como práctica de gestión agraria de amplia difusión durante la Edad Moderna, hasta el punto de constituir prácticamente un marcador cronológico en los perfiles estratigráficos que se documentan en este tipo de contextos.

#### 3.3.1. *Sondeos arqueológicos*

Uno de los ámbitos en los que se han podido constatar las huellas del caleado durante la Edad Moderna son los huertos anexos a las casas rurales de Aizarna y Amaiur (valle de Baztan) (Fig. 1). Estos huertos han sido tradicionalmente empleados para el cultivo intensivo de frutas, hortalizas, legumbres o maíz.<sup>42</sup> Su estudio se ha llevado a cabo mediante la realización de catas arqueológicas de pequeñas dimensiones, prestando especial atención no sólo a la recuperación de materiales arqueológicos –en su mayoría, desechos– relacionados con los contextos habitacionales adyacentes, sino sobre todo a la caracterización de los perfiles estratigráficos en los que están incluidos dichos materiales. Se trata de un método que, mediante una intervención puntual y poco invasiva, permite abordar de manera eficaz el estudio arqueológico de núcleos actualmente habitados, tal y como ha sido ensayado, por ejemplo, en varios contextos británicos.<sup>43</sup>

##### a. *Aizarna*

En 2017 se llevó a cabo una primera intervención en la localidad de Aizarna, centrada en la huerta de la casa rectoral, Erretorekoa. La cata (sector 1000), que tenía inicialmente una extensión de 1x1 m, fue ampliada después hasta abarcar 3x3 m, alcanzando una profundidad total de 150 cm. Bajo el nivel de superficie actual (UE 1001, correspondiente al horizonte 10), entre 20 y

<sup>42</sup> En un entorno cercano y de características topo-climáticas similares como es Bizkaia, las investigaciones etnoarqueológicas muestran la imbricada interrelación entre diversas especies, prácticas y conocimientos en la articulación de estos espacios cercanos a las casas y cultivados intensivamente (González Vázquez, “Las huertas”). De hecho, la relación proporcional que existe entre la cercanía de una parcela respecto al lugar de habitación y la intensidad con la que dicha parcela puede cultivarse es una realidad constatada (Van der Veen, “Gardens and fields”).

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, “New avenues;” Lewis, “Test pit excavation.”

50 cm de profundidad se detectó un depósito de tierra limo-arcillosa de color oscuro, indicativo de un alto contenido de materia orgánica (UE 1003, correspondiente al horizonte 1A). El depósito se hallaba truncado por un corte de forma ondulada (UE 1002); éste fue interpretado como el último paso del arado antes del abandono de la agricultura en la parcela, que ocurrió según informantes locales en torno a 1950-1960. Consecuentemente, la UE 1003 correspondería al horizonte superficial 2A de un suelo de cultivo que habría precedido a dicho abandono, continuamente removido por la acción del cultivo desde su formación hasta su abandono.<sup>44</sup>

El sedimento incluido en la UE 1003 presentaba abundantes motas de cal de origen claramente antropogénico, distribuidas homogéneamente por todo el depósito. Además, se recuperaron numerosos fragmentos cerámicos, un elemento habitual en suelos cultivados que indica el aporte de residuos domésticos como abono.<sup>45</sup> Al estar mezclados homogéneamente por toda la UE 1013, estos materiales deben entenderse como el resultado de un periodo prolongado de cultivo, mientras que el suelo representado por dicha UE se mantuvo en uso. La tipología de estos materiales correspondía mayoritariamente a formas revestidas (vidriadas y esmaltadas), lo que inducía a datar el depósito en cuestión entre mediados del siglo XVII y principios del XX. Por debajo de este depósito, la UE 1004 consistía en un depósito de arcillas claras y plásticas de casi 50 cm de potencia, correspondiente al horizonte C, en el que prácticamente no se recuperó material arqueológico alguno.

En resumen, el huerto de Erretorekoa había sido gestionado, antes de su abandono a mediados del siglo XX, mediante un régimen de cultivo intensivo que incluía el aporte regular de materia orgánica (compost, desechos domésticos) para renovar la fertilidad del suelo, y cal para compensar la acidificación producida por ésta.

#### b. *Amaiur*

En 2020 se llevó a cabo una nueva intervención, centrada en este caso en los huertos situados junto a la bastida de origen medieval de Amaiur, en el valle de Baztan (Fig. 1). En esta localidad se realizaron cuatro catas de 1x1 m de extensión, con resultados similares en todas ellas.

El primer sondeo, denominado sector 1000, se abrió en el huerto situado tras la casa Eskortzea (s. XVII), al sureste de la localidad. Se alcanzó una profundidad total de 60 cm, documentándose un perfil estratigráfico compuesto por varios niveles (Fig. 7a). Los depósitos más superficiales, hasta 15 cm de profundidad (UE 1001, 1003 & 1004), formaban el suelo de cultivo actual (horizonte O), caracterizado por un sedimento oscuro, con un alto componente orgánico, del que se recuperaron fragmentos de material cerámico, lítico,

<sup>44</sup> Narbarte-Hernández, Rodríguez Lejarza, Santeramo, Quirós Castillo, Iriarte, “Evidencias de ocupación antigua.”

<sup>45</sup> Poirier, “Indices archéologiques d’intensification agraire;” “Archaeological evidence for agrarian manuring;” Poirier, Laüt, “Approches comparées du mobilier hors-site.”

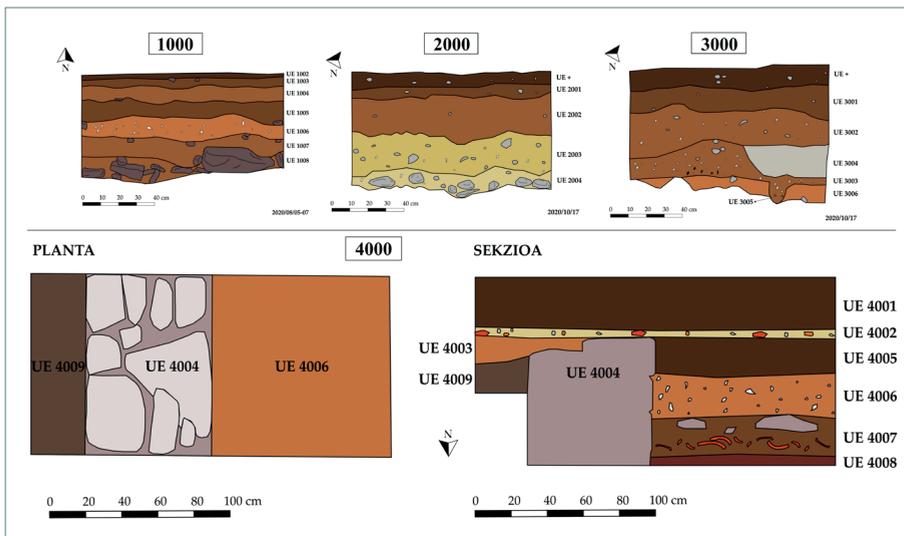


Figura 7. Perfiles estratigráficos de las tres catas realizadas en Amaiur (Navarra).

óseo, vidrio y plástico que indican una cronología reciente, relacionada con las últimas fases de la huerta; de acuerdo con los propietarios de la misma, ésta se cultiva de manera extensiva y como forma de ocio. Bajo estos depósitos, a una profundidad aproximada de entre 15 y 35 cm, se detectó otro depósito formado por dos niveles de tierra limosa (UE 1005, más oscura, horizonte A; y UE 1006, más clara, horizonte B) en los que aparecían fragmentos de cerámicas vidriadas y esmaltadas, cuya cronología se sitúa aproximadamente entre los siglos XVIII y mediados del XX. Ambas unidades presentaban, además, muchas motas de cal en toda su potencia, que desaparecían en las unidades infra y suprayacentes. Finalmente, a 60 cm de profundidad se documentó el sustrato aluvial meteorizado, correspondiente al horizonte C.

El segundo sondeo, correspondiente al sector 2000, se abrió en la trasera de la casa Martinena, a pocos metros de la anterior. La profundidad alcanzada fue de 60 cm (Fig. 7b). El depósito más superficial (UE 2000, 0-5 cm de profundidad, horizonte O) correspondía, de nuevo, al nivel de cultivo de la huerta actual, caracterizado por un sedimento arcilloso muy oscuro, en el que aparecían abundantes fragmentos de tejas, piedras, vidrio, restos óseos y cerámicas modernas de tipo loza blanca o *creamware*. Bajo este depósito, se documentó un segundo depósito formado por dos niveles superpuestos: UE 2001 (5-10 cm), más orgánico, correspondiente al horizonte A; y UE 2002 (10-30 cm), menos orgánico, correspondiente al horizonte B. Ambos se caracterizaban por la presencia de materiales cerámicos adscribibles a cronologías modernas (formas torneadas, vidriadas, esmaltadas y sin revestir), así como fragmentos de carbón y algunas motas de cal. El depósito inferior (UE 2003), por el contrario, estaba formado por un sedimento arcilloso mucho más plás-

tico, con mucha menor presencia de material arqueológico (cerámicas sin revestir, quizá bajomedievales, y algunos fragmentos de escoria), que a 60 cm de profundidad dejaba paso al sustrato meteorizado (horizonte C).

El tercer sondeo (sector 3000) se abrió en el huerto del caserío Bordabeherea, en el extremo septentrional de la bastida de Amaiur. En este caso, se alcanzó una profundidad total de 70 cm, documentando un perfil pluriestratificado (Fig. 7c). El depósito superficial, correspondiente a la huerta actual, estaba formado por tres niveles (UE 3000, de textura suelta y color muy oscuro debido a la presencia de materia orgánica parcialmente humificada, correspondiente al horizonte 1O del suelo de cultivo actual; UE 3001, más claro y arenoso, correspondiente al horizonte 1A; y UE 3002, con varios cantos de arenisca de origen probablemente coluvial, que puede identificarse como el horizonte 1B), entre los que se recuperaron fragmentos de tejas, vidrio y cerámicas. Bajo este depósito se detectó otro (UE 3003), situado entre 48 y 60 cm de profundidad, en el que destacaba la abundancia de inclusiones de cal y carbón, que aumentaban al descender en cota. Se trataba, por tanto, del horizonte 2A de un paleosuelo enterrado bajo la superficie de cultivo actual. Además, este nivel proporcionó abundante material arqueológico: fragmentos de cerámica vidriada y esmaltada, tejas, una concentración de restos óseos (al menos dos individuos ovicápridos), un clavo y un proyectil de arma de fuego de cronología moderna. Por debajo de este nivel se extendía la UE 3005, formada por sedimentos arcillosos de color más claro, correspondientes al horizonte 2B. Tanto las motas de cal como los materiales arqueológicos disminuían conforme se descendía en cota, hasta llegar a la UE 3007, situada a 70 cm de profundidad, que correspondía ya a sedimentos aluviales (horizonte C) sin evidencias de frecuentación humana.

Por último, el cuarto sondeo (sector 4000) se realizó tras la casa Agerrea, en el sector suroccidental del pueblo, alcanzándose una profundidad total de 140 cm. El estrato superficial UE-4001 consistía en un depósito superficial compuesto por tierra orgánica de color oscuro y textura suelta (horizonte O). Éste cubría la UE-4002, un nivel de cemento de 3-4 cm de grosor, y éste a su vez la UE-4003, compuesto por una mezcla de cemento degradado, arcillas amarillas y cal. Ambas incluían material constructivo como tejas y baldosas de corte moderno. Por debajo se situaba la UE-4005, un depósito de tierra arcillosa de color marrón oscuro y textura suelta (horizonte 1A), en el que aparecían incluidos varios fragmentos de material constructivo; a su vez, éste cubría la UE-4006 y la UE-4007, dos depósitos de tierra arcillosa-arenosa de color amarillo a marrón y textura muy suelta (horizontes 1B y 2B), con gran concentración de materiales cerámicos, tejas y cal. Todas ellas se adosaban a un muro de grandes dimensiones (UE-4004), asentado directamente sobre el sustrato de arcillas compactas (horizonte C) en las que se intercalaban cantos de arenisca y óxidos de hierro (UE-4008).

En resumen, los cuatro sectores abiertos en Amaiur proporcionaron un registro más o menos claro de la existencia, bajo las superficies actuales, de un depósito agrario anterior, relacionado con una fase de cultivo intensivo

de los suelos de estos huertos. Dichos depósitos se caracterizaban por la presencia de numerosas motas de cal que indican un aporte regular de este material por parte de los cultivadores, sin duda como enmienda para equilibrar la acidez del suelo; además de numerosos materiales óseos y cerámicos, indicativos de un aporte regular de desechos domésticos (compost), empleados como abono. Aunque mezclados por la acción del cultivo, estos depósitos tienen unas características edafológicas particulares que permiten distinguirlos de los niveles superiores e inferiores, e interpretarlos como el resultado de un proceso de adición prolongado en el tiempo, pero circunscrito a un lapso temporal concreto. La tipología de las cerámicas recuperadas, entre las que predominaban las formas vidriadas y esmaltadas, sitúa estos procesos entre los siglos XVII y primera mitad del XX.

### *3.3.2. Sondeos geoarqueológicos en columna*

Un segundo ámbito de actuación que ha permitido documentar las huellas materiales del caleado en contextos agrarios de la Edad Moderna son los sondeos geoarqueológicos en columna. Este método se basa en la extracción de testigos de sedimento, usando para ello una sonda mecánica que permite acumular varias maniobras superpuestas de hasta un metro de profundidad. Los trabajos arrancaron en 2016 con la realización de varios sondeos en Gipuzkoa, en las localidades de Ibiri (sondeo IBI/1)<sup>46</sup> y Aizarna (sondeos AIZ/1, AIZ/2, AIZ/3, AIZ/4 & AIZ/5); los registros se completaron en 2017 con otros dos sondeos en el barrio de Akoa, anexo a Aizarna (sondeos AKU/1 & AKU/2), y en 2018 con varios sondeos más en Alkiza (sondeo ALK/1) y Zizurkil (sondeos ZIZ/1, ZIZ/3, ZIZ/4 & ZIZ/5). Finalmente, en 2020 se realizaron cinco sondeos más en la localidad baztanesa de Ziga (sondeos ZIG/1 a ZIG/5).

Los sondeos fueron analizados mediante fluorescencia de rayos X (XRF), realizado en el Laboratori Corelab de la Universitat de Barcelona. Se trata de un parámetro que mide la composición elemental de cada muestra, proporcionando una medida semicuantitativa de la concentración de cada elemento con respecto a los demás.<sup>47</sup> Cada sondeo fue analizado a intervalos regulares de 1 cm, obteniendo así una curva continua de la variación en la concentración de cada uno de los elementos. Una de las particularidades que se repetían en la mayor parte los sondeos fue la existencia de un depósito subsuperficial, de potencia variable (desde apenas unos centímetros hasta casi un metro),

<sup>46</sup> Agradecemos a Arantza Aranburu, Martín Arriolabengoa y Eneko Iriarte el habernos facilitado el acceso a este registro.

<sup>47</sup> Para una discusión en detalle del método y sus potencialidades, v. Narbarte-Hernández, Iriarte, Rad, Carrancho-Alonso, González-Sampérez, Peña-Chocarro, Quirós-Castillo, "On the origin of rural landscapes;" Narbarte-Hernández, Iriarte, Rad, Tejerizo, Fernández Eraso, Quirós Castillo, "Long-term construction of Vineyard landscapes;" Narbarte-Hernández, Iriarte, Carrancho-Alonso, Olazabal-Uzkudun, Rad, Arriolabengoa, Aranburu, Quirós-Castillo, "Geochemical fingerprint of agricultural liming."

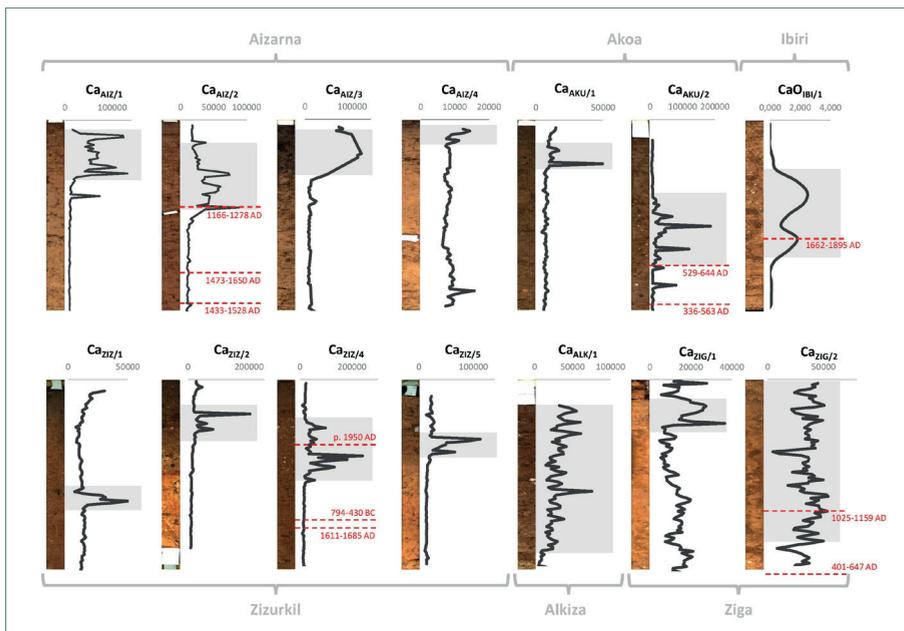


Figura 8. Curva de la concentración de calcio (Ca) en varios sondeos en columna en espacios agrarios de Gipuzkoa y Navarra. Se han sombreado los depósitos agrarios de la Edad Moderna enriquecidos con cal.

caracterizado por una gran concentración de calcio (Ca) que contrasta con unos niveles muy bajos de dicho elemento en los depósitos infra y suprayacentes (Fig. 8). En efecto, el calcio se encuentra por norma general ausente en los sedimentos basales de estos perfiles, mayoritariamente compuestos por arcillas siliciclásticas; por tanto, su alta concentración en unos depósitos muy concretos de cada secuencia sólo puede explicarse como el resultado de una adición antrópica de óxido de calcio, es decir, de cal.

Adicionalmente, los sondeos AIZ/2 y AKU/2 fueron sometidos a análisis de pH en el Laboratorio de Química Agrícola de la Universidad de Burgos. Se analizó una muestra cada 5 cm, obteniendo una curva que, superpuesta a la obtenida de los análisis de XRF, permitió confirmar el efecto de la práctica del caleado sobre la acidez de los suelos. Sin embargo, el abandono de esta práctica, y la generalización del uso de purines en el aprovechamiento ganadero que actualmente caracteriza estos espacios, ha provocado una nueva acidificación de los niveles más superficiales de estos suelos, hasta niveles de pH incluso más bajos que los del sedimento basal.

La datación de estos procesos se llevó a cabo aplicando la técnica del radiocarbono a muestras de sedimento provenientes de distintos niveles estratigráficos de estos perfiles. Los resultados obtenidos se encuentran sintetizados en la Tabla II, aunque deben ser tomados con cautela debido a los problemas de fiabilidad y seguridad que se asocian a este método de datación para crono-

logías tan recientes. Los depósitos enriquecidos con calcio sólo pudieron ser datados directamente en el sondeo IBI/1, donde se obtuvo una fecha calibrada de  $160 \pm 40$  BP, es decir, entre mediados del siglo XVIII y mediados del XIX. En el resto de los sondeos, estos depósitos proporcionaron fechas incoherentes con la secuencia de dataciones obtenidas del resto del perfil –  $800 \pm 40$  BP en el sondeo AIZ/2 y  $2498 \pm 56$  BP en el sondeo ZIZ/4 –, posiblemente debido a la contaminación de las muestras con materia orgánica proveniente de niveles superficiales o simplemente por las remociones provocadas por el cultivo. Por ello, en estos sondeos el depósito enriquecido con calcio sólo pudo datarse de manera relativa a partir de las fechas proporcionadas por los sedimentos inmediatamente infrayacentes. Así, en los sondeos AKU/2 ( $1499 \pm 40$  BP) y ZIG/2 ( $1552 \pm 69$  BP), las dataciones altomedievales de los rellenos de terraza sugieren una vaga datación postclásica para los depósitos enriquecidos con cal, mientras que, en los sondeos AIZ/2 ( $314 \pm 38$  BP) y ZIZ/4 ( $251 \pm 47$  BP) afinan esta estimación hasta situarla *después* de la segunda mitad del siglo XVII o principios del XVIII. Finalmente, la datación de un nivel superficial del sondeo ZIZ/4, situado estratigráficamente por encima del depósito enriquecido con cal, proporcionó una fecha moderna, posterior a 1950, lo que indica que la práctica pervivió en este suelo hasta fechas muy recientes.

En síntesis, el análisis de estos sondeos revela la existencia de un depósito enriquecido con cal en prácticamente todos los suelos cultivados de las seis localidades estudiadas. Esta cal se encuentra ausente en los sedimentos basales, y debe interpretarse como el resultado de un aporte antropogénico que las dataciones radiocarbónicas inducen a situar, aproximadamente, entre mediados del siglo XVIII y mediados del XX. Es decir, se trata de un claro marcador de la nueva rotación agraria de carácter intensivo que se desarrolló durante la Edad Moderna de la mano de la introducción del maíz y otros cultivos americanos, y que pervivió hasta el abandono de la agricultura ‘tradicional’ a consecuencia de la Revolución Industrial.

Tabla II. Relación de dataciones radiocarbónicas obtenidas en los sondeos AIZ/2, AKU/2, ZIZ/4, IBI/1 y ZIG/2.

| Sondeo | Prof.<br>(cm) | Tipo<br>muestra | Código lab. | trc (años<br>BP) | Fecha cal.                                   |  |
|--------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--|--|
|        |               |                 |             |                  | (años – 1s)                                  | (años – 2s)                                  |
| AIZ/2  | 47            | sedimento       | Fi3556      | $800 \pm 40$     | [1211–1270 AD]                               | [1166–1278 AD]                               |
|        | 82            | sedimento       | Fi3495      | $314 \pm 38$     | [1516–1597 AD]<br>[1618–1643 AD]             | [1473–1650 AD]                               |
|        | 97            | sedimento       | Fi3494      | $396 \pm 41$     | [1443–1514 AD]<br>[1600–1617 AD]             | [1433–1528 AD]<br>[1553–1634 AD]             |
|        | 142           | sedimento       | Fi3557      | $1545 \pm 45$    | [535–614 AD]<br>[435–448 AD]<br>[472–487 AD] | [506–641 AD]<br>[428–497 AD]                 |
| AKU/2  | 77            | sedimento       | Fi3741      | $1499 \pm 40$    | [536–622 AD]<br>[477–483 AD]                 | [529–644 AD]<br>[429–494 AD]<br>[510–518 AD] |

*segue*

| <i>Sondeo</i> | <i>Prof. (cm)</i> | <i>Tipo muestra</i> | <i>Código lab.</i> | <i>trc (años BP)</i> | <i>Fecha cal. (años - 1s)</i>   | <i>Fecha cal. (años - 2 s)</i>  |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|
|               | 97                | sedimento           | Fi3673             | 1611 ± 50            | [486-535 AD]<br>[395-438 AD]<br>[443-473 AD]  | [336-563 AD]  |
| AKU/2         | 117               | sedimento           | Fi3674             | 1966 ± 46            | [2 BC - 77 AD]<br>[36-31 BC]<br>[21-11 BC]  | [56 BC - 131 AD]<br>[88-76 BC]  |
|               | 137               | sedimento           | Fi3675             | 2682 ± 50            | [854-803 BC]<br>[895-868 BC]  | [930-791 BC]  |
|               | 36                | carbón              | Fi4230             | Modern               | Moderno   | Moderno   |
| ZIZ/4         | 76                | carbón              | Fi4231             | 2498 ± 56            | [774-727 BC]<br>[718-705 BC]<br>[695-541 BC]  | [794-430 BC]  |
|               | 79                | carbón              | Fi4233             | 251 ± 47             | [1523-1572 AD]<br>[1630-1676 AD]<br>[1769-1771 AD]<br>[1941-... AD]                                     | [1490-1603 AD]<br>[1611-1685 AD]<br>[1732-1808 AD]<br>[1928-... AD]                         |
| IBI/1         | 61                | carbón              | Poz-56564          | 160 ± 40             | [1669-1695 AD]<br>[1725-1781 AD]<br>[1797-1812 AD]<br>[1839-1845 AD]<br>[1852-1877 AD]<br>[1916-... AD] | [1662-1895 AD]<br>[1902-... AD]   |
|               | 70                | Sedimento           | Beta-657720        | 960 ± 30             |   | [1025-1159 CE]  |
|               | 104               | Sedimento           | DSH11417           | 1552 ± 69            |   | [385-387 AD]<br>[401-647 AD]  |
| ZIG/2         | 116               | Sedimento           | Beta-657721        | 3390 ± 30            |   | [1574-1564 BCE]<br>[1767-1758 BCE]<br>[1753-1611 BCE]<br>[1863-1855 BCE]<br>[1552-1549 BCE] |
|               | 122               | Sedimento           | DSH11418           | 1883 ± 25            |   | [83-96 AD]<br>[115-230 AD]  |

#### 4. Conclusión

En las páginas precedentes hemos expuesto un corpus de evidencias, provenientes de distintas fuentes (documentales, etnográficas, arqueológicas, sedimentológicas), que ilustran claramente la existencia de una importante transformación en las formas de gestión agraria en muchas áreas del Cantábrico oriental durante la Edad Moderna, de la mano de la introducción de cultivos americanos y el establecimiento de sistemas agrarios más intensivos. Pero, si bien este proceso se enmarca indudablemente en una tendencia de fondo que afectó a la mayor parte de las regiones atlánticas de Europa en las mismas fechas, su explicación no puede circunscribirse a una narrativa positivista de simple “mejora” agronómica, sino que debe tener en cuenta a los propios grupos sociales campesinos que, en definitiva, lo implementaron y desarrollaron.

El uso de la cal como enmienda agraria es un buen ejemplo de cómo esta

agencia campesina puede abordarse a partir de las *prácticas* sociales concretas (de producción, relación, transmisión de conocimientos y bienes) en las que los grupos sociales campesinos activaban una serie de relaciones sociales y ecológicas, y a través de ella incidían en su realidad cotidiana. En efecto, la práctica del caleado muestra, ya desde el siglo XVIII, un sorprendente nivel de penetración y estandarización para unas sociedades campesinas que operaban, en teoría, sobre la base de unos modos de producción fuertemente enfocados en la unidad doméstica. Este hecho pone de relieve la existencia de redes de acción colectiva, a menudo informales y poco institucionalizadas, cuyo reflejo material es aún visible en el paisaje, pero cuya definición escapa a las categorías (unidad doméstica, comunidad, cooperación) que habitualmente se manejan en el estudio arqueológico de este tipo de contextos.

Desde este punto de vista, el caleado debe entenderse no sólo en el marco de su funcionalidad como factor de acondicionamiento de los suelos cultivados con un fin productivo, sino también como un elemento en torno al cual se entretejían una serie de labores, objetivos y saberes compartidos a través de diversos vínculos superpuestos de vecindad, parentesco o solidaridad. Este ejemplo muestra, por tanto, que las prácticas sociales de producción son en realidad la suma de numerosas *acciones* que forman parte de un universo mucho más amplio y dinámico de relaciones que se superponen a varias *escalas*, y que se repiten en el tiempo con innumerables variaciones para formar, con su propia acción, la forma misma de transmisión de un corpus de conocimientos ligados a las citadas interacciones.

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# **The “arenas of struggle” of peasant agency in early medieval times: a theoretical and archaeological approach**

by Carlos Tejerizo García

The main aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities and limits of the application of the concept of agency to tackle early medieval peasant-based societies. While this concept has achieved great success in archaeology since the 1980s onwards, it has rarely been applied for medieval contexts. However, recent historiographical developments and approaches within medieval archaeology invite to consider its applicability to expand our understanding of this social group. Through two case studies located in central Iberia considering the emergence and development of post-Roman peasant-based societies, I will argue that an archaeology of peasant agency during early medieval times is not only possible, but also necessary in order to overcome over-optimistic and biased approaches to these societies. Furthermore, it will be argued that this archaeology depends on the complex analysis of the relationship between agency and structure and the detection of those “arenas of struggle” through which the agency of different social groups are displayed.

Middle Ages, peasant-based societies; structure; settlement pattern; Iberian Peninsula; materiality.

## *1. Introduction: the “agency outbreak” in early medieval archaeology*

In a 2016 interview, Anthony Giddens was asked if there was any element in his work that he considered to be the most important for those pursuing social and political change. He answered that

It would be the format that we’re talking about: the immense subtlety of the interaction between how people make their own lives and at the same time are creatures of

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the larger structures of which they are part. That's as true in politics as in other areas. Well-intentioned policies are never enough and can often rebound.<sup>1</sup>

He was specifically referring to the agency vs. structure debate that has centred much of the sociological debate of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>2</sup> being the concept of agency one of the major contributions of Sociology to Human Sciences as a whole. After the hegemony of structuralism in Western academia throughout most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion that individuals have a real capacity of intervention in the world gained momentum, even becoming one of the fundamental bases of postmodernism during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that the concept of agency, as well as the agency vs. structure debate, is complex enough to just being reduced to one close definition or author. However, what I want to underline here is its crucial role in advancing Social Sciences in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including archaeology.

The impact of the different analyses on the agency in archaeology was both immediate and immense, articulated mainly – but not only – through the works of A. Giddens and P. Bourdieu, which were widely applied to archaeological analysis.<sup>4</sup> As a reaction to narrow functionalist and behaviourists approaches, concepts such as those of action or agency “promised instead to document the informed choices of sentient humans in context.”<sup>5</sup> It is indeed one of the major basis of what has been named as the postprocessualist school.<sup>6</sup> The founding books of this approach, those of Shanks and Tilley profusely discuss Bourdieu’s work, while Ian Hodder’s first theoretical books use Giddens structuration theory to incorporate the individual to the historical processes against reductionist accounts based on narrow structuralist or materialist approaches.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by other contributions that expanded the possibilities of an approach through the ideas of agency and/or *habitus* to the archaeological record.<sup>8</sup> The common reference for all of them is the idea that, far from being just a passive subject of the context (i.e. structure, history, society, etc.), individuals and groups have an active participation in the construction of the social milieu and that in this interaction, materiality also plays an active role.<sup>9</sup> This outbreak of the agency in archaeology was quite successful, and by the change of the century, some of the most outstanding ar-

<sup>1</sup> Kolarz, “Sociology, politics and power.”

<sup>2</sup> Giddens, *The constitution of society*.

<sup>3</sup> Lyotard, *La condición postmoderna*.

<sup>4</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Agency in archaeology.”

<sup>5</sup> Wobst, “Agency in (spite of) material culture,” 40.

<sup>6</sup> Trigger, *A history of Archaeological Thought*.

<sup>7</sup> Shanks and Tilley, *Social theory and Archaeology*; Shanks and Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology*; Hodder, *Symbols in action*; Hodder, *Reading the past*.

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, “Agency: a revisionist account”; Dobres and Robb, “Doing Agency.”

<sup>9</sup> I am voluntarily excluding here the new materialist approaches, as they are indeed very critical of this conceptualization of human agency Witmore. “Symmetrical archaeology.”

chaeologists gathered to discuss its limits and possibilities.<sup>10</sup> As these authors state in the introduction of the volume dedicated to agency in archaeology:

the common ground among these disparate approaches to “theorizing the subject” was the claim that historical contexts of social and material interaction, along with non-discursive perceptions of the world, served as the proximate boundary conditions within which ancient people negotiated their world, while simultaneously creating and being constrained by it.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, an approach from the idea of agency to the archaeological record not only re-introduced the individual into discussion, but also its capacity to interact with the political, social and economical milieu and even to create counter-narratives through different social strategies, such as resilience and/or resistance.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this concept was flexible enough to be applied to different contexts, engaging with multitemporal approaches, which was undoubtedly part of its success within archaeology.<sup>13</sup>

Although with a little delay, this process has also impacted medieval and early medieval archaeology, being also the concept of agency commonly used for better understanding the archaeological record, especially regarding the funerary contexts but also other economic and political processes such as state emergence.<sup>14</sup> This approach from the idea of agency has expanded to other topics. Recently, in the context of the emergence of an early medieval peasant archaeology, J.A. Quirós and myself proposed that an approach from the perspective of relational agency can be a successful strategy to overcome some problems and gaps in peasant studies, such as the lord vs. peasant reductionist narratives or the active role that peasantries played in the construction of early medieval societies.<sup>15</sup> In short, what began as a proposal from Sociology has permeated to other disciplines such as medieval archaeology, pushing forward the research in the last decades.

However, and in a similar historiographical process to other concepts,<sup>16</sup> the application of the concept of agency to early medieval peasant contexts rises some concerns regarding its uncritical use and what can be named the “overoptimistic vision” of agency.<sup>17</sup> This optimistic vision may produce some analytical and interpretative problems, such as “seeing” agency and/or resistance everywhere, or ignoring the context of power in which these societies are placed into, just to mention two of them.<sup>18</sup> In other words, an uncritical appli-

<sup>10</sup> Dobres and Robb, *Agency in archaeology*.

<sup>11</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Agency in archaeology,” 7.

<sup>12</sup> Pauketat, “The tragedy of the commoners,” 113-29.

<sup>13</sup> Barrett, “Agency.”

<sup>14</sup> Halsall, *Early Medieval Cemeteries*; Theuvs, “The integration of the Kempen Region.”

<sup>15</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo, “Filling the gap.”

<sup>16</sup> Tejerizo, “The archaeology of the Peasant Mode.”

<sup>17</sup> González-Ruibal, *Archaeology of Resistance*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Barrett, “A thesis on agency.”

cation of the concept of agency may produce the involuntary consequence to empty its potentialities for understanding early medieval peasant contexts.<sup>19</sup>

The aim of this paper is to critically discuss the validity and limitations of the concept of agency in order to better understand early medieval ages and particularly early medieval peasantries. For that purpose, in the first section, I will try to frame the concept of agency within the parameters of a materialist approach through a theoretical discussion of the agency vs. structure debate, while discussing its possibilities of application to tackle peasant-based societies. These potentialities and limitations will be subsequently discussed through two particular case studies located in central Iberia, those of the birth of the village during the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and the role of power relationships within the limits of the village through funerary remains. Finally, I will propose a methodological and theoretical frame in which incorporate agency as a valid concept, dealing with a relational approach.

## 2. *An archaeology of (early medieval peasant) agency?*

In a paper written in 2004, historian Mark Tauger makes a very compelling criticism to what he calls the “resistance interpretation” of peasant responses to Stalinist collectivization, which is commonly seen as the epitome of repression and negation of human individuality.<sup>20</sup> Historians have tended, he argues, to look at peasantries during the process of creation of kholkoz as pre-eminently resistant against totalitarianism. However, critically looking at the written record shows that not only active resistance to collectivization was a minor response, but also that these were not against the system, but against what they contextually felt was an attack to their “traditional” moral economy,<sup>21</sup> something common within peasant-based societies<sup>22</sup>. For instance, the main strategy of rebellion was not open contestation or violence, but to divide the collective land into individual fields to harvest.<sup>23</sup> Tauger’s approach is, thus, a critic to those approaches which sees every action from subaltern groups not only as a materialization of their agency but also a form of resistance, following an extreme reading of Scott’s weapons of the weak.<sup>24</sup> The problem, Tauger states, is one of representation and, therefore, of contextualization: “such anecdotal reports are problematic... because it is impossible to determine whether they are representative.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo, “Filling the gap.”

<sup>20</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a state*; Tauger, “Soviet peasants and collectivization.”

<sup>21</sup> Tauger, “Soviet peasants,” 74.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Tradición, revuelta y conciencia de clase*.

<sup>23</sup> Tauger, “Soviet peasants,” 75.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

<sup>25</sup> Tauger, “Soviet peasants,” 76.

In the other extreme of the analysis of the capacity of human beings to express agency even in the most severe contexts, we can cite an example coming from the archaeology of the Spanish concentration camps. By analysing the materiality of these camps, Alfredo González-Ruibal argues that “material culture was central to the totalitarian project... by using every place at their disposal as a concentration camp, the new regime achieved their fascist dream: transforming every corner of Spain into a space of control.” Concentration camps in Spain were the ultimate materialization of repression as well as a way to undermine resistance and re-shape individuals to fit into the new regime: “the places used as concentration and forced labor camps did not just serve to humiliate, punish, and re-educate the vanquished, they were also a powerful, yet unconscious means of reinforcing political clichés: so unconscious, in fact, that those who created them were not fully aware of their role in depriving the prisoners of their humanity.” At the level of materiality, even in these extreme conditions, prisoners had the opportunity to express individuality and collective through means such as graffiti, the reconditioning of their barracks (creating artistic entrances with colouring stones) or the creation of specific *habitus* and petty contestations and meetings (Fig. 1). However, from González Ruibal’s point of view, this was just a subtle and unconscious way of strategies at the service of power: “graffiti, then, allowed the prisoners to leave a physical trace of their predicament, before being wiped out of history – but at the same time rendered them more transparent and legible before power.”<sup>26</sup>

These two examples, even extreme, synthesize both the possibilities and setbacks of the concept of agency when used to tackle social and political interaction in past and present societies, and, specifically, as I will be discussing in this paper, peasant-based societies. A first consideration to be made here is related to what has been referred before as the “overoptimistic” approach to agency and resistance. In Alfredo González-Ruibal’s words:

I argue that the concept of resistance has been trivialized and exaggerated in recent times. There is a far too optimistic notion of the agency of the subaltern. This ascribing of agency purportedly aims to give them a voice but may actually betray the iniquities of their situation. By granting too much capacity for resistance to the oppressed, either practical or moral, we run the risk of downplaying their suffering and exonerating the brutality of the repressive instances.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, abusing the concept of agency to interpret the archaeological record may result in a romantic distortion of the past, overestimating the real capacity of agents to express their identity and to consciously interact with social inequalities and relations of power. From this standpoint, every piece of material culture then may be a direct representation of agency and resistance, resulting in, as Dobres and Robb states, an archaeology of agency that “begins to look somewhat like “the archeology of breathing” – a dynamic

<sup>26</sup> González-Ruibal, “The archaeology of internment,” 68-9.

<sup>27</sup> González-Ruibal, 68.

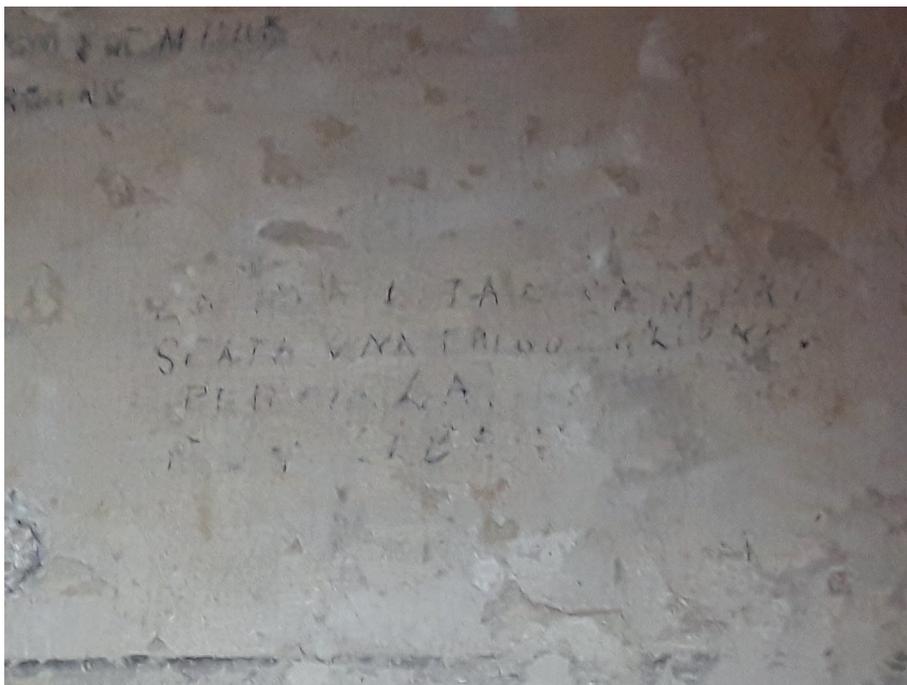


Figure 1. Graffiti as the material expression of prisoner's identity. Casa dello Studente (Genoa). Photo by author.

so universal and inescapable that, without further linkage to something more specific, it is difficult to see how it can illuminate particular aspects of the past.”<sup>28</sup>

Critically departing from this optimistic view on agency what I would argue, regarding the archaeology of early medieval peasantries, is threefold: first, that we run the risk of misinterpreting the archaeological record in favour of biased approaches when confronting early medieval times; second, that we may neglect, or even erase, the relevance of some instances of identity, such as the condition of peasants or local identities, on behalf of others, such as ethnicity or religion,<sup>29</sup> in other words, to blur the relations of power behind action and agency; finally, that optimistic approaches to agency tend to neglect the specific context in which material culture is placed.<sup>30</sup> The analysis of early medieval personal adornments as ethnic markers is a classic example that has been repeatedly assessed by different authors.<sup>31</sup> Understood as a di-

<sup>28</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Doing Agency,” 160.

<sup>29</sup> Martínez and Tejerizo, “Assessing place-based identities.”

<sup>30</sup> Barrett, “A thesis;” Wobst, “Agency in (spite of) material culture.”

<sup>31</sup> Recent compilations in López, Kazanski and Ivanišević, *Entangled identities*; Quirós and Castellanos, *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania*.

rect materialization of ethnic agency, its interpretation neglects not only other instances of identity represented through these objects, but also blurs the political, economic and social milieu in which they are displayed.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, even interpretations of these objects as a representation of communal or peasant identities may be neglecting their use as a political tool for making these societies legible for the emergent early medieval Germanic states and their relations of power.<sup>33</sup>

All these examples illustrate the idea that agency, in fact, exists everywhere, but it does not always represent neither the free will of the agents nor the naive idea that every act is resistant or counter-hegemonic.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, they draw attention to be cautious about seeing what we want to see in a multifaceted social context, calling for a complex and deeper understanding of the concepts of both agency and peasantry in order to analyse the archaeological record<sup>35</sup>. This is even more true for the medieval times, where the empirical evidence is less clear than in the abovementioned examples from contemporary history and archaeology. For that reason, it is important to make some framing remarks on the concept of agency and the necessity to assess it from a contextual and complex approach. Thus, I will develop some brief remarks on the conceptualization of the agency in order to better tackle the general question of early medieval peasant agency in general and the subsequent empirical examples in particular.

Even though the concept of agency, as stated at the beginning of the paper, has received a lot of attention in the last decades and, therefore, developed many different definitions and variations, I will depart by the definition given by A. Giddens who formulates action or agency “as involving a stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world.”<sup>36</sup> This definition encapsulates the main aspects I want to stress here: the relationship between agency and structure, the centrality of practice,<sup>37</sup> the possibility of considering agency beyond the individual, and the specific condition of peasantries (as “corporeal beings”) regarding agency and active involvement in the world.

As previously suggested, even from the most radical structuralist standpoint, the ontology of agency is out of the question as there is always a causal interaction with the world.<sup>38</sup> The problem stems in the formal question of how action interacts with the world, how to connect “a notion of human action

<sup>32</sup> Halsall, “Ethnicity and early medieval cemeteries;” Pohl, “Telling the difference.”

<sup>33</sup> Carvajal and Tejerizo, “The early medieval state;” Scott, *Seeing*.

<sup>34</sup> González-Ruibal, *Archaeology of Resistance*.

<sup>35</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo, “Filling the gap.”

<sup>36</sup> Giddens, *Central problems in social theory*, 55. In essence, this is not very different from the definition of agency given by the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines agency (from the Latin *agentia* or doing) as “action or intervention producing a particular effect”, or “a thing or person that acts to produce a particular result.”

<sup>37</sup> Pauketat, “The tragedy of the commoners,” 115.

<sup>38</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Doing.”

with structural explanation,” that is, the old question of how structure and agency interrelates. For instance, Giddens considers a fallacy to separate one from the other, because they presuppose one another<sup>39</sup>. In this regard, in order to tackle agency is necessary to introduce the structural milieu in which this agency takes place<sup>40</sup>. Here I will be following the work of Alex Callinicos, who defines “structure” not just as constraints, but as “power-conferring relations,” that is, that “what social structures do, then, is to give agents powers of a certain kind”.<sup>41</sup> This materialist understanding of structure derives in many implications, but I should underline here four: 1) agents are determined by these structures but they don’t obliterate their agency and capacity of interact with the encompassing context; 2) power and politics are mainly relational and thus, depending of the specific *habitus* and social relationships;<sup>42</sup> 3) the starting point is the material context, and, thus, quoting Callinicos, following Gerald Cohen: “what is materially possible defines what is socially possible”;<sup>43</sup> and 4) against vulgar determinism, the impossibility of foreseeing the results of social relationships even though they are defined by them, what has been conceptualised by Bob Jessop and others as “contingent necessity”.<sup>44</sup>

Returning to Tauger’s paper, he emphasises two interesting ideas that I consider relevant for my purposes here. First, that peasant agency is only comprehensible when introduced in a specific historic and political context, and second, that it is possible to acknowledge agency beyond the individual. Regarding the first issue, Giddens suggests that for a complex understanding of agency it should be incorporated in a specific temporality and in particular set of power relations, both as containers of human agency<sup>45</sup>. This implies, therefore, to acknowledge human action regarding, as Tauger stated, whether they are representative or not of a specific intention, i.e. resistance. Regarding the second assertion, one of the most compelling ideas coming from the concept of agency is to go beyond the individual in search of a complex interpretation of collective action.<sup>46</sup> Against methodological individualism, which states that only the individual is capable of intentional action and structure is just a mere abstraction<sup>47</sup>, ideas such as *habitus*, structuration or structures as power-conferring relations opens the possibility to tackle collective forms of agency within a specific historical context<sup>48</sup>. In other words, agency, when analysed from the point of view of collective action, is dependent of the power relations in which they are integrated. This network of relationships is what

<sup>39</sup> Dobres and Robb, 53.

<sup>40</sup> Barrett, “A thesis.”

<sup>41</sup> Callinicos, *Making history*, XX.

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*.

<sup>43</sup> Callinicos, *Making*, 54-69.

<sup>44</sup> Jessop, *State power*.

<sup>45</sup> Giddens, *Central problems*, 54; Johnson, “Self-made and the staging of agency.”

<sup>46</sup> Barrett, “A thesis.”

<sup>47</sup> Callinicos. *Making*, 34-7.

<sup>48</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Doing,” 162.

authors such as Ian Burkitt conceptualise as “relational agency”, based on social relationships that constitute “the very structure and form of agency itself”.<sup>49</sup>

Practice, as said, is crucial for an analysis from the point of view of agency. Being Bourdieu’s well-known *habitus* or Giddens structuration theory, the key element is that agents interact with the world through actions. It is precisely through this practice that agents materialise in the world, leaving those numerous evidences that we can track through the archaeological record. However, from the point of view of the network of relationships that defines the relational agency through which material culture will be approached here, a central concept will be that of the “arenas of struggle” defined by sociologist N. Long upon Bourdieu’s work. Arenas of struggle defined as those specific material spaces where social interaction (that relational agency) occurs and through which agency is built.<sup>50</sup> Arenas that, following what has been previously said, are contextual to the social milieu and not previously predetermined.

This framing of the concept of agency leads us to question how peasant-based societies can be specifically analysed from this point of view and whether there is an specific peasant agency to be tackled through the archaeological record. As Jan Douwe van der Ploeg has stated: “peasant studies have been weak in acknowledging *agency*, which evidently is an (unintended) consequence of its epistemological stance,” which figures peasants as “passive victims.”<sup>51</sup> A perspective from an archaeology of peasant agency is only possible as far as we acknowledge a complex understanding of peasant and peasant societies.<sup>52</sup> This is not the space to delve into the concept of peasantries, but it is useful to briefly underline three ideas regarding the specificities of peasant-based societies. First, that peasant must be addressed as a particular social group or class in order to be understood in its own terms,<sup>53</sup> while introduced in specific historical contexts and processes.<sup>54</sup> Second, that practice is crucial to define peasants, as argued by van der Ploeg: “Being involved in peasant agriculture is what makes people peasants. Peasants are not just engaged in agriculture... they organize and develop agriculture in a specific way”.<sup>55</sup> And third, the centrality of the domestic unit to define and historically (and archaeologically) characterise peasant-based societies.<sup>56</sup> Thus, following M. Johnson, the strategy is not to develop cross-cultural models of agency, but

<sup>49</sup> Burkitt, “Relational agency.”

<sup>50</sup> Long, *Development sociology*.

<sup>51</sup> Van Der Ploeg, *The new peasantries*, 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Quirós and Tejerizo, “Filling the gap,” 13-4.

<sup>53</sup> Chayanov, *The theory of peasant economy*.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

<sup>55</sup> Van Der Ploeg, *The new peasantries*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Shanin, *Peasants and peasant societies*.

models for “particular historical epochs or periods,”<sup>57</sup> in this case, post-Roman and early medieval peasantries.

All said, the proposal made here is close to what J.C. Barrett calls an “archaeology of inhabitation,” which summarises the main ideas of this discussion. An archaeology of inhabitation that “considers the various possible structuring principles which agents practices in their movement through time/space, given the structural conditions that were available to them,” by characterizing elements such as the existing material structural conditions operating at any particular time,” “the practical use of available stocks of knowledge” and “the practical reworking of the structuring principles which secured these communities” identities.”<sup>58</sup> These are the conceptual and theoretical basis which I will try to mobilise in the following sections through some case studies coming from early medieval Iberian archaeology.

### *3. Peasant-based societies in central and northwestern Iberia: some case studies*

Agency, from the abovementioned perspective, implies a specific contextualization, both spatially and historically. In the following section, I will present two case studies with the aim of using the theoretical background towards the discussion of the possibilities of an archaeological analysis of peasant agency in early medieval Iberia (Fig. 2). Evidently, this is not about offering a definitive account of the topic, but to give some empirical background for future research. All case studies share a geographical space, that is, the central and northern parts of the Iberian Peninsula, and a specific time span, that of post-Roman times between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. This is a logical proposal considering the necessity, as stated, of creating particular models for specific times and epochs. Besides, these case studies will be considered within the same analytical frame, focusing on three basic elements: the historical and political context (i.e. structure as power-conferring relations); the “arenas of struggle” or those material elements that in these contexts may illuminate peasant agency; and the relational agency through the presence of social inequalities and tensions.

#### *3.1. The origins of European peasantries: a “golden age”?*

I have argued in other seeds that, if we take seriously a strict definition of “peasant” following authors such as Eric Wolf, Teodor Shanin, Robert Redfield, etc., based on the idea of the extraction of peasant production by other

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, “Self-made,” 214.

<sup>58</sup> Barrett, “A thesis.”

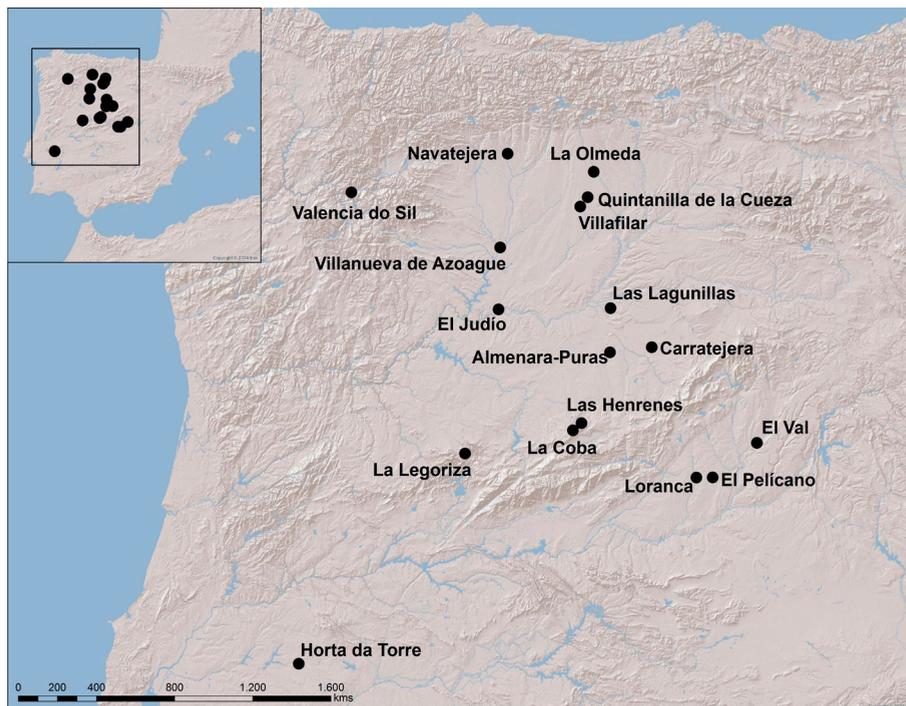


Figure 2. Sites mentioned in the paper. Map by author.

agents through rent, then the logical conclusion is that the origins of European peasantries should be placed in the aftermaths of the dismantling of the Roman Empire, as I will argue later. This idea, nonetheless controversial, has been shared by other authors such as Werner Rösener, whose history of the European peasantries begins precisely with the dismantling of the Roman Empire, or Michael Mitterauer, who argues that the specific development of the medieval domestic unit is what configures the specificities of European history.<sup>59</sup> Even not explicitly argued as such, Chris Wickham states that it is precisely with the dismantling of the Roman state that the autonomy of the peasantries increased, establishing a particular “Peasant Mode of Production” which dialectically confronted the Feudal Mode of Production.<sup>60</sup> This idea has had some impact in archaeological studies. The specific analysis of the archaeology of central Iberia led Alfonso Vigil-Escalera to establish the 5<sup>th</sup> century as the moment of emergence of the first peasant landscapes in the Iberian peninsula.<sup>61</sup> An extreme vision of this idea proposes that the early me-

<sup>59</sup> Rösener, *Los campesinos en la historia europea*; Mitterauer, *Warum Europa?*.

<sup>60</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

<sup>61</sup> Vigil, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*.

dieval ages was some sort of a “golden age” for medieval peasantries, something that has been criticized by other scholars, considering the economic crises of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD which implied the impoverishment of the whole Western Mediterranean, peasant-based societies included.<sup>62</sup> In this section, I will argue that the archaeological record suggests a causal relationship between the two phenomena, that it is precisely because of the increase of the level of autonomy of rural societies – and therefore, of its agency and capacity to act in the world – that the general picture has been read as one of economic crisis.

The period between approximately 400 and 450 is a crucial period that will pave the way for the next centuries. As Wickham states, nobody during the 4<sup>th</sup> century would have guessed what will happen in the next century as there was any signal of crisis in the change of century.<sup>63</sup> This seems to correspond with the archaeological record of the central and northwestern parts of the Iberian Peninsula. During the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century there are practically any fundamental nor structural transformations in the settlement pattern or the material culture. In fact, what we usually detect are transformations indicating more investment by the elites such as reforms in the big rural villas, the investment of both rural and urban communities in the funerary rituals or the economic expansion in the landscape. A good example of the latter is the site of Valencia do Sil, located in the region of Valdeorras, current Galicia. This site, dated between the 4<sup>th</sup> and mid 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and interpreted as a hub for the exploitation of metal, suggests the economic expansion of the territorial elites during the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup> Contemporarily, this was the peak of the expansion of the Roman rural villas and the investment of the elites on them as a way of promoting their status and control over the territory,<sup>65</sup> which included the control over the complex network of little farmsteads and settlements, better known for other territories,<sup>66</sup> but still very visible in the Iberian landscape.<sup>67</sup>

Since the second third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the evidence of structural change multiplied both in the urban and the rural world. Focusing on the latter, two are the main features I will be considering here: the abandonment and subsequent reoccupation of some spaces in the rural villas and the emergence of a new settlement pattern, spatially – but not functionally – linked to the rural villas. The final of the Roman villa in Western Med-

<sup>62</sup> Hodges, “The primitivism of the early medieval peasant in Italy?;” Ward-Perkins. *The fall of the Roman Empire*.

<sup>63</sup> Wickham, *The inheritance of Rome*.

<sup>64</sup> Tejerizo, Rodríguez, et al., “El final del Imperio Romano.”

<sup>65</sup> Chavarría, *El final de las villae*.

<sup>66</sup> Bowes, *The Roman Peasant Project 2009-2014*.

<sup>67</sup> Bermejo, “Roman peasant habitats”; Bermejo and Grau, *The archaeology of peasantry in Roman Spain*.

iterranean has been a major topic of inquiry in the last decades,<sup>68</sup> including specific analyses in the Iberian peninsula.<sup>69</sup> Even though there is yet a lack of particular case studies, a general overview shows hints of transformation in the rural villas during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, which included significant changes such as, for example, the construction of productive spaces in previous domestic areas.<sup>70</sup> This was documented in the villa of Navatejera (Villaquilambre, León), where an oven was constructed in the northeastern part of the villa during the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>71</sup> Similar changes occurred in the site of Villafilar (Cisneros, Palencia), where an oven was built partially destroying a prior barn.<sup>72</sup> (Fig. 3)

While these changes are significant enough, they can be interpreted still within the economic logics of the Roman Empire.<sup>73</sup> Probably they are showing the last attempts of the territorial elites to resist the economic and political crises of the 5<sup>th</sup> century at the expense of their status display in the Roman villas. However, this will not last long, and by the mid and third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century many Roman villas were abandoned, such as the big and sumptuous villas of La Olmeda, Almenara-Puras, Quintanilla de la Cueva and many more.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, many of them show signs of reoccupation through the presence of postholes, precarious walls, or temporal uses of spaces. Well known examples are the villa of El Val, where a cluster of postholes breaking a mosaic were interpreted as the construction of a hut inside the villa,<sup>75</sup> or La Olmeda, where mudwalls were documented in the domestic spaces of the villa.<sup>76</sup> Traditionally, these reoccupations have been interpreted as the remnants of squatters, sometimes related to the barbarian invasions, using the ancient villas as shelters.<sup>77</sup> However, new excavations are considering alternative explanations. A recent project at the Villa da Horta da Torre (Fronteira, Portugal) conducted by André Carneiro has unearthed different hints of occupation after the abandonment of the residential part of the villa which included animal bones, fireplaces or possible huts.<sup>78</sup> According to the excavators, these evidences may effectively suggest the presence of (non barbarian) squatters or temporary uses by passersby, but also the stable use of the villa by rural communities in the surroundings: “This population was familiar with the landscape and saw the villa as a salient ruin in their mental maps of the area.

<sup>68</sup> Brogiolo, Chavarría and Valenti, *Dopo la fine delle ville*; Castrorao, *La fine delle ville romane in Italia*; Lewit, *Villas, farms and the Late Roman rural economy*; Van Ossel, “De la ‘villa’ au village.”

<sup>69</sup> Carneiro, “The fate of villae;” Chavarría, *El final*.

<sup>70</sup> Chavarría, *El final*, 125

<sup>71</sup> Benítez and Miguel, “Relectura arqueológica de la villa romana de Navatejera (León),” 120-1.

<sup>72</sup> Strato, *Excavación arqueológica en extensión en el yacimiento de “Villafilar”*.

<sup>73</sup> Tejerizo, “The end of the world.”

<sup>74</sup> Chavarría, *El final*.

<sup>75</sup> Rascón, Méndez and Díaz, “La reocupación del mosaico,” 195-7.

<sup>76</sup> Palol and Cortes, “La villa romana de la Olmeda,” 19.

<sup>77</sup> Lewit, “Vanishing villa;” Rascón, Méndez and Díaz, “La reocupación del mosaico.”

<sup>78</sup> Carneiro, “O final das villae na Lusitânia romana.”



Figure 3. Oven partially destroying a Late Roman barn in Villafilar. Photo by STRATO.

This same population may also have felt some form of fascination concerning the dwelling.”<sup>79</sup>

This last interpretation is coherent with the emergence, contemporary to these changes, of a new type of settlement territorially related to the Roman villa, but with a very different functional and structural layout. These contexts are generally characterized by the presence of sunken featured buildings, mainly storage silos and huts, and little stone-footed buildings constructed close to a Roman villa and dated in the mid or second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps one of the best examples known for the Iberian Peninsula is the site of El Pelicano (Arroyomolinos, Madrid), a rural settlement occupied between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD widely excavated (aprox. 175,000 m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>80</sup> In the so-called sectors 09 and 10, some fireplaces and landfills were documented over a Late Roman complex dated in the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid and last third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, different sunken-featured buildings associated with a little cemetery – which included some furnished burials dated in the mid and second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century –, were located close to the prior

<sup>79</sup> Carneiro, “The fate,” 175.

<sup>80</sup> Vigil and Strato, “El registro arqueológico del campesinado,” 177-200.

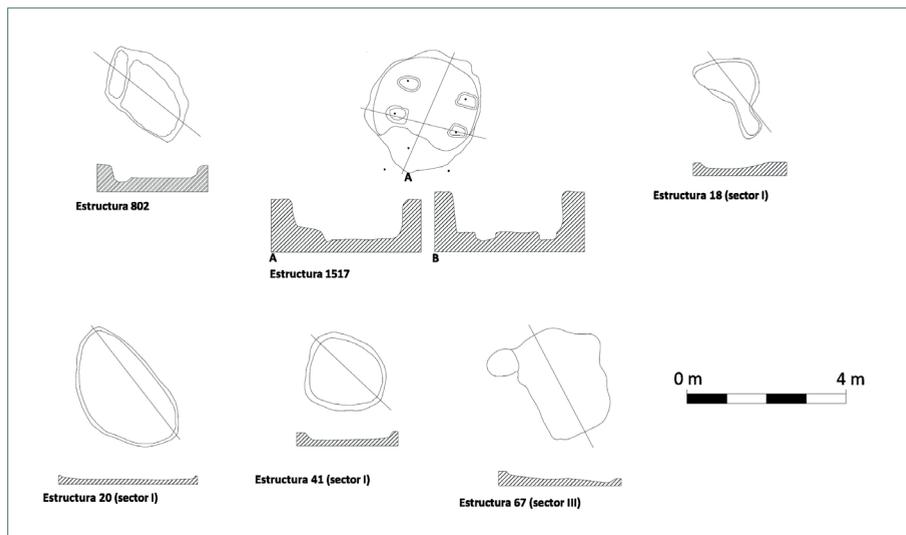


Figure 4. Sunken featured buildings in Carratejera, including the wine press used for a special deposit. Drawing by author.

evidence. This settlement was subsequently transformed in a dispersed village formed by different domestic units.

A similar case study is the site of Loranca (Fuenlabrada, Madrid). This site was extensively excavated between 2005 and 2006, unearthing a very complex rural site consisting in an Early and Late Roman rural complex altogether with two early medieval cemeteries.<sup>81</sup> As El Pelicano, the excavators documented both stone-footed buildings related to sunken featured buildings and storage silos dated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Before the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD these buildings were abandoned and the stone blocks were used for the construction of some of the burials of a poorly known early medieval village.<sup>82</sup>

A last good example could be the site of Carratejera (Navalmanzano, Segovia). This site was excavated in 2003 and 2007 as a consequence of the construction of a highway, which allowed for an extensive excavation.<sup>83</sup> (Fig. 4) The sequence of the site can be divided in two phases. The first one refers to a Late Roman rural occupation – including an oven abandoned in the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – related to a Roman villa probably situated 200 m. away, while the second shows the common features already described such as a cluster of 47 storage silos and near six sunken featured buildings. This second phase is dated in the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century considering the stratigraphical sequence and pottery assemblages. A very interesting feature coming from

<sup>81</sup> Oñate, “Las necrópolis altomedievales de Loranca;” Oñate and Barranco, *Memoria final*.

<sup>82</sup> Oñate and Barranco, *Memoria final*.

<sup>83</sup> Marcos, Sanz, et al., “La ocupación tardorromana en el yacimiento de Carratejera.”

this site is a rich deposit of metal objects – including horse blinkers, agrarian tools or personal objects – reusing the possible basis of a wine press and dated in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the nature of this type of deposits is unclear,<sup>84</sup> what is interesting to highlight here is that it shows a distinct rupture with the prior Late Roman occupation.

Although El Pelicano, Loranca or Carratejera are good examples of this phenomenon, they are not unique. Other sites that show these types of new settlements from the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century are, for example, the abovementioned site of Villafilar, Villanueva de Azoague,<sup>85</sup> El Judío<sup>86</sup> or Las Lagunillas,<sup>87</sup> just to mention some of them.<sup>88</sup> Thus, this type of settlement, far from being an exception, seems to be more the rule of a widespread process yet to be fully studied. However, what I would like to underline here are three main ideas. First, that there is a clear rupture in the settlement pattern during the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD closely related to the emergence of a new type of contexts that we can relate to peasant-based societies.<sup>89</sup> Second, that the material culture displayed in these sites suggests a high level of autonomy of these communities regarding the development of the domestic units, the management of their funerary rituals and the exploitation of the territory. Moreover, I would suggest that, in this historical context, the Roman villas acted as an arena of struggle for peasant agency, as they acted as a crucial node for the establishment of the new settlement pattern against the ancient Late Roman elite agencies. These peasant communities progressively disengaged from the old economic context, and thus, the general impression of an impoverishment of the conditions of life. In summary, if there is really a “golden age” of peasant autonomy, that will be, in the case of central and northwestern Iberia, the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. But, as Wickham stated, this type of peasant-based societies did not last long given that the elite and feudal powers “tended to be so much stronger than the former”,<sup>90</sup> something that will have enormous consequences for peasant agency during the early medieval ages.

### *3.2. The funerary contexts of early medieval villages as arenas of struggle for peasant agency: the case of La Coba (San Juan del Olmo, Ávila)*

One of the key topics within the Spanish medieval historiography has been the period between the collapse of the Visigothic kingdom and the emergence of the new states both in northern and southern Spain. A topic that, from the

<sup>84</sup> Morris and Jervis, “What’s so special?”

<sup>85</sup> López and Regueras, “Cerámicas tardorromanas de Villanueva de Azoague.”

<sup>86</sup> Strato, *Trabajos de excavación arqueológica en el yacimiento de “El Judío”*.

<sup>87</sup> Centeno, Palomino and Villadangos, “Contextos cerámicos.”

<sup>88</sup> For a more complete view on the phenomenon, see Tejerizo, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*, 116-23.

<sup>89</sup> Vigil, “Apuntes sobre la geneología política.”

<sup>90</sup> Wickham, “Conclusions,” 358.

beginning, has been subjected to controversies due to ideological approaches, that has burdened historical interpretations.<sup>91</sup> Recent researches, however, have tended to focus both in the local scale and the archaeological record to surpass these controversies in the pursuit of a coherent historical narrative.<sup>92</sup> My point here, altogether with other scholars,<sup>93</sup> is that a perspective from the development and dialectics of peasant-based agencies and how they managed their practices in the world may be a good strategy to overcome the setbacks of a still controversial issue. In particular, funerary remains, as has already been acknowledged (see above), and is still one of the best parcels of materiality to tackle the issue of agency and structural framing. For that purpose, I will focus on a particular case study from the central part of the Iberian Peninsula, that of La Coba (San Juan del Olmo, Ávila).

La Coba is a site located in a slight valley in a mountain range called the *Sierra de Ávila*, forming part of the *Sistema Central* which divides the Iberian Peninsula in two big plateaus. Specifically, La Coba was built occupying the central part of a valley which was used as a traditional pathway for cattle as it connects the highlands of the *Sierra de Ávila* with the lowlands of the Amblés valley, where the city of Ávila stands. These highlands have been the object of some archaeological projects which have documented a quite complex settlement pattern during the early medieval ages.<sup>94</sup> In the context of a community archaeology project, we have been excavating in the site from 2020 onwards, documenting an extensive early medieval village dated from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Moreover, what we were able to document is the presence of two different phases of the village, one which can be dated between the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century to mid 8<sup>th</sup> approximately, and a second phase centered in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This second phase supposed the restructuration of, at least, part of the settlement.

All said, this site was previously known precisely for its funerary remains. Surrounding the domestic areas there is a significant number of rock burials, 83 already recognised, and distributed in at least five different nuclei in a space of 30 hectares coexisting with a small communal cemetery of a dozen cist burials.<sup>95</sup> (Fig. 5) This coexistence is something interesting in itself, as it is quite rare in the context of early medieval ages in central Iberia. Furthermore, our hypothesis, to be confirmed in subsequent excavations, is that each of these nuclei of rock burials are related to different domestic units occupying the valley, which implied then the presence of a network formed by a central settlement of about 10-12 domestic units and 3-4 little farmsteads in the surroundings. For its part, the communal cemetery was the object of an

<sup>91</sup> Escalona and Martín, “The life and death of an historiographical folly”; García, “Denying the Islamic conquest.”

<sup>92</sup> Escalona, “The early Castilian peasantry.”

<sup>93</sup> Quirós, “An archaeology of ‘small worlds.’”

<sup>94</sup> Martín and Blanco, “Ancestral memories.”

<sup>95</sup> Martín, “Enterramientos, memoria social y paisaje.”



Figure 5. Rock burials at the site of La Coba. Photo by author.

archaeological excavation in the year 2012, which resulted uncovered a furnished burial dated in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Another interesting aspect of La Coba, shared with other settlements in the surroundings such as Las Henrenes or La Legoriza, is that the material culture shows some hints of social inequalities within the community itself. Specifically, in all these sites liriform brooches and different types of rings – dated in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries – were in domestic contexts, which can be interpreted as the property of significant individuals or families of the village. These objects contrast starkly with the rest of the material culture, absent of pottery imports, other personal objects, or elements of prestige. In summary, early medieval villages characterized by peasant-based communities formed by relatively equal domestic units but with the presence of some inner subtle inequalities.

What is interesting in the case of La Coba is the possibility to make criss-cross analysis of the funerary and the domestic contexts, something that is not very common in the Iberian context.<sup>96</sup> Our hypothesis, considering all the available information, is that there is a correspondence between the development of the domestic and the funerary contexts. In other words, that the communal cemetery corresponds to the first phase of the site and the extension of the rock burials with the second occupation of La Coba. In quantitative terms,

<sup>96</sup> Quirós and Castellanos, *Identidad y etnicidad*.

this is very coherent in the sense that the number of burials and the chronological scope of the domestic occupation in both phases seems logical (15-20 cist burials for a one century occupation and near 85 rock burials for two and a half centuries). Moreover, the only furnished burial that was excavated is very coherent with the chronological span of the first phase of La Coba, between mid 7th and mid 8th century approx.

This potential correspondence is highly interesting in terms of peasant agency as it shows two ways of displaying the funerary ritual regarding two structural and social milieus, understood as those “power-conferring relations.” Here I would like to underline some ideas as working hypothesis regarding the question of peasant agency. One of them is that there is an interesting connection between the type of funerary ritual and the political background in which they are displayed. The late 7<sup>th</sup> century seems to be a period of important changes at the local scale in central Iberia, where an expansion of new formed settlements seems to be occurring in the highlands.<sup>97</sup> The specific agents behind this expansion are not clear. Some scholars tend to underline the role of the Visigothic state while others highlight the role of the territorial elites. However, in both the scenarios, local peasant-based communities seem to be under a relevant political and economic pressure whose arena of struggle is the village and, specifically, the funerary rituals. As it has been repeatedly argued, early medieval cemeteries are (one of) the locus of communal tensions and identities regarding social inequalities at the level of the community.<sup>98</sup> Thus, what we usually find is communal cemeteries in which all the community is buried but, at the same time, with differences in the specific materiality used, showing the existence of social differences.<sup>99</sup>

This panorama completely changes during the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD with the collapse of the Visigothic state and, moreover, of the structural milieu in which the elites operated which also affected the agency at a local scale.<sup>100</sup> The control of territorial elites had to be reconstructed under other premises (or other structure) and thus under other material forms. The hypothesis is that all these political changes had some correspondence with the changes at the level of villages such as La Coba, which probably was concentrating the prior settlement pattern. A second life of the village in a different social and political milieu which required different expressions for the death. In this case, and following the analysis by I. Martín Viso, rock burials in the central part of the Iberian Peninsula are especially underlining the agency of the domestic units.<sup>101</sup> What I would add to this idea is that this occurs at the expense of the prior importance of the community, or better, that this new language

<sup>97</sup> Martín, “Espacios sin Estado.”

<sup>98</sup> Halsall, “Ethnicity and early medieval cemeteries.”

<sup>99</sup> Pohl, “Introduction. Strategies of identification”; Vigil, “Prácticas y ritos funerarios.”

<sup>100</sup> Carvajal and Tejerizo, “The early medieval state.”

<sup>101</sup> Martín, “Enterramientos.”

expresses a new form of constructing communities and, therefore, a new form of displaying the agency.

#### 4. *Towards an archaeology of early medieval peasant agency in central and northern Iberia*

These two case studies tried not to exhaust all the possibilities of a potential archaeology of early medieval peasant agency, but to show the utility of the theoretical concept of agency applied to peasant-based societies in early medieval ages as a particular historical epoch, as suggested by Barrett through his proposal of an archaeology of inhabitation (see above). In this regard, I would argue that not only a complex conceptualization of agency – as the one I have tried to delineate in the first section of the paper – may illuminate the materiality of peasantries in the past, but also to do justice to their contribution to history, as Christopher Dyer has recently defended.<sup>102</sup> However, as all the examples previously discussed show, this archaeology of early medieval peasant agency should consider some specificities in order not to fall in the trap of the overoptimistic approach to agency.

The first one is to analyse peasant-agency contextually, always in dialectical opposition to the structure in which it is inserted.<sup>103</sup> This complex understanding of peasant agency gives the possibility not only to clearly define what are its specific material expressions in a determined locus, but also to make a historical account of it. The structural context of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Iberia offered the material conditions for the emergence of a specific form of peasant-based societies in large parts of Europe as the dismantling and collapse of the Roman state and, therefore, of the forms of control of territorial elites, left a space for the development of this type of communities. However, this process has its own history and dialectics, and the development of the subsequent network of farmsteads and villages during the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries took place in another structural milieu as well as those peasant-based societies of the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In summary, the acknowledgement and analysis of the structural conditions in which agency displays is crucial for building specific narratives and models for “particular historical epochs or periods”, retaking M. Johnson’s words.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, what I have tried to show through the case studies is that this parts from the recognition of the specific arenas of struggle in which this agency is materially displayed. Thus, settlement pattern in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and funerary remains in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century in the specific contexts analysed here have been proposed as those arenas of struggle for considering peasant agency. Other possibilities may be equally good, such as,

<sup>102</sup> Dyer, *Peasants making history*.

<sup>103</sup> Callinicos, *Making*.

<sup>104</sup> Johnson, “Self-made,” 214

for example, storage silos, agrarian practices, or local churches, as analysed in other seeds.<sup>105</sup> Quoting Gerald Cohen again, “what is materially possible defines what is socially possible.” In any case, this proposal opens the possibility to an archaeological analysis of peasant agency in the long duration and also to reconsider the question of resistance during early medieval ages.

On the contrary, other evidence in some contexts may be not delving into peasant agency but, as Alfredo González Ruibal’s abovementioned example showed, the capacity of the system to blur power relationships. For example, in a compelling analysis of the use of supernatural elements to cope with everyday life, Thomas Kohl suggests that elements such as saint’s election, the rituals for the control of the weather or the choice of a local church to pray are expressions of peasant agency. However, as he also cautiously states, these may work also as a tool for making peasants more legible before power: “Still, peasants made conscious decisions about the way in which they wanted to interact with supernatural forces – which saint they venerated, which shrines they visited in times of crisis, which offerings they made to them. In doing this, they also considered the people and institutions who were linked to the saints, because they controlled the saints’ resting places”.<sup>106</sup> The warning here is to be cautious when reading materiality through the lenses of agency for not confusing agency with making actions or the capacity to act in the world with the power relationships upon which social inequality and exploitation is built.

This leads us to a second specificity of the archaeology of early medieval peasant agency, that is the integration of the relational agency as a central element for analysis. Following the definition of peasant suggested here, one of its characteristics is that it depends on the relationship with other social groups, mainly the elites that extracts part of their production.<sup>107</sup> This relationship, altogether with the structural milieu shapes peasant agency, as seen in both the examples. In the case of the 5<sup>th</sup> century settlement pattern, the increasing of autonomy of peasant-bases societies relates with a reduction of the level of control by the elites. Furthermore, the agency displayed in the funerary contexts of early medieval villages relates to a dialectic tension between the domestic unit, the peasant community, and the local and territorial elites. It can be suggested through these examples that the capacity of peasantries to display agency and resistance is in dialectical opposition to the capacity of control by the external agents, be the state or the territorial and local elites.<sup>108</sup>

This is a line that is being currently explored by other scholars, opening new and compelling avenues of future research. A good example in this regard is the one developed by Antoinette Huijbers on the peasant culture of the Meuse region. Building on an anthropological perspective of how peasant culture is built through practice regarding other groups actions and its spatial

<sup>105</sup> Quirós, “An archaeology of ‘small worlds’”; Tejerizo and Carvajal, “Confronting Leviathan.”

<sup>106</sup> Kohl, “Peasant agency and the supernatural,” 113.

<sup>107</sup> Wickham, “How did the feudal economy work?,” 37.

<sup>108</sup> Carvajal and Tejerizo, “The early medieval state.”

implementation, she analyses the changes on this culture through the long duration, concluding that “peasants and aristocrats shaped one another on the basis of their shared history of mutual involvement”.<sup>109</sup>

In summary, what I wanted to stress here is that, if we aim to make complex narratives of peasant societies in the past, we should acknowledge the inner complexity of the concept itself. Complementary, in order to overcome naive approaches to the effective capacity of these societies to impact the social milieu and their response to the surrounding system we should take care of how we interpret their specific agency through the material record. What I have argued here, a relational and materialist approach both to peasant-based societies and their agency seems a very compelling path to explore and to reflect on in the future. As Dobres and Robb states: “Agency does not provide an endpoint but a starting point for making sense of the materiality of social reproduction, past and present. The goal of constructing appropriate methodologies for studying agency is not to ‘find agency’ in the archaeological record” but to better tackle the complexities of past societies.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Huijbers, “Peasant culture of the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region.”

<sup>110</sup> Dobres and Robb, “Doing,” 164.

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# **The tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada). Social change in the rural Nasrid world**

by Alberto García Porras

The aim of this work is the study of certain buildings of Granada, constructed during the last medieval centuries: the so-called “Torres de Alquería”. Their functions will be analysed, especially those linked to the defence of rural communities, which has been their traditional purpose, though new ways of interpreting these buildings will be proposed. We also include a case study: the Agicampe Tower. A building that would correspond to this typology. We present the results of the recent archaeological excavations carried out in this building and its surroundings, as well as the impact on the settlement dynamics of the area, changes that could extend to the rest of the rural space of the Nasrid kingdom.

Late Middle Ages, Al-Andalus, Nasrid kingdom, Rural fortification, Settlement dynamics, Agricultural production.

## *1. Introduction*

Over the last few decades, our archaeological knowledge about Andalusí society has increased significantly, especially since the late 1970s. To a large extent, this followed the work of a number of French scholars, such as Pierre Guichard, André Bazzana and Patrice Cressier, whose publications had an immediate effect upon the work of Spanish historians and archaeologists.<sup>1</sup>

Guichard, who was strongly influenced by structuralist anthropology, was probably the most influential among these authors. He placed the dialectic relation between two key structures – the central authority of the Andalusí

<sup>1</sup> García Porras, “Estrategias y formas,” 200.

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state, in all its expressions and in different scales, and peasant communities, which followed their own internal logic – at the centre of Andalusi society; he thus drew a picture of al-Andalus that went beyond the sort of événementiel history that earlier historians had prioritised. In addition, he showed that this dynamic was not exclusive to al-Andalus, but could also be attested in other contemporary Islamic societies. This created a link between al-Andalus and other “oriental” societies, dispelling the notion of Andalusi exceptionalism vis-à-vis other medieval Islamic horizons.<sup>2</sup>

This new historical interpretation of al-Andalus had a very characteristic material expression. Andalusi settlements began being interpreted from this perspective, as sources of social and historical evidence. Cities, fortresses and other sites were interpreted socially, and their features were compared with those of similar structures in other social formations.<sup>3</sup>

Many authors followed the trail left by these authors. Antonio Malpica, for instance, expressed this clearly when he pointed out that

Dealing with Andalusi society in any period is dealing with a tributary-mercantile formation. This formation encompasses two main elements: the State and the peasant groups. They were both similarly important, and none can be understood without the other. Two historiographical positions predominate. On the one hand, those who think that peasant communities were the key factor, and the State something vague and distant. On the other hand, those who see State action as the most important variable. Therefore, some believe that rural communities were autonomous and that cities, where the king dwelled, had no real entity, being a result of a political executive act.<sup>4</sup>

Once these terms had been established, the following step was to determine the nature of the relationship between these two main components; how far did the State’s influence permeate the peasant communities that articulated the territory, and how did these communities affect the policies adopted by the State. The written record – Andalusi records and Christian documents from the aftermath of the conquest of al-Andalus – is scarce and uneven, and leaves many aspects in the dark. Therefore, the contribution of archaeology has always been regarded as crucial.<sup>5</sup> Soon, the combination of the archaeological and the written records began to show that the population of al-Andalus was organised around three key units: cities, castles and rural hamlets (*alquerías*).

It seems quite clear that cities, and their immediate hinterland, were directly related to political power, which resided in them. Even more distant fortifications, especially those in frontier areas (most notably during the Nas-

<sup>2</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus*; Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*; Guichard, *Expansión árabe*.

<sup>3</sup> Bazzana, Cressier and Guichard, *Chateaux ruraux*; Bazzana, *Maison d'al-Andalus*.

<sup>4</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Últimas tierras*, 749.

<sup>5</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 257, pointed this out in reference to rural castles: “lacking Andalusi documents that provide precise information about the material structure of castles in the region around Valencia, we can only but wait for archaeological data, combined with the Christian texts of the period of the conquest”.

rid period, in which they were essential for the survival of the kingdom), were clearly associated to the central authority of the state, and many of them were built directly on the state's initiative.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, Andalusi castles responded to a different set of dynamics, being the reflection of the occupation, exploitation, and collective management of the territory by peasant communities, which is not to say that the power of the state was entirely absent.

*Alquerías* constituted the bottom tier of Andalusi settlement structure. These were rural hamlets inhabited by homogenous and socially stable groups formed by several families; small landowners whose lands were spread around the settlement.<sup>7</sup> According to the above-mentioned authors, *alquerías* were not under the authority of major land owners or manorial structures, like in the feudal world. Their relationship with the state was direct but uneven. In many instances, this relationship was channelled through tribute, and in fact "the *alquería* was the basic source of state revenue".<sup>8</sup> Taxes were often collected by state agents (*mušārīf*), whose profile, known through the written sources, is rather diffuse.

These communities had their own institutions to solve internal conflict, manage economic and social activities and, occasionally, mediate in the relationship of peasant communities with the state. Sometimes, local power acted as delegates of the state in the rural areas,<sup>9</sup> although according to Guichard, this delegation never crystallised in "permanent manorial features comparable to those that existed in the West".<sup>10</sup> Although it does not seem that authority was a more or less permanent prerogative of certain families, it is likely that, over time, a degree of social hierarchisation ensued as a result of the "unequal distribution of production"<sup>11</sup>. In any case, the administrative dependence between central and local authorities seems close enough for fluctuations in their relative standing to occur, and for peasant communities to never be able to act totally independently from the state. Taxation remained the most significant aspect of their relationship, for Andalusi society was an eminently tributary society.

Written references for the peasant world are scarce, isolated, and marginal. There are occasional mentions to local authorities; castles were often inhabited by *alcaldes* and *cadíes*, defined by Ibn Huḍayl (14<sup>th</sup> century) as military officers under the amīr, with approximately one thousand men at their command.<sup>12</sup> This is a very narrow definition, because very often the military function was secondary in fortresses that were far from the frontier, and in other instances the authority of these officials also extended to the adminis-

<sup>6</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Entre la arqueología".

<sup>7</sup> Guichard, "El problema;" Barceló, "El diseño;" Lagardère, *Campagnes et paysans*.

<sup>8</sup> Glick, *Paisajes de conquista*; Barceló, "La primerencia."

<sup>9</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 376.

<sup>10</sup> Guichard, 439.

<sup>11</sup> Barceló, "Visperas de feudales," 107.

<sup>12</sup> Peláez Rovira, *El Emirato nazarí*, 127.

tration of justice. According to some authors, in the Nasrid kingdom these officials were directly appointed by the crown “regardless of their effective relationship with the territory”. This suggests that “their relationship with the local population travelled along socio-political lines related to the defence and control of the territory”. From this point of view, “the delegation of central authority at the local level was an imposition of supra-local authority that the local communities were forced to accept”.<sup>13</sup> *Alcaides* were seconded in rural *alquerías* by *alfaquíes* and other officials of different rank, whose function is still to be characterised in detail.

Therefore, political power in the rural areas is still imperfectly understood, as the scope and limits of the relationship of central government and peasant communities are blurred and changing. We also need to determine to what extent local institutions were imposed from above, or tolerated by the central authority.

From an archaeological perspective, the analysis of rural settlements can provide important data for the links between these two levels, and this is the subject of an ongoing project which aims to analyse the territorial organisation of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada (see Acknowledgements).

## 2. *Alquería towers*

The studies undertaken by the French scholars alluded above established a wide typology of fortified buildings and settlements, each type playing a well-defined role: urban citadels were walled precincts situated in eminent positions within or nearly cities, and their position suggested that they operated independently from the city in which they were located; frontier fortresses were built in strategic positions, and settlements often formed around them, being visually connected with networks of watchtowers from which the territory could be surveyed; castles associated to permanent rural settlements; refuge-castles, located in hard-to-access mountainous areas far from communication routes and major settlements; and tower-*alquerías*, known in French as *Tour de hameau ou de petit village*.<sup>14</sup>

The most general interpretation is that the settlement hierarchy established by these French scholars responded to degrees of proximity to the central authority on one end and to peasant communities on the other. More recently, Patrice Cressier confirmed this point by dividing fortifications into two categories, according to their relationship with the central authority of the state and with the peasant communities, again regarding these two institutions as the key poles around which Andalusí society was configured.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Peláez Rovira, 132, 136-7.

<sup>14</sup> Bazzana, Cressier and Guichard, *Chateaux ruraux*, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Cressier, “Agua, fortificaciones,” 406.

Towers can belong to both these categories: those built by local communities are known as *alquería*-tower or *vega*-tower and those built by an external authority as residential tower or watchtower.

Therefore, although towers were regarded as a specific type of fortification, Bazzana's and Guichard's interpretation presented these towers as characteristic elements of a number of *alquerías* that emerged in the vicinity of the city of Valencia rather late (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century), in response to Aragonese military pressure. Their function was "to defend the *alquerías* of the *Huerta*, forming an early-warning system for the city".<sup>16</sup> As such, they aimed to defend certain rural communities that were far from the city and major castles. Although these buildings are closely linked to peasant settlements, but "stood out" in the rural landscape, they conceived these structures related to peasant communities, but were considered infrequent with respect to the usual peasant settlement structures. In some cases even Bazzana and Guichard<sup>17</sup> suggested that these buildings could be related to aristocratic elites.

To these interpretations we must add that previously Leopoldo Torres Balbás, conservative architect of the Alhambra (Granada) already recognized and superficially studied the Nasrid farmhouse towers, and maintained that the basic function of these towers was "to serve as a refuge for the peasants and inhabitants of the nearby farmhouses in case of danger".<sup>18</sup> It seems clear that the issue is still open after these initial studies. This interpretation must be now revised based on new analyzes under new interpretative paradigms.

Manuel Ación, with whom we agree, already pointed out the need to review these buildings. He considered that these towers played a "disrupting role" in the general proposals advanced by these French scholars, and that too many authors have followed these proposals uncritically. For instance, the designation "*torre-alquería*" has been systematically attached to all residential towers other than watchtowers, "being related to a collective defensive function". In this paper we intend to review these initial interpretations based on the investigations we have carried out in the area of Granada.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. *Alquería towers in Granada*

In a recent survey of the territory of Granada we have identified 30 *alquería* towers, although there is written evidence for 54 more<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 1). In addition to this, 38 buildings have been labelled as possible *alquería* towers and need to be analysed in more detail. Based on the written evidence, therefore, it is likely that their original number was much larger than the current

<sup>16</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, "Tours de defense," 93.

<sup>17</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Torres Balbás, "Torre," 198.

<sup>19</sup> Ación Almansa, "Torres/burūy," 21.

<sup>20</sup> Fábregas García and González Arévalo, "Formas de integración."



Figure 1. *Alquería* Towers found in the province of Granada.

tally suggests, as already pointed out by Leopoldo Torres Balbás, who wrote that “few of these structures have survived”.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a few of the towers that we have categorized as possible *alquería* towers may present *sui generis* features, so it is not implausible that the final list will grow.

The towers identified to date are found in several districts of Granada, from E to W (Fig. 2 above): Huéscar, Baza, Marquesado del Cenete, Tierra de Guadix, Montes de Granada, Vega de Granada, Quempe, Valle de Lecrín, Tierra de Loja and Alhama. Considering the hinterland of major Nasrid cities (Fig. 2 below), it is not surprising that the number of towers situated under the direct influence of Granada is significantly higher than those found in the territories of Baza, Guadix and Loja. In fact, nearly half of all towers identified are situated in the capital’s hinterland. The second in number of towers is Loja, followed by Guadix and Baza. In these instances, the towers are invariably situated in flat areas in the farmlands around Granada and Loja and the *Hoyas* of Guadix and Baza. Only occasionally are they situated on small knolls surrounded by farmland or in areas dominated by a more abrupt topography (such as the Valley of Lecrín), but even in this case the towers are built in small flat areas or valleys. No *alquería* towers have been identified in mountainous areas (for instance, in the Alpujarra or the northern slopes of

<sup>21</sup> Torres Balbás, “Torre,” 190.

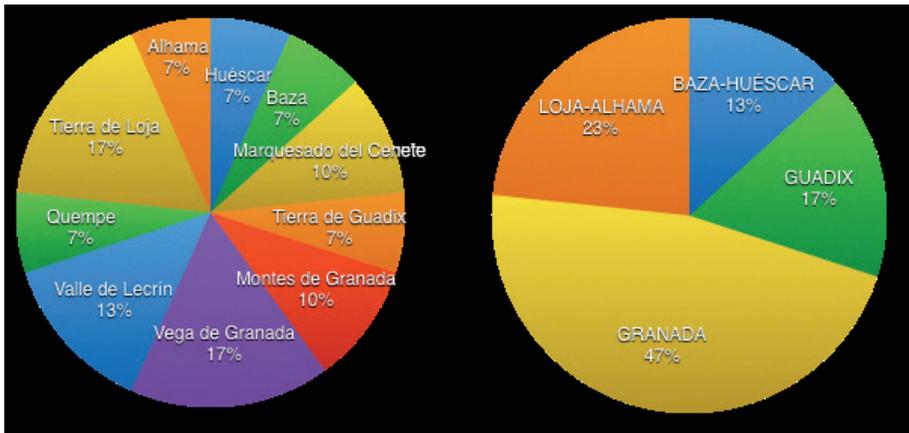


Figure 2. Towers identified in districts of Granada (above) and hinterland of the major Nasrid cities (below).

Sierra Nevada). They are also absent from areas in which the *hışn-alquería* system, a key feature of Andalusí territorial organisation, was well consolidated, that is, in those areas in which the territory was organised around major defensive settlements. (Fig. 2)

Returning to the need to review the functions of these towers already expressed above, we can observe after a careful analysis of their location, that these buildings were not only erected for defensive reasons. There is little doubt that defence was a major concern, and the existence of defensive features around some of these towers supports this interpretation, but it is also clear, on close examination, that most known towers were not large enough to hold the entire population of the *alquería* or *alquerías* under their protection. If we also take into consideration that some of them present other features such as water cisterns (leading the Castilians to interpret them as farmhouses), it seems likely that they were primarily used to store agricultural surplus and livestock, rather than for other purposes.

#### 4. *The Tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada)*

The farmhouse of La Torre, in Loja (Granada), is located in the southern slopes of the Alamedilla hills, in a wide estate called Agicampe or Agicampo, near the homonymous stream. The water flow is rather generous (between 30 and 19 litres per second), but the associated irrigation system is smaller than others found in the district (approximately 30 hectares)<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 3). There is

<sup>22</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5; Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 401-4; Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 209-11.

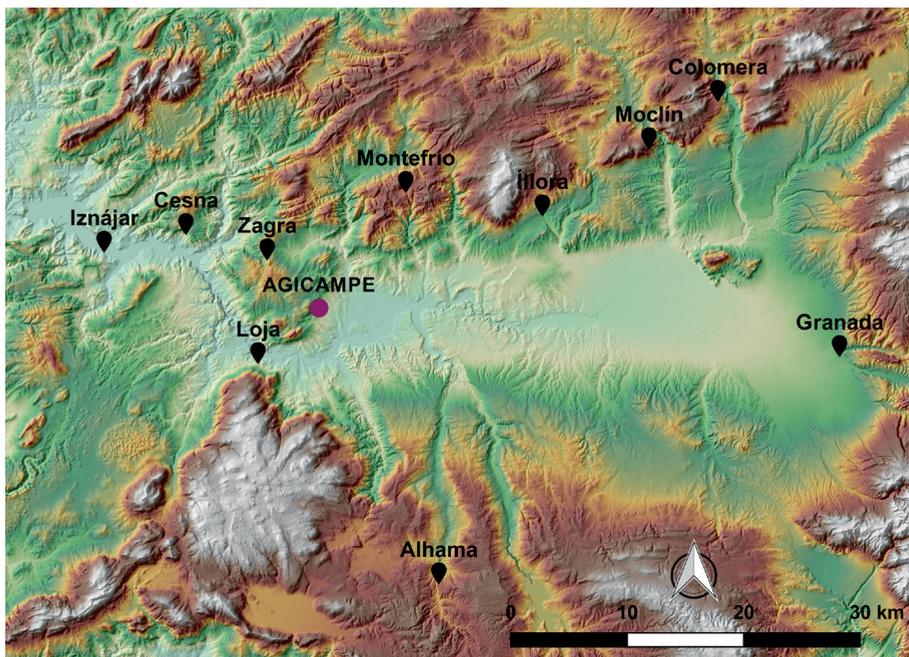


Figure 3. Location of the Agicampe Tower Farmhouse in the Vega of Granada-Loja.

evidence for early settlement during the Andalusí period. According to Iḥāṭa de Ibn al-Jaṭīb (14<sup>th</sup> century), the site existed as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is referred to as Šikanb, after the arrival of a Yemeni who, according to other authors, designed and constructed the irrigation system there.<sup>23</sup>

The tower that lends its name to the farmhouse was built, according to various authors, in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, when the frontier between Granada and Castile was established in the Sub-Baetic ranges.<sup>24</sup> It is also likely that other defensive features were also built alongside it. After the Castilian conquest, it seems that the *alquería* was largely abandoned and reduced to being a mere farmhouse, a common phenomenon in the aftermath of the conquest, especially in the district of Los Montes, where the settlement pattern changed substantially (Fig. 4).

<sup>23</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 212.

<sup>24</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 220; Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 403; García Pulido, “Sistema constructivo,” 380; García Pulido, “Estudio preliminar;” García Pulido, “Consolidation.”



Figure 4. Aerial photo of the ‘Cortijo de la Torre’ in Agicampe (3d model from a photograph from a drone).

## 5. *The territory*

The activities undertaken in the area during the archaeological study of the tower included the survey of the surrounding area. Other researchers had previously examined this area, so some preliminary evidence was available.<sup>25</sup>

The area was divided into several survey sectors. Sector A is the area around the tower and the farmhouse. Sector B is a wide expanse to the east of the tower, where the farmhouses of Chopo and Durano lie. Sector C, to the west of the tower, is the area known as Monte.

Survey area A is the closest to the tower and includes all the land around it and part of the slope of the Alamedilla range. The survey of this wide area yielded abundant Nasrid and Early Modern pottery, especially in the southern sub-sector. A few fragments of pottery dating to Antiquity and Late Antiquity were also found to the north of the tower. Much of this material will have been washed down the hill slope, from sector C (Fig. 5).

Survey area B is a wide expanse to the southeast of the tower and farmhouse. An *acequia* ran down the slope, reaching the farmhouses of Chopo and Durano, beyond the royal road of Agicampe (a road for livestock known as “cordel de Huétor y Granada”). The survey of this sector has yielded Late Medieval material disseminated over a wide area between the farmhouses. These materials are dated to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, so it is to be assumed that the settlement located near the farmhouses has a similar chro-

<sup>25</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5.

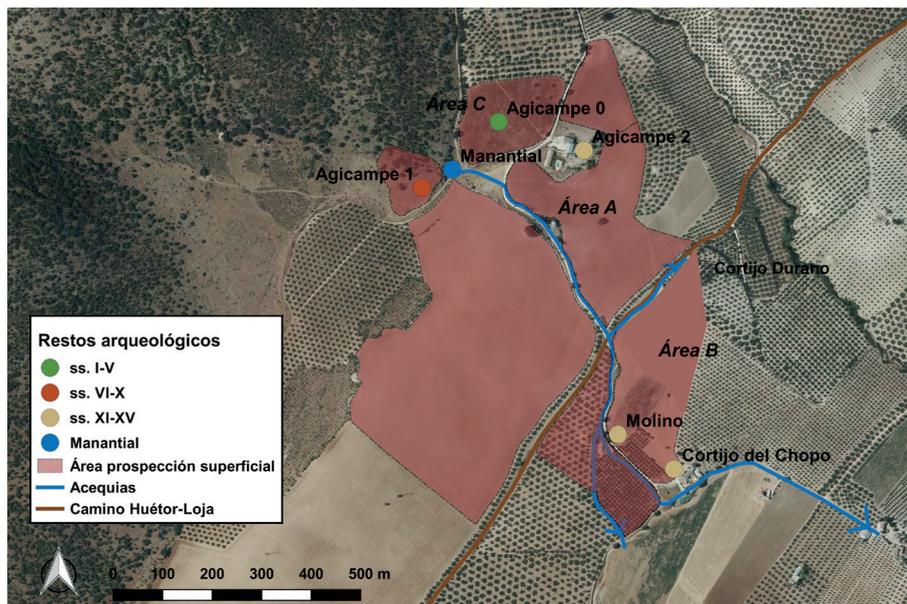


Figure 5. Areas established in archaeological survey and archaeological sites.

nology. The presence of the *acequia*, which is fed by the Agicampe stream, and its proximity to the farmhouse makes us suggest that all these elements formed a close-knit unit constituted by three *alquerías* or one with three different nuclei.

Survey area C, to the northwest and west of the tower, yielded, in the area that is closest to the farmhouse, a large amount of material, including flint cores and points, probably Chalcolithic in date, and abundant fragments of pottery dated to Ancient, the Early Medieval (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century) and the Caliphate (glazed ceramics) periods. This suggests that the site was long-lived; Late Antique, Early Medieval and Caliphate-period materials are especially abundant. The site appears to have been abandoned in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 6).

The most significant find of the survey was the discovery of a large quadrangular building (20 x 25 m) on the steep slope. The building, which we have called the Agicampe I site, was constituted by a substantial central courtyard and surrounding rooms. It was badly affected by erosion. The excavation of the building yielded evidence for Early Andalusí occupation (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century), but no post-Caliphate remains were attested. Although the building is of great interest, and for this reason it has previously been a case study<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 7).

<sup>26</sup> García Porras and Alonso Valladares, “El yacimiento.”

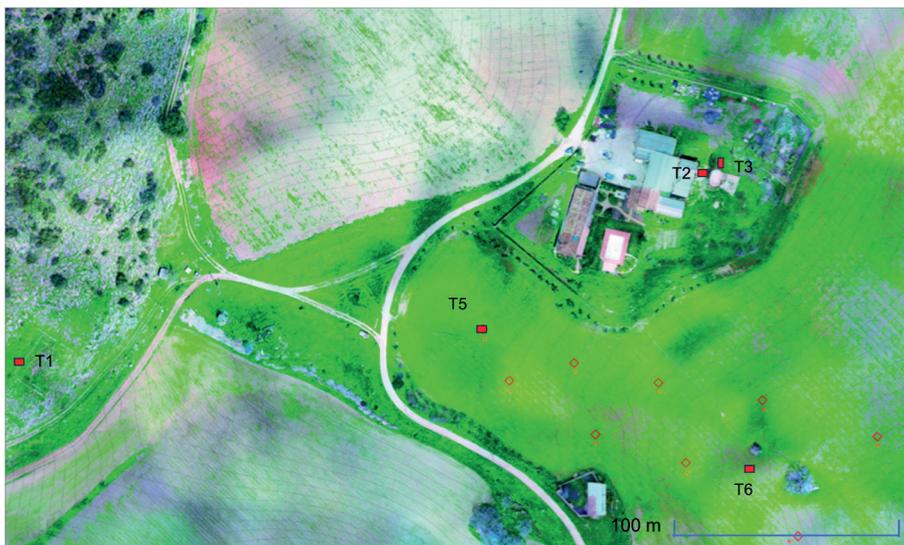


Figure 6. Trench carried out during our 2018 intervention (T1: Trench 1; T2: Trench 2; T3: Trench 3; T5: Trench 5; T6: Trench 6).



Figure 7. Building located in the prospecting área C. Agicampe I site.

## 6. *The fields*

In addition to this, we examined old photographs and the results of a LIDAR flight, focusing on the field to the south of the tower in order to ascertain its agricultural potential, as the exploitation of these fields seemed to go far back in time. We analysed the edaphic potential by taking a few coring samples. These provided detailed evidence concerning the depth of the archaeological layers, the archaeological potential of the soil and the nature and composition of the deposits. Samples were taken to both the southeast and the northwest of the tower. Following this first exploration, we made trench in the most promising areas, some of which found the geological substratum fairly close to the surface.<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 8)

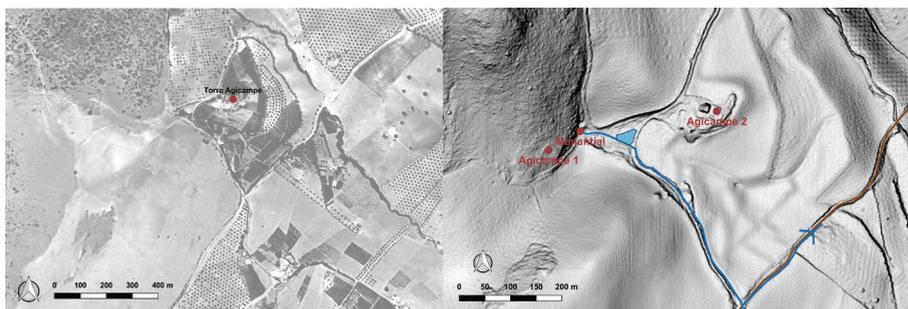


Figure 8. Aerial photo of the American flight (1956) and LIDAR flight.

The point of contact between geological levels and sediments was found to contain a number of fragments of Late Medieval Pottery, especially near the farmhouse, so we can assume that in the Late Medieval period the geological substratum was visible in some areas.

Trench 5 and 6 were the most successful. Trench 6 was situated in the central area of the field to the southeast of the farmhouse. There, the remains of a wall, 1 m high, was found; the wall was interpreted as a terracing wall.

The results of trench 5 were particularly encouraging. The excavation allowed the identification of an agricultural terrace dated to the medieval period, based on the associated ceramic assemblage. This agricultural field was later sealed by a layer of deposits on which another terrace, supported by a masonry wall, was found. Above this wall, a substantial layer, containing a large number of charcoals remains (which were sampled), was found. This layer was covered by more recent agricultural deposits (Fig. 9-10).

The great interest of this trench encouraged us to take micromorphology and phytolite samples from the section. Micromorphology samples aimed to characterise the formation processes of soils and understand the agricultural

<sup>27</sup> Sampling and analysis were carried out by a team led by Aleks Pluskowski from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Reading.



Figure 9. Old cultivation terraces located in Profile S of Trench 5 in the field adjacent to the 'Cortijo de la Torre' in Agicampe.

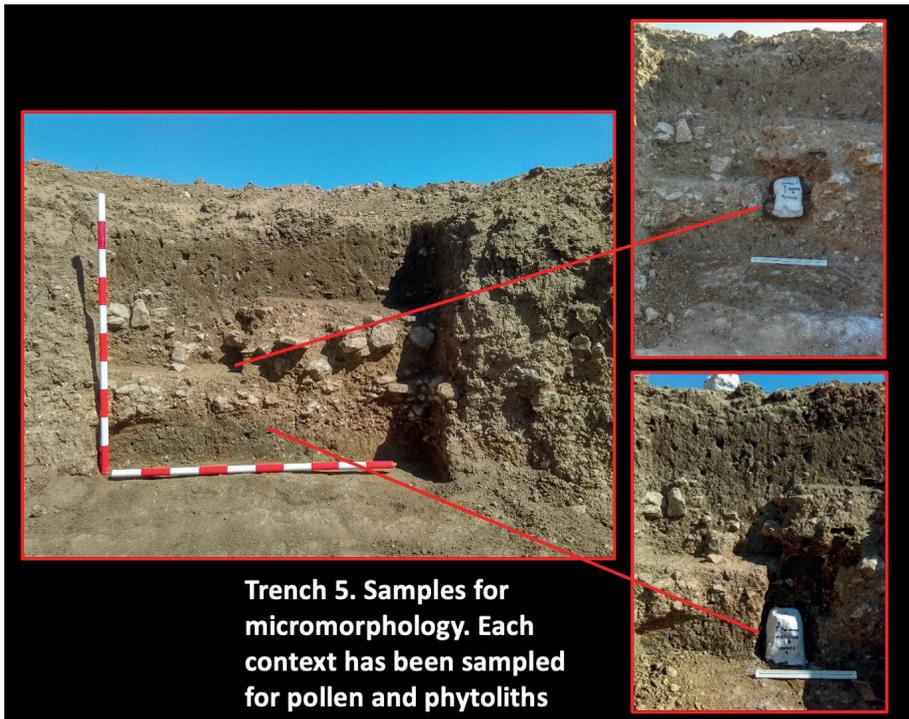


Figure 10. Micromorphology samples taken in trench 5 (R. Banerjea).

management of the terraces, and phytolites were sampled to identify the use of fertilisers and characterise crops. The analysis of phytolites can help to answer archaeological and paleo-environmental questions, as well as to provide evidence for the origin and dissemination of crops, the diet, agricultural practices, crop processing and the exploitation of plant resources for craft and industrial purposes.

Micromorphology analysis has contributed to characterise Nasrid agricultural terraces. According to this analysis, the soils were fertilised with domestic waste, including burnt bone and wood, manure, fish bones and eggshell, which may have modified the soil's micromorphology.

The analyses also suggest that the soils were likely irrigated. The loss of the soil's natural porosity led to fine sediments taking the place of air pockets in the coarser sediment, and certain components were dissolved and precipitated as a result of irrigation. In addition, the identification of newly formed shapeless iron and manganese nodules could suggest that the soils were exposed to alternate periods of arid and humid conditions. Geochemical analyses could go a long way in confirming that these soils were irrigated during the Nasrid period.

Finally, the analyses also provided evidence for the burning of vegetal stubble after the harvest, as suggested by the presence of charcoal, fragments of burnt soil and phytolites. This evidence only concerns the upper soils (the soil was regenerated seasonally) where abundant remains of burnt grassy phytolites (which may have included cereal) were found, although the temperature reached by the fire and its duration could not be determined.

It seems clear that the area around the tower of Agicampe was cultivated intensively during the Nasrid period, and that agricultural practices there involved fertilising, irrigation and stubble burning.<sup>28</sup>

## 7. *The tower*

The most significant architectural element in Agicampe is the tower. The tower, built in masonry bound with mortar, laid down in horizontal courses, was oval in plan; the stones used in the lower courses are larger than those used in the upper courses.<sup>29</sup> The tower is unusual in terms of both plan and construction technique.<sup>30</sup> The interior opens to two rooms covered by an excellent domed brick ceiling, built in a similar technique as that found in Torre de Romilla and some rooms in the Alhambra and the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo,<sup>31</sup> which is remarkable for a building located in a rural setting. The access

<sup>28</sup> The results of these investigations were published in García Porras, Pluskowski, and Banerjee, "Gestión de los recursos."

<sup>29</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 375.

<sup>30</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 219

<sup>31</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 382-3.

to the interior is through a doorway open to the eastern façade and constituted by three large blocks of carved stone. The doorway is situated 6 m above the floor level, so a wooden staircase and platform must have existed outside. The upper room has openings to the lower room and the roof. The configuration of the upper room (a central area and two lateral alcoves) suggests a residential purpose, although no further evidence for this has been attested. The lower room, which was well sealed, must have been used as a storage room, and a good view of the surrounding area can be obtained from the roof<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 11).

The tower was partially built on a calcareous substratum. Based on the surrounding topography, some authors have suggested that the tower was surrounded to east and south by a defensive wall, but no clear evidence for this wall has been found.<sup>33</sup> The tower is visually connected with other nearby defensive structures, such as the tower of Huétor-Tájar or the tower of Salar, and even the Alhambra in clear days. It is also indirectly connected to Loja's citadel, one of the main fortifications in the district, and other castles and towers.

The tower has been subject to several archaeological interventions in recent years. The archaeologist Santiago Pecete and Antonio Buendía worked in the tower during the restoration process in 2016-17 (directed by the architect Luis J. García Pulido) and produced very detailed drawings and plans, which served as main basis for the analysis of the construction process. Three trench were also opened at the feet of the tower (south, west and north exterior faces).<sup>34</sup>

Our 2018 excavation aimed to obtain the widest possible perspective on the territory and its evolution over time (Fig. 6 and 12). Our research project began with the geophysical survey of the tower's surrounding area, with the aim of identifying underlying structures that could be excavated. The survey was undertaken by Rob Fry (University of Reading), using a gradiometer to detect soil magnetic resistivity. The survey clearly indicated the presence of anomalies to the northwest of the tower, linking the building to the area currently occupied by the farmhouse.

Following these results, we opened two trench: Trench 2 (adjacent to the Trench 2 opened during the previous excavation in 2016-7) was situated at the feet of the northern face of the building and Trench 3 (next to the older Trench 3 in 2016-7), at the feet of the eastern face.

The excavations (both those of 2016-7 and ours of 2018) led to the identification of at least three major stratigraphic horizons, corresponding to three important stages in the history of this defensive structure and its surrounding area. First, a series of badly preserved structures and deposits dated to the period in which the tower was operational (Late Middle Ages and Early Mod-

<sup>32</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo;" García Pulido, "Estudio preliminar."

<sup>33</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 219-20; Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5; Argüelles Márquez, "Sistema de vigilancia;" Martín García, Bleda Portero, and Martín Civantos, *Inventario*, 302-3; García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 376.

<sup>34</sup> Pecete Serrano, García Pulido, and Buendía Moreno, "Datos arqueológicos."

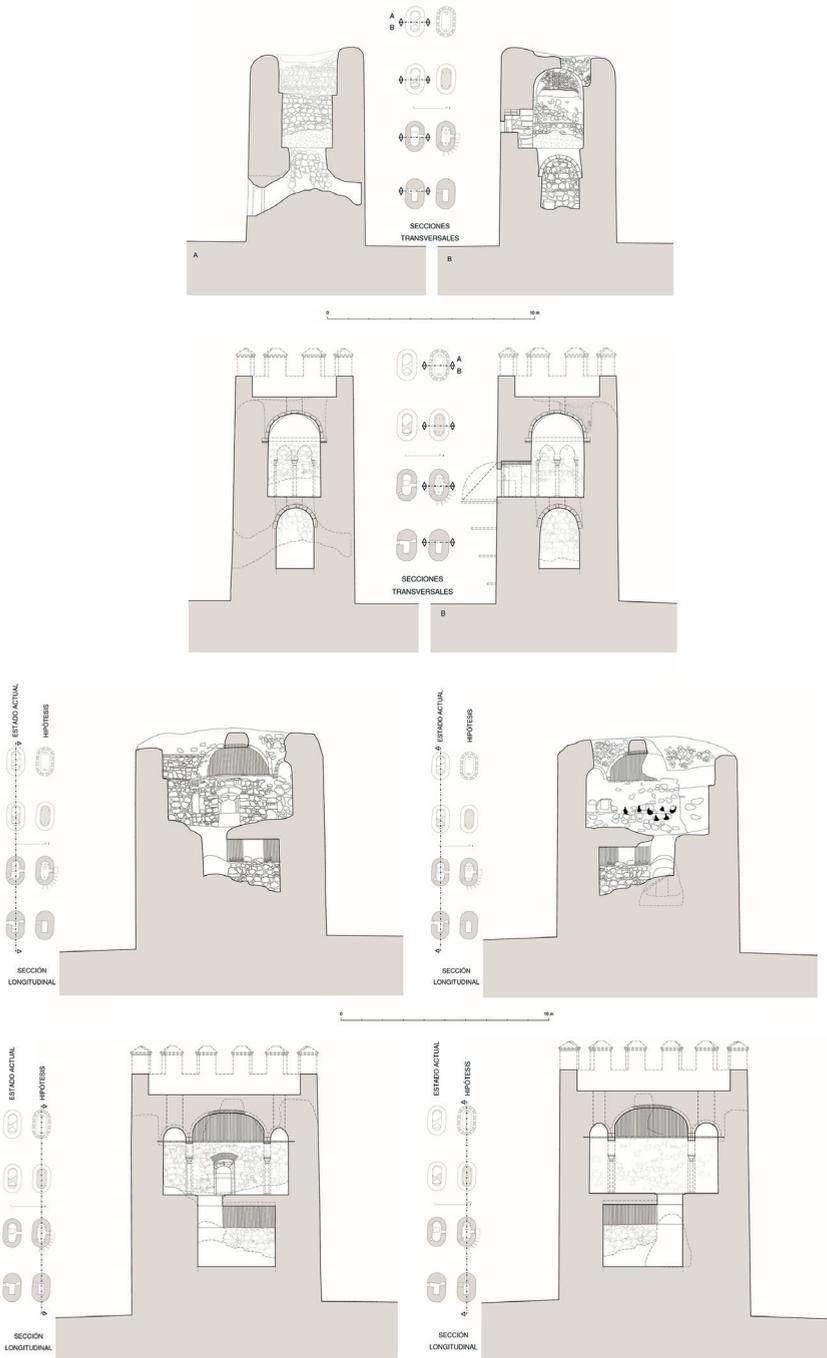


Figure 11. Sections of the Agicampe Tower with the hypothesis of the original moment and the state in which it was (L. García Pulido).

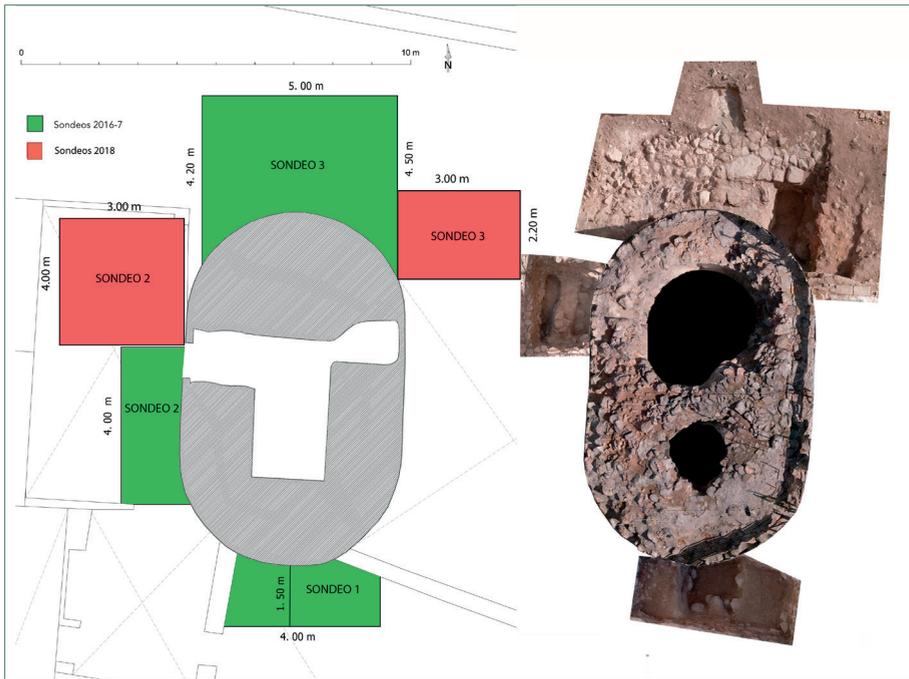


Figure 12. Surveys carried out in 2018 in relation to the previous intervention (A. García, L. García, S. Pecete and A. Buendía).

ern Age). These included a series of features found during both excavation seasons in Trench 2 and the pavement identified in Trench 3 (also during both seasons). These features suggest the existence of a pavement around the tower and a building, which was probably used for storage, as suggested by the ceramic assemblage (Figs. 13 e 14). The building seems to have been pulled down on purpose during the Early Modern Age. It is likely that after this the building and the surrounding structures were abandoned, although the site seems to have remained inhabited, since the terraces found in the vicinity suggest that agricultural practices continued without interruption. It is likely that the farmhouse located at a certain distance from the tower is dated to this period. The farmhouse was expanded towards the tower in the end of the Early Modern Age, the tower being used to keep livestock when a new pavement was laid down. More recently, a pavilion was built next to the tower.

The evolution of the site, as illustrated by the archaeological remains identified during excavation, can be easily integrated in the broader perspective presented by Miguel Jiménez Puertas in his doctoral thesis and later works on the *tierra de Loja* (land of Loja).<sup>35</sup> The Christian conquest led to the destruc-

<sup>35</sup> Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos.”

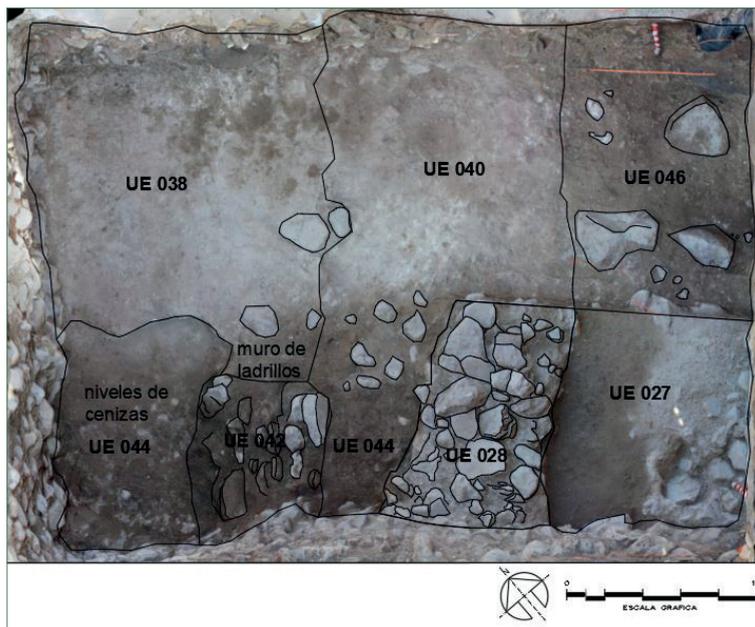


Figure 13. Final photograph of trench 2 (2018).

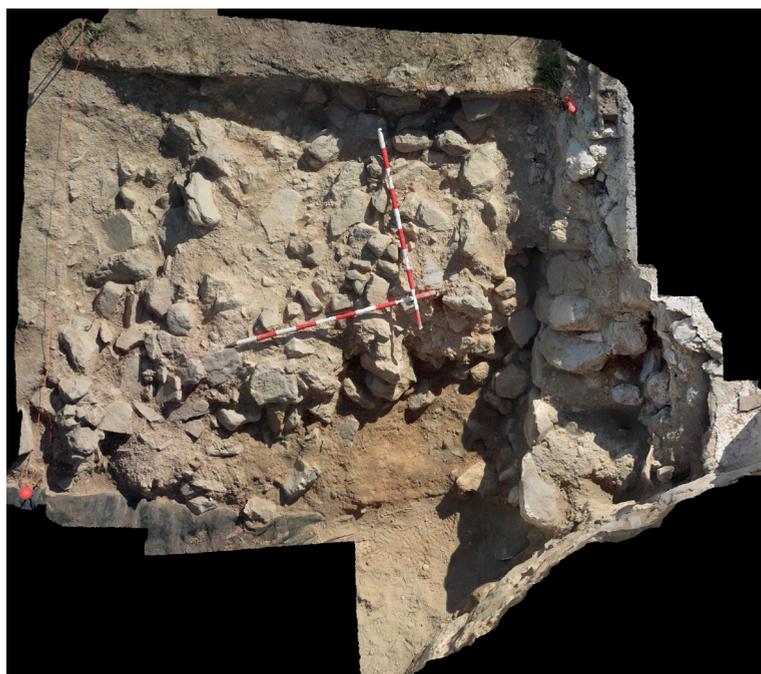


Figure 14. Final photograph of trench 3 (2018).

tion of many of the agricultural *alquerías* that had earlier peppered the territory; the conquest involved a comprehensive transformation of agricultural regimes and a new territorial configuration, which included the construction of many farmlands in the areas formerly occupied by *alquerías*.

## 8. Discussion and conclusion

The presence of the water stream partially explains the intensive human occupation of the area. The steady water flow encouraged human occupation and the agricultural exploitation of the area even before the Medieval Period. The materials collected up the slope suggest Roman and even earlier occupation (survey sectors A and C). In any case, this site, the nature and characteristics of which are unknown, seems to be limited to the slope situated over the stream. Our evidence is not enough to establish whether the agricultural exploitation of the fields that surround the tower began in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages.

Based on the ceramic assemblage collected on the surface near the rectangular building found up the slope, the Roman occupation must have continued through the Early Medieval Period. This large building is dated to the Andalusi period, between the Emirate – and Caliphate-periods, according to the ceramics found in its abandonment levels.<sup>36</sup> It is inevitable to link this building (Agicampe I) and the earliest medieval occupation of the area that is mentioned in the written sources, which points to Šikanb (source of the toponym Agicampe) as the *alquería* and complex irrigation system built by a Yemeni in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

No hydraulic structures have been found in the vicinity of this building, but we have been able to attest a water cistern and an *acequia* that irrigated the fields below all the way to the current farmhouses of La Torre, Chopo and Durano. The material found around the farmhouses during survey (sector B) suggest a construction date no earlier than the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and more likely the 12<sup>th</sup>, for these features. This makes us suspect that the irrigation system was created at that time, once the building up the slope had been abandoned and replaced by a system of *alquerías* (of which three nuclei are known), irrigated fields and a channel network controlled from the cistern above and fed by the stream.

Agricultural activity must have become more intense in the Late Almohad and Early Nasrid periods. Trench 5 and 6, in the field open to the southeast of the farmhouse of La Torre, have yielded a Late Medieval date for the breaking up of these soils, perhaps following the expansion of the agricultural area. The excavation of the first trench led to the identification of a Nasrid agricul-

<sup>36</sup> García Porras and Alonso Valladares, “El yacimiento.”

<sup>37</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 212.

tural terrace and another post-conquest terrace above it. The analyses carried out indicate that the soil was fertilised, that clearing techniques were used to get rid of post-harvest stubble, and that the fields were irrigated.

The intensification of agricultural practices is contemporary to the construction of the masonry wall situated next to the Agicampe farmhouse (Fig. 15). The tower was probably built upon an existing (but still Late Medieval) settlement, as suggested by the discovery of pre-Nasrid material in its vicinity. The excavation of the tower's surroundings confirms that there were other structures associated with the tower, and thus it is plausible to interpret the defensive structure as the core of a larger settlement or *alquería*. The ceramic assemblage suggests that these external structures were used as storage spaces. The tower must have also been used to store valuable produce, especially the inferior room; the superior room presents some features that suggest a domestic nature, but there is no clear evidence for this<sup>38</sup>. It would be interesting to ascertain what was stored in the tower. It is likely that the building was seen as the safest place to store local produce with which to meet fiscal demands and otherwise allocate agricultural resources.

As previously noted, function is still one of the main questions hovering above the study of these *alquería* towers.

As we have previously pointed out, Bazzana and Guichard<sup>39</sup> suggested that some of these buildings were related to aristocratic elites. Aristocratic towers or *rahal* are well attested in Granada, for instance Romilla, Cijuela, Asquerosa and Gabia (some of these no longer survive), and a few late documents seem to confirm that the state played an important role in their construction.<sup>40</sup> Also, a different category altogether are more complex rural fortifications, such as Tájara and Alhendín, which can hardly be referred as towers, being much more complex defensive systems.<sup>41</sup>

Ever since Leopoldo Torres Balbás studied them, it has been generally held that the basic function of these towers was to “serve as refuge for the peasants and inhabitants of the nearby *alquerías* in case of danger”;<sup>42</sup> subsequent authors have repeated this idea, and the towers have been assigned a Nasrid chronology because the region was turned into an unstable frontier. While it cannot be ruled out that some of these buildings were erected for this reason and in this period, a detailed analysis reveals that this is not the only possible explanation. Many of them were far from the frontier, for instance in the Filabres range, El Cenete, the valley of Lecrín and the mountains of Malaga. In addition, as defensive structures, many of these towers fell well short of requirements; textual accounts of their conquest often mention only a

<sup>38</sup> Fábregas García and González Arévalo, “Formas de integración,” García Porras, “Estrategias y formas.”

<sup>39</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, “Tours de defense,” 73.

<sup>40</sup> Mármol Carvajal, *Historia del rebelión*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 396-7.

<sup>42</sup> Torres Balbás, “Torre,” 198.



Figure 15. The 'Cortijo de la Torre' in Agicampe (Loja, Granada) from the south.

few defenders, less interested in actually holding their position than in saving the integrity of the produce and livestock contained within.<sup>43</sup> Others do not match a Nasrid date, as suggested by the construction technique and the associated ceramic assemblages.<sup>44</sup> Many of them were built earlier and are part of a wider phenomenon that affected other regions of al-Andalus in areas that were not under the military pressure of the Christians.

In my opinion, the construction of these buildings may have become common in the Almohad period, when a significant intensification of agricultural production, the result of the introduction of irrigation systems, is attested.<sup>45</sup> These buildings, emerged as spaces from which to manage the increasing surpluses that these agricultural strategies pursued in an attempt to meet the growing fiscal demands of the state, is a material reflection of this process. We must not forget that the *alquería*, from its recognized management autonomy, lay at the foundations of the state's tax base.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, these towers must have been very numerous and played an essential role in the reproduction of peasant communities and the maintenance of the state through tax.

Significant in this regard is an early document (9<sup>th</sup> century) of a tributary nature that deals with the *aqalim* under the jurisdiction of Córdoba, indi-

<sup>43</sup> Fábregas García, and González Arévalo, "Formas de integración."

<sup>44</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Alquería nazari."

<sup>45</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Trasformazioni."

<sup>46</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 308-17.

cating that the rural population was organized in 148 *ḥuṣūn*, 294 *burūy* and 1079 *qurà*, organization of the settlement that will appear repeated in later documents;<sup>47</sup> this information is corroborated by a text post-dating the conquest, which claims that the territory of Córdoba was divided between 888 *alquerías*, 301 towers and 148 castles.<sup>48</sup>

In my opinion, the initiative behind the construction of these towers must have been the peasants; there is no evidence that the state encouraged their construction or participated in any way.

Our tower was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, using similar techniques to those found in other fortresses in the frontier of Granada in the area of Montes, not far from Agicampe. These structures have been attributed to Muḥammad V's wish to reinforce the frontier.<sup>49</sup> There is little doubt that the use of masonry bound with mortar in frontier castles was an attempt to reinforce them against the use of a new war technology: artillery. The use of this construction technique, however, soon acquired a new meaning, being related to the royal authority that promoted this defensive works, a meaning that went beyond its strict poliorcetic function. That is, the building technique conveyed messages of authorship and belonging.

The use of these techniques in the tower of Agicampe, in an eminently peasant environment, can be explained too on defensive grounds. Beyond function and the meaning of certain techniques, the three sites attested in the tower's surroundings and related to it even suggests that a certain hierarchisation existed, although it is impossible, with the evidence available, to confirm that this was the result of a parallel segmentation of the human group that inhabited it.

After the conquest, the tower was, at least partially, affected by the Catholic Monarchs' edict that ordered towers to be made unusable, as suggested by the collapse levels detected during excavation. The tower, however, remained partially standing, and the agricultural fields around it were not abandoned. Progressively, the *alquerías* turned into isolated and independent settlements, and they remain so today. Agricultural production did not decrease, as indicated by the trench opened in the fields, which indicate no diminution in the intensity of exploitation. What changed was the way production was managed. Peasant settlements changed, and a central space to manage production surpluses became necessary, and this was the tower's main aim.

<sup>47</sup> Acién Almansa, "Torres/burūy," 21.

<sup>48</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, "Tours de defense," 75.

<sup>49</sup> Torres Balbás, *Arte almohade*; Acién Almansa, "Tugur;" Malpica Cuello, "Entre la arqueología."

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# **Peasant agency and peopling processes in Early Medieval Catalonia: Some thoughts and examples of rural landscape (5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries)\***

by Karen Álvaro Rueda, Esther Travé Allepuz

The historical and archaeological approach to peopling processes, landscape articulation and social organization during the Early Middle Ages is a complex issue that requires an integrated management of written and material sources. Under Frankish rule, Catalonia was a border area developing its own inner strategies of settlement based upon agrarian expansion. Habitat structures and habitat nuclei show an evolution in parallel to the formation of Counties. Archaeological record of late *villae*, early medieval settlements presenting diverse features, and agrarian landscapes with silos are some examples which illustrate the impact of peasant agency on the landscape during this period. Examining material culture and the evolution of pottery in this area during the early medieval and medieval periods is also a valuable tool to understand the local and regional networks of peasant communities. This paper aims at offering an updated state of the art, together with some reflections about the methodological strategies used in order to explore the role of peasantry during this period in the Catalan area.

Early Middle Age, Catalonia, Peasantry, Rural Settlement, Agrarian Landscape.

## **1. Introduction**

Early medieval Catalonia is a genuine area of study with particular geographic features that have played a role in the historical development of the

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region. Since it is a traditional crossroads between Europe and the Iberian Peninsula through the Pyrenees, its variable orography, with both mountain and coastal landscapes in a relatively narrow area, might have not been deterministic, but it has certainly conditioned the interaction of the human communities inhabiting the region. People in Catalonia have exploited the landscape adapting the environment to their needs and transforming it in accordance with novel requirements and expectations. During the Roman period the coastal region was – and still is to some extent – a main route between Hispania and Gaul, whereas the Pyrenees became a place of shelter for some social groups.

Muslim and Frankish presence involved the arrival of new social, economic and cultural elements that turned the area into a mosaic of different people, open to change and mixing communities that – due to landscape heterogeneity – developed different forms of occupation and settlement in the coastal area, central Catalonia or the Pyrenean region respectively. Hence, the Catalan landscape shows an idiosyncratic evolution depending on a wide variety of factors, especially during the Late Antiquity, including highly Romanised areas, usually under the Frankish domain in the subsequent decades, and other more peripheral landscapes as well. This broad panorama involves a diversity of peasant settlements, with specific features and different occupation strategies.

In this chapter, we aim at introducing the population and social organization processes in the Early Middle Ages in Catalonia, after the fall of the Roman Empire and until the formation of the Catalan Counties, in accordance with archaeological studies. Our goal is to offer an overview of peasant strategies in the formation of Medieval Catalonia within a transition period, bearing in mind the complexities and diversity of rural settlements. Certainly, the evidence of rural settlement and the global interpretation of peasant agency in the period comprised between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD still lacks a global analysis focusing on the interpretation of social structures and landscape articulation according to the material record. Despite this, some settlements have been excavated as part of rescue archaeology and funded research projects. Our contribution will explore the general background of the archaeology of rural settlement in Catalonia, and its main features and transformations occurred in the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, until the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. This period proves to be a turning point in the political and social articulation of the Catalan territory, once Catalonia was under Frankish domain.

## *2. The archaeological background: state-of-the-art and methodological concerns*

A broad overview of the archaeological fieldwork carried out in the latest decades in Catalan rural areas is still under way, with partial and discontinu-

ous descriptive attempts. Current knowledge about the peasant and farming settlements scattered throughout the region is still limited. The archaeological approach to peasant villages in other areas in the Iberian Peninsula has outlined the importance of an extensive approach to these kinds of settlements in order to build a complete and exhaustive record of the stratigraphic complexity resulting from successive alterations, demolitions, cleaning and reuse of ancient elements in order to build newer structures.<sup>1</sup>

There are a few examples of extensive and intensive excavations in Catalonia, including those in the earliest periods of medieval archaeology, such as El Bovalar and Puig Rom, which pioneered in the methodological approach to Visigoth settlements. This earlier work is partially known and has been object of further and renewed research in the last few years as part of more consolidated research projects.<sup>2</sup> There is an assemblage of medieval excavations in different areas included within long-lasting research projects,<sup>3</sup> such as the sites of L'Esquerda, Olèrdola, Santa Creu de Llacunes, Sidillà or Santa Margarida, most of them still under study.

The number of settlements properly integrated within a research plan focusing in peasant agency is scarce, and the global view on peasant settlements in Catalonia between the Late Antiquity and the medieval era is sometimes uneven and confusing. In other regions, in Spain and abroad, scholars have developed a theoretical and methodological approach, the so-called *Archaeology of Villages*, addressing the topic from new research perspectives, reinforcing the inner comprehension of the archaeological record in order to build the historical discourse, and avoiding preconceived models and sweeping statements. The analysis of this period in Catalonia has frequently focused on written evidence, possibly because of the abundance of this kind of data. The approach to the early medieval archaeological record of villages allows for an updated interpretation of rural communities, and for a critical reading of documents in search of integration between written and material evidence.<sup>4</sup>

This review of peasant agency and the identification of its imprints onto the Catalan agrarian landscape presents a more advanced state of the art for the Muslim regions around the sites in Balaguer, Lleida or Tortosa,<sup>5</sup> and for the Barcelonese County in a slightly later period.<sup>6</sup> The Visigoth and Frankish occupations in the cities of Barcelona and Girona respectively have also been studied, but little is known about rural settlements after the disappearance of roman *villae*. It should be taken into account that most of the fieldwork carried out in the last decades in rural settlements in northern and central

<sup>1</sup> Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, "Arqueología de los paisajes rurales," 85.

<sup>2</sup> Subias, et al., "El castrum visigòtic de Puig Rom."

<sup>3</sup> Ollich, "Arqueologia i patrimoni a Osona" and Travé, et al., "De l'església paleocristiana a la sagrera medieval."

<sup>4</sup> Azkarate and Quirós Castillo, "Arquitectura doméstica altomedieval," 18.

<sup>5</sup> Alonso, et al., "Novelties and legacies" and Puy, et al. "The evolution of Mediterranean wetlands."

<sup>6</sup> Mauri, *La configuració del paisatge medieval*.

Catalonia have been part of rescue excavation. Such work is often disconnected from academic research spheres, and developed in a rush, under the time pressures imposed by the agenda of infrastructure building. The methodological requirements of extensive excavation and the detailed record required by the archaeological record are occasionally jeopardized by tight budgets and deadlines and, despite the quality of some archaeological reports, the general perception is that the picture of rural settlement arising from these data is partial and fragmentary, and mostly concentrated in the Barcelonense metropolitan area.

The topic of rural settlement within a global approach does not seem to be in the spotlight of basic research projects, usually focusing on one-single-site studies within a wide diachronic perspective,<sup>7</sup> with very few exceptions. Extensive archaeological excavations in Catalonia at sites from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries are scarce. This fact does not allow us to get detailed knowledge about the general structure of rural settlements as a whole, because only some examples are available. Most of the fieldwork in rural sites from the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD is part of ongoing projects and complete monographs have not been published yet. In addition, other methodological considerations such as transport routes or toponymy should be included as well as a data sources for rural landscape analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Another challenge to take into account is the development of pottery studies once the main circuits of Roman products disappeared and utilitarian pottery production became the most common artefact spreading in regional distribution areas. The characterization of these products, particularly in the transition period between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, will enlighten the chronological adscription of some sites and their main occupation phases.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, a standardization of the ceramic register for early medieval productions and the regular inclusion of archaeometric characterization of the materials in research protocols will enable researchers to obtain a more accurate view of peasant agency and rural settlement. First steps in this direction are being taken,<sup>10</sup> whereas archaeological sciences are contributing to the absolute dating of sites as part of current research.<sup>11</sup>

Amongst the challenges posed by this topic, there are methodological issues in common with other areas in Spain and Europe. The period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD comprises the dawn of the Roman Empire and its consequences, with uneven effects depending on several factors: the presence of Roman *villae* and their concentration in each area, the occupation of new

<sup>7</sup> Ollich, "Arqueologia i patrimoni a Osona," 44-5.

<sup>8</sup> Bolòs, "La formació del hàbitat medieval." Particularly for the northern area of Catalonia, the collection by Bolòs and Hurtado "Atles de la Catalunya Carolíngia" are reference volumes with regard to this topic.

<sup>9</sup> Riutort, et al., "Archaeometric characterisation" and Travé, et al., "Sampling strategies."

<sup>10</sup> Riutort, et al., "Cooking and common wares."

<sup>11</sup> Molist, et al., "Olèrdola (Baix Penedès)," 175.

hillforts, and the appearance of new peasant communities within a framework of semi-autonomous organization.<sup>12</sup> Yet, recent studies have focussed on the role that strongholds had with regard to the territorial control, particularly in the development of borders between Muslim and Christian areas of influence,<sup>13</sup> and the precedents of the castral network,<sup>14</sup> notwithstanding the fact that –in terms of lords’ domain – it does not seem well-formed until later.

Hence, the interpretative attempt to explain peasant agency in Catalonia must take into account these factors together with the research specificities of our area of study. These are the singularities of the territory, with significant orographic differences between areas; the variable and heterogeneous degree of completeness and quality of the archaeological record; and the need to review earlier research, carried out in the sixties and seventies, under new parameters and methods.<sup>15</sup> Bearing this in mind, in the following sections we will present a summary view of our reflection on the transformation of peasant settlements in medieval Catalonia, together with some examples of currently known settlements.

### 3. *Peasantry in the Late Antiquity*

#### 3.1. *The end of Roman villae*

The area delimited by the northern shore of rivers Llobregat and Cardener until the eastern slope of the Pyrenees, including part of the province of Barcelona and the entire province of Girona, shows a structure of rural settlement organized as a network of sites appearing at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. They were progressively scattered throughout the territory and consolidated throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD until the implantation of Frankish rule in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Then, the territory was reorganized under a new political framework, and most of the ancient settlements were progressively abandoned or integrated in the Carolingian landscape structure.

Around the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, new forms of settlement gradually replaced the Roman *villae*. From this moment on, a new rural landscape began to form and mostly carried on with the productive and economic activities inherited from Roman times. As soon as the ancient Roman structures collapsed, a more modest production led towards an agricultural economy of local and autarkic character. Then, these rural *villae* continued in use, but as

<sup>12</sup> Tejerizo, “The end of the world as we know it,” 383.

<sup>13</sup> Pratdesaba, “Les fortificacions osonenques del període medieval.”

<sup>14</sup> Caixal and Fierro, “El Castell d’Eramprunyà,” 504-5.

<sup>15</sup> Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, “Un ensayo de interpretación.”

farms for agricultural and herding purposes where various productive and artisanal activities took place.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the general transformations in the Mediterranean area are visible in the Catalan landscape as well. The end of Antiquity implied far-reaching transformations that affected the internal organization of the territory, both in rural and urban areas, especially for some central and more interconnected areas of the Roman Empire. The political substitution in Catalonia of Tarraco with the modest Barcino as capital of the Frankish counties must be considered along with the gradual weakening in the collective mindset of the idea of the classical city, traditionally perceived as a focus of civilization opposed to the unsophisticated countryside. The role of the countryside, where Roman elites concentrated their rural extensive properties in the Late Roman Empire, changed when these elites disappeared –or rather transformed their forms of domain into more local and fragmented leaderships– giving rise to new ways of organization, and a brand new reality of evolution and endurance.

Some of these settlements reduced their economic activity, in parallel to the transformation of habitat structures, which underwent readjustments in the function and use of some of their buildings. This restructuring took place particularly in those of smaller dimensions, in order to expand the production or storage spaces. Elements such as deposits, *dolia*, or presses, are reported in the archaeological record in rooms decorated with mosaics or in thermal complexes, such as Vilauba,<sup>17</sup> Els Munts,<sup>18</sup> Torre Llauder,<sup>19</sup> or Can Sans<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 10.1). This productive adaptation was characteristic of the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries – occasionally lasting until the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD – when most of the structures were reused for these new productive purposes.

The *villa* of Vilauba (Camós, Girona) is an interesting example of reuse and rebuilding of such facilities. It was transformed at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD to become a productive centre of wine and oil enduring until the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The ceramic record at the *villa* of Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona) and its necropolis point towards the continuity of this *villa* (Fig. 10.2a) until a similar date. A considerable part of the residential area was adapted for productive activities at this site as well. Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) also remained active during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries after the reuse of some residential structures for productive tasks, as evidenced by the presence of some storage rooms and deposits.<sup>21</sup> As shown by the archaeological evidence, a considerable part of the known Roman sites did not endure as fully residential settlements, but survived in the Post-Ro-

<sup>16</sup> Roig, “Vilatges i assentaments pagesos,” 228-30.

<sup>17</sup> Castanyer and Tremoleda, *La vil·la romana de Vilauba*.

<sup>18</sup> Tarrats, et al., “Noves intervencions.”

<sup>19</sup> Puerta and García, “La vil·la romana de Torrellauder.”

<sup>20</sup> Peña, “Producción de vino y aceite,” 106; Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,”

<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 91.

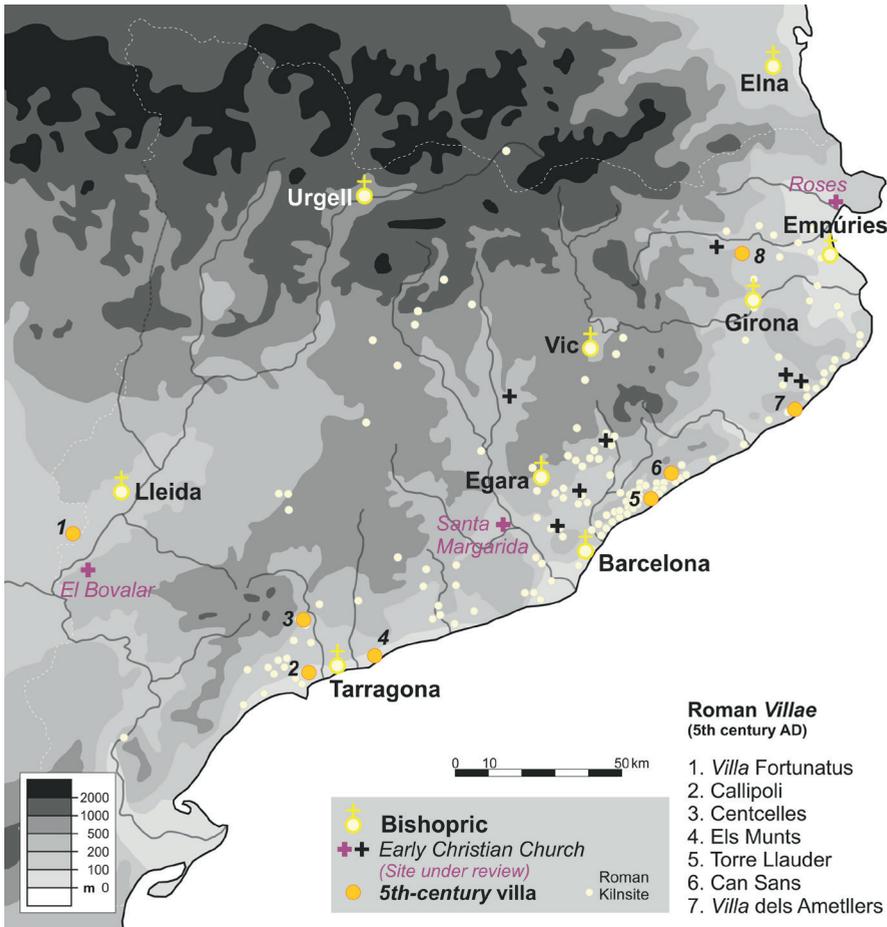


Figure 1. Location map of 5<sup>th</sup> century AD villae enduring in Late Antiquity.

man period after being adapted in appearance and inner distribution to the new farming and production practices that were at the core of peasant life.

This dynamic was common but not general to all villae. A period of new liveliness began for some of them, as documented by complex and sumptuous decoration in their domestic architecture. Particularly in the western part of the Empire, residential complexes were rebuilt in a less classical style. That was the case of villa of Centcelles (Constantí, Tarragona)<sup>22</sup> or in the villa of Els Ametllers (Tossa de Mar, Girona).<sup>23</sup> Probably this phenomenon occurred in some of these villages as a consequence of a process of concentration of

<sup>22</sup> Remolà, “La vil·la romana de Centcelles.”

<sup>23</sup> Palahí and Nolla, “Felix Turissa.”

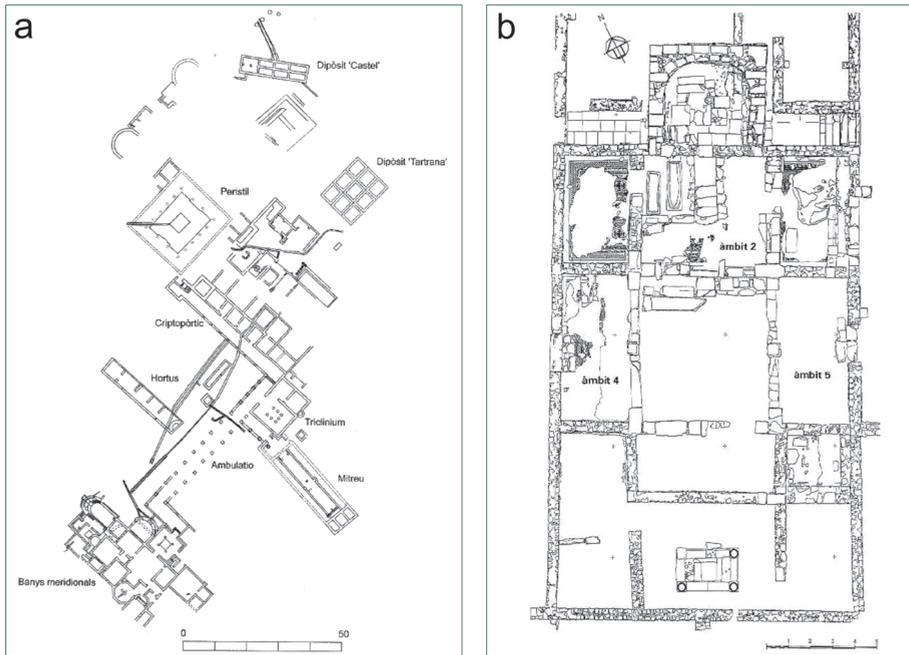


Figure 2. Examples of Roman *villae* enduring in Late Antiquity. Layouts of Els Munts in the Late Roman period in Tarrats and Remolà, “La vil·la romana dels Munts,” 107 (a), and Villa Fortunatus by F. Tuset in Palol and Pladevall, “Del Romà al Romànic,” 193 (b).

rural property in some specific areas, which led to the memorialization of some settlements, the reuse of some others, or the final abandonment of other sites.<sup>24</sup> The presence of Late Roman Fine Wares in this kind of *villae* enduring as residential complexes suggests that they were still connected to some nodal centres of trade, receiving and distributing fine products for ceramic consumption.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps some of these *villae* remained as the property of richer echelons of society and their owners were wealthy enough to afford these luxury products, despite the economic changes observed within these settlements. However, we might wonder if economic activity should be always related to these wealthy dominant groups. It might well be otherwise, as new forms of property and – probably peasantry-mediated – land exploitation might have already arisen.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, according to the archaeological evidence as it stands today, it is difficult to determine the extent of continuity of the residential use of these *villae* exactly, since a considerable part of their surface

<sup>24</sup> Chavarría, *El final de las villae*, 112–6.

<sup>25</sup> Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,” 29.

<sup>26</sup> Schneider, “Structures du peuplement,” 21.

and structures underwent major modifications towards their conversion into production areas. An exception would be the *villa* of Callipoli (Vila-Seca, Tarragona) where a large part of its residential structures was preserved until the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, together with its thermal complex.<sup>27</sup>

The analysis of rural settlement in the inlands of Catalonia and the river Ebro basin is far more complicated. Pottery remains are scarce and it is difficult to know the evolution of settlements beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The materials found in the few sites which have been studied prove the existence of residual occupation. The presence of fireplaces, sometimes directly onto the mosaics, and the dismantlement of a considerable part of the ancient structures advocate for an early abandonment of these *villae*. This was the case of the *villa* Fortunatus, in Fraga (Aragon) (Fig. 10.2b), which had been abandoned by this time. The buildings were demolished, a church was built, and the thermal complex was partially reused as a habitat area, where some fireplaces were found. The building of worshipping structures –not always chronologically related to the rural settlement– is a common feature of some sites as well, such as the church of Sidillà built upon an earlier mausoleum.<sup>28</sup> This is another interpretative problem, because the relationship between the church and the surrounding cemetery, if any, and the habitat structures is not always self-evident. Frequently, the world of the living and the world of the dead do not show a clear confluence in the archaeological record, and it is difficult to determine if the settlement was inhabited at the time the church was built.<sup>29</sup> Further research is needed in order to clarify these issues.

### 3.2. *New forms of settlement*

According to the transformation of Roman structures after the collapse of the Empire, the documented coastal settlements had a longer duration and received importation products until the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century AD, while the endurance of economic or political elites is difficult to see in the inlands of Catalonia. Despite the gradual disappearance of imported pottery, it is adventurous to determine when those settlements were abandoned by their owners and reoccupied under new forms of territorial control. Furthermore, it is basic to consider the fact that *villae* were only a small part of the archaeological elements attested in the rural landscape. From the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, new evidence of settlement, such as newborn villages and hillforts, frequently re-occupying ancient pre-Roman sites, were increasingly configuring the picture of Late Antique settlements.

<sup>27</sup> Macías, “La vil·la romana de Cal·lípolis,” 215.

<sup>28</sup> Ripoll, et al., “Sidillà”, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Brogiolo and Chavarría, “Chiese e insediamenti” and Ripoll and Molist, “Cura mortuorum.”

The proliferation of rural settlements at this time, densely concentrated in some areas, points towards a clear transformation of the rural landscape, which was occupied by a network of villages and peasant habitat nuclei showing a great diversity of forms throughout the region. An explicit definition for these villages, their social classification and property regimes is still to be determined. The challenge of establishing territorial models cannot be addressed in the absence of complete corpora of datasets considering a heterogeneous and diverse region. Instead, the models should arise from significant advances in regional and microregional realities, in order to establish precise comparisons between them in the future.<sup>30</sup> The analysis should be performed in transitional terms, paying attention to the eldest forms of occupation and their evolution, and identifying the regional particularities that transformed and enriched the ancient forms of Roman settlement.<sup>31</sup>

The features of these new forms of settlement reveal the existence of habitat and production structures. Their interpretation in archaeological terms is complex, not only in Catalonia but in the Iberian Peninsula, Western Europe and beyond, for several reasons. Amongst these, the use of perishable materials, especially clay and wood for their construction,<sup>32</sup> led to the total disappearance of these buildings some decades after their abandonment. The relationship between the building techniques, the functionality of different areas within a site, and the socioeconomic dynamics of the moment do not contribute to clarify the explanation of these sites.

The change occurred in building techniques and traditions, visible from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, relates to the new forms of landscape occupation, territory management and exploitation and the control of settlement and production systems. Traditional arguments linking this process to the arrival of Barbarian migrants *exclusively* is no longer accepted.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, this narrow interpretation should not be a reason to avoid the search for ethnicity or identity in order to identify Visigoth or Frank population in Catalanian settlements, for instance.<sup>34</sup> However, generalizations about the presence of newcomers and the concomitant transformation of the space should be avoided.

Actually, archaeological literature published in the last two decades offers a wide range of examples about wooden and perishable buildings not directly related to a specific social, economic or political group. Likewise, new building techniques and materials, together with storage and production structures, were found in the archaeological contexts of Roman *villae* after the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, as discussed in the previous section, which are not related to

<sup>30</sup> Wickham, "Sobre la mutación socioeconómica," 19; Martín Viso, "Tumbas y sociedades locales," 25-30.

<sup>31</sup> Gutiérrez, "Sobre los orígenes," 177.

<sup>32</sup> Hamerow, *Rural settlements*; Peytremann, "The archaeology of early medieval rural settlements."

<sup>33</sup> Quirós Castillo, "La arquitectura doméstica," 77; Quirós Castillo, and Vigil-Escalera, "Dove sono i visigoti?"

<sup>34</sup> Ferrando-Bernal, et al., "Mapping co-ancestry connections."

Barbarian presence. The change in the building features of these sites have occasionally been interpreted as evidence for the production being controlled by peasant agency, to some extent autonomous from the power system.<sup>35</sup>

The heterogeneity of archaeological evidence for rural settlement –despite the rustic appearance of most constructions– is related to the change in uses and the emergence of new needs and purposes for the communities that occupied these areas.<sup>36</sup> A wide variety of hut-like or sunken featured habitat buildings, storage structures like silos or granaries, or artisanal and productive areas, together with a necropolis or a church, follow a certain planning or pattern for each settlement, which points towards a deliberate organization of the space at the site.

The best-known sites in Catalonia occupy one to two hectares at most, with a considerable number of structures of different size and four or five families in the larger ones.<sup>37</sup> These sites have a basic organizational structure, with properly-defined functional areas –perhaps for communitarian exploitation– linked to the productive purpose of the settlement. The habitat structures are at the core of the site, with sunken featured buildings of different sizes. They have occasionally been interpreted as wooden huts, but their interpretation is still being debated and questioned in the contexts of early medieval Catalonia and beyond. This is due to the fact that the term *hut* itself, its meaning, the functionality attributed to the structure and its formal characterization are not clear at all.<sup>38</sup>

As a general statement, we can identify these structures from a pit or sunken surface, cut into the bedrock or natural soil. Their surface is roughly regularized, and their extension is wider than its depth, usually with a circular, oval, or quadrangular shape. The walls and roofs would have been built with wood, unfired clay or vegetal matter forming an assemblage of perishable materials. To that extent, the nature of these structures in the Catalonian sites is not significantly different from other examples.<sup>39</sup> Having been earlier identified in French and British archaeological contexts, there is a vast literature about their features and general distribution.<sup>40</sup> Dry stone buildings or cob structures were frequent particularly in mountain areas, covered with some type of vegetal roof.

In addition to the habitat spaces, these sites originated well-delimited production areas for specialized economic activities. The production of wine and oil is frequently attested by the presence of deposits, presses, tanks, and cellars, and some of these settlements include bread-baking ovens in the more

<sup>35</sup> Tejerizo, “The end of the world as we know it,” 390; Quirós Castillo, “Aristocracias, poderes y desigualdad,” 148.

<sup>36</sup> Tejerizo, 387.

<sup>37</sup> Roig, “Asentamientos rurales,” 212.

<sup>38</sup> Azkarate and Quirós Castillo, “Arquitectura doméstica altomedieval,” 28.

<sup>39</sup> Tejerizo, “Estructuras de fondo rehundido,” 217; Alvaro, Travé, and López, “Construcciones altomedievales,” 6.

<sup>40</sup> Gardiner, “An Early Medieval tradition,” and literature therein.

complex structures. Nevertheless, the most frequent practice is the growth of agricultural products for the consumption and subsistence of the inhabitants of the settlement, which requires adequate storage areas. These spaces featured the presence of large numbers of silos, scattered throughout the site, usually not following any regular pattern and concomitant with less frequent holes to fit large containers and jars.<sup>41</sup> The presence of burial areas, not always associated to a church or any form of worshipping structure, is also common at these sites, with some exceptions such as the site of Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) or Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona), with Early Christian basilicas being at the core of cemeteries on a slightly later chronology.

The chronology of these settlements is a controversial aspect to deal with, especially because of the difficulties arising from their interpretation, stratigraphic dating and the analysis of their material vestiges. Despite this, it is possible to identify successive phases or generational cycles among the entire assemblages or rural settlements. Whereas the origin of these sites is at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, a second generation of sites with similar features and later chronology (from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD) appears in the Catalan landscape. Some of them appear at this later moment, and others transform the previous sites within a long-lasting history of change and continuity.

#### 4. *Permanence and change in early medieval rural settlements*

The structure and organization of rural settlements at the end of Antiquity evolved unevenly but were consolidated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. The previous organization system of residential *villae* transformed into agrarian and productive complexes evolved towards the scenario of a new peasant society that developed new forms of settlement. The archaeological evidence of these sites was heterogeneous, and the organizational system around residential villages was soon replaced with new peasant establishments introducing different forms of settlement. The archaeological record for this period was varied and diverse. The classification of sites follows a similar structure to that shown in the previous centuries: those sites born from the transformation of an earlier roman *villa* were then consolidated as productive exploitations, once the productive and the residential areas were no longer related. New settlements were born *ex novo* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, most of them including wider necropolises.

At the beginning of the early medieval period, the transformation of those ancient *villae* considerably intensified, as they were converted into productive exploitations in order to increase their production. That was the case of the *villa* Can Sent-Romà (Tiana, Barcelona), where the productive structures

<sup>41</sup> Roig, "Formas de poblamiento rural," 125.

of a *villa* were still in use in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, and suffered an increase in production during this period. In addition, the structures and internal distribution of the abovementioned Vilauba were entirely transformed between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.<sup>42</sup> This phenomenon of reoccupation and increase in production in those sites with precedents in the Roman *villae* was related to the consolidation of a social structure based on peasantry. Organized and more mature peasant communities were now living in villages or farms, together with other settlements located next to a Roman site but built in a nearby area, without occupying or modifying the precedent Roman buildings. The concomitance of these two phenomena –the increase in production in ancient *villae* and the appearance of new peasant settlements– was probably a result of the very same dynamic of landscape occupation and social organization, in a new context where the Roman political structures were almost extinct, and the new early medieval peasantry was a fact.

#### *4.1. The increase in production: evidence and examples*

One of the most evident facts to prove the break between the classic Roman *villa* model and the new forms of peasant settlement in the Early Middle Age is the reuse of structures for productive and funerary purposes at some sites, usually after a shorter or longer period of abandonment. This process affects a significant number of rural establishments –particularly medium and small in size– that were restructured with the aim of expanding the production areas rather than the habitat structures, which usually disappeared.<sup>43</sup> A considerable number of rural settlements with small habitat areas intensely developed productive activities from this period onwards. The *villae* of Vilauba (Camòs), Els Ametllers (Tossa de Mar), Can Sans (Sant Andreu de Llavanes), Pacs (Pacs del Penedés), Vinya del Crispí (Guissona), Sant Amanç (Rajadell), L'Espelt (Òdena), Can Terrés (La Garriga), L'Aiguacuit (Terrassa), Torre Llauder (Mataró), among others, are good examples of this transformation (Fig. 10.3).

A new layout was identified at these sites, where sunken featured buildings had to be interpreted in the archaeological record from a series of post-holes and carvings designing a new distribution of structures, only visible and properly identifiable by means of an extensive excavation. The remains of ancient buildings inherited from the Roman period, with lime mortar partially reused in the earliest transformation of these sites, were finally substituted by simpler structures with an optional stone-made underpinning structure and wooden walls and covers. The presence of productive facilities among these structures changed the physiognomy of the sites. Settlements from this

<sup>42</sup> Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 88.

<sup>43</sup> Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,” 27.

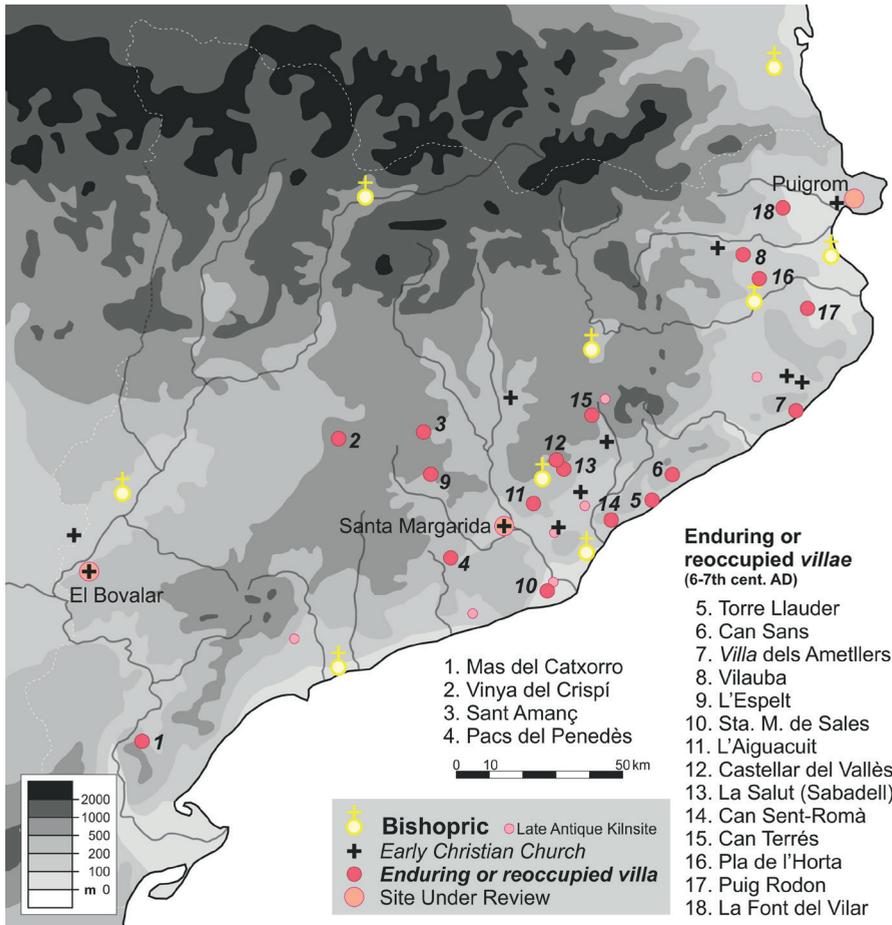


Figure 3. Settlement pattern during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, when some abandoned *villae* were reoccupied. The presence of Early Christian churches scattered throughout the landscape proved the increasing role of the Church.

period might recall those of the Pre-roman landscape; and the archaeological approach requires similar methods.

Some sites developed an increasing activity. The production of wine became an intensive and specialized industry at the sites of La Font del Vilar (Avinyonet de Puigventós), Can Sans (Sant Andreu de Llevaneres), Can Sent-Romà (Tiana), Santa Maria de Sales (Viladecans), La Salut (Sabadell), Mas del Catxorro (Benifallet), among others. The site of Vilauba (Camós, Girona) is, again, an example of endurance and transformation of the earlier structures to intensify the production of wine and oil. Two ovens were built in the village of Puig Rodon (Corçà, Girona) in the same period; and some deposits were installed in Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona), together with a cellar with *dolia* for wine storage.

#### 4.2. *Necropolises and new settlements: towards new ways of life and death*

The funerary evidence is another element to consider in the analysis of rural settlement, and it is not exempt of knowledge gaps and methodological limits. The references to necropolises associated to early medieval villages are not very precise, and considerations regarding their connection with habitat structures are poor. Funerary elements have rarely been the object of an extensive excavation, and archaeological works have traditionally addressed typological aspects in search of a precise chronology, rather than the general layout of cemeteries and their role within the village. There are some examples of *villae* with an associated necropolis such as Pla de l'Horta (Sarrià de Ter, Girona), Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) or Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona).

Pla de l'Horta had several burial phases, one of them attributed to the Visigoths according to the burial goods found in some of the tombs. In this phase, burials combined different typologies (single pits or pits with stone slabs, among others) but they were not related to any particular inhabited area.<sup>44</sup> Funerary complexes in Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) and Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona) were placed 400 metres and 100 metres away from the habitat buildings respectively. The necropolis of Els Munts occupied an area that had previously been a storage space with silos that were abandoned in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. This necropolis included 170 graves cut into the rock or soil and covered with slabs, all of them arranged in a radial distribution. At this site, children were usually buried inside *tegulae* and *amphorae*. Different types of burial coexisted in the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, which makes the chronological attribution of types to specific phases very adventurous. Certainly, the presence of one type of burial or another might have been the result of socio-economic criteria rather than the chronological evolution of burial structures.

Cemeteries are present in those settlements without Roman precedents. The new settlements born in this period are frequently located next to Roman areas which had been abandoned. New settlers did not reoccupy any Roman structure, but they could occasionally preserve and adapt some of the production areas. The plunder of Roman building materials from abandoned sites –when available– and its use for building these new settlements was a frequent practice. The best-known example of this phenomenon in Catalonia is the site of Plaça Major de Castellar del Vallès (Castellar del Vallès, Barcelona) (Fig. 10.4a). The site excavated in this town is dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were remains of a small village built *ex novo* with sunken featured domestic structures once there was no further activity in the Roman *villa* close to the site. The main elements at this site were a wine production area with presses, an annexe with bread-baking ovens, a wide storage

<sup>44</sup> Llinàs, et al., “Pla de l'Horta.”

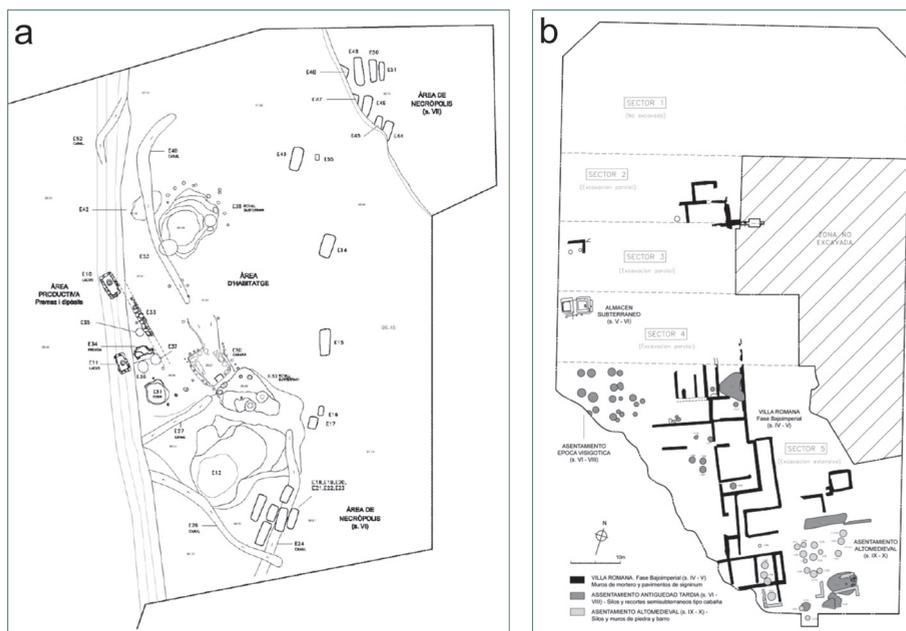


Figure 4. Examples of reoccupied *villae* in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Layouts of the site in Plaça Major de Castellar del Vallès after Roig, “Vilatges i assentaments pagesos,” 231 (a); and L’Aiguacuit in Roig and Coll, “Los palatia altomedievales del Vallès,” 241 (b).

area with plenty of silos corresponding to different phases, and a funerary area with twenty graves, arranged in a well-delimited space.<sup>45</sup> A similar case was found in L’Aiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) (Fig. 10.4b), where the site was reoccupied in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and the materials from the Visigoth phase resemble those from Merovingian and Germanic necropolises.<sup>46</sup> A particular topic to be explored with regard to funerary practices is the presence of deviant burials of people and animals thrown in silos, which are not an isolated phenomenon. They usually are interpreted as anomalous practices related to excluded or marginalised groups.<sup>47</sup> These practices in early medieval Catalonia might point towards the endurance of slavery, according to some interpretations.<sup>48</sup>

In this section we discussed the elements of permanence and change visible in this period. Enduring *villae* from the Roman period were transformed into production complexes, those which were abandoned were occasionally reoccupied with the same purpose, and other villages without earlier precedents appear at this moment. The fact is that the settlement forms inherited

<sup>45</sup> Roig, “Asentamientos rurales.”

<sup>46</sup> Roig, “Formas de poblamiento rural,” 128.

<sup>47</sup> Holloway, “Charcoal Burial: A Minority Burial Rite in Early Medieval Europe,” 131.

<sup>48</sup> Ripoll and Molist, “Cura mortuorum,” 25.

from the Roman Empire seemed to disappear completely in the 8<sup>th</sup> century when new forms of peasantry existed in most parts of the Western Mediterranean.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the progressive abandonment and disarticulation of rural settlements after the end of the Roman Empire, and the beginning of new forms of peasant agency and people-landscape entanglement, arising from new social organization and needs, should be understood as coexisting processes without a clear rupture between them.

#### *4.3. The transformation of the ceramic record: early medieval greyware production*

The change in ceramic artefacts in these later contexts is also remarkable. The latest remains of Roman pottery had almost disappeared, and a lack of materials is clearly ascribed to a well-determined timespan. The material record at these sites no longer corresponds to the well-known imported pottery from the previous period, which was mostly substituted by common and cooking coarse wares usually fired under reducing atmosphere. Their morphology adopted simpler and more functional shapes which remained unchanged for long periods. This new ceramic panorama demands new methodological approaches in order to develop systematic programs of archaeometric characterization, particularly for pottery from those sites with better stratigraphic records and contextual ascription.

The increasing absence of amphorae and other standardized containers for food transport across the Western Mediterranean led to the spread of more local and regional productions. The earliest excavation of some of these sites, during the early 1980s and before, evidenced the unspecified character of early medieval greywares at that time within a scientific context in which the consolidation of medieval archaeology as a discipline was still under way. The ceramic material recovered from excavations by P. de Palol at the site of El Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) was a well-studied dataset that, unfortunately, was never published.

However, the study of the ceramic series dating from the Late Roman period to the Middle Age were very complex. More recent excavation on these sites has provided new information about this pottery, updating previous studies. The analytical characterization of pottery from La Bastida site (Rubí, Barcelona) revealed the existence of eighteen different fabrics of local or regional origin.<sup>50</sup> The abovementioned case of LAiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) revealed the existence of common wares and cooking greyware coexisting with some imported fabrics and oxidizing pottery from the Visigoth period.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 383-8.

<sup>50</sup> Gurt and Navarro, "Les transformacions en els assentaments," 89.

<sup>51</sup> Roig, "Formas de poblamiento rural."

5. *New forms of peasant agency: Hillforts and sites on the plains*

During the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, an important development of villages and fortified settlements in medium-high places took place. These new 8<sup>th</sup>-century sites were devoted to farming and herding activities in some areas that had been considered barren or peripheral in earlier periods (fig. 10.5). New habitat structures, usually with a sunken featured base and delimited with stone plinths or short walls supporting adobe or wooden walls and perishable covers, occupied a heterogeneous assemblage of natural environments and started a long-lasting occupation that will be at the basis of landscape articulation from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Simultaneously, other settlements appeared *ex novo* on the plains.

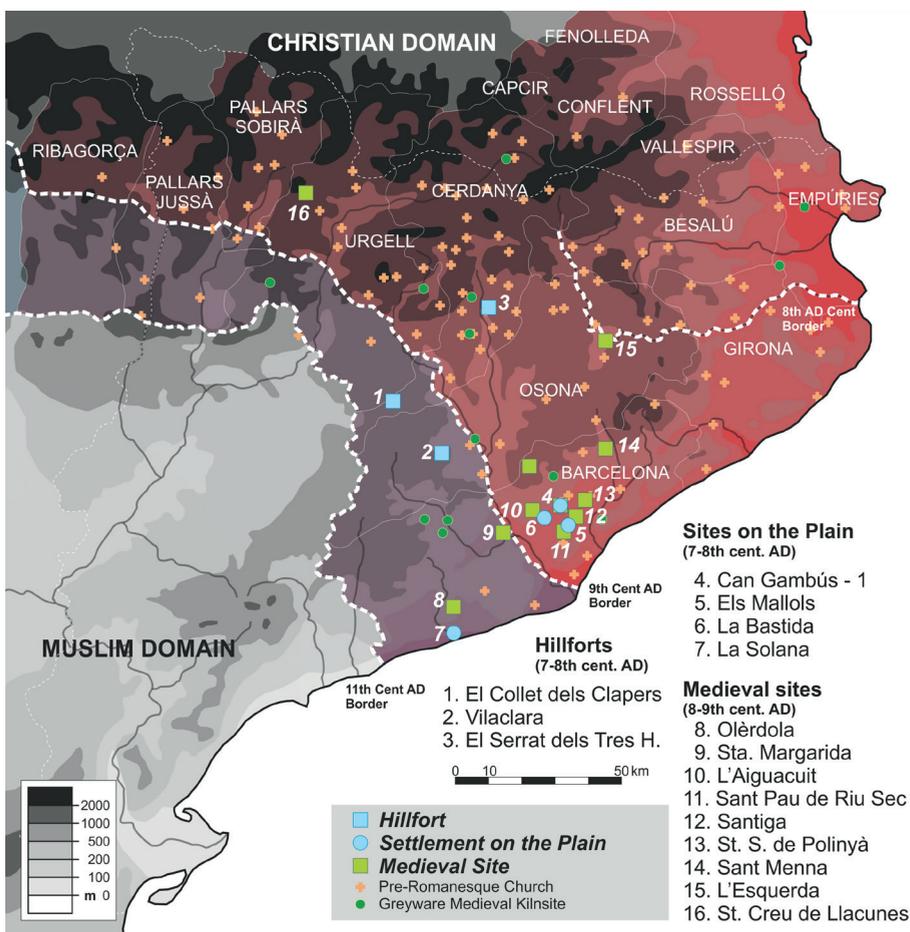


Figure 5. Catalonia in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD, with hillforts and settlements created *ex novo* within the increasing influence of Frankish domain. Pre-romanese temples in this period are indicated after Roig Buxó, “Asientamentos rurales,” 240.

These sites prove the existence of an economic change and a new phase in peasant agency, when new farming strategies defined agrarian exploitations with clearly planned inner structures and layout. In this section we will discuss some examples of both type of settlements consolidated during the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Recent work in the regions of Bages, Solsonès, Berguedà and Andorra have provided information about an assemblage of *ex novo* sites located between 400 and 800 metres of altitude. These sites occupied some extensions of irregular terrain in rocky or mountain environments which were not suitable for cereal growth and, consequently, had not been exploited in the Roman period. This new research outcome offers a good and contrasted reference for comparison in some other sites excavated in the earliest years of medieval archaeology that should be reviewed now, in a renewed epistemological context. These sites are formed by different units of disperse settlement, assembling a few small family households depending on the area. Domestic structures were made with dry stone walls, occasionally covered with mud at the joints, and wooden roofs. Storage structures at these sites were very rare, which reinforces the interpretation of the secondary role played by agricultural practices in high places. The economic activity widely documented at these sites is a subsistence wine-making industry, attested by the presence of presses and cellars, probably for communitarian use. Combined with herding activities, the exploitation of vineyards was a common practice in the Catalan Pyrenees. Written vestiges provide valuable information about the existence of vineyards for self-consumption in rough and hard-to-reach areas in the County of Pallars.

Some examples of these high or medium-high places were found in the northern part of the province of Barcelona, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, usually devoted to wine production as their main activity. Ten silos were found at the site of Vilaclara (Castellfollit del Boix, Barcelona). This area presented some structures and deposits of dry stone and perishable building material. An oven and a winemaking press were found at this site,<sup>52</sup> in which farming seems to have been a secondary activity. The hillfort of Serrat dels Tres Hereus (Casserres, Barcelona), was located on a hill previously occupied by an ancient Iberian town and abandoned during the Roman and post-Roman periods.<sup>53</sup> Amongst the various structures identified in this site, no storage elements were recorded, although a complete study of the settlement has not been published yet. A similar case was found in the small village of Collet dels Clapers de Seguers (Pinós, Lleida), with a similar chronology to that of the sites in Barcelona. A small building consisting of four different spaces included a press and did not have any silo.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Enrich, Enrich and Pedraza, *Vilaclara*.

<sup>53</sup> Folch, et al., "L'ocupació de l'alta Edat Mitjana."

<sup>54</sup> Guàrdia, "El Collet dels Clapers del Segués."

Archaeological remains of settlements on the plain for this period are unevenly scattered throughout the Catalan territory, and they are mostly concentrated in the Barcelonense metropolitan area, with some areas being more densely populated than others are. Probably this distribution is the result of the current state-of-the-art, which is partial and will be modified as soon as more sites are extensively excavated and published. The sites we already know, usually without defensive walls or protective structures, were dedicated almost exclusively to intensive agricultural tasks. Together with the circular or elliptical sunken featured buildings, present in rural settlements since the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, buildings with a rectangular or square base were found at these sites in a more recent period. The largest buildings were frequently divided into several rooms with underpinning stone structures and clay walls. These seemed to be storage buildings including granaries, ovens or silos. The presence of manual rotation mills in some sites proved the processing of wheat for obtaining flour to be one of the usual domestic activities. These sorts of production and storage areas were found in the nearby areas attached to the main buildings as well. Small necropolises, not usually related to a church, were also part of these sites.<sup>55</sup>

The amount and features of storage systems in these settlements on the plain are significant enough to stand for a clear and deliberate agricultural purpose. The storage capacity exceeds the need for self-consumption and points towards the production of surpluses for regional trade, which is attested in the territory of Barcino and the former bishopric of Egara, where a high concentration of settlements was documented.<sup>56</sup> The specific territory of Vallès forms a corridor between the Coastal and Pre-coastal mountain ranges, where several sites illustrate this specific form of peasant agency. Analytical studies carried out in some of these deposits are still scarce, but the existing analyses reveal the growth of cereals –mainly wheat and barley– and the exploitation of vineyards and olive trees.<sup>57</sup> The intensification of agriculture and the diversity of products and supplies are also documented in other settlements with similar features found in other areas at the north and centre of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>58</sup>

Can Gambús-1 (Sabadell, Barcelona) and Els Mallols (Cerdanyola del Vallès, Barcelona), with 232 and 139 silos respectively, are eloquent examples of these kinds of sites (fig. 10.6a). The extension of Can Gambús-1 has been completely excavated. The total area occupied by this site is estimated in 2 hectares. The stratigraphic sequence of silos, production structures, a wine-pressing area, and several ovens determines the existence of three different phases of settlement.<sup>59</sup> A little beyond the village, there was a small

<sup>55</sup> Roig, “Asentamientos rurales” and Folch, et al., “L’ocupació de l’alta Edat Mitjana.”

<sup>56</sup> Roig, “Formas de poblamiento rural,” 128.

<sup>57</sup> Fortó et al., “Los yacimientos del Pla del Serrador,” 267-8.

<sup>58</sup> Quirós Castillo, “La arquitectura doméstica.”

<sup>59</sup> Roig, “Asentamientos rurales,” 225-6.



necropolis of 35 graves. The anomalous burial of 15 people without any ritual of funerary tribute and several animals thrown inside silos were found. The abandonment of silos by filling them with pottery, bone remains or garbage in general was a common practice documented in many other contemporary sites with similar features.

Also in the territory of Barcino, Els Mallols<sup>60</sup> was a similar but smaller settlement. It occupied a bit more than one hectare on the plain as well. The general layout of the site when compared to Can Gambús-1 shows a similar arrangement of sunken featured structures and production or storage areas. A small necropolis is located near the village and anomalous human burials were found inside some silos. The very same pattern is also found in other sites such as La Solana or La Bastida, both in Barcino, until the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

## 6. *Reinterpreting peasant agency at reference sites*

Among the gaps and uncertainties of the archaeological record at the moment, there are two emblematic settlements which represent the transformation of peasant agency along the early medieval period. The sites of El Bovalar<sup>61</sup> and Puig Rom<sup>62</sup> have been known for a very long time and have been considered as reference examples in archaeological literature. Ongoing research in both sites might still provide updated information as part of current research projects. Despite of the fact that the information available is partial, both of them have some particularities deserving special attention.

The archaeological complex of El Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) was discovered in the first half of the past century, when a basilica and a small part of the surrounding habitat structures were excavated; it was not until later when archaeological excavation focused on the necropolis and the village. The site, located at the right shore of river Segre, is an interesting example of the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The church, dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, contains a tripartite apse, and was in use until the abandonment of the settlement. A baptistery and a necropolis were associated to the main building. According to the relation existing between the religious complex and the habitat buildings, the monastic function has been suggested at least in some phases of the site.<sup>63</sup> The settlement was inhabited until an unknown moment between 711 and 723 AD, when it was destroyed by a fire as a result of the Muslim invasion. A coin from Visigoth king Achila II determines the chronology for the abandonment of the site.

<sup>60</sup> Francès, *Els Mallols*.

<sup>61</sup> Palol, *El Bovalar*.

<sup>62</sup> Palol, *El castrum del Puig*; Subias, et al., "Nuevos datos."

<sup>63</sup> Gurt, "Complejos eclesiásticos."

Habitat structures in El Bovalar included three different rooms, one of them containing the fireplace and usually some silos. Walls were built out of clay and stone, as usual, under a wooden roof, since tiles were absent in most sites from this period. Iron and bronze materials, tools, and coins in use at that time were found under a layer of ashes. The archaeological interpretation of a wine-pressing area and two cellars suggests the production of wine for self-consumption at the village, and some working areas for food processing were suggested to be spaces for communitarian use.<sup>64</sup>

The earliest excavation at the village of Puig Rom (Roses, Girona) started in 1917, when J.M. Folch investigated the site. Later on, uninterrupted archaeological research took place in the second half of the past century, when P. de Palol completed a first update and review of the archaeological site.<sup>65</sup> A few years later, a new collaborative research project performed by the University Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona) and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona started another phase of study in 2010. This later phase of research challenged the earlier interpretations of the site. This village – located on a fortified hill at 230 metres high, on the Bay of Roses – had been considered a defensive settlement but, more recently, an alternative interpretation has been suggested. The fortified character of the site might have been related to the fact that it was private and restricted property, rather than having a defensive role.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the presence of thick walls surrounding the settlement, the archaeological record proves that the inhabitants were peasants. The vast number of farming-tool remains, common cooking wares, imported late amphorae and glass point towards the existence of a peasant community living in this site and exploiting its nearby area. In some areas, rectangular habitat structures are arranged in streets. An occupation period between the 7th and 9th centuries AD is estimated in recent literature,<sup>67</sup> which is a broader timespan than suggested in the earliest stages of research at the site. Further work will contribute to clarify and adjust the chronological attribution of the habitat structures.

Regardless of the fortified or unfortified character of these sites, their areas of location – on the plain or on medium-high places –, the more or less luxurious features of material culture, and the presence or absence of religious structures, all of them prove the presence of a new peasant population. Apparently, some of these sites might not have had a clear hierarchical structure yet, but their economy and function were clearly different from the settlement in the previous post-Roman period. The leading role of the Church as an institutional agent of reorganization and territorial control was not consolidated yet – as it would be in forthcoming centuries – but its presence and increasing capability of landscape arrangement is shown by the presence of

<sup>64</sup> Palol, *El Bovalar*.

<sup>65</sup> Palol, *El castrum del Puig*.

<sup>66</sup> Subias, et al., “Nuevos datos.”

<sup>67</sup> Subias, et al., “Nuevos datos” and “El castrum visigòtic de Puig Rom.”

rural churches and necropolises scattered throughout the region. The presence of sites like Sant Menna (Sentmenat, Barcelona), Sant Cugat (Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona), or Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona), among others, indicate that the Christianization of the rural world is a fact, and that the Church would have played a significant role in landscape organization. The archaeological evidence at the site of El Bovalar corroborates the economic role that the church played in early medieval territory.<sup>68</sup>

### 7. *The 8<sup>th</sup> century: a crossroads*

From the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, the arrival of Muslims and the subsequent expansion of the Frankish Empire gave rise to the Catalan Counties. Since Catalonia was a permanent border at this moment, the interests and goals of archaeological research move towards the excavation of fortified settlements, towers, and churches, in an attempt to identify the border shift between Muslim and Frankish domains.<sup>69</sup> The richness of written vestiges have contributed to the interpretation of these research topics. As a result, peasant agency has been overlooked for some time and there are few rural settlements excavated in extension for this period. Notwithstanding these knowledge gaps, similar dynamics beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD transformed the rural landscape across the Western Mediterranean,<sup>70</sup> although the particular processes might differ in different regions. Catalonia does not seem an exception. New strategies focusing on landscape control and the strategic placement of sites were developed as the Frankish influence increased in Catalonia.

From this moment on, scattered settlements started to spread on the top of hills and rocky environments with natural features and physical conditions favouring successful defence. The occupation of hills and the establishment of wall-fortified settlements, although common in pre-Roman Iberia, had not been usual in the previous centuries. Several sites with a long-enduring occupation such as Olèrdola (Sant Miquel d'Olèrdola, Barcelona) or L'Esquerda (Roda de Ter, Osona) are emblematic examples of this phenomenon. Both examples are part of ongoing research projects and have provided updated information in recent years. The long-lasting occupation of Olèrdola, from prehistoric until medieval times, provides information about the transformation of the site<sup>71</sup> and its role as a power centre in the region until it became the focus of the feudal uprisings in the County of Barcelona.<sup>72</sup>

In particular, the defensive features of L'Esquerda – placed on a strategic meander of the river Ter – have been explored since 2012. Recent materials

<sup>68</sup> Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments.”

<sup>69</sup> Pratdesaba and Ollich, “La civitas visigoda.”

<sup>70</sup> Wickham, *El legado de Roma*, 243.

<sup>71</sup> Molist et al., “Olèrdola (Baix Penedès).”

<sup>72</sup> Lluç, “El conflicte de Mir Geribert.”

found at the site, such as Frankish pottery and a coin from Louis the Pious associated to the wall stratigraphy, prove the Frankish influence in the building of a massive wall protecting the weakest natural defence of the site. This finding suggests a new role of this site in the definition of borders in early medieval Catalonia.<sup>73</sup> Another example was found at the site of Castellar Vell (Castellar del Vallès, Barcelona), located on a small hill with rough and rocky sides and protected by a moat on its most vulnerable side. Although it has not been fully excavated, a chronology between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries has been suggested.<sup>74</sup> The abovementioned site of L'Aiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) was inhabited intermittently. After the abandonment of the late antique settlement,<sup>75</sup> a small village was discovered close to the earlier remains, and it endured until its abandonment in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD.

After the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, habitat structures changed their features significantly. Sunken featured structures disappeared, and larger, new, square constructions were built. Perishable materials such as wood or unfired clay were no longer used and substituted by stone walls and tiled roofs. The production and farming areas were not so clearly defined, and, in some cases, it is difficult to determine where the production tasks were carried out. In some cases, firing structures and metallurgical complexes were identified and recorded. These settlements developed subsistence agriculture, with cattle or livestock as a complimentary activity depending on their location.

Some changes are visible as well in the material record: material remains and artefacts were not as diverse as in the previous period. The general lack of glass materials or metallic ornaments –frequent in earlier periods– is also a feature of these sites. In the absence of amphora-type containers, which transported food across the Mediterranean, greyware cooking pottery with a very limited repertoire of pots, casseroles and jugs was the main artefact found in this period. Coarse greyware fired under reducing atmosphere replaced earlier local productions, along with other types of containers made of wood, leather or textile, which left no traces in the archaeological record.<sup>76</sup> The great homogeneity of the ceramic record for this period occasionally leads to misinterpreted chronological attributions. The radical change in the study of ceramic from this period is a new and exciting challenge for material science, since the archaeometric characterization of well-contextualized materials within the stratigraphic sequence of these sites is an essential strategy in order to understand the new local and regional contexts producing and consuming these materials.<sup>77</sup> Regional cases of study focusing on the pottery production and distribution mechanisms between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

<sup>73</sup> Ollich, et al., “Visigots i Carolingis a Osona.”

<sup>74</sup> Coll, Roig and Molina, “El conjunt arqueològic de Sant Esteve.”

<sup>75</sup> Barrasetas, Palet and Martín, *La vil·la romana de l'Aiguacuit*.

<sup>76</sup> Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 90.

<sup>77</sup> Travé, “Los hornos medievales,” 125-9.

AD have been carried out in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>78</sup> First summary views about the typological features of these pottery materials in Catalonia for the same period have been recently published, together with some petrographic characterizations at some sites.<sup>79</sup> Broadening the scope of published pottery assemblages from well-defined stratigraphic contexts will significantly contribute to obtaining a precise chronology for this period.

Most of these sites include a necropolis with anthropomorphic tombs of various sizes and a religious building with different phases of construction. The relation of the cemetery with a Romanesque or Pre-Romanesque church is self-evident in this period, even though the church might have originated later than the necropolis. That could be the case of Sant Menna, Santiga, Sant Salvador de Polinyà, or Sant Pau de Riu-sec, among others.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the Early Christian church at the archaeological site of Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona) was the earliest remain in the site, so that the necropolis grew around the temple. Nevertheless, two different phases of refurbishment – Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque – affected the burial yard layout and different phases in the necropolis are associated to different building phases in accordance with the stratigraphic sequence<sup>81</sup> (fig. 10.6b). However, regardless of the origin of the temples and their temporal relationship with the village and the cemeteries, the Church established a clear control of the territory and reorganized the rural areas since the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. This was a new scenario in which feudalism began to be the predominant social and economic system, and peasant agency was subjected to the landlords' desires and goals, so that peasants lost most of their previous freedom.

## 8. Concluding remarks

The role of peasant agency between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries contributed to the transformation of rural settlement, and the construction of medieval society. The political and economic transformation resulting from the collapse of the Roman system set the bases for the formation of medieval peasantry, developing new forms of settlement and landscape exploitation. These new rural communities, their social organization, and the control over the production systems grew in parallel conditioned by different factors such as the degree of Romanisation, the political role of new powers, and the environmental features of landscape.

Catalonia as a crossroad between the Iberian Peninsula and Europe developed in these centuries a peripheral character with regard to central – Visigoth, Muslim or Frankish – powers. The development of peasant agency

<sup>78</sup> Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, *La cerámica de la Alta Edad Media*.

<sup>79</sup> Travé, et al., "Sampling strategies."

<sup>80</sup> Róig, "Asentamientos rurales," 244.

<sup>81</sup> Travé, et al., "De l'església paleocristiana a la sagrera medieval."

was determined by this situation and still must be approached from a holistic perspective. The strengthening of medieval archaeology in Catalonia boosted the study of feudal Middle Age, usually encouraged by the richness of written evidence and the challenge of integrating these vestiges with the material remains. The analysis of the previous period is more complex as data are partial and unevenly scattered throughout the territory.

The close relation between the number of settlements known and the incidence of rescue archaeology leaves significant gaps in the knowledge of these processes, although some efforts have been made to provide syntheses views of the evolution of rural settlement. The transformation of late Roman *villae* into production areas were the chance of survival for some of them, while many other were abandoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. During the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, new sites were created *ex novo* and the production intensified considerably. A new generation of sites was born within a more heterogeneous and diverse scenario, and more variegated settlements displaced progressively from the coastal areas to the inner valleys between the pre-coastal and coastal mountain ranges.

Ancient early-abandoned *villae* were partially reused as second-generation sites together with other settlements placed in medium-high places from central Catalonia or in the pre-coastal plains. The increase of the production provided material vestiges of wine and oil-making structures, bread-baking kilns, silos or other storage facilities, and sunken featured habitat buildings occupied by peasants. The role of the Church, though permanently present as evidenced by the early Christian churches related to some of these sites, is not clear for the initial period. Some of the most emblematic sites such as El Bovalar or Puig Rom are under study and review in order to clarify confuse chronologies and to explore the relation between new forms of social power and the peasant society. On-going research projects at these sites and some others like Santa Margarida, with long-lasting occupation sequences will shed some more light on the studies of rural settlement in Catalonia.

The occupation of hillforts from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards and the appearance of first pre-Romanesque churches encompassed the arrival of new political powers, and the development of new strategies for territorial control. The consolidation of the Catalan counties, first under Frankish domain and progressively ruling the Catalan landscape on their own, developed the settlement and landscape exploitation manners that would consolidate the feudal domain. Throughout this paper, we attempted to offer a summary view of these processes, paying attention to the methodological needs of further research and offering some examples of the most emblematic sites.

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# **The reoccupation of the late Roman *villae* of the Iberian Peninsula and the record of the subaltern debris. The case of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba)**

by Jesús Bermejo Tirado

Recent studies on the peasantry in the ancient world and early Middle Ages on the Iberian Peninsula have experienced a revitalization due to new archaeological records and the application of landscape archaeology. Alternative historiographical perspectives that focus on concepts such as collective action, peasant agency, and small politics have led to a rethinking of peasant communities in rural areas. However, the historiography of the ancient peasantry on the Iberian Peninsula still struggles with historical explanations for the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages. This paper proposes an alternative historiographic perspective that analyses the archaeological record of the final phases of occupation in Roman *villae* using concepts from peasant and subaltern studies. The focus of our approach is on understanding the everyday practices and agency of subaltern rural communities during Late Antiquity, rather than viewing the archaeological record solely from an architectural perspective. We illustrate our proposal using a case study: the late antique reoccupation of the Roman *villae* of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba).

Late Antiquity, Iberian Peninsula, Roman *villae*, Peasantry, Subaltern agency, Everyday practices.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years we have witnessed a revitalisation in studies of the peasantry in the ancient world and during the early Middle Ages on the Iberian

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Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> To a large extent, this revival has been based on the evaluation of new archaeological records resulting from preventive archaeology and the generalisation of spatial studies that we can group under the denomination of landscape archaeology.<sup>2</sup> The development of these new methodological perspectives has led to an exponential increase in the volume of empirical evidence available for the analysis of these peasant communities. In parallel to this increase in evidence, the introduction of alternative historiographical perspectives based on the application of concepts such as collective action,<sup>3</sup> peasant agency<sup>4</sup> or small politics,<sup>5</sup> has led us to rethink the making of peasant communities in various rural areas.

Despite all these undeniable advances, the archaeology of the peasantry on the Iberian Peninsula is still marked by the search for historical explanations regarding the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the study of late antique peasant communities is still conceived mainly as a transition between the slave<sup>7</sup> and peasant modes of production.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps one of the best examples of the application of this historiographical framework is the question of the purported “end” of the Roman *villae*.<sup>9</sup> This historiographical trope is repeatedly cited as a precedent in the first chapters of the most recent syntheses on the late antique and early medieval

<sup>1</sup> Vigil-Escalera, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*; Bermejo Tirado, “Roman peasant habitats;” Quirós Castillo, *Archaeology and History of Peasantries 1*, *Archaeology and History of Peasantries 2*; Quirós Castillo e Tejerizo García, “Filling the gap;” Bermejo Tirado, and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Peasantry*; Kirchner, “La arqueología del campesinado en época alto-medieval;” Nesbitt, “New Book Chronicle.”

<sup>2</sup> Mayoral, Grau and Bellón, *Arqueología y sociedad de los espacios agrarios*; Fernández Mier et al. “La formación de los paisajes;” Kirchner, “Arqueología del paisaje y arqueología de los espacios de cultivo;” Ballesteros Arias, et al. “Por una arqueología agraria.”

<sup>3</sup> Carballo, Roscoe and Feinman, “Cooperation and Collective Action;” Feinman, “Multiple pathways to large-scale;” Carballo, “Cultural and evolutionary dynamics;” DeMarras and Earle, “Collective Action Theory;” Blanton, “Collective Action and Adaptive;” Blanton and Fargher, *Collective Action in the Formation*. For the Iberian case, Carvajal Castro, “Collective Action and Local Leaderships.”

<sup>4</sup> Bouchard, *Negotiation and Resistance*, 128-53.

<sup>5</sup> Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community*; Grey, *Constructing Communities in the Late Roman*, 91-121. For the Iberian case Martín Viso, “Unequal Small Worlds.”

<sup>6</sup> Francovich and Hodges, *Villa to Village*. For a nuanced review of these historiographic approaches, Quirós Castillo, “From Villa to Village?”

<sup>7</sup> Carandini, *Settefinestre. Una villa schiavistica*; Leveau, ““villa, romanisation, développement économique.”

<sup>8</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*; Tejerizo García, “The Archaeology of the Peasant Mode of Production.”

<sup>9</sup> To frame this general discussion Brogiolo, *La fine delle ville romane*; Francovich and Hodges, *Villa to Village*; Metráux, “Late Antique Villas;” Castrorao Barba, *La fine delle ville romane in Italia*; Munro, “Recycling, demand for materials;” Brogiolo, Chavarría and Valenti, *Dopo la fine delle ville*; Cavaleri and Sacchi, *La villa dopo la villa*; Cavaleri and Sfameni, *La villa dopo la villa 2*. For the Iberian case, Chavarría Arnau, “Considerazioni sulla fine delle ville;” Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las ‘villae’ en ‘Hispania’*; Ripoll and Arce, “The Transformation and End of Roman;” Chavarría Arnau and Brogiolo, “El final de las villas y las transformaciones.”

rural communities and landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, although introduced as the conclusion of an era, the end of the *villae* is the basis on which most published historiographical proposals explain the emergence of early medieval peasant communities.<sup>11</sup> However, as Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo has recently pointed out,<sup>12</sup> this type of proposal eclipses the previous existence of peasant communities in Roman times<sup>13</sup> as fundamental agents for understanding the historical evolution of the rural world in late antiquity.

In this paper, we propose an alternative historiographic perspective for analysing in their own context the people who lived in the Roman *villae* in their final phases of occupation. These human groups constitute an example of “people without history”<sup>14</sup> who need to be analysed independently of previous historiographic agendas and academic specialisations. One of the essential points of our proposal is based on the application of several concepts taken from the so-called peasant studies.<sup>15</sup> Our main aim is to explain how the archaeological record of these last phases should not be understood as the result of an abandonment process but as a reflection of the everyday practices and agency of the subaltern rural communities that inhabited these sites during late antiquity.

## 2. *The end of the Roman villae: a historical overview*

The final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the shaping of a profound historiographical debate regarding the “end” of the *villae* in the *pars occidentalis*. This debate was insightfully systematised in a work by Brian Ward-Perkins<sup>16</sup> from the formulation of two opposing trends: catastrophist and continuist. In summary, the catastrophic tendency brought together those scholars who argued that the end of the *villae* would have been the result of a process of abrupt destruction explained by the impact of such phenomena as the crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and the Germanic invasions. This group, mainly composed of historians, made use of accounts from late antique authors to support this view. Another group of scholars, the so-called continuists, disagreed with this idea of sudden destruction. They supported a more detailed review of the archaeological record of every single case, cit-

<sup>10</sup> Caballero, Mateos and Cordero, *Visigodos y Omeyas: el territorio*; Ariño, “El hábitat rural en la Península;” Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique & Early Medieval*.

<sup>11</sup> E. g. Vigil-Escalera, *Los primeros paisajes altomedievales*; Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*.

<sup>12</sup> Quirós Castillo “From Villa to Village?”

<sup>13</sup> Several recent publications have defended the importance of the peasant communities in the Roman period: Reddé, “Fermes et villae romaines;” Bermejo Tirado, “Roman peasant habitats;” Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Roman Peasantry*; Bowes, *The Roman Peasant Project*; Van Oyen, “Innovation and investment.”

<sup>14</sup> Woolf, *Europe and the People*.

<sup>15</sup> Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Roman Peasantry*.

<sup>16</sup> Ward-Perkins, “Continuists, Catastrophists.”

ing the existence of a late occupancy of these settlements associated with the transformation of the features recorded at those sites.

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, the works of Alexandra Chavarría Arnau<sup>17</sup> can be justifiably considered as a fundamental landmark in disproving the catastrophic hypothesis. Her studies confirmed the generalised absence of devastation layers that could be linked to this hypothetical sudden devastation caused by the Germanic invasions or other similar warfare episodes. In addition, her studies have served to document systematically the architectural reconfiguration of many late Roman *villae* through the building of productive features related to agriculture.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Chavarría's work was influenced by a series of limitations that conditioned her interpretations. Even when her famous book contained a catalogue with many *villae*,<sup>19</sup> in very few cases was precise stratigraphic documentation from archaeological excavations available. In most cases, the documentation of different occupation phases recorded in the *villae* can be established from the presence of constructive elements overlaying the monumental phases or the installation of productive features in the residential sectors of the settlements.<sup>20</sup> These limitations, which in no way can be attributed to Chavarría but to the state of the evidence itself, forced her to take a fundamentally architectural point of view in which the monumental phases of the settlement remained the focus of the perspective, as is referred to in the very title of her well-known essay, *El final de las villae en Hispania*. Even when this "finalist" perspective<sup>21</sup> is linked to the continuist trend (*sensu* Ward-Perkins), it implies a hierarchisation of the occupation phases that eclipses the remains generated by other forms of habitation that are only revealed if we apply a broader concept of the archaeological record not exclusively focused on architectural elements.

The first decades of the new millennium have brought the publication of the results of new excavations with the application of precise stratigraphic documentation, including the recording of a large number of find assemblages. These new archaeological records have opened up novel discussions on the end of the *villae* in the Roman West. A good example of this type of discussion can be found in two articles published in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*.<sup>22</sup> In his article, *Vanishing Villas*, Tamara Lewit theorises that the changes seen in this type of settlement can be interpreted as a result of the cultural

<sup>17</sup> Chavarría Arnau, "Considerazioni sulla fine delle ville," Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las 'villae' en Hispania*.

<sup>18</sup> Chavarría Arnau, 126-9.

<sup>19</sup> Chavarría Arnau, 163-298.

<sup>20</sup> On this kind of taphonomic problems in the context of the late antique occupation of Roman *villae* see Kasprzyk, "L'équipement et les formes," 235-8.

<sup>21</sup> Rooted in the Italian tradition of late antique e early medieval archaeology, e.g. Brogiolo, *La fine delle ville romane*.

<sup>22</sup> Lewit, *Vanishing villas*; Bowes and Gutteridge, "Rethinking the later."

revolution experienced by the rural elites of late antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Lewit openly rejects the interpretation of the changes in that period as evidence of decadence or impoverishment and supports the continuity of occupation by elites whose aesthetic expectations would have been changing in the new cultural context of late antiquity.

Two years later, in direct response to Lewit's work, Kimberly Bowes and Adam Gutteridge proposed the need to rethink the late antique rural settlement from a different perspective. This paper highlights the need to analyse the archaeological strata of these late antique occupations in their own context, independently of any possible beginning or end. In other words, they should not be seen from an *a priori* classical or medieval perspective and more comprehensive consideration should be given to the possibilities offered by the new archaeological records generated by landscape archaeology and preventive excavations.

Implicitly, the impact of many of the ideas raised in this paper has been felt in some of the more recent studies on this issue. This is the case of Beth Munro's study<sup>24</sup> of the recycling activities and management of the resources available to the inhabitants in the final phases of the *villae*. Other studies of interest can be found in the recent volumes entitled *La villa dopo la villa*<sup>25</sup> on the archaeology of rural settlement in the central and northern sectors of the Italic Peninsula.

### 3. *Peasant agency: A Roman archaeologist's perspective*

The use of the term *peasantry* in historical studies has been controversial in recent decades. Many authors have preferred to avoid it in different historiographical contexts, replacing it with more ambiguous terms.<sup>26</sup> This controversy cannot be separated from the decline in peasant studies in the social sciences since the late 1980s.

In the case of Roman studies, this decline<sup>27</sup> is marked by the success of the *villa schiavistica* paradigm, which is linked to the model introduced by the Settefinestre excavations under the direction of Andrea Carandini.<sup>28</sup> The application of this paradigm implied acceptance of the Marxist slave mode of production model as the basis for the economic and social structure of the entire Roman rural world. This also implies accepting the idea that the reason

<sup>23</sup> Lewit, *Vanishing villas*, 270-1.

<sup>24</sup> Munro, "Recycling, demand for materials."

<sup>25</sup> Cavaleri and Sacchi, *La villa dopo la villa*; Cavaleri and Sfameni, *La villa dopo la villa 2*.

<sup>26</sup> On this question see Quiros Castillo, "Do we need an archaeology;" Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo García, "Filling the gap."

<sup>27</sup> Even when we attested the publication of some remarkable studies on the Roman peasantry since the late seventies (Garnsey, "Peasants in ancient Roman," "Non-slave labour;" Evans, "Plebs Rustica I;" Evans, "Plebs Rustica II").

<sup>28</sup> Carandini, *Settefinestre*.

peasant communities disappeared from the fields was the Roman imperialist expansion in the Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup>

In recent years, however, thanks to several research projects focusing on the application of various spatial analysis methodologies in archaeology and, above all, the systematic study of new archaeological records generated by preventive excavations, we have witnessed the explicit reintroduction of the concept of peasantry in several publications on the Roman rural world.<sup>30</sup> A common factor in many of these studies is the application of models and analytical concepts developed in the field of the so-called peasant studies. Another common point is the recognition of wide diversity in the peasant communities of all the territories of the Roman Empire.

The recognition of this heterogeneity renders any attempt to establish an essentialist definition of peasantry in Roman times an impossible task. As scholars such as Theodor Shanin or Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg have already pointed out,<sup>31</sup> the idea of establishing a fixed definition of this term does not work from an analytical point of view. By way of contrast, we advocate the use of this concept in a more pragmatic sense, speaking of peasant communities rather than of a peasant class in itself.

In spite of this diversity, we believe there is a common element that must appear in any attempt to characterise the peasant communities of the Roman period, i.e. their subaltern condition. These groups were usually subjected to different forms of control or coercion by the authorities, either through a specific landowner or through a state or provincial administration or magistracy,<sup>32</sup> as was often the case during the Roman period. The subaltern condition of these peasant communities and their own lack of definition in terms of social class make it very difficult to record their historical evolution from a diachronic perspective. These difficulties are marked by the fact that most of the historical sources to which we can turn for information on them are not narratives.<sup>33</sup> This is a particularly relevant problem in relation to our ability to record their agency. Traditionally, scholars interested in the historical analysis of subalterns have used synchronic sources for their study (e.g. an inscription alluding to an episode in the life of a person or a document referring to litigation by a community against an authority or higher institution). However, to analyse the profound historical impact of peasant community agency, we have to adopt diachronic perspectives different from those traditionally posited by conventional historical narratives. As Kostas Vlassopoulos recent-

<sup>29</sup> On this assumption Garnsey, "Peasants in ancient Roman;" Rathbone, "The Development of Agriculture."

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Grey, *Constructing Communities*; Bowes, *The Roman Peasant Project*; Reddé "Fermes et villae romaines"; Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira, *The Archaeology of Peasantry*.

<sup>31</sup> Shanin, *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, 20-3; Van der Ploeg, *El Campesinado y el arte de la agricultura*, 104-19.

<sup>32</sup> Grey, "Contextualizing Colonatus."

<sup>33</sup> Vlassopoulos, "Subaltern community formation," 36-7.

ly pointed out,<sup>34</sup> our capacity to analyse the role of these subaltern groups in the making of antiquity depends on our ability to situate their agency at the forefront of historiographical debates.

Another especially relevant problem for the study of peasant agency in antiquity refers to the very definition of the historical agents. In the framework of social theory at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, agency was essentially linked to the ability of individuals to act independently of the possibilities previously established by social structures. This way of conceiving agency was largely influential in the archaeology of the turn of the millennium.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, however, a new generation of archaeologists has endeavoured to overcome the old dichotomy of individuals vs social structures by applying a new paradigm of agency based on the concept of collective action.<sup>36</sup> In the context of late antique and early medieval studies, these perspectives have been applied to study the management of commons or, more frequently, in relation to litigation undertaken by local communities.<sup>37</sup> Many of these works are structured around the creation of new legal and social interaction scenarios established between peasant communities and the political authorities and based on the structuring of tax systems.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the undeniable interest of this research, this collective concept of peasant community agency poses certain analytical problems. In most cases, the sources in which such collective actions are recorded were mediated by elites. They often present peasant communities as abstract entities organised in opposition to the interests of a given ruler or large landowner. Such abstractions tend to oversimplify the inner social structures of those communities. They encompass different mechanisms of cooperation and solidarity,<sup>39</sup> as well as of competition and individualism.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly significant if we consider other scales of social relations within these communities. On other levels the individual, the household or family may have been above the local community itself. This tension between solidarity and competition has been best explained by Cam Grey who states that “those communities offered mutual insurance against economic disaster, for they provided opportunities to access and exploit a range of strategies for managing subsistence risk. But they were also characterised by inequality and tension, in the form of social differentiation, disagreements between closely related neighbours, and an

<sup>34</sup> Vlassopoulos, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Dobres and Robb, *Agency in Archaeology*; Robb, *The Early Mediterranean*; Knapp and Van Domelen, “Past Practices.”

<sup>36</sup> Carballo, Roscoe and Feinman. “Cooperation and Collective Action;” Feinman “Multiple pathways to large-scale;” Carballo, “Cultural and evolutionary dynamics;” DeMarras and Earle, “Collective Action Theory;” Blanton, “Collective Action and Adaptive;” Blanton and Fargher, *Collective Action in the Formation*.

<sup>37</sup> E. g. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*; Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 148-60. For the Iberian case, Carvajal Castro, “Collective Action and Local Leaderships.”

<sup>38</sup> Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*.

<sup>39</sup> Mayer, *The Articulated Peasant*, 89-94.

<sup>40</sup> Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 91-120.

array of mutually contradictory demands upon scarce social and economic resources. As a consequence, we may observe these communities participating in a variety of activities which function as brakes upon conflict and safety valves for dissatisfactions and jealousy”.<sup>41</sup>

The identification of peasant community agency as a form of collective action in historical studies often overshadows the internal dynamics that affect the interests of individuals, households and families. This way of conceiving the agency of past peasant communities is very important when interpreting the question of the end of the *villae*, as it has been put forward as the basis of a political emancipation process among early medieval peasantry, as opposed to the slave mode of production, which would have enabled these emerging communities to “control the land and their own work process”<sup>42</sup> or to “control their own holdings and keep their fruits after rents were paid”.<sup>43</sup>

Restricting the historical analysis of peasant community agency to the recording of coordinated actions against elites, such as legal disputes, rebellions or *bagaudas* would be the same as limiting the analysis of 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century working class trade union struggles to strikes and other forms of organised protest. If we limit ourselves to considering these kinds of cooperative or coordinated actions, we run the risk of ignoring more prosaic (but more constant) ways in which the late antique peasant communities developed their agency.

#### 4. *Subaltern debris in the archaeological record of the Western villae*

Our approach to the archaeological analysis of peasant community agency will be structured around the application of the subaltern debris concept, as formulated by Beatriz Marín-Aguilera in a recent article.<sup>44</sup> Based on the Gramscian definition of common sense (*senso comune*)<sup>45</sup> and the matrix of dominations notion developed by the feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins,<sup>46</sup> Marín-Aguilera states that the archaeological record generated in most of the excavated habitats forms a debris with the material traces of the everyday practices of the subaltern communities.

This way of understanding the archaeological record is especially useful for interpreting the late antique reoccupation of many of the Roman *villae* systematically excavated in recent decades. As we have discussed, a large part of all the debates around the end of the Roman *villae* has been focused on the analysis of the building elements as essential archaeological proxies. In many

<sup>41</sup> Grey, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Wickham, “The Other Transition,” 9.

<sup>43</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 560, versus Banaji, “Aristocracies, Peasantries.”

<sup>44</sup> Marín-Aguilera, “Subaltern Debris.”

<sup>45</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison*, 419.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 203, 287.

cases, the occupation phases (or their absence) are established according to different types of architectural markers (e.g. the segmentation of rooms, the looting of decorative elements or their reuse for other functions). However, the analysis of the strata and finds assemblages that fill these structures has traditionally been left in the background. In many cases these deposits have been considered as “abandonment levels”, if not levels directly generated by squatters.<sup>47</sup> However, this kind of interpretation is based on a very superficial assessment of the formative processes that served to configure these deposits and assemblages.

Nevertheless, in recent years archaeological excavations have been carried out on several Roman *villae* on the Iberian Peninsula using more systematic recording procedures, including those of Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid),<sup>48</sup> Baños de la Reina (Alicante),<sup>49</sup> Horta da Torres (Alentejo),<sup>50</sup> Balazote (Albacete),<sup>51</sup> Fuente Álamo (Córdoba)<sup>52</sup> and El Salar (Granada).<sup>53</sup> They have revealed that the archaeological deposits that fill the monumental spaces of the late Roman aristocratic residences contain clear evidence of a continuous inhabitation of these rural sites well into the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. These deposits, traditionally interpreted as abandonment levels or the result of squatter frequentation,<sup>54</sup> must now be seen as possible examples of subaltern debris generated by their later inhabitants. As I will try to illustrate in the second part of this study, the detailed analysis of the assemblages recorded in these later occupation phases must be considered as essential sources for the historical record of the everyday resistance strategies of late antique peasant communities.

##### 5. *The late antique occupation of the Roman villa of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Spain)*

As an example of our proposed analytical perspective, we will focus our attention on a case study in the Roman *villa* of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba). This archaeological site in Baetica province has a long history of research<sup>55</sup> that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the fortuitous discovery of a series of mosaics.<sup>56</sup> A second research phase encompassed a series of excavation campaigns carried out from the early nineteen-eighties. They revealed

<sup>47</sup> Lewit, ‘*Vanishing villas*’, 37, 91-165, 168-77.

<sup>48</sup> García Merino and Sánchez Simón, *El final de la villa de Almenara*.

<sup>49</sup> Abascal Palazón et al, *Baños de la reina (Calpe, Alicante)*, 115-8, 167-9, 197.

<sup>50</sup> Carneiro, “Adapting to change.”

<sup>51</sup> Sarabia Bautista, “Exploring the Dynamics of Occupation.”

<sup>52</sup> Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colomina, “Economías domésticas y patrones.”

<sup>53</sup> Román Punzón et al. “Life and afterlife of a Roman villa.”

<sup>54</sup> López-Palomo, “Balneum y villa.”

<sup>55</sup> Delgado and Jaén, “La Fuente del Álamo: historia y arqueología.”

<sup>56</sup> Neira Jiménez, “Acerca de dos mosaicos hallados.”

a series of structures related to several sectors of this rural settlement.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the resumption of excavations in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has provided us with a detailed record of the stratigraphic sequence documented in this settlement.<sup>58</sup> From these records, it is possible to reconstruct various periods of occupation at the site with different transformations between the early Imperial and the Islamic periods.

An initial early Roman phase is associated with a series of structures interpreted as a possible *Balneum*.<sup>59</sup> A second late Roman phase corresponds to the monumentalisation of the *villa* and can be compared to the events recorded in similar aristocratic residences in many other parts of the Iberian Peninsula. This is the phase to which most of the figural mosaics discovered in the settlement belong.<sup>60</sup> This monumental phase would have lasted until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or probably the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, at which point the archaeological record of the settlement shows a series of changes on which we will focus the rest of this section. That phase includes the construction of a *horreum* attached to the northern part of the *pars urbana*.<sup>61</sup> The last of the settlement's occupational phases is marked by the construction of an Islamic olive oil mill attached to different parts of the late Roman *villa's pars urbana*.

Thanks to the detailed stratigraphic recording undertaken by the archaeologists in charge of the site,<sup>62</sup> it was possible to document the remains of the settlement's late antique phase. This covered a period from the middle decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD to an undetermined point in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>63</sup> and is marked by the segmentation of the structures corresponding to the late Roman *villa's pars urbana* with various adobe walls. In addition to the adobe collapses documented during the excavations, several of the rooms in the so-called Sector C of the late Roman *villa's pars urbana* were refurbished with hearths composed of vitrified ceramic blocks laid directly on the sumptuous mosaics that decorated this sector of the aristocratic residence.

The presence of these hearths and other ash levels directly resting on these pavements indicates several things. The first is that these sectors were reoccupied at a time when the *villa's* mosaics had not been subject to a pro-

<sup>57</sup> López Palomo, "Excavaciones de urgencia;" "Balneum y villa." For a complete study of all the Roman mosaics discovered in the residential sectors of this site see Neira Jiménez, "Los mosaicos romanos del yacimiento."

<sup>58</sup> Delgado and Jaén, "Territorio y ciudad. El yacimiento;" "El Conjunto Arqueológico de Fuente Álamo."

<sup>59</sup> López Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 307-28; Delgado e Jaén, "Territorio y ciudad. El yacimiento," 72-4. For a chronological discussion of finds vid. Bermejo Tirado, Moreno and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 243-53.

<sup>60</sup> Neira Jiménez, "Los mosaicos romanos del yacimiento."

<sup>61</sup> López-Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 340-3.

<sup>62</sup> We would like to thank Manuel Delgado and David Jaén (Puente Genil Town Council. Parque Arqueológico de la Villa Romana de Fuente Álamo) for their help in reviewing all the archaeological finds relating to our study of this late antique phase of the site.

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed chronological discussion of this phase see Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 254-8.

longed period of abandonment. The second implication, though somewhat obvious, is that the hearths indicate that the late antique occupants of the settlement no longer had the same aesthetic appreciation of these figural mosaics as the aristocratic *domini* of the late Roman period. The final implication is that it is most likely that the construction of these hearths can be linked to the occupation of various rooms joined together by different households, thus segmenting a property that until then had been conceived as a unitary residential space. It is plausible to believe that each hearth would have corresponded to the dwelling of a different conjugal group within the settlement. In other words, having once been the home of a *dominus*, his family, relatives and domestic service, this area was converted into several independent households (although perhaps related by neighbourhood or kinship ties).

#### 6. *Everyday practices during the late antique occupation of Fuente Álamo*

To analyse the daily activities of the people who inhabited the settlement during this late ancient phase, we proposed applying a study methodology similar to that of the so-called household archaeology.<sup>64</sup> As usual in this type of analysis, our study began with the comparison of all the taphonomic processes documented in the strata recorded during the excavation, to avoid possible quantitative and qualitative bias related to the so-called “Pompeii premise”.<sup>65</sup> Among all the registered archaeological deposits, we identified two that met all these taphonomic requirements (Strata C. 63 and C. 64). These deposits were resting directly on the paving of various rooms in Sector C and sealed by homogeneous collapse levels. Moreover, both strata contained assemblages composed of a high percentage of almost complete (although fractured) vessels linked in groupings that included the majority of the fragments of each piece.<sup>66</sup>

After selecting these strata, we carried out an exhaustive examination of the artefact (and ecofact) assemblages documented in them. We had two main objectives. The first was to engender a detailed chronological discussion of this occupation phase. The second, and most important for this chapter, was the characterisation of the everyday domestic activities undertaken by the successive inhabitants of this phase. We should note that it was never our aim to propose a quantitative study linked to concrete moments of occupation or specific households. Given the nature of the taphonomic processes documented in the sampled archaeological deposits, this was simply not possible.

<sup>64</sup> Allison, *The Archaeology of Household*; Bermejo Tirado, *Arqueología de los espacios domésticos*; Bermejo Tirado, Moreno, and Colominas, “Economías domésticas y patrones.”

<sup>65</sup> For a more detailed methodological and theoretical discussion see Binford “Behavioral Archaeology;” Schiffer “Toward the Identification;” “Is There a ‘Pompeii Premise;’” *Formation Processes*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> Bermejo Tirado, Moreno, and Colominas, “Economías domésticas y patrones”, 240-4.

However, we do not have enough room in this paper to offer a detailed review of all inferences recorded. Instead, we will summarise the main documented patterns in relation to the daily production, storage and consumption practices recorded in the assemblages.

With regard to the production practices, we can identify a small group of tools consisting of a rake leaf and two sharpeners linked to the maintenance of farm implements. This type of find can be used to characterise a relatively simple (at least in technological terms) set of agricultural tools probably used in some kind of intensive farming.

In terms of storage practices, we have had the opportunity to document several fragments of *dolia* or large handmade pottery jars (belonging to at least two different examples). This type of large storage vessel reveals the concern of the inhabitants of this occupation phase to preserve a certain volume of agricultural yield. However, given the number of finds, it would not have been possible to store a large volume of agricultural surplus. Rather the storage would have been intended to supply the pantry of a small or medium-sized household. Also relevant is the presence of a base fragment of a possible African amphora and a complete vessel of the Late Roman 1 type, a wine amphora of eastern production manufactured in workshops from Cyprus and Cilicia.<sup>67</sup> The latter has parallels that can be related to a classical type with a broader neck and cylindrical handles that is generally dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>68</sup> Although these amphorae finds allow us to establish connections between this occupation phase at the site and the long-distance trade networks operating in the Mediterranean of the late antiquity, these vessels had probably been recycled (especially in the case of the wine vessel) as part of the domestic storage set.

The documentation of these containers reveals a pattern of small-scale domestic storage that in no way can be linked to a scale of surplus production aimed at supplying regional or interprovincial markets. In addition, the fact that we document these containers among the deposits corresponding to one of the conjugal dwellings arising from the segmentation of the late Roman *villa's pars urbana*, we could also be seeing the segmentation of storage practices that would have been managed within each household.

We have much more information about the consumption patterns during this occupation stage. The analysis of the tableware from this phase of the settlement offers us interesting patterns. A significant percentage of the sample (approximately a quarter) is made up of TSH sherds of Baetican origin and African cookware, all of them early Imperial period productions.<sup>69</sup> The major presence of finds of this chronology in these deposits could have a similar explanation to that proposed by Margarita Sánchez Simón and Car-

<sup>67</sup> Pieri, *Le commerce du vin*; Reynolds, "Hispania in the late Roman."

<sup>68</sup> Egloff, *Kellia III*, 196.

<sup>69</sup> Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patronos," 254.

men García Merino in the case of the last occupation phase of the town of Almenara de Adaja-Puras.<sup>70</sup> According to those scholars, the documentation of large volumes of early Imperial pottery is explained by its reuse as a binder for earthen wall construction. In the excavations it is impossible to distinguish the collapsed walls from other abandonment processes. In fact, the elevated presence of such finds in these contexts can be interpreted as an indicator of the use of earth construction techniques to segment internal areas in this sector of the *villa*.

Other items of tableware included examples of oxidized coarse ware and, above all, various pieces of TSA, such as a Hayes 73 bowl,<sup>71</sup> a Hayes 76 African D patera with an decoration of incised concentric circles on its base,<sup>72</sup> as well as another fragment of a patera or an African C open plate, probably Hayes 51.<sup>73</sup>

A notable aspect of the consumption patterns recorded at this stage concerns cookware. The most outstanding finds in these assemblages are the pots with turned rims and no handles, very similar to other simple vessels documented in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century AD Andalusian contexts.<sup>74</sup> Also within this section, we have to mention several casserole sherds that present profiles similar to those documented in late antique contexts in the Malaga area.<sup>75</sup> These consumption data are complemented by the archaeofaunal analysis carried out by L. Colominas (ICAC). Although the faunal remains found were particularly exiguous, in the sample recorded in these contexts the remains of up to seven molluscs (belonging to the genera *Ostrea*, *Callista* and *Glycymeris*) were identified.<sup>76</sup>

## 7. Discussion: The late antique occupation of Fuente Álamo and the art of not being governed

The analysis of the daily practices recorded in the subaltern debris of Fuente Álamo constituted by these so-called abandonment levels can be considered an essential source from which to register the historical agencies (in plural) of these peasant communities that inhabited the site during late antiquity. The reconfiguration of the built environments, together with all the changes recorded in the daily practices, provide undeniable proof of the alterations in the ways of life in the settlement. Confronted with the thesis that advocates interpreting these changes as a “cultural revolution” organised by

<sup>70</sup> García Merino and Sánchez Simón, *El final de la villa de Almenara*, 19-32.

<sup>71</sup> Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, fig. 21, 134.

<sup>72</sup> Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, 125; Bonifay, *Etudes sur la céramique*, 203.

<sup>73</sup> Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, fig. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Serrano Ramos, *Cerámica común romana*, 134; Ación Almansa et al. “Cerámicas tardorromanas y altomedievales,” 515-30.

<sup>75</sup> Serrano Ramos, 155; figs. 17-22.

<sup>76</sup> Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, “Economías domésticas y patrones,” 261-2.

the elites themselves, I believe that those seen in this later phase of Fuente Álamo correspond to the reoccupation of this built environment by a community with a social and economic structure very different to that of the late Roman *villa*.

The comparative analysis of the daily practices described above allows us to characterise very precisely the type of domestic economy developed by these communities. The relative simplicity of the recorded agricultural equipment is similar to that which would have been present in any peasant household involved in intensive farming with little surplus production.<sup>77</sup> This limited ability to generate surpluses appears to be confirmed by the relatively low number of domestic storage vessels found. The fact that these *dolia* or examples of amphorae plausibly reused for storage (all located in the new segmented conjugal dwellings) suggests the individualised domestic management of agricultural yields. Although we have not yet been able to make a detailed study of the stratigraphic sequence recorded in the *horreum* of the late Roman *villa*,<sup>78</sup> the distribution and capacity of storage vessels located in the analysed assemblages appears to rule out the possible re-use of this *horreum* for the storage of a large surplus generated by the late antique community. In view of the type and simplicity of the agricultural tools and storage vessels recorded in the analysed phase of the settlement, we must consider a production structure based on small or medium-sized plots, probably exploited by several peasant households. This would have been a relatively simple system of agricultural exploitation whose productive yield would have been on the margins of subsistence.

These finds reveal the importance of the individual households as a structural element of the settlement's economy. This type of agricultural exploitation is closer to that reflected in the records of individual disputes documented in the papyri of later Roman Egypt<sup>79</sup> than to the models of collective action based on the organised management of communal resources in the early medieval period.<sup>80</sup> It is a type of economic and social structure more representative of the distinct needs and agencies generated by different persons, families and households within these communities.

The analysis of consumption patterns also raises very interesting elements for our discussion. The cookware contained in the sample shows a relatively small repertoire of forms, all of them locally produced. Very revealing are the fire abrasion trace analyses performed on these sherds. Most of them show very irregular abrasion patterns all over the surface.<sup>81</sup> These types of traces of use, together with the relative morphological simplicity of the pot rims, tell us

<sup>77</sup> Netting, *Smallholders, Householders*.

<sup>78</sup> López Palomo, "Balneum y villa," 340-3.

<sup>79</sup> e.g. Grey, *Constructing Communities*, 91-121.

<sup>80</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle*, 560.

<sup>81</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Bermejo Tirado, Moreno and Colominas, "Economías domésticas y patrones," 271-2.

of poorly controlled cooking processes. This means that, in many cases, these vessels were used as part of very simple cooking methods in which the pots and their contents would have been placed close to the heat sources with little control. These relatively simple cooking processes (such as soups or stews that are simmered) are those traditionally used for cooking in parallel with agricultural tasks, since they do not require much attention.

The archaeofaunal record, composed exclusively of shellfish shells, would confirm these relatively simple cooking practices. Given the inland location of the *villa* de Fuente Álamo in the surroundings of the Andalusian *campiña*, this type of shellfish could be interpreted as a prestige item. However, when compared to the faunal record of other phases of the settlement, we observed that the presence of this type of species is constant throughout its occupation.<sup>82</sup> More significant in this comparison is the absence of mammalian remains such as *ovidae* and *equidae*, which are represented in the early Roman phases of the settlement. This fact suggests that not only should the molluscs documented in the analysed phase not be interpreted as prestige items, but that in reality we find a certain impoverishment in the meat consumption habits recorded in the levels under discussion.

These changes in cooking practices contrast with the patterns recorded in tableware. The important presence of TSA items, some of them of a certain quality, tell us that the convivial practices were still linked to the trade networks established between the pottery production centres of North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean. In addition, the absence of use-wear traces presented by the pieces recovered in Fuente Álamo (so frequent in other Roman peasant contexts in central Spain)<sup>83</sup> indicates that the inhabitants of this occupation phase had sufficient resources to renew their tableware with imported products relatively frequently. Although the domestic economic structure that characterised this settlement phase could be related to a low capacity for surplus production, these groups were still willing to invest a certain amount in decorating their tables with this type of imported pottery. This pattern, linked to the acquisition and use of conspicuous products such as TSA objects, contradicts the conservatism with which the peasant community consumption practices are usually characterised. This sort of practice reveals the economic complexity of these households, as well as the social importance given to the convivial practices within these rural communities.

#### 8. “Now this is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end...”

The title of this final point refers to a well-known quotation from a 1942 speech by Winston Churchill concerning the Second Battle of El Alamein. It

<sup>82</sup> Bermejo Tirado, Moreno Navarro and Colominas, 260-1.

<sup>83</sup> Bermejo Tirado, “Early Imperial Roman Peasant.”

contains an implicit reference to the partiality with which we, archaeologists and historians, seek to establish milestones in the past of human societies. The formulation of the question of the end of the *villae* is a clear example of the extent to which our interpretation of the archaeological record has been conditioned by a sequential concept of history. In most cases, these historical sequences have been set from the top, regardless of the subaltern communities of the past.

As Bowes and Gutteridge stated in their aforementioned article,<sup>84</sup> the problem of the so-called end of the *villae* had been caught between two antagonistic historiographical perspectives. On one side we have the classical archaeologists, who have not hesitated to qualify the late occupation phases of these settlements as levels of abandonment or squatter habitations because they contravened the aesthetic and formal criteria arising from traditional Roman models. On the other hand, we have medievalists who need a turning point, a milestone from which to begin the formative processes from which to analyse the making of the medieval peasantry as a social class. The main challenge of both historical perspectives is that they renounce the study of the communities that inhabited these late antique phases in their own historical context, as an object of independent analysis and not as mere epigones or prologues (depending on the approach) of other historical phases that have traditionally taken the focus in conventional narratives. As we have seen, what some archaeologists have termed “abandonment layers” actually contain traces of a time-dilated occupation. The archaeological record of the peasant communities that inhabited many of these settlements between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, especially that we have denominated the subaltern debris, should be studied as a way (perhaps the only way) to register the agency of these “people without history” beyond previous historiographical perspectives. In addition, their study should be approached from alternative temporal sequences to those traditionally posed by conventional historical narratives. Only in this way can we be in a position to escape the synchronic tendency of most studies of the subaltern groups of antiquity.<sup>85</sup>

Although this is a single case study, from which no generalisations can be drawn, the example of Fuente Álamo shows us how the analysis of this subaltern debris constitutes a window for recording these peasant agencies in their own historical context. The detailed analysis of these contexts indicates that the site was occupied between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD by a community of peasants grouped in different households. A preliminary study of the burials recorded in this period has confirmed this continuity of occupation.<sup>86</sup> The data presented here are a plausible indication that, more than the end of the *villa*, what we are recording is the end of a model of exploitation linked

<sup>84</sup> Bowes and Gutteridge, “Rethinking the later.”

<sup>85</sup> Vlassopoulos, “Subaltern community formation.”

<sup>86</sup> Jaén and Delgado, “Morir en el campo,” 343-5.

to the late Roman period aristocratic residence. However, in no case can this be considered the end of the occupation of the settlement that would henceforth be inhabited by a community following a completely different economic model.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how, through a systematic study of the assemblages documented in the so-called abandonment levels, it is possible to record the living conditions of these groups. Perhaps if we integrate the analysis of other similar phases documented in a growing number of the *villae* on the Iberian Peninsula and in the Roman West in general, we can propose a historical reinterpretation of the diachronic evolution of these communities, given the historiographical perspectives that can reflect the complex matrix of agencies gestated within it. However, to achieve this objective we must adopt temporal frameworks different to those generated by the areas of chronological specialisation that usually guide archaeological studies.

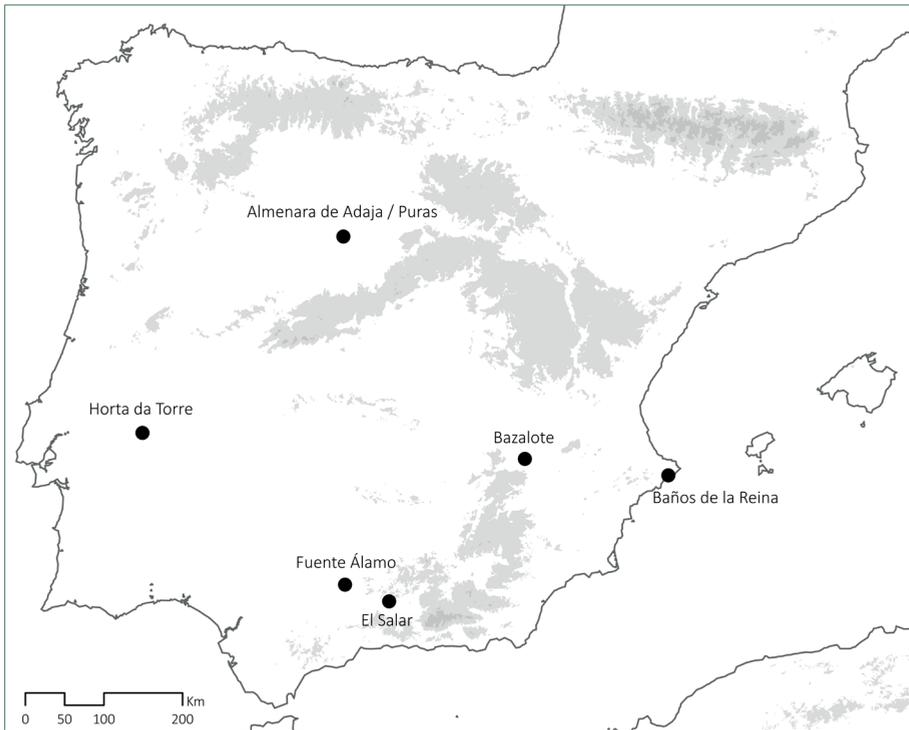


Figure 1. Map with the main Roman *villa* sites mentioned in the text (CAD: Fernando Moreno).

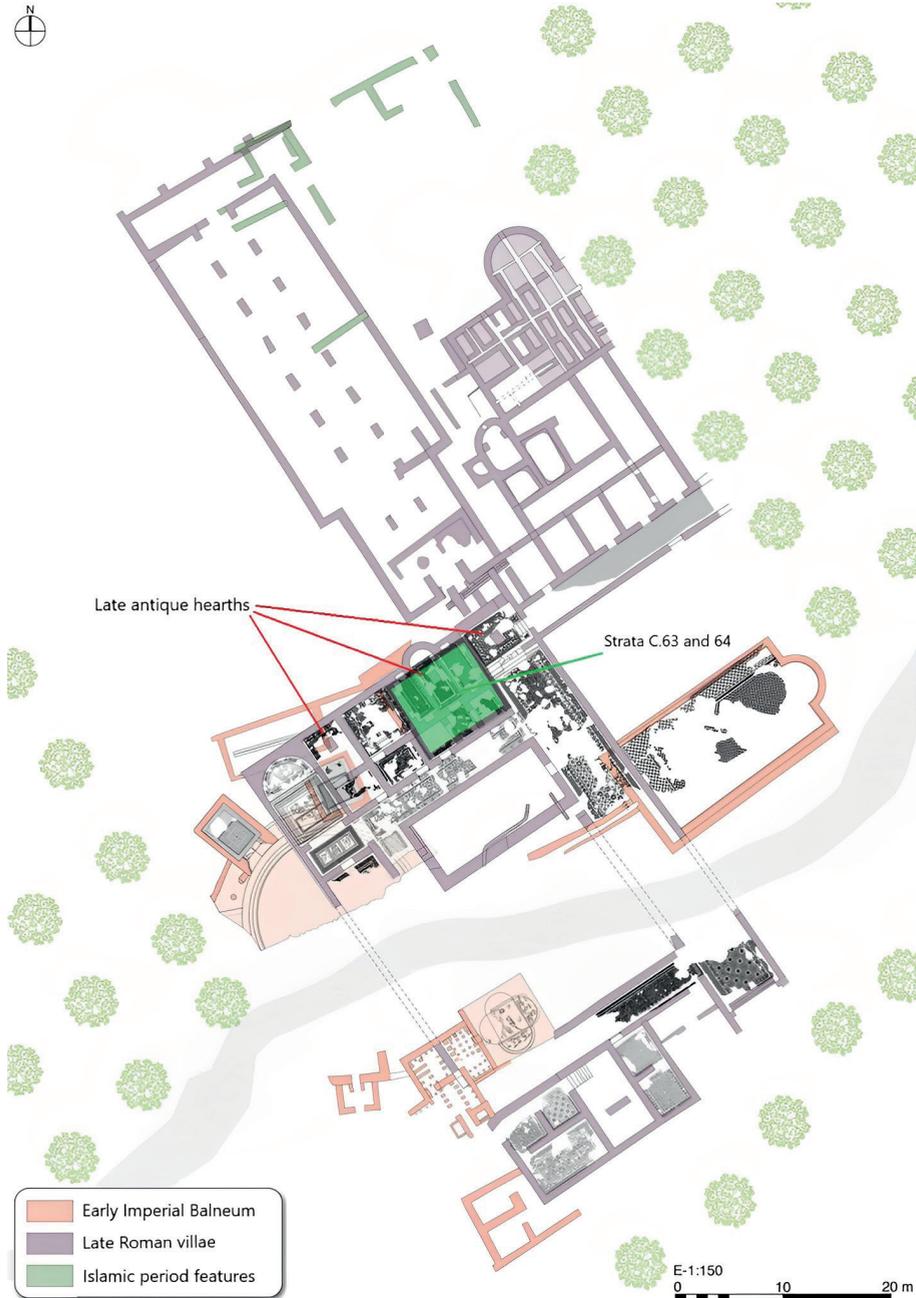


Figure 2. Plan of the structures belonging to each occupation phase documented at Fuente Álamo (with modifications after <https://fuentelamovillaromana.es/>). Courtesy of Manuel Delgado and David Jaén.

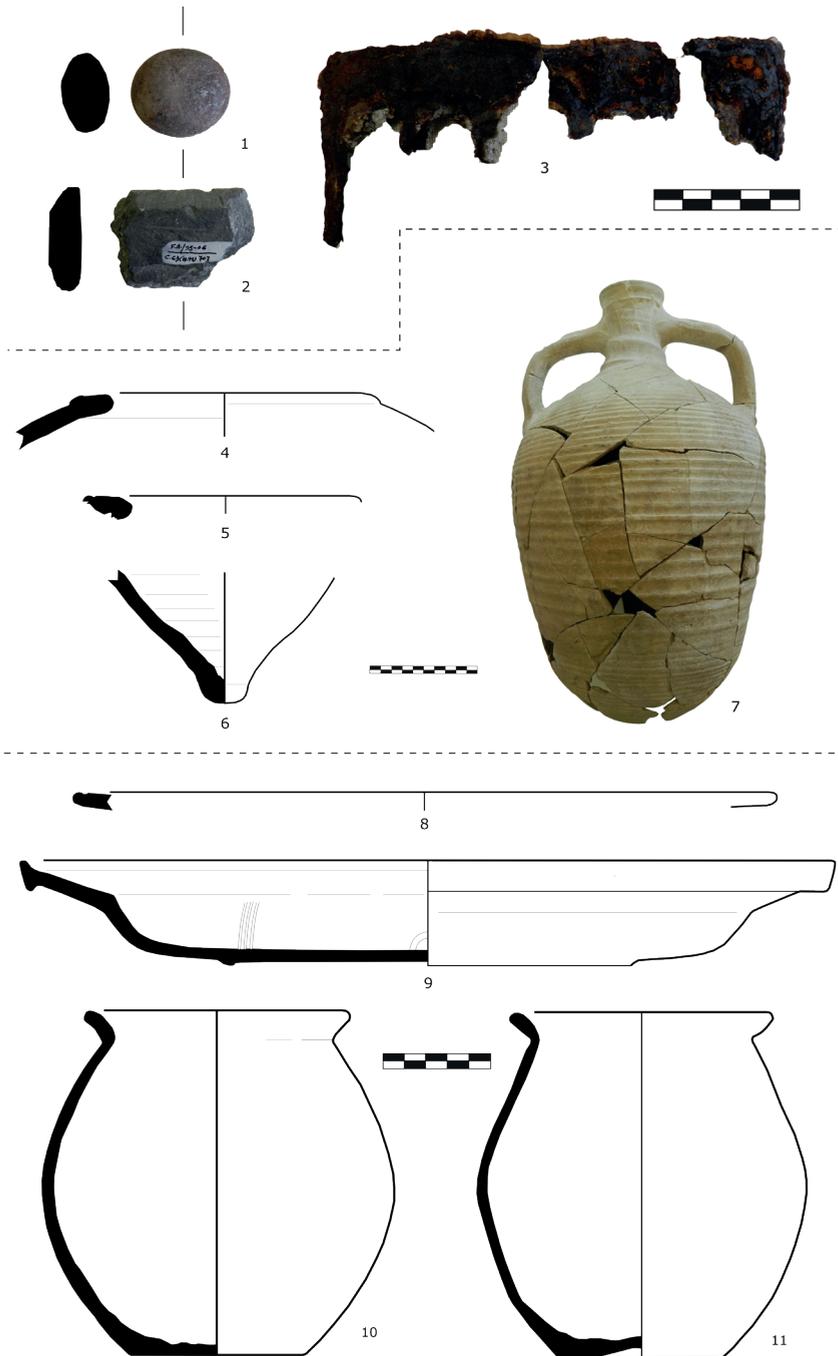


Figure 3. Resume of the main finds belonging to the strata c. 63 and c. 64 mentioned in the text. 1-3) Finds related to production activities. 4-7) Finds related to storage activities. 8-11) Finds related to consumption patterns.

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# LOCAL SOCIETIES AND PEASANTRY AGENCIES IN MEDIEVAL IBERIA

Despite the significant attention medieval scholarship has devoted to the study of peasant societies, these groups have traditionally been depicted as passive and homogeneous, merely able of resisting pressures from the state or powerful individuals. However, in recent years, the availability of new records, the widespread adoption of microhistorical analyses, and the renewal of conceptual frameworks have enabled scholars to undertake more detailed and nuanced investigations. This collective volume aims to explore the political, economic, and social practices of Iberian medieval peasant societies. A key finding of this multivocal analysis is the revelation of the relative subalternity of medieval ruling groups and the constraints on peasant actions across various geographical and chronological contexts.

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