Response to Visigothic Symposium 3, Panel 2: Circulation[1]

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The articles included under the heading *Circulation*, in the third presentation of the Visigothic Symposia series, are so heterogeneous that it is difficult to find a thread to build one essay as a general response. Anyway, there is a contrast game that might show an approximate way to get going. The complex Iberian reality from the fourth to the eighth centuries swings between two chronological poles of political unity: the Roman Empire and the Visigothic monarchy, that is, a contrast between the mid-fifth century and the end of the sixth, by which a whole series of more or less centralized and variably coexistent political domains had developed – the Suevic kingdom, the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo, the Byzantine domain in the southern-Levantine border.

When Tomás Cordero analyzes Egitania's evolution over this chronological span, he presents an outlook that, in some ways, can help uncover the keys to grasping it. The construction of a fresh scenario of urban-rural links is seen in the light of the new relational context between elites and subsidiary groups after the disappearance of Roman power. It is true that the city's axial role in the territory would eventually be replaced by the Church's leadership, especially that of the bishops who would act from the same cities that had structured the imperial administration; however, the absence of

[1] This article has been translated from the original Spanish by Patricia Di Gialleonardo, Buenos Aires University, Humanities College.

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unifying political ‘guidelines’ and market unity caused territorial fragmentation. Local or regional elites expanded to the point of turning their power bases into the independent jurisdictional units. It seems that this process was connected to the abandonment of many late-imperial settlements.

Tomás Cordero claims that this fact should not be associated with the arrival of the barbarians or the crisis of the collapse of Roman administrative unity. He relates this process, however, to a concentration of settlements and, perhaps, of properties, due to a time of Suevic dominance, or to Egitania’s role as an episcopal seat or its strategic border situation. I think that quite different reasons can be given. The concentration of ownership, or the increase of personal dependencies liable to get assimilated by a *patronus* does not mean a necessary change in the form of exploitation. If what is evident is the disappearance of dwellings due to concentration processes, then violence can be included to understand these abandonments. Egitania’s subordination under the sphere of Suevic sovereignty is not evident enough in the fifth century; in fact, it can hardly be ascertained in the middle of the following century, although it may have been a consequence of Visigothic weakness after the Battle of Vouillé in 507. At that time, some *villae* seem to have endured, and in the surroundings of Idanha, in the Egitanian territory, there is a series of high settlements, easy to defend, that could have been dwelling centers of rural elites; the author refers to two specific places such as Monsanto and Penha García. I believe that the key to spatial reordering was not in the Suevic domain but in the local rearrangements that occurred approximately between 411 and 510. The *Parrochiale Suevum*, written at a much later time, in the short news concerning the Egitanian bishopric, is probably transmitting these transformations, namely the formation, next to the district capital, of two important administrative units:

ISSN 2475-7462

Monecipio, perhaps a previous settlement of certain importance, and Francos, whose toponymy, as in other examples of the period, could reflect the nature of its settlers, perhaps a barbaric contingent that arrived in the early fifth century.

The Parrochiale Suevum functions as a link to the contribution put forward in this panel by Luís Fontes. Through essentially archaeological points, the professor of Braga attempts to analyze the factors of continuity in the period from the fifth to the eighth centuries in the Spanish northwest, while arguing against a rather common topic about Iberian isolation at the time. Examples of the basilica of Falperra, on a hill on the outskirts of Braga, probably from the end of the fifth century, in the Monastery of Dumio's church, of the most prosperous period of the Suevic kingdom, and the Greek cross church that Fructuosus would build in the second half of the mid-seventh century as a burial place, enable him to build an explanatory *continuum*. How much external influence is there is difficult to elucidate. In the first case, the author identifies an Italian and North African influence, an Eastern one, in the case of Dumio, the imitation of a Byzantine model coming via Italy or the Merovingian kingdom; in the case of Montelios, elaborate architectural solutions are adopted (horseshoe arches, Greek cross plan and evolved Corinthian orders) that seem to be associated with an evolution of Peninsular traditions. Ultimately, the essay avoids the discussion about the Caliphate's imprint on Visigothic architecture – or its post-Visigothic nature – and has considered many of the debates in the light of the last three decades.

As opposed to what the author writes, the building of a church by the bishop, aiming to furnish it for his own burial, was not something illegitimate. The possibility is envisaged in the Ninth Council of Toledo's fifth canon, held in 655; it is true that this

ISSN 2475-7462

is a Carthaginian provincial council, but its inclusion in the *Colección Hispana*, and the fact that it was not refuted in subsequent councils, validates the present subject. In the canon mentioned above, a double limitation arises, as just one church can be built and it will not be lawful to expend more than a hundredth part of the cathedral church's income on the construction. Undoubtedly, Braga was a rich seat, then the magnificence of the work that, as the author notes, was an expression of social power, was not so much for the seat as for the bishop. All of this features in the central role of Braga in the Iberian northwest, an influential area in the last years of the Western Empire. The region was also far from being isolated in the Suevic period, when the episcopal seat remained in contact with Rome, and while diplomatic and commercial relations between the Suevic court and the Byzantine settlements were active; relations with Merovingian Gaul can also be shown. These contacts seem equally supported by the invocations of Gallaecia's churches, where Eastern martyrs abounded and the memory of Martin de Tours was palpable

This openness to contacts and external influence does not seem to be found in all areas of the Peninsula. Luciano Gallinari delves into the role of the "indigenous peoples" of the Iberian Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages, and does so, in fact, through the comparative survey with the example of Sardinia. The bet is rather bold, since the comparative survey should be, in my view and especially here, extraordinarily entangled due to the diversity of contexts or to the dissimilar nature of the sources. To apply Halbwachs's theories to collective memory adds another element of complexity to a problem that, as the author himself notes, is not so much historical as historiographical. Between the starting point on Byzantine administrative sources, in the case of Sardinia, and that represented by the *Notitia Dignitatum Occidentalis* for

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the alleged Cantabrian *limes*, a parallel can be drawn; a long and exhausting historiographical discussion that over the course of four decades has been focused to a noticeable extent on the end of Roman Hispania and the origins of the Christian kingdoms, a debate – as the author notices – where nationalist passions, of different lines, are cyclically repeated.

Undoubtedly, Gallinari puts forward an attractive analysis, as his work introduces factors of wide interest for any historical debate on relations between natives and external rulers, the role of borders, internal as well as external ones, and concepts of isolation, remoteness and ethnic purity/authenticity. However, without denying the value of some of these categories in antiquity, the problem is that they are basically instruments of historical or sociological appreciation as much as "collective memory" is, that is, essentially modern categories. Archaeology comes to reveal gradually that the autochthony of these areas is not always sustainable, neither is it from a cultural point of view nor from a political one; they are not marginal areas in a political sense, though perhaps they may be so from an economic view, though this is also arguable. The concept of "remote" is, in this sense, an absolutely modern category; the periphery is such as regards a center. In this line, much of the apparent "indigenous" problem of the peninsular north is a socially recent product in the seventh century's outlook, not a distant heritage but the formation of locally based elites that as of the fifth century would take the place of the imperial authorities. In this sense, the problem of these hypothetical northern *limes* has very little to do with the Visigothic-Byzantine border, where mutual accusations of *barbaritas* are not so much a cultural, or religious, referent, as a political one.

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These realities closely link up with Andrew Kurt's proposal, where the term "circulation" encompassed in the panel has an absolutely tangible meaning: the circulation of coins, basically the seventh-century Visigothic coinage. The author affords in his proposal – occasionally some explanations that are probably in his broad reference work are missing here – an issue of great importance for the history of the Toledan monarchy: the meaning of its monetary system. The reader is shown virtually all the questions that a monetary system brings forward. How these currencies were used, what they were minted for, the nature of the authority producing them, the symbolic, fiscal or administrative use, their role in trade relations, their determinant character or not in the economic system, in defining the power of the elites. All this added to the genuinely formal problems, such as their types, their quality, the number of mints and their survival, the foundation or abandonment of minting sites, the circulation of the pieces, as far as distance or speed or concentration/dispersion of their findings is concern. Much of the provided data is already known or commonplace: the non-centralized nature of the coinage, the wide dispersal of the workshops, the episodic character of many of them, the existence of barely fifteen to twenty places where continuity seems attested, at least for five reigns. There seem to be other commonplace factors, such as the eminently fiscal and/or administrative nature of the coinage, a royalty whose source and reception-centers were the royal treasury.

Nevertheless, the author explores rightly enough other implications of this gathering of apparent certainty. The "apparent" concept is related to the number of pieces preserved (about 7,500) and, especially, to the knowledge we have of them, many kept in collections without the slightest knowledge of their provenance. An interesting aspect is the coincidence of coinage in connection with the military campaigns, what has been

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claimed in the case of the Byzantine frontier, but also in the surroundings of the border with the former Gallaecia or some "occasional" mints at the Cantabrian border. In these instances, it is quite debatable that they were used for the payment of war activities, as it is most likely that they were allocated to re-coinage or taxation or even war offsets. Certainly, in war contexts it is very difficult to prevent one from considering that coinage was not used for propaganda.

More interesting, in my opinion, is the analysis about the connection between monarchy and *potentes* in the coinage cycles put forward by Barceló and Retamero. The role of local elites as tax collectors and intermediaries for gold tax circulation is quite attractive; however, that mechanism of collection, which seems to be taken from tetrarchy examples linked to Diocletian's and Constantine's reforms, is not evident enough in written sources, and the hints of circulation through the findings seem unsound. Circulation and concentration guidelines are also considered to argue for the economic use of Visigothic tremisses, their incorporation into commercial circuits, as Metcalf and Barral i Altet wanted, in parallel to a residual copper circulation would bring about a monetary economy in two closed circuits, where, once again, reminiscences of late Roman explanations are perceived. Coinage would be plenty useful in basic economic exchanges in the cities, in aristocratic fortifications, in the south, with the greater presence of money, and the Levantine coast. The reasoning process may have some weaknesses, for instance, the scarce dispersion of currencies outside the Peninsular area, mainly if it is seen, in coastal cities, in relation to foreign trade, as well as the fact that, as pointed out by the author, the placement of the mints does not seem to be determined by commercial needs. On the other hand, it would be interesting to pay attention to the reserve of gold coins as treasure, which would mean

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a decrease of circulating money and hoarding in case a problem arises in an environment where it is not certain that gold mining had a level of production able to meet the monarchy's needs.

In conclusion, the concept of "circulation," applied here to late Iberian history, can be considered from a wide range of nuances. In the present issue, some possibilities have been brought forward, though, undoubtedly, there should be much more comprehensive ones.

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