

Ethnicity in early middle age cemeteries. The case of the "visigothic" burials

Etnicidad en los cementerios altomedievales. El caso de los enterramientos "visigodos"

Carlos Tejerizo García *

SUMMARY

The study of the Early Middle Age cemeteries in Europe has had a very long path since the beginning of Archaeology as science related to the XIXth nationalism. These cemeteries were used then to establish national identities and to invent traditions, in Hobsbawm's words, for a new bourgeoisie that, for the first time in History, achieved the control of power and economy. Ethnicity played an important role in establishing these national identities, linking the present peoples to the past *Völk*s and being the center of the interpretation of historical change from a culture-historical and diffusionist approach. Although in Spain nationalism had a different development comparing to other European countries, the so called "Visigothic" burials were important in the establishment of Archaeology and the interpretation of the Early Middle Age under the paradigm of ethnicity and diffusionism. Although this vision has been clarified after World War II in European historiography, is still hegemonic in Spanish academy.

In this paper it will be presented an interpretation of the so called "visigothic" burials in order to suggest new ways of analysis of the role of ethnicity in the conformation of this archaeological record. For this purpose, a critic of the traditional culture-historical interpretation is made, stressing its limits and problems and the links between national politics and archaeological development. The alternative interpretation is based in the review of the Early Middle Age cemeteries of the oriental part of the Duero basin, stressing the importance of contextual studies and introducing new archaeological views from the excavation of other Spanish regions, over all the area of Madrid. In conclusion, ethnicity is analyzed as one more factor of framing social relations and identities in a historical moment where important changes in settlement pattern and economy are occurring and the social stratification and hierarchy are in constant dispute and construction.

Key words: ethnicity; Early Middle Age cemeteries; visigoths

RESUMEN

El estudio de los cementerios altomedievales en Europa ha tenido un largo recorrido desde el comienzo de la Arqueología como ciencia, relacionado con los nacionalismos del siglo XIX. Estos cementerios fueron utilizados entonces para establecer identidades nacionales e "inventar tradiciones", según Hobsbawm, para una nueva burguesía que, por primera vez en la Historia, consiguió el poder político y económico de los diferentes "Estados-nación". La etnicidad jugó, pues, un importante papel en el establecimiento de estas identidades nacionales, relacionando los pueblos actuales con los pasados *Völker*, siendo el concepto central para la interpretación del cambio histórico desde una perspectiva histórico-cultural y difusionista. Aunque en España el nacionalismo tuvo un desarrollo diferente en comparación con otros países europeos, las mal llamadas "necrópolis visigodas" fueron importantes para el nacimiento de la Arqueología y la interpretación de la Alta Edad Media bajo el paradigma del etnicismo y el difusionismo. Aunque esta visión sufrió algunos cambios tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, todavía es hegemónica en la academia.

El presente trabajo presentará una interpretación de las "necrópolis visigodas" con el objetivo de sugerir nuevas formas de análisis del rol que la etnicidad tuvo en la conformación de este registro arqueológico. Con este propósito se hará una crítica a las concepciones histórico-culturales, resaltando sus límites y problemas y las relaciones entre la política nacional y el desarrollo arqueológico. La interpretación alternativa que se presenta está basada en una revisión de los cementerios altomedievales de la parte oriental de la cuenca del Duero, enfatizando la importancia de los estudios contextuales y la introducción de nuevas visiones arqueológicas desde otras regiones, como Madrid. En conclusión, la etnicidad es analizada como un factor más de las relaciones sociales e identidades dentro de un momento histórico de importantes cambios en el patrón de poblamiento y la economía y en el marco de una débil estratificación social en las comunidades locales en continua disputa y construcción.

Palabras clave: etnicidad; cementerios altomedievales; visigodos.

* Becario FPU, University of the Basque Country. Medieval and Post Medieval Archaeology Research Group. University of the Basque Country, C/ F. Tomás y Valiente s/m, 01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz, quiros.castillo@ehu.es. Work carried out within the framework of the HUM2009-07079 research project funded by the Ministry of Education and Science under the auspices of the National R+D+I Plan entitled "La formación de los paisajes medievales en el Norte Peninsular y en Europa: Agricultura y ganadería los siglos V al XII".

“Lo que percibimos en torno de nosotros, las ciudades y aldeas, los campos y bosques, lleva en sí el sello de la transformación. No solo en su vestimenta y modo de presentarse, en su configuración y en su modo de sentir son los hombres un resultado de la historia, sino que también el modo como ven y oyen es inseparable del proceso de vida social que se ha desarrollado a lo largo de milenios. Los hechos que nos entregan nuestros sentidos están preformados socialmente de dos modos: por el carácter histórico del objeto percibido y por el carácter histórico del órgano percipiente” (HORKHEIMER, 2003 [1937])

I. INTRODUCTION

The actual sociopolitical context is showing a growth of ethnicity, nations and even race as factors for explaining historical and political processes in the present and about the past (DÍAZ-ANDREU and CHAMPION, 1996; HAKENBECK, 2004). This situation has a correspondence in the Archaeological and Medieval History areas, where we assist to a renewal of the old ethnic theories of the 30's German school, sustained by a revitalization of the culture-historical approach, which aim is to study historical processes as a series of responses to movement of population, migrations and cultural adaptation (HAKENBECK, 2008; TRIGGER, 2009 (2nd edition)).

In Europe there is a debate between two opposite theories that analyse ethnicity from the archaeological remains; on the one hand, those who defend a primordialist, objectified and analyzable ethnicity that had a fundamental role in the constitution of past societies; in the other hand, those who question this role or, at least, the supposed primordialism and monolithism of ethnicity, preferring the constructivist and contextual study of ethnicity. Of course, this outline is simplifying a complex scientific debate in which we can find numerous intermediate contributions.

This opposition of theories in Medieval History has had as one of its main object of study the funerary remains of the period of the barbarian invasions (*Volkerwanderungszeit*). The appearance through Europe of new funerary rituals opposed to the old roman tradition has been the object of discussion about the presence of barbarian *gentes* that carried its culture inherent to their Germanic ethnicity since the very beginning of Archaeology in the 19th century.

These studies have generated intense debates, between which is inevitable to mention the one of ethnogenesis since the publication of the works of Wenskus and Wolfram and their continuity just to the present (CURTA, 2007; GILLET, 2002; POHL and REIMITZ, 1998). A debate that is, at this moment, in pause; a pause that has provoked a radicalization of the opinions of their participants, in spite the wish for consensus expressed at the end of 90's (POHL, 1998a: p. 7).

However, in the Iberian Peninsula these processes have taken a very different character: Although the fundamental importance that played ethnicity in the configuration of Archaeology as a science related, firstly, to nationalism and, afterwards, to Franquist dictatorship (MEDEROS MARTÍN, 2003-2004; OLMO, 1991), since the 90's it is having a very strong stagnation in its study. The lack of global studies have created a kind of “theoretical sclerosis” that have produced that the European debate has not taken into consideration in the study of the Early Middle Age cemeteries, in spite of the increasing of archaeological excavations in the last fifteen years ¹.

In summary, there is a very important delay in ethnicity studies in the Iberian Peninsula that has not only stagnate the theoretical debate, but also the methodological and analytical fields. On the contrary, there is a growth in the perspectives that take ethnicity as the major factor of historical explanation under a heavy

¹ This lack of global studies has its origins in the political and regional distribution of policies developed since the political transition that established the Heritage Law of 1985. This law made the different regions the main subject in the development of excavations with the consequent regionalization of studies (DÍAZ-ANDREU and CHAMPION, 1996; PARGA-DANS, 2010).

hegemony of the culture-historical studies only worried about the ethnic question in the cemeteries and not about other aspects that are being revealed as fundamentals for the comprehension of the historical process that produced the early medieval burials.

This paper has as a main object questioning the purely ethnic analyses, driving others that allow understand not only who where the buried people in the cemeteries of the North Spanish Plateau, but also the socio-economical context that shaped them and, in some kind of way, determined them.

2. "VISIGOTHIC BURIALS": A CRITIC OF THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Although the so called "visigothic" cemeteries are known since the last years of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th century, it was not until the 30's when the first theoretical frame was developed by Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla. Santa-Olalla, influenced by the germanist culture-historical approach, related to the German nationalism (TRIGGER, 2009 (2nd edition): p. 170) transferred almost literally the kind of analyses carried out in German in order to apply them to the necropolis found in the Duero basin. In almost every statement he did only changed the subject "gothic" by "visigothic". This transference of the culture-historical paradigm meant the beginning of a new school in Spain which aim was to locate, differentiate and describe the more important traits of the different cultures in the Iberian Peninsula during Late Antiquity, that is to say, romans, gothic/visigothic², byzantines and hispanovisigothics, although, evidently, the interest was focused on the Visigoths.

This historicist and primordialist school, yet hegemonic in actual studies of the Early Middle

Age cemeteries, have its origins in a very specific view of ethnicity, acting independently of the subject. The behaviour of these subjects is totally determined by ethnicity and, so, the material culture they produce. An ethnic phenomenon applied to different contexts without critical basis (JONES, 1997). It was supposed that the "Visigothic" subject would have been buried as a "Visigoth" and a "Roman" one with roman objects.

The ontology of this theoretical paradigm is related to the concept of "archaeological culture", based in the question of the existence of human groups (united in tribes or in different units) with homogeneous characteristics, which can be efficiently differentiated; in other words, if "cultures" exist or they do not and, even more important, if they can be studied by Archaeology (BRATHER, 1998: p. 150). Following Childe: "we find certain types of remains [...] constantly recurring together. Such a complex of regularly associated traits we shall term a "cultural group" or just a "culture" (CHILDE, 1929), supposing "an essence, that is, something intrinsically natural that preceded the very existence of the group, led to its creation, an defined its character" (DÍAZ-ANDREU, 1996). An idealist and nationalist theory by which through History different cultures (voluntary related to a "nation" or a "Volk" in a not always innocent game of *presentism*) that, united unconsciously by some common ideological and cultural conceptions, generated the same kind of materials in their productive and reproductive cycles. Materials that actual archaeologist can differentiate applying typologies of traits learned through extra-archaeological sources (normally written sources). These typologies, however, usually take into account only the ethnic assignation to the object, but not the "significación cultural de todas las decisiones tecnológicas presentes en la elaboración del mundo material y asignando, además, un significado social único a

2 One of the most interesting facts about the Archaeology of Late Antiquity in the Iberian Peninsula is the "invisibility" of other cultures such as suevs, alans or vandals. Except from some rare and questionable exceptions, no material associated to this cultures is known (DÍAZ MARTÍNEZ, 2011; Jorge LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2004). A fact very similar to what happens in the south of the Gaul during the visigothic reign of Tolosa. Recent works have tried to explain this recurring to process of "deculturation" and "reconstitution" of a national material culture (KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008: p. 189).

cada objeto, invariable a lo largo del tiempo” (FALQUINA APARICIO; MARÍN SUÁREZ; ROLLAND CALVO and TIERRA DE NADIE, 2006).

This was the main ideas of the theoretical frame that Santa-Olalla transferred to Spain. He assumed the existence of a “gothic” or “visigothic” culture of which archaeologists have to find its material culture. As happened in European contexts, the assumption of Santa-Olalla was based in the documentary sources that situated Visigoths “unmistakable” in the Iberian Peninsula in the 6th century after the defeat of Vouillé (507).

Although Blas Taracena stated that some of the materials of the cemeteries of the Duero Basin could be “visigothic”, it will be Santa-Olalla who would define the visigothic material culture (MARTÍNEZ SANTA-OLALLA, 1934) through a typology commonly used nowadays without major changes³. This typology had to differentiate the Visigothic from the non-Visigothic and, by this way, culture-historical archaeologists could singularise a previous “hispanorroman” culture and a later “hispanovisigothic” culture as a synthesis between the others (PALOL, 1966). In other words, from the material culture of the “Visigoths” others were separated, in spite of, as Brather states, “setting two scientific categories in parallel does not produce historic realities” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 157).

In contrast with what happens in European contexts, where ethnic differences are defined by archaeologists through funerary practices, weapons or pottery (KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008: p. 189 y ss), in *Hispania* two are the main traits that could define the “visigothic culture”: furnished burials and the so-called *Reihengräberfelder*.

Changes in funerary rituals can be detected in the Vth and VIth centuries with the apparition of furnished burials in a “germanic style”.⁴ These burials are also associated with a very pronounced sexual differentiation, with women buried under the so-called “danubian mode”, characterized by the presence of two pair of *fibulae* on the shoulders to hold the *peplum*.⁵ Many studies have been written about this questions that, in some European contexts, are the only sign of a “foreign” presence in cemeteries. In later times some critical responses have arisen, such as Sebastian Brather writing that “it is not posible to detect ethnic differences on the basis of brooches” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 153), or, even more radically, Halsall (HALSALL, 1995, 2011) when he states that, evidently, “an object does not have an ethnicity”, but ethnicity is done to the object by the holder.

The other “visigothic” trait used by the culture-historical school is the appearance of the so-called *Reihengräberfelder*, row cemeteries which were defined in the Iberian Peninsula as:

“Los Reihengräberfelder (o civilización de los cementerios alineados), son característicos en muchos lugares de Europa y abarcan cronológicamente los siglos VI y VII, llegando incluso hasta el siglo VIII. La Península Ibérica en parte ocupada durante estos siglos por una población visigoda, pacífica, vio florecer en la Meseta Castellana varios de estos cementerios. Se trata de una concepción única de las necrópolis y por ello la alineación y la orientación son básicas para que ésta se desarrolle e incremente de forma ordenada con el paso de las generaciones. Las enraizadas tradiciones familiares y de clanes o grupos, junto con unas creencias

3 Although I am stressing the role of Santa Olalla, the importance of other german authors in the expansion of these ideas in the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Nils Aberg, Hans Zeiss or Joachim Werner), is essential to understand this process.

4 Although it was once again Taracena the first in differentiate some furnished burials associated to the last moments of the roman Hispania, it will be Zeiss (ZEISS, 1934) the first one to talk about “necrópolis tardorromanas” that, later on, will become the “necrópolis of the Duero” (CABALLERO ZOREDA, 1974; FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; PALOL, 1958).

5 This mode was detected in some Spanish sites Duratón or Herrera de Pisuerga. Even Though, the argument was very normativist: “this tomb has the pair of fibulae, so it has to be from a woman”. In that moment this method was used to determine the gender of the individual due to the lack of anthropological analysis. We are not stating that the individuals were not woman, but to stand out the important bias that affected these studies. Moreover, in cemeteries recently discovered, as a consequences for the reduced number of furnished burials, no statistical study could have being done.

religiosas muy vivas, hicieron que el pueblo visigodo trajese consigo unas costumbres que quedan patentes en la arqueología funeraria” (RIPOLL, 1991a: p. 28, personal emphasizing)

We only know at the moment just some examples among which we only have the plane of three of them: Carpio de Tajo, La Olmeda Sur y Duratón (and only a little part of it that not remotely seems a *Reihengräberfeld*). From the rest we only have some archaeological notes stating that the tombs are located in rows, that drives them again to use circular arguments and biased ideas about the ethnicity of the individuals buried there.

Weapons are another typical ethnic element used by culture-historical archaeologists in German, France or England (HÄRKE, 1990; KAZANSKI and PÉRIN, 2008). However, in the Iberian Peninsula weapons in burials are very rare with few examples to mention ⁶, so they have never been considered as a truly “Visigothic” trait (AZKÁRATE, 2004).

Using these two elements, the furnished burials and the presence of row graves, the germanist school of the 30’s was able to define a “Visigothic archaeology”; from this moment on ideas have little changed. Even nowadays the main object of funerary archaeology is mainly to locate, determine and characterized ethnic groups in the Iberian Peninsula (J. LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2010). This does not mean that some minor modifications have been produced; so, some researchers, due to the ethnogenesis debate and using its most primordialists ideas, state that we are no longer searching for concrete ethnic groups, but “foreign” and “heterogeneous elements”, but always within the culture-histo-

rical approach (BARROSO CABRERA; MORÍN DE PABLOS and LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2008; Jorge LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2004).

The translation of this theoretical frame caused a tendency to use circular arguments and *ad hoc* hypothesis to adjust the facts to the paradigm. This supposed the establishment of strong biased ideas that, to the extent the number of sites and facts were increased, finally contradict the archaeological remains, as some studies show (HALSALL, 1995, 2011; HÄRKE, 1990; JEPURE, 2006). In the Iberian Peninsula context the most serious of these biased ideas is the chronological question.

The chronology of these cemeteries is, nowadays, one of the most controversial elements when analysing the Early Middle Age cemeteries of the Duero ⁷. Despite the fact that there are several alternative chronologies, all of them were based in the same culture-historical approach ⁸. It is worth mentioning that the most important chronological contribution was made by Gisela Ripoll (RIPOLL, 1991a) and the use of the correlative-complementary table.

Although some improvement has been made using this method, for example, in establishing a more rigorous taxonomy of grave-goods, the main problem arises when trying to give an absolute chronology to these associations (COLLINS, 2005). Ripoll, without other chronological methods ⁹ (RIPOLL, 1991b), linked to a biased historical narrative, related the changes in the archaeological funerary remains to the political and historical events known through the written texts like; the conversion of Recaredo in 589, the byzantine invasion of the peninsular south coast, etc. ¹⁰ Giving a

6 Less than twenty examples in the whole Iberian Peninsula (ARDANAZ ARRANZ; RASCÓN MARQUÉS and SÁNCHEZ MONTES, 1998; BARROSO CABRERA and MORÍN DE PABLOS, 2006)

7 In Madrid this issue has been reformulated through the excavation of sites with both the domestic and funerary areas (J.A QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2011)

8 The Works of Martínez Santa-Olalla, Ebel-Zepezaue; Pablo Ciezar or Barbara Sasse are some examples (JEPURE, 2009).

9 “No poseemos ningún elemento fiable de datación, por tanto mientras la situación de los hallazgos no varíe [...] tendremos que seguir apoyándonos en las cronologías de los materiales hallados fuera de la geografía hispánica y en algunas referencias históricas respecto a Hispania –a pesar de lo que ello significa- que parece no presentan graves dudas cronológicas” (RIPOLL, 1991b: p. 111)

10 Something similar happens with the case of the ‘invisibility’ of Visigoths in the south of Gaul. “Without a historical record that told us that people called Goths came to Aquitaine in the second decade of the fifth century, there would be no problem, there would be no ‘absent’ or ‘invisible’ Goths to explain” (HALSALL, 2011)

random date to the changes detected in the archaeological record, as long-term changes, by relating them to a particular historical fact committing an archaeological mistake because, as Brather writes, “the identification of long-term developments (which archaeology can identify) with short term political and ethnic situations (which history reconstructs) is wrong” (BRATHER, 1998: p. 171).

This methodology generated supposedly neutral absolute chronologies, but which were, in fact, interpreting the already dated material. For example, if we find a particular group of brooches we date the cemetery in the VIth century and before the conversion of Reccared. So, the cemetery has to be “visigothic” and in a moment when these peoples were totally separated from the roman bulk, as happens in the typical “visigothic” necropolis, as Duratón (Segovia) or Herrera de Pisuerga (Palencia). Moreover, this methodology usually gives a chronology to all burials in one site, without considering phases or internal development; this is the error called “sincronía aparente”, very common in culture-historical studies (FELIPE BATE, 1998: p. 129). (Fig 1).

To summarize, these cemeteries have been given a chronology only within the conceptual and methodological limits of the Culture-Historical approach, based not only in empiricist and arbitrary criteria, but also in serious methodological problems that we carry out until today, standing out the question of the open area excavation and the radiocarbon dating. It is worth mentioning that over 2000 burials we do not have a sole radiocarbon dating¹¹ that allow to construct a reliable chronological sequence. Only with the implantation of correct protocols of archaeological work, appropriate to the record handled in these cemeteries, can archaeologists solve the chronological problem. However, this chronology is used in

almost all the publications nowadays to date the cemeteries.

And, at last, we also find some analytical problems about how are these cemeteries studied. Having the main object the differentiation of ethnic groups, be them “visigothic”, “foreigners”, or “romans”, scholars usually leave apart the study of societies behind the ethnic groups in a given historical and geographical context, the “contexto-momento” (FELIPE BATE, 1998: p. 109).

For these “a-historical” scholars, the huge cemetery of Duratón or Madrona (Segovia)¹² is just the same visigothic necropolis as the small one of Herrera de Pisuerga or Espirido-Veladiez (Segovia). By this methodological approach they are merely rejecting the study of some minor cemeteries like Ventosilla y Tejadilla (Segovia) in Segovia or Las Quintanas (Valladolid), in spite of giving important information about the settlement and social organization in the Iberian Peninsula in the VIth and VIIth century.

The example of Las Quintanas (Valladolid) is very noteworthy. Situated close to the prehistoric city of Pintia, is a cemetery where approximately 100 burials have been excavated¹³. Among them only three are furnished with rings and earrings. More interesting is the different treatment of the gender in the ritual; while women are buried directly in the earth, men are buried in coffins or structures that separates the body from the earth (VELASCO, SANZ and CENTENO, 2003). The archaeological study of the materials in the site has determined a lengthy occupation from the IV-Vth century to the VIIth century. From a strictly ethnic analysis these people wouldn't be Visigoths, but a group of indigenous, probably “hipanoromans” that stayed contemporaneously at the moment of the Visigoth's invasion preserving its own culture. The simply apparition of just one brooch would have totally changed this reading.

11 About the question of open area excavation in the Iberian Peninsula context (FERNÁNDEZ UGALDE, 2005) For the question of radiocarbon dating in early medieval cemeteries context (QUIRÓS CASTILLO, 2009)

12 It is worth mentioning that, at the moment, Antonel Jepure is in process of revision of the cemeteries excavated by Antonio Molinero in Segovia. (JEPURE, 2009).

13 Not published at the moment.

Moreover, Las Quintanas could be one of the few examples that could establish a bridge between the Vth and the VIth century and, for that reason, it is very important to analyse other aspects beyond ethnicity.

Besides the contextual study of the sites, we cannot simply ignore the socio-economic issues as factors of change. If we explain changes in the archaeological record using just external influence, if we deny the capability of societies to have an internal development and that this capability could play a role in the change of the archaeological record, we will lose the core studies of economic and social development of societies behind cemeteries and only debate about the “culture” that adapts the better to the traits that are found. It is a common mistake within the culture-historical paradigm to understand “archaeological cultures” as monolithic beings, that is to say, denying the internal struggle caused by domination relationships (FALQUINA APARICIO et alii, 2006).

Gisela Ripoll exemplified this aspect when, in her 2007 publication, against the criticisms of Roger Collins (COLLINS, 2005) and other scholars, she answered: “se debe contemplar la posibilidad de que las denominadas necropolis visigodas de la Meseta castellana, en realidad no lo sean. Pero si no lo son habrá que preguntarse quién está enterrado en esas sepulturas fechadas desde finales del siglo V hasta finales del siglo VI y halladas casi de forma exclusiva en la Meseta” (RIPOLL, 2007). The point for us is not to analyze who were the specific people buried, but how were their societies. In other words, the main point is not if they were Visigoths or not, but if they were Visigoths, so what? Does that affect the understanding of the society behind the burials? And if it so, how does it work in each context? It’s not only a matter of questioning the archaeological record “How

can people be distinguished?” (POHL, 1998b:p. 17) but also, why people need to be distinguished? (HALSALL, 1995).

In summary, we observe how in the study of the visigothic cemeteries have predominated a primordialist and essentialist vision of ethnicity. This instrumental vision denies a complexity well reflected in the archaeological record

3. AN ATTEMPT OF INTERPRETATION OF ETHNICITY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGE NECROPOLIS OF THE ORIENTAL PART OF THE DUERO BASIN

In the oriental area of the North Plateau we found, at least, 43 sites dated between VIth and VIIth century (Fig 2) ¹⁴. It’s interesting that among those 43 cemeteries, 24 are located in spaces that weren’t previously occupied showing important changes in the settlement organization by the communities of this period¹⁵.

Considering the size of the sites we can differentiate two types; the small ones (6 to 100 burials); and the big ones (over 100 burials; Aguilafuente, Madrona, Castiltierra, Duratón and Piña de Esgueva). The important difference between them reinforces the idea of studying them contextually in order not to fall in monolithic or “God’s eye” explanations typical of culture-historical approaches (HAKENBECK, 2008).

It is worth mentioning the contrast between these cemeteries and the previous ones, wrongly known as the “Duero Necropolis” ¹⁶, with 24 examples in the Duero basin. At first sight, the most interesting fact is that, quantitatively, the number of archaeological sites increases from one period to the next. From 23 necropolis

¹⁴ We have considered here not only the “classic” examples of these cemeteries, such as Castiltierra or Duratón but also all of the excavated sites within this chronological frame.

¹⁵ We must consider the fact that we know little about some of these cemeteries and it is possible that previous phases were not detected.

¹⁶ This denomination is now obsolete and has been replaced with others such as “postimperial necropolis” (FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009) as they are not limited to the Duero basin and show a different socioeconomic reality from the roman past.

documented in the previous phase we now find almost the double. However, the radical change is related to the grave-goods, based on roman tradition in the cemeteries of the IVth and Vth, and personal and "germanist" in the second phase of this burial process.

The study of these two "horizons" has been traditionally separated because they were considered to belong to two different cultures. The barbarian invasions supposed such a break with the "hispanoroman" culture that it would have no sense to study them together. However, and following the proposals of some scholars (DOMÍNGUEZ MONEDERO, 1985; FUENTES DOMÍNGUEZ, 1989a; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009), it is necessary to study the changes between them in order to analyze the importance of the internal development of these communities.

Studies in this area and others all over the Iberian Peninsula (CHAVARRÍA ARNAU, 2007; Juan Antonio QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2006; WICKHAM, 2005), show a clear break that we can situate in the middle of the Vth century. A break not only affecting the rituals and the culture, as we can deduce from the changes produced in burials or the typology of grave-goods, but also a break in the settlement pattern, the economy and social organization.

New logics of production, more local and less orientated to a roman "world economy" lead the local communities to adaptation (HALSALL, 1995) with very different development according to the context where they were occurring. So, we can find different situations, or better, different ways of adaptation to the new world that was emerging. Examples of different ways of developments from the concentration in hillforts, possibly associated with old elites, as in Simancas (Valladolid), to the occupation of spaces not used since the Iron Age, as Tolmos de Caracena (Soria), or the continuity of some productive areas as La Olmeda (Palencia) or urban contexts as Duratón (Segovia). The funerary results of these changes were the postimperial necropolis. This does not mean that the change was as catastrophic as Hidatys' writings may suggest. There was a continuity in some productions, with a special mention to the Terra

Sigillata Hispánica Tardía or glasses, at least until the end of the fifth century, which indicate some hints of productive continuity with the Roman past but in a more local and regional scale.

Within this approach, that of radical but progressive change, that of slow adaptation to new logics of production, we may insert the appearance of new rituals and furnished burials. As Halsall and Pohl have stated (HALSALL, 1995, 2007; POHL, 1998a: p. 3), the furnished burials and the ethnicity expression associated to them are the consequences of periods of strong political stress within the communities where the social *status* and power were in continuous dispute, justification and reproduction.

So, as another phase of ritual development of local communities, we have the "visigothic cemeteries". What is the role of ethnicity in the study of funerary remains? We believe some crucial facts should be considered. On the one hand the "visigoths", that is to say a group of individuals who penetrated in the Iberian Peninsula between the end of the Vth century and the beginnings of the VIth century, were a minority comparing to local population (DOMÍNGUEZ MONEDERO, 1986; RIPOLL, 1989, 1991a). On the other hand, these Visigoths, as they were recognized as that by others reached the political power and could exercise an hegemonic control over that power, which culminated by the visigothic monarchy.

A power that seems to be characterized by weakness, fragmentation and insecurity, excepting during those periods of political stability under strong kings who certainly managed to fully control the political and military powers to the state. A central power that couldn't exist if not through a patronage system and relations with inferior and local powers and in different scales (CASTELLANOS and MARTÍN VISO, 2005; ESCALONA MONGE, 2002). These local communities of the visigothic period aren't but the result of the economical development and expansion of those communities which were in process of generation in IVth and Vth centuries and whose funerary representation was the postimperial necropolis but in a different political context.

The radical change in grave goods we detect between the end of the Vth century and the beginning of the VIth century is related in some ways to the arrival of that minority that achieved power and, even more important, the elements of representation of that power; "in the absence of any Roman threat, Gothiness came to be redefined there in relation to landowning [...] the achievement of sixth-century Visigothic kings in making local elites take notice of, and indeed direct their political lives around, the court at Toledo, should not be underestimated" (HEATHER, 1998: p. 305 y 306)

From the political and economical point of view we think we can understand better the changes perceived in the archaeological record. Firstly we had communities adapting to a new logic of production; now, the same kind of communities get to expand and develop in a more controlled space. We see these societies and their elites in a continuous state of political stress, adapting their ways of framing social relationships and the ways to preserve them (BOURDIEU, 1997) to new forms of power and simbology.

Simplifying, through the archaeological record we can divide these communities in two big groups (HAMEROW, 2002; VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2007): single farmsteads, usually composed of few familiar units which habitat is supposedly isolated, this could be the example of Las Tenerías (Burgos) (PALOMINO; NEGREDO and ABARQUERO, 1997-1998); and villages, with a group of families integrated in communal economic strategies. As a consequence, firstly of the breaking up of the *villae* as the economical and social centre of the rural world, and secondly of the own internal development of the communities, villages were progressively generated. These villages are characterized by the unification of several familiar units in the same habitat and organized in the same economical relationships. The consequence of the development of these relationships is a faint social stratification that we can define as "la desigualdad [que] ha tomado cuerpo o se ha institucionalizado, y que existe un sistema de relaciones sociales que determina quién recibe qué y por qué" (KERBO, 2003). A social stratification that, in precapitalist societies,

not depend only of the access to resources and the hoarding of the surplus value (the economist reading), but also depend of the different *status* within a value system exteriorized by different simbologies and *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 1997; HALSALL, 1995; LENSKI, 1969; MARX and HOBBSBAWN, 1979). We may think that this kind of social stratification is what we can detect in the early middle age cemeteries of the Duero basin and is what is showed in the distribution of furnished burials within the cemeteries "what we can see in the graves is primarily social rank and distinction *within* societies –not conscious distinction from adjoining societies" (BRATHER, 1998: p. 157).

The picture, however, gets more complicated as we take into consideration that some of these cemeteries are not inserted exclusively in rural contexts, but in suburban ones, as it seems to happen with the example of Duratón (JEPURE, 2006). Again, although we are trying to define some general ideas of the development of the Early Middle Age cemeteries, we have to take into consideration local contexts.

In consequence, what we are analysing are the members of a local elite that takes the "gothic element" (be themselves descendants or not of gothic individuals) as "key to the political power" (CURTA, 2007; POHL, 1998a: p. 2). These keys are justifying the social relations of production developed within the communities, based in a better situation in the production and distribution of resources and the subsequent *status*. As Heather states "the new element in the elite of the Peninsula may well have chosen to assert their Gothic origin in clothing [...] because belonging to the immigrant group was the source of their claim to landed wealth and social prominence [...]" (HEATHER, 1998: p. 311). We may suggest that, in the moment that economy develops and more territories are integrated under the control of the same elites, there must be a more coercive power over the subordinates. Visigothic ethnicity and its representation in death could work to shape and justify this power; but an ethnicity built on changing elements and adapted to different contexts and revealed by elements in the form of weapons, brooches, dressing, etc (POHL, 1998b).

We can therefore interpret ethnicity as an element of “gothic” simbology inside a wide hegemonic system. A hegemony defined, in a gramscian way as “el modo en que el poder, la élite local y regional de las aldeas y ciudades, se gana el consentimiento de aquellos a los que sojuzga” (FALQUINA APARICIO et alii, 2006; GRAMSCI, 2010). A “visigothic” simbology as far as it is recognized by the individuals. Symbols through which a community can understand and structure the social position of the bearer of the grave-goods and, maybe more important, recognize the position of its family and its clients in a public ceremony as the burial one (HALSALL, 1995).

These social relationships are related to the geographical and historical context in which the communities are involved, so they can vary through the Iberian Peninsula. This could be the explanation of the example of Aldaieta and others in the north (AZKÁRATE, 2004) or the poor degree of social differentiation detected in the domestic areas of the Madrid village network (QUIRÓS CASTILLO and VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2006). However, the number of furnished burials in Early Middle Age cemeteries shows that only a minority had the access to these “Germanic” objects, so the ethnic vision of these *habitus* gets more complicated, with social, political and economical elements interacting in the same social action field.

In other words, these new *habitus* may be the expression of a new socio-political structure of a new local elite that has in its hands not only the economic capital (as we see in the wealth of the furnished burials), but also the symbolic one. As Heather states, gothic identity belongs primarily to the dominant class (HEATHER, 1992: p. 323). An ethnicity that did exist and it was recognized by the bulk of the people. A fluid ethnicity which purpose would be framing and defining identities, not only the individual ones, but also the social and economic identities. An ethnicity defining not only the difference

between the *us* and *them*, but as Halsall states; the difference between ‘the *us* and *us*’ within the communities (HALSALL, 2007). An ethnicity that, as opposed as what is supported by the germanist school “are in no way natural facts. They are highly abstract, culturally constructed ways of categorising people who might differ a lot among each other” (POHL, 1998a: p. 4).

Following this logic, the progressive decrease of the furnished burials since the VIth century would be explained beyond the “cambio de moda” (mode changing) due to the invasion of the byzantine empire (J. LÓPEZ QUIROGA, 2010; PALOL and RIPOLL, 1988; RIPOLL, 1991a). We may suggest that, in a moment when the economical development of local communities fixed the internal social stratification, the public ceremonies that externalized the symbolic power where unnecessary and new forms of public ostentation and social differentiation, were established, as for example the construction of religious buildings and the privatization of the funerary spaces (HALSALL, 1995). As Pohl states: “as barbarian dominion came to seem natural, these sharp and often visual perceptions disappeared” (POHL, 1998b: p. 62).

However, we don't want to fall into ingenuous instrumentalist explanations about a conscious and “evil” minority that, assuming the concrete *habitus* they have made up, only apply them in order to preserve the social structure¹⁷. The social field is a complex area within the cognitive processes of social stratification is grasped both voluntary (through different access to resources) and involuntary (through process of socialization).

Neither want we to state that ethnicity was the unique way of structuring these societies. Identities are multi-layered, and within these multiple layers, ethnicity plays its role. A necessary role but not the only one: urbanity and rurality, stockbreeding and agriculture, artisans and peasants, man and woman (as we have

¹⁷ We don't want to deny the importance of the conscious and individual strategies that social agents can have in the development of ethnic identities, as showed in some anthropological studies (BARTH, 1976) However, what is described here are the main tendencies where the particular cases converge.

seen in the case of Las Quintanas)... are mental structures that also played a role in the formation and conservation of societies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper the main aim was to suggest an alternative interpretation of the early middle age necropolis of the Duero basin through a critic to the Culture-Historical approach, hegemonic in the Iberian Peninsula studies. We focused on the necessity of the reconstruction of the general theoretical frame after a time when the regional and local studies have been the rule and beyond culture-historical explanations.

However, there are still some problems to solve. Through the paper we tried to give a meaning to the furnished burials within the cemeteries, wrongly called "Visigothic". These ideas allow us to state that we may change the focus to the question of the signifiers as archaeological objects, where were they made? Which were the mechanism of distribution of these objects? Why in a so wide and so localized territory could these symbols of power spread? Were they acting as symbols and marks of a social stratification as we suggest?

We now detect some archaeological examples of productive areas within the villages that could be used as metal furnace in the North Plateau, as Mata del Palomar (Segovia), Ladera de los Prados (Valladolid) or Veranes (Asturias), dated in the VIth and VIIth centuries. Nevertheless, they were probably used to produce local products more than specialized and luxury ones as those found in the graves. In fact, the absence of these objects in domestic areas is very significant as we can observe in sites as Gózquez (Madrid) or La Cárcava de la Peladera (Segovia). This idea calls us to think that these elements were mainly used in funerary contexts, reinforcing the idea that they were symbolic markers and not simply elements used in life and re-used in death.

So, we can consider the presence of specialized centres of manufacture of these "luxury" elements, possibly situated in urban centres

(Mérida, Barcino, ¿Clunia?, etc...). Through inter-change relationships we can relate the urban elites with local and rural ones, maybe in a strategy hold by the urban aristocracy to have an indirect control of far properties, as some hypothesis suggest (VIGIL-ESCALERA, 2009).

As a conclusion, we stress that, far from some approaches (BARROSO CABRERA et alii, 2008; BROGIOLO and CHAVARRÍA ARNAU, 2008; VALENTI, 2009), we don't have a doubt about the arrival of a "foreign" population to the Iberian Peninsula; that is to say, Visigoths DID came into the Peninsula. However, this does not imply the necessity of a different "material culture" that we, archaeologists, can differentiate. What is stated here is that the process of migration, adaptation (never simply "acculturation") and internal development, through the archaeological remains, were much more complex as the ethnic paradigm interprets. As Clark states: "existence [of invasions and minor intrusions] has to be demonstrated rather than assumed" (quoted in HAKENBECK, 2008: p. 14). We may consider that we can only detect and differentiate archaeologically only the final testimonies of these processes, when they were established. Ethnic paradigm is based, as it has no alternative, in the detection of immutable traits. Nevertheless, we have suggested that, from the archaeological record we may recover from the Early Middle Age cemeteries, this idea is hardly testable. Walter Pohl simplifies this idea when he states: "the most fundamental point is that ethnic communities are not immutable biological or ontological essences, but the results of historical processes, or, as one might put it, historical processes in themselves" (POHL, 1998a: p. 8).

This leads us, finally, to stand out the actual political relevance of the historical study of ethnicity. Unfortunately this is not an issue without implications beyond the scientific field (if there is any), and we can question about the political and ideological implications of some scientific positions about ethnicity in defending nationalistic narratives or the creation of conservative identities and local traditions (HAKENBECK, 2008; HOBBSBAWN, 2002). Historical critic is necessary in order to denaturalized the present and to

show how narratives are constructed and what kind of discourses they are legitimizing (HORKHEIMER, 1966, 2003 [1937]). As Halsall fears: "In many ways the most worrying aspect of the thesis presented here is that it may well be right!" (HALSALL, 1992: p. 207).

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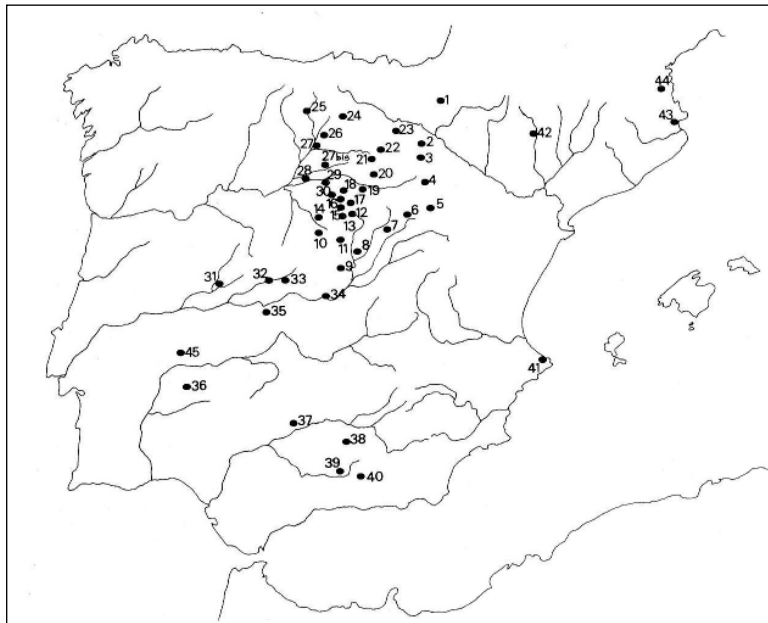


Fig. 5. – Mapa de las necrópolis visigodas (según Pedro de Palol, 1966). 1. Pamplona; 2. Taniñe (Soria); 3. Suellacabras (Soria); 4. Deza (Soria); 5. Vilhel de Mesa (Guadalajara); 6. Palazuelos (Guadalajara); 7. Alarilla (Guadalajara); 8. Daganzo de Arriba (Madrid); 9. Madrid; 10. Madrona (Segovia); 11. Torrelaguna (Madrid); 12. Sebulcor (Segovia); 13. San Miguel de Noguera (Segovia); 14. Espirido (Segovia); 15. Ventosilla y Tejadilla (Segovia); 16. Duratón (Segovia); 17. Sigüero (Segovia); 18. Castiltierra (Segovia); 19. Estebanvela (Segovia); 20. Osma (Soria); 21. Hinojar del Rey (Burgos); 22. Ortigosa de Cameros (Logroño); 23. Albeida de Iregua (Logroño); 24. Avellanosa del Páramo (Burgos); 25. Herrera de Pisuergra (Palencia); 26. Padilla de Arriba (Burgos); 27. Villajimena (Palencia); 27 bis. Amusquillo de Esgueva (Valladolid); 28. Piña de Esgueva (Valladolid); 29. Castillo Tejeriego (Valladolid); 30. Sacramenia (Segovia); 31. Zarza de Granadilla (Cáceres); 32. Diego Alvaro (Avila); 33. Santa María de la Cabeza (Avila); 34. El Carpio de Tajo (Toledo); 35. Azután (Cáceres); 36. Tierra de Barros (Badajoz); 37. Cerro Muriano (Córdoba); 38. La Guardia (Jaén); 39. Brácan (Granada); 40. Marugán (Granada); 41. Jávea (Alicante); 42. Coscojuela de Fontova, Montecillas (Huesca); 43. Ampurias (Gerona); 44. Estagel (Rosellón Francia); 45. Alburquerque (Badajoz).

Fig. 1. Distribution of 'visigothic' cemeteries (PALOL, 1966)

Fig. 2. Early Middle Age cemeteries in the oriental part of the Duero. 1. Hoyo de sieteiglesias 2. Las brujas 3. Piñel de Abajo 4. Las Quintanas

