# Urban Transformations in the Late Antique West

## Materials, Agents, and Models

A. Carneiro; N. Christie; P. Diarte-Blasco (eds.)

**Apresentação:** esta série destina-se a publicar estudos de fundo sobre um leque variado de temas e perspetivas de abordagem (literatura, cultura, história antiga, arqueologia, história da arte, filosofia, língua e linguística), mantendo embora como denominador comum os Estudos Clássicos e sua projeção na Idade Média, Renascimento e receção na atualidade.

Breve nota curricular sobre os coordenadores do volume

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Abstract

This volume is the fruit of a highly productive international research gathering academic and professional (field- and museum) colleagues to discuss new results and approaches, recent finds and alternative theoretical assessments of the period of transition and transformation of classical towns in Late Antiquity. Experts from an array of modern countries attended and presented to help compare and contrast critically archaeologies of diverse regions and to debate the qualities of the archaeology and the current modes of study. While a number of papers inevitably focused on evidence available for both Spain and Portugal, we were delighted to have a spread of contributions that extended the picture to other territories in the Late Roman West and Mediterranean. The emphasis was very much on the images presented by archaeology (rescue and research works, recent and past), but textual data were also brought into play by various contributors.

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# Preface

This volume is the fruit of a highly enjoyable and productive international research gathering held at the University of Évora, Portugal, from 22 to 23 June 2017 on the theme of '*Urban Transformations in the Late Antique West: From Materials to Models*' and numerous meetings and discussions that the editors have had with the authors that present their papers in this volume. This was a collaborative initiative between the Universidade de Évora (Portugal), the University of Leicester (UK) and the Marie Sklodowska-Curie MED-FARWEST Project (hosted at Leicester, but with partnerships in Rome and Madrid), designed to bring together academic and professional (field- and museum) colleagues to discuss new results and approaches, recent finds and alternative theoretical assessments of the period of transition and transformation of classical towns in Late Antiquity. Experts from an array of modern countries attended and presented to help compare and contrast critically archaeologies of diverse regions and to debate the qualities of the archaeology and the current modes of study. While a number of papers inevitably focussed on evidence available for both Spain and Portugal, we were delighted to have a spread of contributions that extended the picture to other territories in the Late Roman West and Mediterranean. The emphasis was very much on the images presented by archaeology (rescue and research works, recent and past), but textual data were also brought into play by various contributors. This volume publishes a majority of the papers presented and has offered scope for many of the talks to be extended in detail to explore facets of the designated research theme.

Évora University and the city of Évora were ideal venues for the event: the stunning architectural setting of the University is matched by the rich and relevant archaeological heritage of the city itself, showing in its very heart a transformation of a Roman monument to a late antique complex. Delegates much appreciated the city tour we undertook, and the reception held in the city hall. We thank warmly the city authorities and especially the University for hosting and supporting our event and this publication.

In addition to the kind assistance of various student helpers during the research meetings and other investigation initiatives, we also must thank all contributors to this volume for their work on submitting papers, responding to editorial and peer reviewer comments (our thanks to those very helpful

reviewers too!), submitting revised texts and then being patient in the final, and slightly delayed process of passing all papers material to press. And a final word of acknowledgment goes to the Coimbra University Press for their patience and support.

*Andre Carneiro, Neil Christie, Pilar Diarte-Blasco* (May 2019)



CHAIA
CENTRO DE HISTÓRIA DA ARTE
E INVESTIGAÇÃO ARTÍSTICA

# From *Invisible* to *Tangible* Power in Late Antique Rural *Lusitania*: Between Text and Material Evidence

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses settlement and land evolution in the territory of *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida), the capital of the late Roman province of *Lusitania*, seeking to contrast the archaeological data related to the new occupation profiles of the sites and evidence for *villa* life and changes in ownership, with the perception conveyed by the *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeritensium* on this specific phenomenon of rural change. The resulting image will contribute to enhancing current understanding of the local context and its dynamics in *Lusitania* after the collapse of the Empire.

**Keywords:** Lusitania, *villa*, Christianity, power, bishops

## 1. Power and authority: visibility and invisibility

Following the break-up of Roman Imperial authority, the territory of the *Lusitania* province underwent profound transformations. Similar to changes in other Western provinces, *Lusitania* did not escape the dynamics of a time affected by profound (although geographically not uniform) economic, social and political upheavals, and by the consolidation of a new cultural and religious reality. Between the 5th and 7th centuries, the rural (and urban) settlement network suffers a downturn, with properties and estates being abandoned, and architectural norms and lifeway sat *villae* undergo notable, even drastic, modifications. These changes, among others, can be perceived as the abandonment of the *otium* and *convivium* that had marked the lifestyles and material expressions of rich landlords who had owned parts of the countryside in the previous centuries; as the resultant emergence of new communities; and the economic transformation of the rural exploitation model, which devolved from

a large-scale exploitation of agricultural resources to a model based on extensive, but much less sophisticated exploitation.

In part related to these changes is the growth and influence of Christianity, which in time modified sensibilities according to a new cultural and moral paradigm, leading to new ways of perceiving rural populations, sites and the territory. However, any Christian presence in the territory was relatively muted prior to the 4th century AD (Maciel, 1996, p. 31), and in this respect archaeology to some extent mitigates the reference made by Cyprian of Carthage (in *Epistle* 67, written in AD 254) to the "Christian people" of some cities, including *Emerita Augusta* – this roughly coinciding with the first martyrdoms documented in the Peninsula in 259 (with prominent victims being Fructuosus, Bishop of Tarraco, and his deacons Augurius and Eulogius), and with later records of numbers of martyrs, including Eulalia, during the wave of persecutions led by Diocletian. Material evidence of Christian presence becomes stronger subsequently,[1]attested, for example, by epigraphic records, namely two inscriptions, one funerary and the other of AD 380 possibly related to the construction of a basilica or a place of worship (Mateos Cruz, 1995, p. 241), but also by the presence of bishops from *Emerita* in the Church Councils in the 4th century[2].

Although this late expression of Christianity may be explained by the fact that *Augusta Emerita* was, by this stage, very closely bound to the traditional canons and dominated by an equally traditional political elite[3], it was this elite

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[1] Arce, 2002, p. 31: "Aunque escasos, los testimonios del cristianismo en *Augusta Emerita* durante el siglo IV dejan entrever una comunidad cristiana que probablemente no era muy numerosa pero que a nivel jerárquico, y posiblemente como consecuencia de la situación preminente de la capital, se muestra muy activa e influente; por otra parte, el rápido desarrollo en los siglos siguientes de los cristianos de Mérida es la mejor muestra de que el germen era lo suficientemente importante en el siglo IV. No obstante, para la época que estudiamos, la «topografía cristiana» de Mérida parece reducida exclusivamente al *tumulus* de Eulalia y a la basílica de Santa María." For an overview of the situation in Augusta Emerita, see Sastre de Diego, 2011.

[2] The numerical presence of bishops recorded in the Councils will always be low. For instance, in AD 308 the bishop Liberius was present at the council of Iliberri, where 19 bishops and 24 priests were present; and in 314, the same bishop attended the council of Arles, but on that occasion was the only Spanish bishop present. Bowes, 2005, p. 237, observes that «Hispania remains a starkly under-bishoped province by any standard. The Spanish bishop would thus have found his geographic area of responsibility much larger than that of his Gallic or Italian colleagues, and his hold on the furthest regions of his diocese would have depended very much upon his personal interest and energies.»

[3] Arce, 2002, p. 16, states:' 'En Emerita residía el *vicarius hispaniarum*. [...]. El *officium* de un *vicarius* venía a incluir unas 300 personas, y el de gobernadores provinciales en torno a las 100. Toda esta enorme cantidad de burócratas constituían una *militia non armata*, y eran la esencia misma de la organización del poder tardorromano". It is worth noting that in Merida the major performance venues continued in use: the theatre and the circus (for which the tombstone of Sabinianus – curiously a Christian *auriga* – demonstrates the social impact of the races), as well the forum.

who, progressively Christianised, in fact came to ensure that urban dynamics, trade flows and distinctive cultural life that attracted people and ideas to the city from across the Mediterranean, were maintained. In this way the *redefinition* of the city was supported by the activities of Christian groups and leaders, who in time became notable landlords hierarchically organised. They also became involved in maintaining or renovating the infrastructures (such as city walls, streets and bridge, plus other projects in public areas), and in ordering the urban community (Arce, 2002; Goméz Fernández, 2003).

When the Emperor Diocletian promoted *Emerita Augusta* to capital of the *Diocesis Hispaniarum*, this reinforced the city's prestige and strategic importance[4]. In the 5th century, *Emerita* survived the passage and damages of the Suevi, Vandals, Alans and Visigoths, and in the 6th century even experienced a renaissance: the decaying pagan and monumental classical public spaces were offset by Christian ecclesiastical powers, who built and populated new architectural spaces (or reshaped the pre-existing ones) (Diáz, 2003, p. 135), overseen by the most senior authorities of the Catholic Church, namely the bishops, who exponentially increased their influence in the city.

However, while archaeological excavations within the city have led to the discovery of several monuments and structures (notably the Santa Eulalia Basilica and a structure interpreted as a *xenodochium)* and so provided strong guides as to how the urban zone was reconfigured, far less secure is our picture regarding rural areas. Although the archaeological data generally confirm that land usage was active (cf Rodríguez Martín, 2002; Christie, 2006, p. 6), the nature of this is on many levels substantially different from the classical model of land occupation that had prevailed in *Lusitania* in the previous centuries. Firstly, the concentration of properties in the hands of prominent *domini*, presumably largely belonging to the old Hispanic-Roman aristocracy and to members of the new Visigothic court, led to the progressive disappearance of medium-sized productive units and the subsequent abandonment of some *villae*. The difficulties in maintaining or reconstructing the imperial-period water infrastructures (notably aqueducts) also led to the gradual abandonment of larger-scale irrigation farming, to be replaced by a more extensive and less specialised agriculture, as well as by the practice of pastoralism[5]. With regard to production, although it is

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[4] Cruz Villalón, 1985, p. 28, observes: "Desde la reforma administrativa llevada a cabo por Diocleciano, se convirtió en la capital gubernativa de la *Diocesis Hispaniarum* que comprendía también la Mauritania Tingitania, dignidad que aún queda documentada claramente a finales del siglo IV. (...) La primacía de la ciudad de Mérida en España quedó testimoniada por Ausonio en el *Ordo Civium nobiliorum*, donde Mérida es incluida entre las ciudades más destacadas del Imperio, y en el mismo siglo IV, también por Prudencio, que en el *Peristephanon* alude a la ilustre colonia de Mérida, a la que califica de floreciente y rica."

[5] Chavarría Arnau, 2007, p. 81: «Las pizarras visigodas se refieren a caballos (39 y 42), a

difficult to analyse what the economic base of the region may have been, given the current lack of relevant archaeological data, documentary evidence reveal that, from the 5th century onwards, weak currency circulation led to major economic problems (Chavarría Arnau, 2007, p. 86), meaning that the basic method of payment now became centred on the exchange of goods, namely cereals[6]. Therefore, although the reconfiguration of economic space, which had become increasingly concentrated and less specialised, arguably indicates an "end of complexity" (Ward-Perkins, 2006), there was in fact still a combination of complex relationships that culminated in the reorganisation of the local and regional aspirations of populations and in the creation of a new political and institutional legitimacy.

In terms of contemporary written sources, the *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeritensium* (VSPE)*,* an anonymous work, undoubtedly panegyric and structured into five narratives, are a significant testimony of events within the city between AD 530 and 620, and a prime source for understanding the social, political and religious conflicts that afflicted *Lusitania* from the sixth century. Setting aside the diverse historical and political questions that have been very widely studied and debated with regard to the VSPE (notably those on ecclesiastical power relations between *Emerita* and Toledo, and the tensions emerging from heresies and other dogmatic differences; and, from a literary point of view, questions of intertextual relations with other hagiographic works from the Western late antique tradition), these texts are a key source through which to analyse and contrast those archaeological data which reveal changes in the rural landscape, as well to help understand the new forms of land occupation and how these changes were projected in the perceptions of the local community.

One notable episode in the VSPE of value in this regard is the description of the process of transferring an enormous property, offered in an individual capacity by one of the most distinguished inhabitants of *Augusta Emerita*, namely a senator and *illustris vir*, to a bishop named Paulus who had miraculously cured the senator's wife (VSPE IV, pp. 1-18; Diaz, 2003). Later, on the death of the bishop's heir (his nephew Fidel), the Church of *Augusta Emerita* inherited this entire estate, thereby becoming the largest property owner in the whole of *Hispania*.

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yeguas (43), vacas y terneras (uitulas) y novillos (*nouellos*) (54), corderos (54), ovejas (75 y 97), carneros (76 y 97), cerdos (92) y marranas (*scrona*) (54).» The author cites some archaeological data indicating the maintenance of a mixed system of livestock supplemented by the practice of hunting. In general, the osteological register remains constant in relation to the pattern under the Empire but with two differences: a growing importance of cattle and a loss of exotic species.

 [6] In the Visigothic *pizarras,* in the Salamanca region, payment in grain is attested. See Velázquez, 1989.

The concentration of lands to which this source refers would certainly have been a more common reality, enabling a new rural landscape to be created that extended over vast areas. This phenomenon confirms the trend by which the bishops, together with the major landowners, became both spiritual leaders and secular authorities in the political-institutional network of *Lusitania*, and the driving force behind the emergence and sustainability of the new systemic functions. As Pérez Sanchez observes, «el obispo, acorde con los fenómenos sociales imperantes en la época, desempeña en las ciudades de manera clara el papel de patrón, de protector, a través del ejercicio de la caridad mediante obras que son en gran medida continuadoras de las prácticas evergéticas anteriores. El poder del obispo se sustenta en una labor social de carácter redistributivo [...].» (Pérez Sánchez, 2002, p. 251)

In other words, the bishop was established in the community as the pastor who sheltered and protected, linking the Christian community by a unified worldview, structured by divine morality.

Significant in this regard is the catalogue of the works (as well the political *res gestae*) carried out by Masona (VSPE V, 3), the successor of Fidel in the city's episcopate: the text tells us that Masona, a man of great wealth, founded many monasteries, providing them with extensive properties, several churches as well as a *xenodochium* to welcome travellers and sick people, giving orders to uphold all men, free or slave, Christian or Jew. Similarly, his charitable actions are widely listed: he answered all the requests of the poor and instructed a deacon of the monastery of Santa Eulalia to respond to any who were in dire need; and, in keeping with the moral qualities a bishop should display, these efforts were always focused on the public sphere[7]. Equally important is Masona's psychological portrait, revealing a man of humble spirit, of immaculate conscience and a mind free from malice; his constancy did not change as a result of gains or losses; unflappable in the face of adversity, prepared for anything, he was always patient and firm; his expression never changed either in joy or in sorrow; and in all situations he retained a pure humility and serenity (VSPE V, 3), even in exile (VSPE V, 6).

This portrait of Masona presented in the VSPE includes three important features: his activity as sponsor for the construction of ecclesiastical works; his close connection to the community in which he acts as a both *reparator* and saviour[8]; and his personal qualities which resemble the sage's virtues in the Stoic

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[7] VSPE V, 3, 11: *nihilque auferebat, et ultro cunctis concedebat, donabat multa, largiebat plurima, ditabat munificentia universos beneficiis, et, munificientia largus habebatur. Omnes ab illo augebantur, donis ac diuitiis locuplebantur, et non tantum fratribus et amicis, quam et ipsis servulis ecclesiae se muneribus largum, ultra quam credi potest, praebebat.*

[8] Particularly interesting is the reference to his quasi-euergetistic role as a distributor of wine, oil and honey to the *civibus urbis aut rusticis de ruralibus* (VSPE V, 3, pp. 4-9). See Diaz, 2000, p. 26.

tradition. The portrait's rhetoric implies therefore a double aspect: on the one hand, it is a narrative and an expressive medium demonstrating the characteristics and actions of a distinguished man among his community; on the other hand, this portrait works as a universal *exemplum* to be admired and imitated. However, contrary to what happens in, for instance, martyrdom narratives, in which the martyrs are characterized almost solely by their Christian qualities (unwavering faith, strength in adversity, etc.), the construction of Masona's portrait, in this diverse historical context, centres on tangible actions within public sphere and involving public perception (in this regard it has more resemblance to Homeric heroes, whose recognition and honour depended on public perception, than to Stoic philosophers). Indeed, such episcopal interventions in the public sphere, both physically and socially, would be decisive to the growth of Christianity and the Church in terms of social and power relations: since the 5th century (and even the 4th century given state donations) the Church had become a major property owner, both in an institutional sense and in terms of its individual members, some of whom held large properties[9] inherited from their families or acquired as rewards; this meant that an ecclesiastical career enabled individuals to act «como un auténtico *villicus*, un administrador patrimonial»[10]. In this respect, the concentration of landholdings could come to have a decisive influence on the Christian management of the territory – a management based on the precept of working in direct contact with communities and legitimised by «procedure» or, in other words, by *visible power*.

This visible power was also manifested in the landscape. In fact, one of the essential concerns of the Catholic hierarchies in the early days of Christianity lay precisely in the «*domestication of the rural landscape*» and in removing from here residual secular pagan rites. As such, these *possessores* stamped their *fundi* and luxurious *villae* with an imprint that attested to their new Christian ownership. This imprinting took place at different times and might be organised either by members of the local elites or by bishops[11], who transformed their estates into physical and symbolic landmarks in the new Christian topography.

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[9] Maciel, 1996, p. 39, observing: «[...] também na Lusitania os bispos possuíram propriedades rurais fundiárias, quer para produção quer para descanso ou *otium* como os seus congéneres da Itália ou da Gália, seja por pertencerem a famílias aristocráticas detentoras de grandes *fundi* no campo, seja como administradores dos bens eclesiásticos, desde que *Constantinus* distribuiu à Igreja massa *fundorum*.»

[10] Díaz, 1994, p. 307. The ecclesiastical structure also offered the possibility of a career – something attractive at a time when the *cursus honorum* had stagnated or even expired. Although the entry criteria for an ecclesiastical career were tightened, the phenomenon was not restricted to elites. On this subject, see Jones, 1973, pp. 920-929. Canon 18 in the Mérida Council of AD 666 clearly reflects the concept: *dominus et presbiter*, where the priest is attested as the administrator of both the productions and the labourers.

[11] Sanz Serrano, 2017, pp. 328-329: «A ellos podemos sumar los numerosos ejemplos

One of the structures most affected in this process was the *villa*. Whilst the changing powers and politics had led to the abandonment of some, within *Lusitania* a relatively continuous occupation of these spaces has been recorded throughout the 6th century and even into the 7th.[12] However, from the 5th century onwards, it is no longer possible to speak of the *villa* in terms of the classical rural complex, since even where still occupied, these sites had been adapted to meet the needs of the new faith and of different economic priorities. It is not surprising, therefore, that places of worship come to be established in these, as confirmed archaeologically at various sites across the Mérida region (Fuentes Dominguez, 1995, pp. 235-236; Sastre de Diego, 2011). The phenomenon of structural change was not entirely new, being the continuation of a mechanism of change that can already be identified at some *villae* in the 3rd century, linked to the weakening of civil prestige and public careers and to modified outlooks. This trend was reinforced in the 5th and 6th centuries, following the definitive breakdown of Roman imperial control, and accompanied the replacement of public offices by Christian power. As part of this process, the classical concept of the *villa* suffers a gradual implementation of a less ordered form of habitation structured around a symbol of authority, which is now symbolic and religious. In other words, the *villa* as a «*conceptual paradigm of rural life*» effectively ended in the late 5th century or during the 6th century[13], surviving only in isolated situations but by then already devoid of the content which the original concept implied[14].

However, this adjustment to new times and uses was not uniform: in some cases it involved an ongoing grandeur and in others a simplicity of expression. The work by Bishop Braulio of Zaragoza (ca. 590-651) provides an outline image of properties in the middle region of the Ebro Valley, showing that «Toda esta zona parece ser un espacio habitado por aristócratas con propiedades de ámbito local que siguen la tradición tardorromana, al menos a lo largo de todo el siglo VI» (Wickham, 2008, p. 330). In the *Gallia* territories, the classic guide is Sidonius

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presentados por Ildefonso de Toledo en su *De viris illustribus*, obispos a los que podemos considerar como grandes transformadores de los territorios, *castra*, *vici*, *pagi* y *villae* que les pertenecían por herencia familiar. Por lo tanto es evidente la acción de las elites cristianas, poseedoras de grandes predios y lujosas villas, en el fenómeno de la transformación del espacio rural y de su cristianización con la fundación de iglesias y de monasterios y la imposición de la nueva fe por las buenas o por la fuerza a siervos y esclavos que dependía de esta nobleza y que en los concilios aparecen denominados como *familia ecclessiae*.»

[12] Chavarría Arnau, 2006, p. 32, states that Higinus reports that, in his time, several *possessores* had acquired multiple properties; however, while some of these properties were maintained, others might well have been left abandoned or vacant and uncultivated.

[13] Wickham, 2008, p. 670. The phenomenon occurred at different paces, with peripheral territories again the first to be abandoned: for 5th-century Britain, see Dark, 2004.

[14] In many cases, these were already extinct: see Chavarría Arnau, 2007.

Apollinaris (mid-5th century), who describes an active landscape of residential *villae* where poetry recitals and receptions were held and whose atmosphere was, in general, conservative or even one of splendid and magnificent places that ignore a ruined world[15]. Thus, the author gives a portrait of his property in *Avitacum* (*Ep.* II, 2, pp. 4-13) which appears, even in these times, ostensibly pagan and *classical*: the *villa* has a porch made up of numerous columns, from where one can contemplate the lake; a watercourse that feeds water to the still fully operational baths building; whilst for the majestic main building, the reception room has a *stibadium*, and there is a winter triclinium (*triclinium hiemale*) and another *triclinium* used by his wife (*triclinium matronalis*), by whom he had inherited the property.

The same impression is evident in *De reditu suo* by Rutilius Namatianus at the start of the 5th century, who, as a senator and the owner of extensive properties, describes journey back via (a damaged Italy) to his estates in Gaul. Despite some evidence of damage and even destruction in the cities especially, and of an instability and insecurity experienced by those travelling on the roads, Rutilius' vision of life in the *villae* that he visited in fact remains one of remarkable tranquillity, in which normal activities were still being pursued.

Such accounts and reports present us with an interpretation of continuity: regarding the ways of living in the rural world, the conservative atmosphere continues to flourish, providing the *otium ruris litteratum* and *philosophicum* (Sfameni, 2006, p. 64).

However, the signs of change were already present, and one of the most interesting and revealing testimonies of how habits were evolving emerges from the descriptions left by Sidonius Apollinaris, namely when he speaks about Maximus, former head of the provincial administration who had retired to his *villa*, a building of no particular decorative or architectural interest, and one where he ate frugally, wore a long tunic and let his beard grow, living an almost monastic life (*Ep.* IV, 24, pp. 3-4). Here we observe the gradual transition from an aulic ambience and from *luxuria priuata*, towards an introspective environment, now favouring an austere, humble way of life. Indeed, this denotes a new paradigm of daily life, and yet this new paradigm uses the same architectural structures. Traditional historiographical explanations tend to see this process of change and greater simplicity as symbolising a "loss of techniques" and "technological setbacks" linked to economic decay especially. However, there is also still an ethnic reading offered, seeing this material change as one of the effects of the replacement of indigenous populations by

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[15] Ignoring this world or intentionally avoiding it, according to the perspective by Sanz Serrano, 2007, p. 467.

barbarian population groups, and yet, in reality, the archaeological evidence for destructions caused by barbarians is scarce.

But probably the most significant episode displaying changes in elite rural lifeways is the story of Abbot Nanctus (VSPE III, 8ff), who came from the «African regions» and who, after spending some time in *Lusitania*, joined the Santa Eulália basilica. Like Bishop Paulus, this abbot was given an estate (*locum fisci*) by the Visigothic King Leovigild. The property was transferred together with its inhabitants/workers, who are assumed to have been free-men (with families), bound by economic constraints to a life of servitude and therefore tied to the titleholder of the property. However, it appears that when they met their new landlord, they were so disenchanted with his humble appearance that they refused to serve him and decided to kill him. The murderers were brought to justice, and yet the king decided to release them, saying «if they have killed a servant of God, let God avenge the death of his servant without recourse to my vengeance» (VSPE III, 14). The author of the VSPE ends the story by describing their punishment: «As soon as they were set free, they were set upon by demons who tormented them for many days, until they drove their souls from their bodies and they died a cruel death» (VSPE III, 15).

This account, to be set between AD 570 and 580, clearly describes a community (or, rather, diverse small communities) of workers, who probably lived in settlements close to the big *villae* and were buried in a sizeable necropolis or shared burial ground. These people likely worked under a system of *absentia domini* which, as in other regions, was becoming increasingly common for two reasons: firstly, because direct management both of extensive properties *in continuum* and multiple properties made up of geographically dispersed *fundi* was becoming difficult, if not impossible[16]; and, secondly, because the rural economy, in which large agricultural estates prevailed, did not require a trained and regular workforce. However, more importantly than these economic references, this episode constitutes a powerful mental and cultural representation of a community which encapsulates a set of puzzling features: for, in fact, although they were effectively in servitude, the community had sufficient autonomy to work together to assassinate the new *dominus*; and they had no very serious reason for killing him, only an *aesthetic* motive (the «tattered clothes and dishevelled hair of the *dominus*»).

Arguably, this aesthetic motive carries an important symbolic dimension, for it brings to the forefront the problem of power representations. And here the

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[16] Chavarría Arnau, 2004b, p. 116: «La acumulación de propiedades y la dispersión geográfica de las mismas hace que difícilmente este patrimonio pudiese ser gestionado de modo directo y lleva a pensar que, como en otras provincias, es posible también en *Hispania* que el sistema de arrendamiento de tierras fuese uno de los modos utilizados por los grandes propietarios para explotar el territorio.»

problem is especially eloquent, because it shows the clash between two worlds: on the one hand, if the murder of the *dominus* suggests that the servants can still be connected to a traditional worldview in which the elites asserted their influence, wealth and authority through external signs, including appearance and dress, on the other hand, the response given by the VSPE text to answer to this inability in perceiving new power signs, is entirely Christian. Yes, the servants were punished, but the punishment, far from late Roman legal prescriptions which would have demanded the death penalty for any servant guilty of murdering their *dominus*[17]*,* seems no longer to have a basis in civil law, being now defined and applied by *divine* will. Nevertheless, these apparent perplexities reveal the dual tension being experienced then in terms of sensibilities, regarding how the symbolic capital emanating from the power structures was displayed.

In sum, this process of affirmation of new cultural values, which replaced ostentation by austerity, corresponds to a phenomenon already felt in Sidonius Apollinaris' time and which became stronger in the following centuries, leading to the «desvanecimiento del principal elemento que había determinado el estilo de vida aristocrático durante el período imperial: la existencia de una cultura literaria civil y erudita» (Wickham, 2008, p. 376). However, despite its relative uniformity, the process was slow – as often happens in periods of paradigmatic transition. In fact, if the description of Maximus and the story of Abbot Nanctus reflect the premises of the new faith, the simplicity of habits still co-existed with sophisticated appearances and an almost baroque taste for jewels and ornaments inspired by Visigothic aristocracy or by Byzantine power. In this respect, the Visigothic necropoleis in the centre of the Peninsula – without doubt reflective of a notable landowning context in proximity to the royal court in Toledo – provide evidence of how such ornaments were displayed, both in life and death[18].

## 2. Displays of power: changes in material culture

In terms of material culture, the Christian places of worship that were erected in the *villae* formed one of the most efficient forms of organising the related and dependent rural communities[19]. However, the process of insertion

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[17] Probably the most famous case of a *murder* of a *dominus* by a slave is the case of Pedanius Secundus in AD 61. The Senate ordered the execution of all of the *dominus'* slaves, including an elderly, women and children. Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.42-44.

[18] Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau, 2008, p. 202: «Teniendo en cuenta la frecuencia con que estos elementos aparecen, tal vez haya que plantearse la posibilidad no sólo de la profunda romanización de las poblaciones bárbaras, sino también el fenómeno contrario: la población romana fue absorbiendo progresivamente nuevas formas de vida y signos de identidad traídos por inmigrantes e invasores.»

[19] Bowes, 2001, pp. 336-338, states: «Taken together, the canons of the councils of Zaragoza and Toledo attest to the presence of extra-episcopal villa-churches that were viewed as a threat

of Christian chapels and churches is surprisingly poorly documented, in terms of both contexts and pace/chronology, due to obvious difficulties in establishing dates based on limited associated finds (cf Bowes, 2005, 207). In general, in the few cases examined in detail in *Lusitania*, there appear to have been two distinct periods: (i) up until the 5th century, construction involved redesigning a pre-existing structure, most likely a pagan shrine or cult space, in the villa complex itself; plans, therefore, in part depended on these pre-existing units (as in the well-known examples of Quinta das Longas, Elvas, and Monte da Cegonha, Beja). Subsequently, these new cult *foci* tended to be erected from scratch in an area near the residence, sometimes within the baths structure (something fairly common in the Italian Peninsula or in Catalonia, but less well-known in Lusitania[20]), or sometimes further out, up to half a kilometre distant from the residence, which in general, by this stage, had been abandoned. One notable example is the huge *villa* of Torre de Palma, Monforte, where the basilica was established in the previous burial area.

Obviously all these different transformations and impositions had a different significance, since building a Christian chapel in an active, albeit redesigned complex is not the same as erecting one in abandoned or non-functioning areas or in a detached location. Yet, despite these variations, the new presence of a church would not "perpetuate" the life of the *villa* itself in any of these cases, since in practice this involved a complete reformulation of the dwellings, meanings and substance of their symbolic content[21]. Furthermore, the insertion of burials around or even within the (normally ruinous) *villae* structures accentuated this trend. In fact, the creation of such burial grounds in *villa* sites in *Lusitania* help to reveal this inversion of modes of perceiving and valuing built structures, through their (re)using of an area that had formerly been a "living space" as a resting place for members of the community. And often it appears that the deceased in these

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to episcopal control. Their rural setting suggested non-orthodox practices specifically associated with agricultural rituals. [...] The villa churches similarly suggest a semi-independent, rural Christianity, tied to the *dominus* and the *fundus*, and founded in areas with few urban entities and even fewer bishoprics.»

[20] Bowes, 2001, p. 324: «There are two basic structural types of villa-churches, the intra-villa church, constructed inside the *villa urbana* or *rustica* by modifying an extant space, and the extra-villa church, a free standing building located 100-500m from the villa proper.»

[21] In some cases, it is possible that monasteries were installed. This might be the case of Palhinha, Fronteira, and São Pedro dos Pastores, Campo Maior, with epigraphic evidence too (Carneiro, 2014). In very special cases, other types of spaces may have been built with more specific purposes in mind; note the significant example given by Bowes, 2006, p. 95: «The letters exchanged between Paulinus and Sulpicius describe in some detail the latter's elaborate provisions for his ever-increasing relic collection. Sulpicius, who had attempted to procure the body of Martin de Tours, had to be content with that of Clarus, Martin's disciple, which he housed in a church on his estate-*cum*-ascetic community, along with a number of Holy Land relics.»

burial plots were of workers, not related to the former family owners of the *villa* and estate, further reinforcing the transition in role and perception[22].

As previously discussed, the presence of these rural Christian places of worship developed in various ways, and this diversity undoubtedly should be seen to reflect distinct rhythms and concepts, which had very different meanings. However, what is interesting to note is that, despite this polymorphism, these basilicas and chapels emerged as semi-public spaces, which were accessible to a greater number of the faithful than those residing in the *villa* (in those cases where residential functions persisted). Kim Bowes has noted this phenomenon: «these basilicas are more than private chapels. (...) The church was only accessible from outside the domestic core, suggesting permeability to extra-household members» (Bowes, 2001, p. 334). This concept led to changes in the way in which the space was perceived: in fact, its transformation, in order to provide access for people who did not live in the *villa*, marked a strong contrast with the privacy that had been dear to the Roman spirit and thus had been associated with these structures in previous centuries. These new circuits may have perhaps been seen as a means of elevating the figure of the *dominus* and impressing the *rustici*, allowing them to view quality areas of the *villa*. However, this effect should not be overemphasised, since the structure of the (surely multiple) Hispano-Roman societies did not change so significantly in such a short space of time. In the *villae* where basilicas were constructed within the fabric of the original building, access would have remained restricted to the established social networks, without the assumption that these spaces would function as "missionary cells"[23] *urbi et orbi*.

Yet the construction of the "semi-private" basilicas implies the presence of at least a priest or a body of priests or even of an ecclesiastical authority capable of organising and overseeing related rural territories and worker groups. So far this has only been documented from the 6th century onwards or, on other words, from the point at which the *villae* were definitively abandoned as residential *foci*. In 5th-century Church Councils, parish administration was not discussed[24], indicating that for some generations the Christian faith had spread in an unstructured way, promoted more on the basis of private initiatives, with

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[22] It's difficult to perceive the dimensions of the burial grounds and the number of graves per site, due to the lack of extensive excavations. However, in Pombais (Marvão, in the previous bath complex) we can count at least 30 burials, and in Monte de São Francisco (Fronteira, survey obtained by GPR) there are nearly 15.

[23] Jorge, 2002, p. 165: «Ces *villae*, témoins de l'enrichissement de leurs propriétaires, pouvaient de la sorte constituer de vraies cellules missionaires.»

[24] Bowes, 2001, p. 334: «However, the Church councils of the fourth and early fifth century are silent on matters of parish organization. The only canons scholars have cited as evidence for such organization are precisely those condemning villa-churches.»

the Catholic hierarchy struggling to operationalize proper oversight of what was actually happening in rural areas[25].

In summary, the redesigning of spaces, the creation of burial areas and of Christian chapels and basilicas in areas surrounding the *villae* indicates that the *villa,* representing the outer shell of a classical way of life, no longer functioned and its material structures were now understood in a different way. These trends agree with the documentary data that also signify that the use of the term *villa* was gradually dying out and being replaced by more neutral terms[26]. Nevertheless, this set of factors helps to explain one of the most surprising facts concerning early Christian architecture in *Hispania,* namely the diversity of plans and solutions in the rural context, which were far greater than those found in cities (Chavarría Arnau, 2007)[27]. Arguably, this wealth of forms in architectural expression reflects, on the one hand, the noted weakness of the Church's networks of control, but also the ambitions of the secular elites to affirm their influence on a local level. This later influence may have been expressed in many ways, namely by creating structures evocative of *martyria* and spaces dedicated to *memoria* containing relics and other symbols that served as an additional attractions for the faithful. The gradual building of places of worship would polarise the investments of the elites, whilst at the same time serving to affirm the new languages, either from an architectural or, primarily, from an iconographic point of view, as languages that would eventually replace the classical pagan culture.

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[25] Bowes, 2005, highlights how under the early Church, the Hispanic Episcopal network would have been fairly weak and not very active, as can be inferred from the scattered presence of bishops in the councils. Despite the hierarchical determinations, the regional relations of the Church with the secular elite would have constrained the actions of Church officials, who will have been still very attached to clientelistic alliances.

[26] Isla Frez, 2001, p. 12: «También resulta sorprendente que las menciones de *villae* desaparezcan de la *Hispana* a partir, precisamente, de *circa* 400. [...] En las fórmulas visigodas, un repertorio de textos elaborado en el último período del reino visigodo para servir de modelo en diferentes actos jurídicos, conservamos algunas que tienen que ver con la compraventa de tierras, la fundación de centros eclesiásticos o las cartas de dote. Curiosamente en ninguna de ellas se menciona la *villa* como referente del mundo agrario [...]. Nos encontramos, sin embargo, con termos más genéricos del tipo *locus* o, en algún caso, *possessio* (*Form.* IX) e, incluso, *terrae in locum...* (*Form.* XXXVI).» The author reflects also on the use of the word *villula*, recalling the words of VSPE, where the term appears to describe sites most probably located on the banks of the Guadiana.

[27] Bowes, 2005, p. 228: «Just as the functional aspects of these rural Christian buildings show a surprising variety and complexity, so, too, do their designs and construction techniques. Unlike the garden-variety plans and generally modest materials of Spain's urban churches, the peninsula's rural commemorative monuments display a dizzying array of plans and materials, many of them otherwise unknown in Hispania. While standard designs can be found within the corpus, Hispania's countryside also boasted a number of real Christian architectural oddities, displaying plans that were either rare or unique for their date.»

Overall, it can be argued that the *villa*, ceasing to be a structured model, loses its classic identity as paradigm, one organized to function as an economic and social microcosm; and yet, curiously, it does not lose its symbolic potential. Previously, the Roman elite had established around the concept of *villa*, relations between nature and culture, between *otium* and *negotium*, human and nature, city and country; these relationships not only echoed the real world of the *villa*, but also several symbolisms, whether aesthetic, political or philosophical (Spencer, 2010, especially chapter 5). With the demise of the classical world, the *villa* disappears. But the architectural changes and the construction of Christian symbols in these old spaces leave us an important message: the Empire had suffered territorial fragmentation; as the Middle Ages progress, the creation of nationalities will develop strong regional self-consciousness among populations; the development of national languages will mean that the inhabitants no longer recognize themselves as part of the same linguistic and literary community; the division between urban and rural worlds will become further pronounced – and these symbols, found both in cities and in the countryside, whether in *Lusitania*, in Gaul or in any other former Roman province, display a cultural homogeneity in a world that, despite being already fragmented, religiously and symbolically will never be so unified.

Overall, these data enable us to understand that Christianity in fact fostered the evolution and transformation of an architectural and experiential profile, adding new cultural elements that were blended with existing ones to create new realities; and this was a trend that spread slowly outward from the cities to the countryside. It is becoming increasingly evident that periods of transition are broad and that within them there was always scope for assimilating contributions from other cultures, many of which remain to be fully considered. Within this field, the entire 7th century AD in *Lusitania*, and more widely, represents a crossroad where diverse Christian, Visigothic and even Byzantine influences converged and influenced one another[28],forming a new way of living, perceiving and planning, in an area that is now starting to be considered "plural and multiform".

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[28] Maciel, 1996. On the architecture of the seventh century, see Almeida Fernandes, 2009, and Caballero Zoreda, Mateos Cruz & Utrero Agudo, 2009.

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