



Being Roman under Visigothic Rule: Space and Identity in the Northeastern Territories of the Iberian Peninsula (*Hispania Tarraconensis*)

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ABSTRACT

Despite being a topic with an extensive historiographical tradition, the end of the Roman Empire and the consolidation of the first barbarian kingdoms in Western Europe continue to lead to different interpretations, leaving many questions unresolved. The lack of a continuous and exhaustive repertoire of documents regarding the disappearance of the Roman state has contributed to the perpetuation of a complex historiographical debate, which has been remarkably enriched in the last decades with the introduction of new and varied perspectives. *Tarraco*, capital city of the northeastern territories of the Iberian Peninsula, that is, *Hispania Tarraconensis*, is no exception to this trend.

The Visigothic conquest of the city of *Tarraco* by the armies of King Euric (r. AD 466-484), in the last third of the fifth century (472), allowed him to exert control over the entire Roman province (*Hispania Tarraconensis*), so the chroniclers tell us. Traditional historiography interprets these events as representing a real break for *Tarraco*, as well as the beginning of an irreversible period of decline that resulted in an almost complete loss of its former competencies – civilian and ecclesiastical – as capital city of Roman



Tarraconensis. According to the conventional view, the city would have become something similar to a military colony, at the mercy of the representatives of Visigothic public power, whose main aim would have been to satisfy the ruling kings, themselves controlling a unified kingdom from distant royal sees in Toulouse, first, and in Toledo, afterwards.¹ Uncovering details about the inclusion of the provincial capital of Roman Tarraconensis into the dominions of the Visigothic kingdom, as well as the impact on the immediate history of the city, is a hard task due to the scarce information available.

The current debate on the dynamics of ethnicity and ethnogenesis has contributed to clarifying the ‘barbaric’ features of the first European ‘Germanic’ kingdoms, in accordance with the diversity of situations derived from their encounter with *romanitas*, while forcing scholars to call attention to the perpetuation of the many realities which were common before the disintegration of the Roman state in these territories.² In addition, the growing interest in the historiography of the late antique city and a sounder knowledge of the archaeological materials of the period together offer new approaches to analyzing the processes of urban transformation characteristic of these centuries.

¹ Emilio Morera, *Tarragona cristiana. Historia del arzobispado de Tarragona y del territorio de su provincia (Cataluña la Nueva)* I. Institut d’Estudis Tarraconenses Ramon Berenguer IV (Secció d’Arqueologia i Història 46) (Tarragona, 1981), 54-61; Josep Maria Recasens, *La ciutat de Tarragona* (Barcelona, 1975), 11-23.

² *Kingdoms of the Empire: The integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 1997); *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities 300-800*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Javier Pampliega, *Los germanos en España* (Pamplona: Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1998); *The Visigoths from the Migration period to the VIIIth century. An ethnographic perspective*, ed. Peter Heather (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press [Studies in Historical Archeoethnology 4], 1999); *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Hans Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2003); and, Jorge López Quiroga, “La presencia ‘germánica’ en Hispania en el siglo V d.C. Arqueología y procesos de etnogénesis en la Península ibérica,” *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* 30 (2004): 213-23.

ESSAY

According to the anonymous *Chronica Gallica* of 511, a Visigothic army, coming from Gaul under the command of the *comes Gothorum* Gauterit, crossed the Pyrenees through Pamplona and conquered Zaragoza and neighboring cities. Next, another wing of the same Visigothic army, led by Heldefred, entered the eastern ports following the *Via Augusta* and, with the complicity of the *dux Hispaniarum* Vincentius, took possession of *Tarraco*.³ Capturing the capital city of the last Roman province of Hispania allowed the Visigoths to ensure the obedience of the most relevant urban centres along the coast.⁴ These events, which should be read as a conquest, took place in the year 472 and, with them, the authority of the Western Roman Empire vanished in Tarraconensis, giving birth to its political dependence on the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse and its king Euric.⁵

The extant sources do not allow scholars to resolve all the questions posed by the new political situation in *Tarraco*, with its diverse complexities. Nonetheless, a review of the written sources in consideration of broader current perspectives reveals a rather limited impact of the initial episodes of conquest, as well as a deliberate preservation of the previous social fabric by the new rulers, as shown by the assimilation of certain positions of the Roman military administration and the role assigned to bishops. The archaeological evidence provides supplementary data that allows scholars to overcome previous interpretive limitations and which suggests a significant continuity between

³ *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 472/473. To be followed by Arles and Marseilles: *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 476/477; Jordanes, *Romana et Getica*, 45, 244; *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, ad ann. 473; Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, 34, ad ann. 466.

⁴ *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 472/473: “Gauterit comes Gothorum Ispanias per Papilonem, Cesaraugustam, et vicinas urbes obtinuit. Heldefredus quoque cum Vincencio Ispaniarum duce obsessa Terrachona marithimas urbes obtinuit.”

⁵ Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, 34, ad ann. 466-483: “Euricus [...] qui post captam Pampilonam Caesaraugustam invadit totamque Hispaniam superiorem obtinuit.”

the pre-conquest dynamics of urban transformation, begun during the late Roman period, and those of post-conquest *Tarraco*.

The relative sparsity of written sources represents an insurmountable obstacle to comprehensively understanding the immediate effects of the conquest of *Tarraco* and dependent territories. However, the military interest in the main cities of Roman *Tarraconensis*, including the administrative capital, suggests the will to exert effective control over the whole province.⁶ The vacancy in the Western imperial throne after Anthemius's death, in July of the same year, would have provided an excellent opportunity for this scenario.⁷

The fifth century opened with turmoil and disruption, with a series of episodes crucial to the fate of the Roman Empire as a power structure in the West. In the far Western territories of the empire, belonging to the former Prefecture of the Gauls, the usurpation of the throne by Constantine III (407-411) – following the crossing of the Rhenish *limes* by a group of barbarian peoples in 406 – gave rise to many conflicts which triggered a chain reaction inside the Prefecture. To preserve imperial authority in the West, it was imperative for the empire to design a new geostrategy that prioritized shifting military targets. Hispania played a crucial role in this transformed political landscape, at the centre of which was *Tarraco*, from which this new strategy radiated.⁸

⁶ Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 203; Javier Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania (400-507 A.D.)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons [Historia]), 135; Roger Collins, *La España visigoda, 409-711* (Barcelona, 2005), 27.

⁷ Jordanes, *Romana et Getica*, 45, 239: "Eurichus vero rex Vesegotharum Arevernam Galliae civitatem occupavit Anthemio principe iam defuncto." Also, *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 471/472; Jordanes, *Romana et Getica*, 45, 238; *Fasti vindobonensis priores*, 606, ad ann. 472.

⁸ See Josep Anton Remolà and Meritxell Pérez Martínez, "Centcelles y el *praetorium* del *comes hispaniarum* Asterio en *Tarraco*" *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 86 (2013): 161-86.

Tarraco remained the capital city of the sole Roman province of Hispania in the hands of the legitimate imperial power of the West after the parceling out of its provinces between the barbarian peoples in 411, and after entering the Iberian Peninsula in 409. Sources confirm that *Tarraco* turned into the base of operations and destination of the high commanders sent to Hispania (*ad Hispanias missi*) by the legitimate imperial authority of the West throughout the fifth century, together with the army, to fight against barbarians and, more particularly, against usurpers.⁹ Diverse reasons could have caused the decision: the city's status as administrative capital of the Roman province, seat of the governor and metropolitan see; its having an active and well-connected seaport; and, its unique location at the crossroads of the coastal road – the *Via Augusta*, which connected Hispania, Gallia, and Italy – and the inland road, the *Via De Italia in Hispanias*. Furthermore, *Tarraco* was a city close to and well-connected with the governmental centres of the West in southern Gaul.

These facts attest to the uninterrupted interest of the Roman Empire in Hispania and the leading role played by *Tarraco*, as the central source of power in the Peninsula throughout the course of the fifth century. This corresponds with the traditional normal functioning of a city like *Tarraco*, which, as a Roman provincial capital and metropolitan episcopal see, still represented the Roman Empire in the Peninsula. This strongly implies the unbroken validity of the empire in these territories, as well as the continuity of the feeling of belonging to a larger political entity of Roman identity.¹⁰

Tarraco still exerted a leading role over the whole Iberian Peninsula, in a fashion

⁹ Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos*, 7, 42, 1; Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania*, 203-12; Meritxell Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía. Cristianización y organización eclesiástica* (Tarragona: Arola Editors, 2012), 121-26.

¹⁰ Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 61; Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 114-26.

similar to that which had happened at the beginning of the Roman conquest of Hispania. The presence in *Tarraco* of Roman officers and high commanders, who are recorded in the written sources, perpetuated the links between the north-eastern territories of the Iberian Peninsula with the imperial machinery for most of the fifth century. In accordance with its status as the capital city of Roman *Tarraconensis*, *Tarraco* remained a city loyal to the empire, thus allowing the Roman structures to be preserved.

Tarraco had a ruling class and a local populace loyal to the empire, as shown by the bonds of its most distinguished citizens with the imperial machinery by means of direct kinship ties (Asterius), dating by consulates,¹¹ and erecting commemorative statues and dedications in the honor of the emperors.¹² The ruling social group, responsible for preserving established procedures and displays of prestige, knew perfectly well of the need to show loyalty to the empire and to the emperor, especially in times of misfortune. They also had the material means to carry out demonstrations of the kind. This is evident thanks to the abundant amount of imports that have been found in the waste dumps that archaeologists have uncovered in the city.¹³ On the eve of the occupation by Euric and his Visigothic armies in 472, these same elites decided to erect a commemorative statue in honor of the Emperors Leo I and Anthemius in the provincial

¹¹ RIT 947.

¹² RIT 100. According to Consentius's Epistle 11, *comes Hispaniarum* Asterius and his family were well settled in the city and the province. Leucadius, *primicerius domesticorum*, passed away in *Tarraco* in the first decades of the fifth century (Géza Alföldy, *Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co. 1975] [hereafter abbreviated as RIT], 971; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* [hereafter abbreviated as CIL], II2/14, 2126). Other funerary inscriptions reveal additional pertinent personalities, amongst whom are the *vir honoratus* Aventinus (RIT 946), Ampelius (RIT 954), and Optimus (RIT 937). On June 30, 471, Rusticus was buried in the same Christian cemetery, close to the River Francolí. The date is known thanks to a reference to the consulates of Severus and Jornades in his funerary inscription (RIT 947).

¹³ Josep Anton Remolà, *Las ánforas tardoantiguas en Tarraco (Hispania Tarraconensis). Siglos IV-VII d. C.* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2000); Josep Anton Remolà and Jacinto Sánchez, "El sector occidental del suburbi portuari de *Tarraco*," *Butlletí Arqueològic* 32 (2010): 595-618.

Forum of *Tarraco*, the inscribed pedestal of which is still intact.¹⁴ Even if the spirit for and the possibility to undertake these sort of actions remained, this would be the last imperial dedication plaque from *Tarraco*.

However, the military occupation of *Tarraco* did not mean an immediate political submission of the entire province and its ruling elites to the Visigoths. Isidore's reference to the resistance posed by the Hispano-Roman *nobilitas* to Visigothic early domination has been widely used by historians as proof of the provincials' rejection of Euric and his Visigoths.¹⁵ The *Consularia Caesaraugustana* point in the same direction when they talk about frustrated attempts of rebellion by local aristocrats, which were only settled by the re-enforcement of Visigothic authority in the province during the reign of Euric's son and successor Alaric II (r. 484-507). That was the case of Burdunelus and Petrus,¹⁶ who assumed tyrannical power in 496 and 506 in response to the successive occupation of lands in 494-506.¹⁷ Even if the period of time between the conquest of *Tarraco* (472) and the first of these rebellions (496) suggests a still rather limited control of the Visigoths over the territories south of the Pyrenees, reinterpreting these rebellions within current perspectives confirms the pre-existence of a military occupation in the province, as well as the restoration of the Visigoths' legitimate authority after capturing and defeating the rebels.¹⁸ On the other hand, the reference in the sources to cities on the riverbanks of the Ebro, such as Zaragoza and Tortosa, clearly

¹⁴ RIT 100=II 4109=ILS 815; CIL II²/14, 947. An in-depth study with a new contextualization of the inscription may be found in Meritxell Pérez Martínez, "El final del Imperio romano de Occidente en *Tarraco*. La inscripción de los emperadores León I y Anthemio," *Pyrenae* 45.2 (2014): 117-38.

¹⁵ Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, 34, ad ann. 466-483: "Tarraconensis etiam provinciae nobilitatem, quae ei repugnauerat, exercitus irruptione evertit."

¹⁶ A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Burdunelus i Petrus 25.

¹⁷ *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, ad ann. 494-497: "Gotthi in Hispanias ingressi sunt. Burdunelus in Hispania tyrannidem assumit. Gotthi intra Hispanias sedes acceperunt; ad ann. 506: Dertosa a Gotthis ingressa est. Petrus tyrannus interfectus est."

¹⁸ Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania*, 168-72.

shows a visible interest in the geostrategic settlements in the province, including the capital. Conquering them would have been an essential step towards controlling the entire province.

Our current knowledge of these initial episodes of Visigothic conquest suggests that obtaining the main cities of Roman Tarraconensis did not infer a systematic and fully-organized settlement of the Visigoths.¹⁹ The references included in the *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, together with the archaeological data from the cemeteries of the Castilian Plateau (alta Meseta castellana), led to a good number of twentieth-century authors defending the thesis of significant penetration of Gothic populations from Gaul into Peninsular territories by the end of the fifth century.²⁰ Prevailing historiography has conveniently put into context the number of Visigoths settled in the province at this time, while archaeological studies have confirmed the problems derived from identifying the material remains only by ethnicized criteria.²¹ Textual sources place the settlement of King Athaulf (r. 411-415) and his court in the city of *Barcino* in 415, after he was compelled to leave Narbonne by the general and patrician Flavius Constantius. This stay would have been temporary.²² Even if this early Visigothic presence in Tarraconensis produced small settlements of Visigothic soldiers and their families, who

¹⁹ Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania*, 146.

²⁰ The idea of these popular settlements was carried to its extreme by José Orlandis (Orlandis, *Historia de España. La España visigótica* [Madrid: Gredos, 1977], 63): “esta inmigración de finales del v daría origen a los asentamientos populares visigóticos de la zona de las necrópolis en la alta meseta castellana”, documented by Wilhelm Reinhart, “Sobre el asentamiento de los visigodos en la Península,” *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 18 (1945): 124-77. A recent approach can be found in Collins, *La España visigoda*, 181-94.

²¹ Pampliega *Los germanos en España*; López Quiroga, “La presencia ‘germánica’ en Hispania en el siglo V d.C.”; Gisela Ripoll, “The Archaeological Characterisation of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo: The Question of the Visigothic Cemeteries,” in *Völker, Reiche und namen im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Matthias Becher and Stefanie Dick (Munich, 2010), 161-79.

²² Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos*, 7, 43, 8; Hydatius, *Chronica*, 52 [66], ad ann. 416; Olimpiodorus, *Fragmenta*, 26; *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 416-418; Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, 19, ad ann. 410.

would have been an essential part of the western imperial armies as federate troops, it should be noted that the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse was a kingdom centered in Gaul. That fact would explain the scarcity of sources regarding Visigothic settlement in the peninsular territories until a later time.

Tracing the impact of the Visigothic conquest over the former provincial capitals of Roman Hispania is a difficult task, but, in general terms, scholars agree that the new rulers would have preserved the Roman administrative structures as a guarantee of their own political survival, as well as a Roman sense of order and *civilitas*.²³ Having said that, particular examples for proving this are limited.²⁴ We know of a series of ecclesiastical sources from which we can infer a clear interest in the preservation of the late Roman social fabric. The most recent works of revision have allowed scholars to emphasize that, besides the episodes of aristocratic opposition in the province mentioned by Isidore and the *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, there is evidence of another type of source which refers to the immediate and natural cooperation established between local leaders and the representatives of Visigothic power.

²³ The classical works on the subject are Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, *Ruina y extinción del municipio romano en Hispania e instituciones que le reemplazan* (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1943), 96-97; Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, "El gobierno de las ciudades en España del siglo V al X," in *La città nell'alto Medioevo, VI Settimana di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1959), 360-85; Manuel Torres, "Instituciones económicas, sociales y político-administrativas de la península hispánica durante los siglos V, VII y VIII," in *Historia de España. III: España visigoda, 414-711 d. C.*, ed. Ramon Menéndez Pidal (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1963), 223-45; and, Luis A. García Moreno, "Estudios sobre la organización administrativa del reino visigodo de Toledo," *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 44 (1974): 5-155.

²⁴ The traditional view may be found in José Maria Lacarra, "Panorama de la historia urbana en la Península Ibérica desde el siglo V al X," in *La città nell'alto Medioevo, VI Settimana di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: 1959), 330; Ramón de Abadal, *Del Reino de Tolosa al Reino de Toledo* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1960), 55-66; E. A. Thompson, *Los godos en España* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1971), 46-55; Luis García Iglesias, "El intermedio ostrogodo en Hispania (507-549 d. C.)," *Historia Antigua* 5 (1975): 120; Orlandis, *Historia de España*. 84-89.

The collection of the epistles of Pope Hilarius contains a letter that was written by the metropolitan bishop Ascanius of Tarragona and the other bishops of the province, circa 464/465. In it, the latter requests the opinion of the *collegium Romanum* about serious problems of ecclesiastical insubordination that had taken place in Tarraconensis.²⁵ According to the epistle, the bishops made the decision to consult the Pope on the advice of the *dux provinciae nostrae* Vincentius, who had previously informed them about Hilarius's sensitivity to the problems of the provincial churches.²⁶ This Vincentius is in all likelihood the same person who is mentioned in the *Chronica Gallica* of 511 as being the *dux Hispaniarum* who supported King Euric's interests in Tarraconensis and helped Heldefred capture *Tarraco* and the most important cities of the coast.²⁷

Located on the western fringes of Tarraconensis, the church of Calahorra brought together ecclesiastical life in the lands of the upper and middle Ebro valley at a time when the progressive detachment of the provincial elites from the central government at the capital created nuclei of resistance in local episcopal sees. These groups, organized around local civilian and ecclesiastical elites, became the foci of opposition to the empire.²⁸ As metropolitan bishop, Ascanius of Tarragona found himself obliged

²⁵ Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 180-91. Also, Ascanius and the bishops of Tarraconensis wrote two epistles to Pope Hilarius between 464-465. They have been preserved, attached to Hilarius's response in *PL* 58 (1847), 12-19. On Bishop Ascanius of Tarragona, see Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 161.

²⁶ *Epistula II Tarraconensium Episcoporum ad Hilarum Papam* (*PL* 58, 16): "Quam curam apostolatus vester de provinciarum suarum sacerdotibus gerat, filio nostro illustri Vincentio duce provinciae nostrae, referente cognovimus: cuius impulsu votum nostrum in ausum scribendi prona devotione surrexit."

²⁷ Jones, et al., *Prosopography* 2, Vincentius 3; Luis A. García Moreno, "Vincentius dux provinciae Tarraconensis. Algunos problemas de la organización militar del Bajo Imperio en Hispania," *Historia Antigua* 7 (1977): 79-89; Pérez Martínez *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 180-91. Also, *Chronica Gallica* 511, ad ann. 472/473. For more on the impact of the Visigothic conquest see Meritxell Pérez Martínez, "Obsessa Terrachona maritimas urbes obtinuit. L'impacte de la conquesta visigoda de Tarraco per Euric segons les fonts escrites i l'arqueologia," *Revista d'Arqueologia de Ponent* 23 (2013): 237-48.

²⁸ Koldo Larrañaga, "Entorno al caso del Obispo Silvano de Calagurris: consideraciones sobre el estado de la iglesia del alto y medio Ebro a fines del Imperio," *Veleia* 6 (1989): 181-87.

to intervene and did so. Ascanius reported the illicit behavior of the Westerners to the Pope and, in so doing, found the institutional support of the *dux* Vincentius, who sought to quell any disobedience of provincials.²⁹ As *dux provinciae*, Vincentius had been loyal to the empire and acted as a guarantor of Roman legality in the province for almost a decade. He knew perfectly well the problems of the Roman province and was familiar with the elites in the capital. Vincentius remained loyal to the empire in this difficult context, allowing the preservation of imperial structures to be preserved, but his collaboration with the Visigoths marked the political end of Roman *Tarraco*.³⁰

The case of Vincentius illustrates the process of detachment from the empire in the north-eastern territories of Roman Hispania, which consisted of an assimilation of the Roman ruling classes by the Visigoths. It is possible that, by 472, the Visigoths were the only force able to guarantee the survival of the traditional fabric of society.³¹ That process could have had a greater breadth in the ancient provincial capitals of Roman Hispania, where the metropolitan bishops would have been crucial allies in deploying a still limited authority to the inland territories.³² In fact, this is also suggested by other chronologically related examples. According to the famous inscription of the bridge from Mérida, a very similar situation could have taken place in the capital city of Roman Lusitania, as suggested by the collaboration between Bishop Zeno and the Visigothic *dux* Salla in refurbishing some essential buildings and infrastructure in

²⁹ The cooperation of the *dux provinciae* with the bishop could have had an impact inside the metropolis too, as suggested by certain works of repair and refurbishment that have been documented in *Tarraco* for the same years (see, Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 126-32).

³⁰ For services rendered, Vincentius was given the title of *quasi magister militum* and sent to Italy, where he was killed by the *comites* Alla and Sindila: *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 472/473: “Vincencius vero ab Eorico rege quasi magister militum missus ab Alla et Sindila comitibus Italia occiditur.”

³¹ Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-83.

³² Purificación Ubrić, *La Iglesia en la Hispania del siglo V* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2004), 90-91; Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania*, 148-49.

483.³³ Referring to the case of Mérida, Koch has recently come to the conclusion that it was this collaboration which made the Visigothic entry into the Peninsula such a success.³⁴ As already seen, cooperating with the new Visigothic rulers and the resulting transfer of loyalties played a significant role in the political end of Roman *Tarraconensis* and the example of *Tarraco* provides very interesting data for this process.³⁵ The Visigothic interest in Tarragona, and eventually Mérida, represented their explicit desire to control the ancient Roman provincial capitals as a step toward gaining authority over the rest of the provincial territories, an action which implies a significant preservation of the administrative structures of Roman Hispania.

Visigothic power over the Iberian Peninsula was sporadic until after the battle of Vouillé (*Vogladum*) (near Poitiers) in 507. The Frankish victory over the Visigoths and the death of their king, Alaric II, on the battlefield led to significant consequences for the evolution of Visigothic possessions on both slopes of the Pyrenees. Most immediately, it meant the seizure, by the Franks, of the Visigothic capital and royal treasure, the demise of the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse, the formation of the Ostrogothic protectorate of Hispania, and the largescale immigration of Visigoths from Septimania to Hispania.³⁶ The complete lack of explicit references to *Tarraco* in the

³³ The authenticity of the inscription (ICERV 363; José Luis Ramírez and Pedro Mateos, *Catálogo de las inscripciones cristianas de Mérida*. Museo Nacional de Arte Romano [Mérida: Asociación de Amigos del Museo, 2000], nº 10), which is only preserved by handwritten tradition, has been widely questioned by specialists, even if it is still considered a key piece in weighing the impact of the Visigothic domination of Hispania during Euric's reign. An exhaustive approach to these problems can be found in Arce, Velázquez and Koch published in the discussion forum of *Pyrenae*, 39/2: 121-45.

³⁴ Manuel Koch, "Nunc tempore potentis Getarum Eurici regis. El impacto visigodo en Hispania a través de la inscripción del puente de Mérida (483 d.C.)," *Pyrenae* 39/2 (2009): 140.

³⁵ Such an interpretation provides a new approach to understanding the end of the Western Roman Empire in *Tarraco* (Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 151-53; Arce, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania*, 145-46).

³⁶ *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, ad ann. 507; *Chronica Gallica 511*, ad ann. 505-506; *Vita Caesaris Arelatensis episcopi*, 1, 28; Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, 2, 37; Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, ad ann. 483.

sources during this period suggests that the city had remained under the nominal authority of the Visigothic kings since Vincentius's withdrawal in 472.

This helps explain the prosperity which *Tarraco* was about to experience during the first half of the sixth century. *Tarraco* was a natural passage zone between Hispania and Septimania and, as the capital of the north-eastern territories of the Peninsula, it boasted the mechanisms to exert its influence. That proved crucial when Theoderic, the Ostrogothic king of Italy, was established as the head of Iberian politics, officially as the regent of his grandson, the Visigoth Amalaric.³⁷ During the period of the formal Ostrogothic protectorate (511-549),³⁸ Hispania and Septimania were added to Theoderic's larger political project of Roman restoration (*restauratio romani nominis*).³⁹ Theoderic favored the Nicene church in his dominions and enhanced the prerogatives of bishops in the management of civic life, as a guarantee of his own political consolidation. Bishops were asked to play a key role in the new political order, which resulted in the reinforcement of episcopal authority and growth of ecclesiastical establishments in the territories of the Visigothic crown.

Tarraco experienced a real explosion of ecclesiastical life in these years, one that prefigures the organizational effort of the Peninsular ecclesiastical structure that would crystallize in the Visigothic Church of the seventh century.⁴⁰ The writings of bishops John and Sergius of Tarragona reveal a new age of creative and institutional growth

³⁷ *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, ad ann. 513; Isidorus, *Historia Gothorum*, ad ann. 507.

³⁸ The regency formally ended in 526, but an Ostrogoth remained on the Spanish throne until 549.

³⁹ P. S. Leicht, "Epilogo," in *I Goti in Occidente. Problemi. III Settimana di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1956), 669-91; Biagio Saitta, *Custodia legum civilitatis est indicium: Teoderico l'Amalo e la civiltà romana. Antigüedad y cristianismo. Monografías históricas sobre la Antigüedad tardía. VII: Cristianismo y aculturación en tiempos del Imperio romano* (Murcia: 391 i ss, 1990), 391.

⁴⁰ Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 209-92.

aimed at the spiritual and material rebuilding of the episcopal see and the territorial articulation of the episcopal domain, beyond the physical limits of the ecclesiastical metropolis itself (both in the dioceses and in the province). The regular calling of provincial synods between 516 and 546, and the exportation of the church's hierarchical structure to the secondary towns in the province (*municipia, castra* and *vici*) reveals the ecclesiastical dynamism of Tarraconensis during these years.⁴¹ The bonds with the ecclesiastical structure of southern Gaul, caused by the joint administration of the Visigothic possessions located on both sides of the Pyrenees, could explain the quick arrival of the reformist guidelines promoted by Caesarius of Arles, which would, from here, later spread throughout the *regum Visigothorum*.

The blossoming of *Tarraco* as ecclesiastical capital had its own reflection in the consolidation of a new topography of episcopal power. This may be inferred by the transfer of the *ecclesia mater* and the settings of episcopal representation to the ancient Roman Acropolis in the upper part of the city, and the succession of an extensive restoration and monumentalization program at the sites of the cult of Fructuosus, bishop and martyr, as is well attested in the suburbs (Visigothic basilicas in the Francolí Necropolis and the amphitheatre).⁴² The ecclesiastical flowering of the first half of the sixth century demonstrates that Gothic dominion coincided with a religious freedom for Catholics, at least initially, which favored the institutional strengthening of the bishop of *Tarraco* and his church.⁴³ So too did the continued dependency on the

⁴¹ The provincial councils of Tarragona (516), Girona (517), Barcelona (540), Lleida (546) and València (546) were convened by the Metropolitan Bishops John and Sergius, or under their direct influence. These synods include the first preserved documentary evidence for the episcopal churches of *Emporiae* (Empúries), *Dertosa* (Tortosa), *Ausona* (Vic) and *Urgellum* (Urgell).

⁴² Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 599-616.

⁴³ There is no evidence (written nor archaeological) of Arian Bishops or Churches in the city during the dominion of the Ostrogothic kings, who were Arians themselves (Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 210-15).

prosperity of cities for political authority. As a result, *Tarraco* enjoyed a new period of urban and commercial development. The significant amount of products of Eastern origin in the city confirms the vitality of its commercial port, as well as the existence of a demand for imports by the wealthy, both lay and ecclesiastical, who still saw the city as an appropriate place to live.⁴⁴

The archaeological material from *Tarraco* provides the information necessary to revise the traditionally pessimistic view of the history of the city after the end of the Roman empire. The evidence provided by recent excavations confirms the consolidation of the urban dynamics that began during the first decades of the fifth century and consisted of the progressive establishment of two separate residential foci around the buildings of the provincial government, one in the upper city and one down in the port, in the lower town. This feature, which would forever transform the profile of the ancient city, became visible in the period 420-430. The proliferation of this urban activity, together with the continuous commercial activity of the port, indicate the existence of a new period of the city's prosperity which would last throughout the sixth century. It also forces scholars to reconsider the impact of the Visigothic conquest of *Tarraco* in the latter part of the fifth century.

In *Tarraco*, the public precincts of the provincial government in the upper part of the city, designed in Flavian times, underwent a first stage of functional transformation and

⁴⁴ Josep Maria Macias, *La ceràmica comuna tarδοantiga a Tarraco. Anàlisi tipològica i històrica. Segles V-VII*. Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona (Tulcis. Monografies Tarraconenses 1) (Tarragona, 1999); Remolà, *Las ánforas tarδοantiguas en Tarraco*; Josep Maria Macias and Josep Anton Remolà, "L'àrea portuària de Tarracona," in *VI Reunió d'Arqueologia Cristiana Hispànica (València, 8-10 maig de 2003)*, Institut d'Estudis Catalans/Ajuntament de València/Universitat de València/Universitat de Barcelona/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Monografies de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica 9) (Barcelona, 2005), 175-87.

systematic dismantling in the period 420-430, as attested by the diverse rubbish dumps dug inside the ancient Roman Acropolis, the provincial Forum and the Circus.⁴⁵ This new dynamic of urban transformation was largely consolidated in the last quarter of the fifth century. By then, a series of reforms and the refurbishment of the defensive system put an end to the transformation process started decades before. That is, the refurbishing of the urban walls (Torre de Minerva) and the conversion of former monumental buildings into rubbish dumps for urban waste (Torre de l'Audiència and Torre de Minerva), which have been dated to c. 470, according to ceramics. The reuse of public infrastructures with diverse purposes transformed the traditional itineraries in the sector and sealed the two upper terraces of *Tarraco* (Acropolis and Forum), depriving them of their natural entrances.⁴⁶ All this was accompanied by a systematic residential occupation of the sector and, in accordance with the wealth of the materials, with a relocation of the main buildings of the civilian and ecclesiastical power to this part of the city.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Un abocador del segle V d. C. en el Fòrum Provincial de Tàrraco* (Tarragona: Taller escola d'arqueologia, 1989); Macías, *La ceràmica comuna tardoantiga a Tarraco*; Remolà, *Las ánforas tardoantiguas en Tarraco*.

⁴⁶ Theodor Hauschild, "Excavaciones en la muralla romana de Tarragona. Torre de Minerva (1979) y Torre del Cabiscol (1983)," *Butlletí Arqueològic* 6-7 (1988): 11-38; Xavier Dupré and Josep Maria Carreté, *La Antiga Audiència. Un acceso al foro provincial de Tarraco*. Excavaciones Arqueológicas en España 165 (Madrid, 1993); Macías, *La ceràmica comuna tardoantiga a Tarraco*, 230-31; Luis Piñol, "Baixada del Roser, 1-3 (Antiga Audiència)," in *Intervencions arqueològiques a Tarragona i entorn (1993-1999)*, ed. Rodolfo Cortés (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2000), 233-42.

⁴⁷ Luis Piñol, "Intervencions arqueològiques al carrer Merceria, 11. Noves aportacions al coneixement del fòrum provincial de Tàrraco," in *Els monuments provincials de Tarraco. Noves aportacions al seu coneixement*, ed. Ricardo Mar (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 1993), 257-68; Luis Piñol, "Els nivells tardorromans i visigòtics del carrer Merceria, 11. El canvi funcional de les estructures altoimperials de la part alta de Tarragona," *Butlletí Arqueològic* 17 (1995): 179-228; C. A. Pociña and Josep Anton Remolà, "La plaza de representación de Tàrraco: intervenciones en la plaza del Fòrum y la calle d'En Compte," in *Tàrraco 99. Arqueologia d'una capital provincial romana. Tarragona, 15-17 d'abril de 1999*, ed. Joaquin Ruiz de Arbulo (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2000), 27-45; Macías, *La ceràmica comuna tardoantiga a Tarraco*, 238-40. Also, Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad tardía*, 203-09.

In Tarragona, the refurbishing of the upper city as a new space of public representation and residence coexists with an increase of the areas of housing and production in the port and the Western suburbs in the course of the sixth century, which would culminate in a trend that started in the middle decades of the fifth century with the reactivation of the commercial port.⁴⁸ The existence of suburban *domus* with private baths suggests an interest in these types of residences by the oligarchs of the time, while also supporting the idea of the re-urbanization of the port suburbs which is well-attested in many coastal cities of the sixth century, such as Cartagena.⁴⁹ The city's vitality during these years is also borne out by the renovation of the port infrastructure and the increase in imports from different parts of the Mediterranean that would leave a deep imprint on the economy of the capital and the rural landscapes throughout the sixth century.⁵⁰ Even if the ceramics belong mainly to forms of the sixth century, the arrival of African Red Slip Wares and Eastern amphorae is confirmed well into the seventh century.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Maria Adserias, César Augusto Pociña and Joseph Anton Remolà, "L'hàbitat suburbà portuari de l'antiga Tàrraco. Excavacions al sector afectat pel PERI 2 (Jaume I-Tabacalera)," in *Tàrraco 99. Arqueologia d'una capital provincial romana. Tarragona, 15-17 d'abril de 1999*, ed. Joaquin Ruiz de Arbulo (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Documents d'Arqueologia Clàssica 3), 2000), 137-54; Macias and Remolà, "L'àrea portuària de Tarracona," 175-87.

⁴⁹ Josep Anton Remolà and Joaquin Ruiz de Arbulo, "L'aigua a la colònia Tarraco," *Empúries* 53 (2002): 56-63.

⁵⁰ Clementina Panella, "Merci e scambi nel Mediterraneo tardoantico," in *Storia di Roma. III: L'età tardoantica. II. I luoghi e le culture* (Turi: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1993), 651-52; Ramon Jàrraga, "Las cerámicas de importación en el nordeste de la Tarraconense durante los siglos VI y VII," in *V Reunión d'Arqueologia Critiana Hispànica (Cartagena, 16-19 abril de 1998)*. Institut d'Estudis Catalans/Universidad de Murcia/Universitat de Barcelona/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona/Museo Arqueológico de Cartagena (Monografies de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica 7) (Barcelona, 2000), 480; Xavier Aquilué, "Cerámicas decoradas africanas procedentes de la Torre de la Audiencia (Tarragona)," *Empúries* 48-50 (1989): 26-35; Xavier Aquilué, *Las cerámicas de producción africana procedentes de la Colonia Iulia Urbs Triumphalis Tarraco* (PhD Thesis: Universitat de Barcelona, 1992), 423-24; Josep Maria Carreté and Xavier Dupré, "La fase tardoantiga de l'Audiència de Tarragona," in *III Reunión d'Arqueologia Critiana Hispànica (Maó, 12-17 setembre 1988)*, 157-66; Dupré and Carreté, *La Antiga Audiència*, 117-65; Macias, *La ceràmica comuna tardoantiga a Tàrraco*.217; Adserias et al., "L'hàbitat suburbà portuari de l'antiga Tàrraco," 137-54; Josep Maria Macias and Josep Anton Remolà, "Tàrraco visigoda: caracterización del material cerámico del siglo VII," in *V Reunión d'Arqueologia Critiana Hispànica (Cartagena, 16-19 abril de 1998)*. Institut d'Estudis Catalans/Universidad de Murcia/Universitat de Barcelona/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona/Museo Arqueológico de Cartagena (Monografies de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica 7), 485-97. Barcelona, 2000), 485-97.

⁵¹ Macias and Remolà, "Tàrraco visigoda: caracterización del material cerámico del siglo VII," 485-97.

In closing, the transformation of the public buildings in the upper part of the city and the reforms in the defensive system represent a natural evolution of the process of urban transformation which had started decades before with the last representatives of imperial power in the province. The study of ceramics supports an important preservation of previous realities too, as shown by the fact that *Tarraco* continued to be a dynamic and active urban centre in the commercial and cultural networks of the Mediterranean. The continuity of urban life in and commercial role of *Tarraco* suggests a rather limited impact of the Visigothic conquest in 472, while prefiguring a new era of prosperity for the provincial capital which coincided with the beginning of the consolidation of the Visigothic power in Hispania after 507. According to the archaeological evidence, at the beginning of the sixth century, *Tarraco* was still an active urban centre and a flourishing episcopal city with the capacity to exert its influence over an extensive province. The blossoming of the city during the period of the Ostrogothic protectorate of Hispania, a few decades after the Visigothic conquest, indicates, moreover, that it any break or transformation would not have been as decisive as scholars have thought. On the contrary, *Tarraco* continued to identify itself with the Mediterranean and openly displayed its Roman identity, without significant changes, up to the Islamic conquest of much of the Peninsula in the early eighth century. But this is another chapter in the history of the city, one which is still awaiting further attention from the academy.

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