



Response to Visigothic Symposium 3

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We have for this Visigothic Symposium (VgS 3) ten essays that include my own contribution on the topic of communication in late antique / Visigothic Hispania and which represent a wide array of topics and geographical locations. I have been active in this field since 1980 (the year of my first publication) and before that from 1977 to 1979 in my unpublished Master's Thesis (University of Texas-Arlington) on Saint Martin of Braga. It is encouraging to see that Visigothic studies and cognate fields are so robust, as evidenced by this collection of essays whose authors are from diverse countries. They also reflect careers that are at various stages of development; some are relatively new to the field, while others have been active for several decades. I think that the future bodes well for the study of late antique / Suevic and Visigothic Hispania, as we all well know that there are also many others producing important research across disciplines. This brief reflection on the VgS 3 essays will proceed in the main chronologically. I have, however, taken the liberty to couple a few of the essays, based on their shared theme or regional representation.

The first essay is by Liubov Chernin (Independent Scholar, Jerusalem / HUJI) on the ongoing and much-discussed theme of the situation of Jews in Visigothic society, entitled "Visigothic Jewish Converts: A Life in Between." The author rightly notes that "The Visigoths had very distinctive conceptions about the structure of their society.



The Isidorian formula of *rex, gens et patria Gothorum* created a kind of social ideal, and the striving for its implementation in many respects called forth the anti-Jewish campaign(s) of the seventh century.” It would be useful for the author to pursue this topic to compare this construct with other regions such as Merovingian Gallia, Italy, or Byzantium to ascertain just how unique this was or whether it conformed to a general pattern regarding Jews. It is also tantalizing when it is noted that the Visigothic authorities attempted to solve the “imagined problem” of the Jews. Are we able to know what was perceived to be so threatening about the Jews to the Visigothic rulers and society? Were they seen as political or economic enemies or a threat to Christian souls? Is that ever made clear in any pre-Muslim invasion sources? I think it is worth seeking an answer to this question. The author highlights that even when Jews converted there was a great failure to truly facilitate their full integration: converts paid special taxes and restrictions were imposed on them. Even though some declarations were made to integrate ex-Jews, notably in the seventh century in 637, 654 and 681, they were in the long term a failure. The theology behind these efforts deserves further scrutiny in what our author identifies as “the concept of liberation from spiritual slavery” of converted Jews. What is surprising to me, even though the essays are restricted in length, is that there is no mention of the very important letter between Braulio of Zaragoza and Pope Honorius I regarding Jewish converts who reverted back to the Jewish faith. That letter reveals the divide that existed among the bishops on what to do with them and the militant policies advocated by the Visigothic monarchy, some bishops and Honorius I; it is a crucial supplement to the anti-Jewish conciliar legislation. The omission, notwithstanding, our author has initiated an interesting trajectory on the very complex question of Jews – lapsed converts especially – and their place in Visigothic society.

The second essay, by Javier Martínez Jiménez (Churchill College, Cambridge) “Engineering, aqueducts, and the Rupture of Knowledge Transmission in the Visigothic Period” moves into an important aspect of the material evidence of continuity and discontinuity from the late Roman to the Visigothic period via engineering and aqueducts. The author focuses his efforts on the aqueduct in Reccopolis because of its “new hydraulic infrastructure.” It was a royal project that suggests links between the Visigothic monarchy and the Eastern Empire. The thesis is that in the Eastern Empire engineering skills continued while in the West, specifically in Visigothic Hispania, they were lost and by implication became unknown to the Visigoths. So, the aqueduct in Reccopolis must have had the considerable assistance of Eastern engineers recruited by the Visigothic monarchy to execute its construction plans. This is a most tantalizing proposition that may not be entirely unreasonable; this in light of the abundant evidence we have of Easterners of many professions moving about Hispania in this era. Engineers from the East being among them ought not be ruled out. Attestation from literary sources about said engineers may prove to be a great obstacle. A question I have is this: is there anything distinctive about the aqueduct in Reccopolis that bears the signature of Eastern engineering methods? I would not completely rule out that the Visigoths, after their long sojourn in the Empire since their permanent entry after the battle of Adrianople, may have picked up some skills on this front. Let us remember that it was the Legions who were the main builders of the Empire in the provinces in terms of infrastructure and that many Goths were recruited into the Legions. As a corollary, were the Goths incapable of learning some engineering skills from the Romans? Another thing to ponder: what kind of aqueduct are we talking about here, a grand one as we find in Segovia or something more modest in scale and proportion? A third option is that it was a possible collaborative effort of Visigothic engineering skills

with some help from outsiders, Easterners perhaps. If the presence of Eastern engineers can be established, it would be one more important piece of evidence of the depth of contacts between Hispania and Byzantium in the Suevic-Visigothic period. The essay by Luís Fontes that I will get to below provides more evidence of Eastern influences in Suevic Gallaecia that complements this essay. Our author, in my view, is pursuing a very important line of research on Reccopolis and engineering skills that merits vigorous investigation on the continuity and discontinuity of infrastructure from late Roman to Visigothic Hispania.

In the ensuing study by Jason Osborne (University of South Carolina), “A Call to Arms: Cross-Regional Communication and the Visigothic Military,” he moves into an entirely distinct topic that forms one of two essays in this collection on military history. One observation I wish to make is that by “military” the author means to identify certain pivotal battles; it is not meant to flesh out tactics and strategies. Of the former, we only have the barest of information because of the unfortunate brevity of our sources from Hispania. Of the latter topic, military tactics, we are at a disadvantage. Do we know if the Visigoths developed their own distinct forms of waging war or did they adopt those developed by the Romans? Writers such as Isidore and John of Biclar yield no information on this front, they are brief to a fault. The author cites as the most important turning points of Visigothic military campaigns those that occurred under Liuvigild and Reccared. Several distinctions need to be made, it was Liuvigild that brought about territorial hegemony by defeating the Sueves in 585 and absorbing their territory permanently into the Visigothic kingdom. Reccared inherited this hegemony and did not have to fight any battles to gain or expand it. The Arian rebellion he faced in 589 in the Narbonne after the official conversion in Toledo that same year was a minor

skirmish that posed no serious threat. The sub-theme of this paper, that the gains made by Liuvigild and Reccared facilitated more cross-regional ties in all of Hispania and the south of Gaul was in my view the achievement of Liuvigild, not Reccared. The latter benefitted in this regard as testified by the councils that met in his reign from 589 until his death. A series of articles published in the *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* delve more deeply into these developments (48 [2016-2017], 87-108; 46 [2014], 27-52; 44 [2012], 27-46; and, 40 [2008], 61-84).

The role of the Church is not given enough credit here, it had created a vast network of communication that the Visigothic kings, whether Arian or Catholic, benefitted from to make their authority present throughout Hispania. The author neatly summarizes for us the events that led to this situation of communication and there is certainly more along these lines to pursue, in particular the collaboration of monarchy and Church in this regard. While he is correct to argue that, “that the development of a high degree of native support for the ambitions of the Visigothic monarchy served to facilitate unification, even while that monarchy itself often faced resistance from much of the Gothic nobility,” he has relegated to the periphery the crucial contribution of the bishops and the Church. The central place of the Church would help answer more fully the author’s desire to explain “how a small conquering force became a legitimate governing body.” The Visigothic monarchs would have had a virtually insurmountable task without the collaboration of the Church and the efficient network of communication that already existed, not just within Hispania but within Gallia as well.

Fernando Ruchesi (Universidade del Nordeste, CONICET, Buenos Aires) in “Military Matters in the Visigothic Kingdom: Initial Considerations” provides the second essay

focusing on the impact of military campaigns. In this, he does cite a time when, in the *Historia Wambae*, a military tactic was recorded: the turtle formation. Our author explains the importance of this small detail. The essay centers on three themes: the Battle of Vouillé, the death of King Alaric II (r. 485-507), and the theft of the royal Visigothic treasure. On the last one, there is nothing out of the ordinary about taking treasure as booty in wars and the taking of captives to sell or retain as slaves. The essay has great merit as an attempt to compare and contrast how the sources differ in Gallia and Hispania when reporting on the same event. On the detail about the 300 Visigoths that withstood 60,000 Franks in John of Biclar's *Chronicle*, the author needs to bring to the fore the biblical backdrop to some of these stories; for example, the 300 soldiers of Gideon come to mind, as found in Judges 7. The manner in which the Franks are spoken about in some sources of Hispania reveals definite agendas, as set forth in an article of mine in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.2 (1995): 195-210. There are also the Sueves in sources of Hispania to be kept in mind – see for example my study in *Latomus* 46 (1987): 201-203. They were not unknown to Gregory of Tours; a comparative analysis of writers from Hispania with the bishop of Tours when reporting on the same subject might be worth looking into.

I would caution against attributing all such writing to “political agendas,” which would be too simplistic. Several precautions come to mind: who read these accounts and how widely did they circulate? The discrepancies should not be attributed to agendas in every instance, it could well be partial knowledge of events as versions of the stories moved between Gallia and Hispania. It is true, however, that at times divergent details may be deliberate omissions to drive an agenda. The author is off to a good start and has more ahead to work on should he decide to continue in this vein. What we need of

the sources that he cites is a comprehensive study on how Gallic writers present all events from Hispania and the same in reverse with a full inventory of similarities and dissimilarities. It seems that our author intends to continue with this line of inquiry since the concluding part of the title of the essay ends with “Initial Considerations.”

Tomás Cordero Ruiz (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) in “At the Center and the Periphery of Lusitania: The Evolution of the City of Egítania and its Territory (4th-8th centuries),” has written an important essay because rarely do we find studies that take us into late Roman Suevic/Visigothic Gallaecia for anything between 409 and 585, that is, from the Suevic kingdom of Gallaecia. Even after the Visigoths conquered the Sueves and Gallaecia in 585, the area did not immediately cease to be Suevic; their disappearance as a people occurred gradually over time. Even though Visigothic political hegemony was imposed, the Sueves would have continued to thrive. No massive expulsion of Sueves from Gallaecia is recorded in the sources, they do not as much as hint at any such action by the new rulers. As the author indicates, the Suevic-Visigothic episcopal city of Egítania (Idanha-a-Velha, Portugal) was a continuation of the Roman city of *Civitas Igaeditanorum* in the Roman province of Lusitania. Even so, it is quite the challenge to reconstruct its transition in the fourth through eighth centuries. They remain elusive according to the author because of “our poor knowledge of the urban and rural inhabitants of Egítania.” What he proposes is to initiate a study of the urban and rural context of Egítania. He has done so by focusing on Emerita Augusta [Mérida]. He has also gathered the literary evidence that speaks of Egítania. One question that readily emerges in my mind is what relationship Mérida and Egítania had over that same period. Also, is there any rural archaeology to explore in the environs of Egítania or is that avenue closed due to lack of any remains? He

needs to clarify why Mérida is a template to understand the evolution of Egítania the city and its surroundings. His thesis has great merit and is worthwhile pursuing, especially for the Suevic-Visigothic phase of Egítania.

Distinguished Portuguese scholar Luís Fontes (Universidade do Minho, Braga) has made his entire academic career exploring in depth the archaeology of Dumium/Braga and the entire region of Suevic-Visigothic Gallaecia. His latest installment is this essay, “The Circulation of Models in the Construction of Christian Identity in the Northwest Iberian Peninsula: Architecture and Hagionymy in the Braga Region,” which complements the previous one. The author identifies architectural features that demonstrate diverse influences external to Gallaecia. The examples are from the fifth-century church of Santa Marta das Cortiças (Falperra), the sixth-century basilica of São Martinho (Dume), and the seventh-century mausoleum of São Frutuoso (Real). Fontes states that they “reveal influences from the Adriatic via Continental routes (e.g. Ravenna, Milan and Tours) and through the sea (via the southern Italian Peninsula and North Africa).” In his mind, it is proof positive that the fifth through seventh centuries – the pre-Suevic and Suevic-Visigothic period of Gallaecia – was one of continuous building of structures and of social vitality. The crucial role of the Church – in which there was definite external influence – is evident. This is of great importance because it confirms, as many of us have been arguing from other approaches – e.g. textual evidence – that Gallaecia was not a remote, out of touch region – there were steady contacts with Gallia, the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, Rome, and Constantinople – add to this North Africa. On another front, to confirm these external influences, Fontes includes the spread of the cult of relics that reflect hagionymic evidence in the written sources. His observations on patron saints in Christian Braga and the significant

presence of Eastern holy martyrs in the Iberian Peninsula is groundbreaking. This essay is an important contribution on matters that I hope Fontes and others will continue to investigate.

Widely known, Pablo C. Díaz (Universidad de Salamanca), has had a significant impact through his numerous publications on Suevic Gallaecia and many related topics. Now he offers us, “Sociability and Sense of Belonging: Community Interaction in the Work of Valerius of Bierzo.” He has over the years produced what have become seminal studies on the figure of Valerius of Bierzo (c. 630 - c. 695). He continues to glean from Valerius information on the social structures that were more complex than we might suspect. For this study, he cast his net of sources wider to include the *Vita Fructuosi*, the monastic rules of the Fructuosan environment, the minutes of Third Council of Braga (675) and any other references to Gallaecia in other councils. Collectively, according to our author, these reveal “a picture of a profoundly complex social reality; a society of horizontal and vertical relationships, a world of rigid hierarchies but likewise a world of occasional and more or less reified coexistences that can provide a glimpse of a certain sense of sociability.” On this front, I wish that these “extra” sources would have been engaged more than they were in the essay; I realize limited space was imposed; for that reason, we can look forward to a follow up study. What might also be fascinating, if it has not been done, is how the *Vita* of Valerius is similar or different from other hagiographies. In other words, what is it that makes it unique in hagiographical literature within and without Hispania? The author deftly fleshes out from Valerius the many insights about social structures and tensions between groups. We are shown that there is much more to these texts than simply extolling a holy man and that there is still more research to do on the works of Valerius.

Luciano Gallinari (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Cagliari) contributes a distinct comparative approach in his "Indigenous Peoples in Sardinia and the Iberian Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages: A Comparative Historiography." The author, to accomplish this, says, "The essay presents some parallelisms on the concept of 'border' and the relations among Vandals, Byzantines and Sardinians on the one hand, and among Byzantines, Goths and Hispano-Romans, on the other, in the former Roman provinces of Sardinia and Hispania (the Iberian Peninsula) during the early Middle Ages." On the surface, it appears to be a rather ambitious agenda in a limited amount of space. It is apparent however, that he intends the essay to be a preliminary exploratory study. He moves into questions of ethnic identities of the peoples of Sardinia and Hispania. Sardinia is a logical choice for comparison given its proximity to the Balearics and Hispania in the western sector of the Mediterranean. It also makes sense within the context of the Justinianic grand scheme to re-establish the Roman Empire in the West. Although the texts for this era are well known and may still yield more information, novelties may lie elsewhere. I am thinking of archaeology in Sardinia in relation to contemporaneous Hispania (Balearics included). Would such an analysis shed any light on the similarities and differences of the two regions? There has been much archaeological work done on the Balearics and I suspect that the same can be said for Sardinia. Whether such comparisons have been carried out I do not know; it might be worthwhile to add this venue as he delves deeper into these questions.

The last study of this collection, "Visigothic Currency in its Making and Movement: A Varying State of Circumstances" by Andrew Kurt (Clayton State University), revisits the Visigothic numismatic evidence. I have always been amazed at how epigraphers

and numismatists can glean so much from a certain perspective with the most minimal of evidence. Andrew Kurt in this study offers an exemplary example of what coins, in this case from Visigothic Hispania, can reveal to us about the larger presence of the Visigothic political and social network in Hispania. The themes that he sets out to flesh out are those present throughout this collection: “If we start with a thematic component of these papers, that of circulation, some basic questions suggest themselves. There is the question of what the geographical pattern of currency movement looks like. When we consider the nature of the movement of coinage, we approach the problem of possession of coin. In other words, how were gold coins used, and by whom? This gets at the very essential question of why coins were made, and exactly by what authority they were produced.” In sharp contrast, based on what we have in hand in terms of known mint sites, the Visigothic kingdom, Kurt shows, was more modest and less systematic in comparison to Roman-Byzantine and Merovingian minting sites. Kurt enlightens us on this state of affairs, stating that “Quite unlike the later Roman and contemporary Byzantine minting system for gold currency, which was highly concentrated at just one or a very few mints, the Visigothic regime opted to create coined money in a dispersed minting over a large network of sites. Today just short of one hundred mint-sites are known for the entire era of regal coinage from around 575 to perhaps 714, though during any single reign only roughly 30-50 mints were active, according to the corpus of coins which have come to light.”

I would emphasize that these observations, which the author is fully aware of, are not the full picture of the Visigothic kingdom. The conclusions reflect the current state of knowledge based upon what has been discovered thus far. There are, I am sure, more sites and hoards yet to be discovered and if I may be so ambitious, that includes the

kingdom of the Sueves mainly in the Northwest in Gallaecia. These efforts are hampered by two obstacles: the hard-to-find funding for digs and that there are very few archaeologists whose focus are the kingdoms of the Sueves and Visigoths. Kurt deftly expounds what the gold minting can tell us in terms of the internal kingdom of the Visigoths in Hispania and how it compares to their predecessors, the Romans and the contemporaneous Byzantines. The reign of the Arian Liuvigild seems to have been an important phase in gold coin minting. The use of coins as propaganda for victorious Visigothic kings is noted. Evidence from Visigothic law and hagiographical sources shed light on monetary policies. Important to the overarching theme of this collection of essays, Kurt situates this coin activity in the larger trade networks of Hispania that is of no small significance. In his own words, he observes that “Meanwhile northwestern Iberia experienced trade of Eastern Mediterranean origin as a result of Byzantine commerce with Britain. Recent account of Visigothic Spain’s trading activities with distant points within the Mediterranean is enlarging the geographic and for certain locations the chronological scope. The seventh century certainly saw deterioration, but with modifications rather than collapse. In the face of lower-scale commercial production in Iberia in so far as currently ascertained, the coastal cities appear to have relied heavily on Mediterranean imports. Written and material evidence tells of substantial exchange in both directions between the peninsula and North Africa, under the Vandals as well as the eastern Romans.” Minting of coins is yet another piece of evidence that Suevic/Visigothic Hispania was never on the sidelines of events occurring in the Mediterranean from North Africa to Rome to Constantinople. This research piece, that is well documented with primary and secondary sources, forms part of a larger monograph that is forthcoming; we look forward to its appearance.