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[A stampa in “Early Medieval Europe”, 13 (2005), 1, pp. 1-42 © degli autori – Distribuito in formato digitale da “Reti Medievali”, www.biblioteca.retimedievali.it].



The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)

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Envisaging political power as dynamic allows the historian to deal with its structures with some sophistication. This paper approaches political power, not as a circumscribed block of bureaucratic elements, but as a complex phenomenon rooted in social reality. The authors explore the dialogue between local and central power, understanding 'dialogue' in its widest sense. Thus the relationships (both amicable and hostile) between local and central spheres of influence are studied. The authors propose a new analytical framework for the study of the configuration of political power in the northern zone of the Iberian peninsula, over a long period of time, which takes in both the post-Roman world and the political structures of the early Middle Ages.

The organization of political power in the post-Roman west has been the focus of much scholarly reappraisal in the last few years. One might have thought, however, that, thanks to the study of institutions, we have been aware for some time of the realities of power which lay behind the political structures emerging in the west from the fifth century onwards. To a certain extent, this is true. A more or less literal reading of the sources provides detailed descriptions of the institutions of the different *regna* that emerged in the former western Roman empire, and of their subsequent evolution towards the forms of government described in text books on the early Middle Ages. Thus there are a number of excellent works which are full of descriptions of, and references to, palatine *officia*, administrative and territorial responsibilities, the judiciary

* We should like to thank Ignacio Álvarez Borge, Ángel Barrios, Pablo C. Díaz, Julio Escalona, José M^a. Mínguez and Chris Wickham for reading and commenting on the original version of this paper. Any remaining errors are, of course, the responsibility of the authors.

and military organization. These scientific developments in themselves mean that we can now turn to the question of the *dynamic* of political power. Rather than studying political power as a circumscribed block of bureaucratic and administrative elements, the historian needs to pay attention to its complexity. We also need to remember that political power is, above all, a human issue. In studying it one must therefore evaluate factors that are diverse, profound and, in the widest sense, cultural.¹

From within the range of possible analytical approaches, we have chosen to emphasize the study of the principal elements of the dialogue between central and local power. In other words, we consider the mechanisms that made possible the local implantation of central power, focusing on the analysis of two-way channels of communication, of mutual collaboration, of consensus or of its breakdown. Clearly, this investigation cannot start from the idea that political power is a monolith that either imposes itself or fails to do so by virtue of a series of specific events. We understand 'dialogue' in its widest sense, with all that that implies about the dialectic of historical structures that does not imply mutual comprehension, but a relationship of some sort. We emphasize that, in our opinion, the dialogue between central power and the local scene is one of the keys to a precise understanding of the articulation of political power. Finally, it is appropriate to delimit the geographical and chronological scope of our development of this theme. The area covered is the greater part of the northern third of the Iberian peninsula – the north-west, the Cantabrian mountains, the northern Meseta and the Upper Ebro (Fig. 1). The chronological limits are the post-Roman and early medieval periods, politically linked in these areas to the kingdoms of the Sueves (409–585) and the Visigoths (507–711) and, after the collapse of the latter, to a series of loosely constructed polities which crystallized in the ninth and tenth centuries as the kingdom of the Asturias and León and the county of Castile.

In the north-west of *Hispania* in the Roman period the *civitas*, including Augustan foundations such as *Lucus*, *Bracara* and *Asturica*, was a fundamental means by which Roman political power was established in any given territory.² Rome had as its principal objectives the control of resources and the maintenance of the peace; in these respects,

¹ On this approach for *Francia*, see P. Fouracre, 'The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt to Regulate the Cult of Saints', in J. Howard-Johnston and P. Hayward (eds), *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 143–65, at p. 165.

² I. Sastre Prats and D. Plácido Suárez, 'Onomástica y formas de dependencia en el Noroeste peninsular', in F. Villar and F. Beltrán (eds), *Pueblos, lenguas y escrituras en la Hispania prerromana*, *Actas del VII Coloquio sobre Lenguas y Culturas Paleohispánicas* (Salamanca, 1999), p. 295 ff.



Fig. 1 Area of study.

Roman interests were in line with those of the indigenous aristocracy.³ Well-organized local and regional control of the latter furthered Rome's political ends in the broadest sense. Rome's chosen instrument, the *civitas*, was a tool constructed for the benefit of the regional aristocracy and which resulted in the strengthening of Roman political control.⁴ It represents the key to the political order of north-west *Hispania*, especially after the Augustan period. The development of the *civitates* also

³ This included a military element, since we know of the existence, in the area under discussion in this article, of a series of garrisons commanded by the establishment of the *Legio VII Gemina* in the future León in the first century AD. These establishments, from Galicia to the headwaters of the River Ebro (cf. A. Cepas Palanca, *Crisis y continuidad en la Hispania del siglo III* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 41–2), were operative during the Principate and the beginning of the late Roman period, but they do not appear to show many signs of activity during the turbulence of the beginning of the fifth century. Thus most current scholarship rejects the traditional *limes* hypothesis for the fifth century. The bibliography is extensive; for a clear restatement of the position with bibliography, see J.M. Novo Güisán, 'El "limes hispanus", un concepto llamado a desaparecer de nuestros libros de Historia', in F. Bouza-Brey Tillo (ed.), *Galicia: da romanidade á xermanización* (Santiago de Compostela, 1993), pp. 61–90. As Arce has indicated recently, the textual basis of this hypothesis, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, includes a large amount of bureaucratic propaganda, which helps to explain its reiteration of anachronisms; cf. J. Arce, 'Un limes innecesario', in M^a.J. Hidalgo, D. Pérez and M.J.R. Gervás (eds), *Romanización y Reconquista en la Península Ibérica: nuevas perspectivas* (Salamanca, 1998), p. 185 ff.

⁴ I. Sastre, *Formas de dependencia social en el Noroeste peninsular. Transición del mundo prerromano al romano y época altoimperial* (Ponferrada, 1998).

affected the human landscape, which became more varied.⁵ The success of the implantation of Roman political power in the north-west lay in the integration into the *civitates* of the system of *castros* or *oppida*, which was the basic pattern of settlement in this region. In recent times, Spanish historiography has come to grips with the complex character of the political and social organization of the *castra* and *oppida* of the Indo-European world, which contrasts with traditional 'tribal' and *gentilicio* (kin-based) views of these societies.⁶ Most recently, elites within the complex political and social organization of these *castros/oppida* have been identified; this was already in evidence in pre-Roman times, when these elites controlled embryonic organizational networks.⁷ The *castro* was the axis about which smaller settlements turned. The local aristocracy was not only the key element and beneficiary of Roman political power, but also the pivot upon which it rested. Together with this human factor, the Romans developed the *civitas*, which in the north-west was the focal point of different territories, in which the *castros* continued in many cases to play an organizational role. Epigraphy reveals that suprafamilial indigenous groups survived, now forming part of the socio-political equilibrium that the Romans called *pax*. Thus *castros* and suprafamilial groups, as elements of indigenous origin, were neither isolated nor a mere 'survival', but an integrating factor in the articulation of Roman power in the north-west of the Iberian peninsula.⁸ And not only in the north-west, since the most recent studies of other areas of the northern third of the peninsula have drawn very similar pictures. This is the case in the Asturias and Cantabria, as well as in the greater part of the northern Meseta.⁹ Perhaps even more

⁵ A. Orejas Saco del Valle, *Estructura social y territorio. El impacto romano en la cuenca noroccidental del Duero* (Madrid, 1996).

⁶ [Translator's note: *castro(s)* is the technical term in modern Spanish for the nucleated, often fortified, settlements of the north-west, which Latin sources often call *oppida* or *castra*. The term *gentilicio* is also a standard one in recent Spanish historiography.] Amongst other revisionist contributions, see M^a.C. González Rodríguez, *Las unidades organizativas indígenas del área indoeuropea de Hispania* (Vitoria, 1986); M^a.C. González and J. Santos (eds), *Las estructuras sociales indígenas del Norte de la Península Ibérica* (Vitoria, 1994); F. Beltrán Lloris, 'Un espejismo historiográfico. Las "organizaciones gentilicias" hispanas', in *Actas del I Congreso Peninsular de Historia Antigua 2* (Santiago de Compostela, 1988), pp. 197–237; G. Pereira, 'Aproximación crítica al estudio de la etnogénesis: la experiencia de *Callaecia*', *Complutum* 2–3 (1992), pp. 35–43; J.F. Rodríguez Neila and F.J. Navarro Santana (eds), *Los pueblos prerromanos del Norte de Hispania. Una transición cultural como debate histórico* (Pamplona, 1998).

⁷ For a wide-ranging survey, see M. Almagro-Gorbea, 'Estructura socio-ideológica de los oppida celtibéricos', in Villar and Beltrán (eds), *Pueblos, lenguas y escritura*, p. 35 ff.

⁸ G. Pereira-Menaut, 'Los galaicos', in Rodríguez Neila and Navarro Santana (eds), *Los pueblos prerromanos*, p. 301 ff.

⁹ For the Asturias and Cantabrians, J. Mangas, 'Pervivencias sociales de astures y cántabros en los modelos administrativos romanos: tiempos y modos', in Hidalgo, Pérez, and Gervás (eds), *Romanización y Reconquista*, pp. 117–28; M^a.C. González Rodríguez, *Los astures y los cántabros vadinienses* (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1997). For the whole of the Submeseta, see J.M^a. Solana (ed.), *Las entidades étnicas de la Meseta Norte de Hispania en época prerromana* (Valladolid, 1991).

revealing of the heterogeneity within which Roman dominion was structured is the ever-increasing information that is coming to light about Roman-style settlements and archaeological finds in areas which until recently were considered almost virgin territory in this respect; Roman social patterns which, furthermore, would remain important in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.¹⁰ In short, we can see that even in areas traditionally thought to have had little relationship with the Roman world, the channels establishing Roman power are now known to have been very varied. The way in which *civitates* were developed also varied; there are examples of creations *ex novo*, such as *Asturica* (Astorga) and *Legio* (León), and also of foundations developed from earlier centres. The latter characterizes the majority of settlements which are identified as *civitates*, on the basis of the literary sources, or else following the conclusions of archaeologists. Thus the impact of Roman structures in the north of the Iberian Peninsula was much greater than has previously been thought. At the same time, however, both *castra* and large-scale indigenous family structures were realities which often were strengthening inside the framework of Roman dominion, above all thanks to the *civitates* and the *castra* themselves, as well as other smaller units and, of course, the role local aristocracies played in the Roman power structure.

The post-Roman age: the Suevic and Visigothic periods

In the post-Roman period, our focus here, the *civitates* continued to have great importance as axes of the articulation of political power.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was no single model for the *civitas*, nor was it the only structural element of geopolitical control. The idea of local political centres, *sedes*, appeared; thus, in the north-west, the Sueves took as their symbolic centre *Bracara* (Braga), the royal seat, the capital of the *regnum*. *Bracara* was also a metropolitan see (with *Lucus*, Lugo) and its local centrality was incorporated almost unchanged into the Visigothic *regnum*.¹²

¹⁰ The recent bibliography is extensive and widely dispersed, but for a synthesis for the Asturias, see L.R. Menéndez Bueyes, 'Algunas notas sobre el posible origen astur-romano de la nobleza en el *Asturorum Regnum*', *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua* 13–14 (1995–6), pp. 437–56.

¹¹ The archaeological record is proving increasingly fruitful in this area. For the *civitates* of the north of *Hispania* see, amongst others, the contributions of C. Fernández Ochoa and A. Morillo, *De Brigantium a Oiasso. Una aproximación al estudio de los enclaves marítimos cantábricos en época romana* (Madrid, 1994); C. Fernández Ochoa, 'La ciudad en la Antigüedad tardía en la Cornisa Cantábrica', in L.A. García Moreno and S. Rascón Marqués (eds), *Complutum y las ciudades hispanas en la Antigüedad tardía* (Alcalá de Henares, 1999), pp. 73–86.

¹² P.C. Díaz, 'El reino suevo de *Hispania* y su sede en *Bracara*', in G. Ripoll and J.M^a. Gurt (eds), *Sedes regiae (ann. 400–800)* (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 403–23. On the subject of the *civitates* in the post-Roman and early medieval north-west, see recently J. López Quiroga and M.R. Lovelle, 'Ciudades atlánticas en transición: la "ciudad" tardo-antigua y alto-medieval en el noroeste de la Península Ibérica (s. V–XI)', *Archeologia Medievale* 26 (1999), pp. 257–68.

However, the key to the articulation of political power in the north-west seems to have been more localized units. The *castra* were again important: these are recorded in the written sources (particularly, as we shall see, in the Chronicle of Hydatius) and were the fulcra of both the political expansion of the *regnum*, and of the opposition to this expansion. This is confirmed from late antiquity onwards by archaeology, both in Galicia and in areas more closely linked to the north-west corner of the Meseta – and, indeed, in the whole of the north-west.¹³ The *Parrochiale Suevum*¹⁴ – a late sixth-century list of thirteen episcopal sees and their dependent churches – reveals in the north-west a complex process of regulation which implies the establishment of central places. These relate both to local centres, briefly mentioned in the sources, and to the centres of extensive territories.¹⁵ Thanks to their inclusion in an official document such as the *Parrochiale*, together with the fact that they occasionally coincided with mints, it is clear that they were the basis of political articulation in the north-west.¹⁶ They formed a network that combined not only former *civitates* such as *Bracara*, *Lucus* or *Asturica*, but also *castra* or fortified sites, as well as smaller places. The implementation of earlier networks of control based on *civitates*, which had already articulated indigenous structures within channels of Roman power, is also detectable in the Asturian interior. This is a good example of the exploitation of these areas for geo-strategic reasons, such as minting, in the context of the expansion of the Visigothic *regnum*.¹⁷ Some of the places that appear as ‘churches’ in the *Parrochiale* were to lose their importance with time, but others grew as hubs of articulation of local power. A case in point is *Senimure* (present-day Zamora¹⁸), which appears as a dependent ‘church’ of the see of *Asturica*, and to a lesser extent of *Senabria* (present-day Sanabria). Both centres played an organizational role not only in late antiquity but also in the Middle

¹³ Novo Güisán, *Los pueblos*, p. 106 ff; J. López Quiroga and M.R. Lovelle, ‘Poblamiento rural en el Noroeste de la Península Ibérica (ss. V–XI): una introducción al estudio del poblamiento rural entre la Antigüedad tardía y la Alta Edad Media en Galicia a través de un análisis micro-regional’, *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval* 7 (1993), p. 13; and ‘Castros y castella tutiora de época sueva en Galicia y norte de Portugal: ensayo de inventario y primeras propuestas interpretativas’, *Hispania Antiqua* 23 (1999), pp. 355–74; Gutiérrez González and Benítez González, ‘Los tiempos oscuros’, p. 109.

¹⁴ *CCSL* 175 (Turnhout, 1965).

¹⁵ P.C. Díaz, ‘El *Parrochiale Suevum*: organización eclesiástica, poder político y poblamiento en la *Gallaecia* tardoantigua’, in *Homenaje a José M^a. Blázquez*, VI (Madrid, 1998), pp. 35–47.

¹⁶ P.C. Díaz, ‘Consideraciones sobre las cecas de la *Gallaecia* visigoda’, in *III Congreso Peninsular de Historia Antigua, Preactas*, II (Vitoria, 1994), pp. 642–8.

¹⁷ This is true of the mint at *Pesicos*, cf. N. Santos Yanguas and C. Vera García, ‘Las acuñaciones monetarias de *Pesicos* y la conquista de Asturias por los visigodos’, *Hispania Antiqua* 23 (1999), pp. 375–400.

¹⁸ J.A. Gutiérrez González, ‘La ciudad de Zamora entre el mundo antiguo y el feudalismo: morfología urbana’, *IV Congreso de arqueología medieval española* 2 (1993), pp. 243–50.

Ages, having received in the post-Roman period a political imprint from the ecclesiastical network linked to central power. Nonetheless, within this complex dynamic were several sources of conflict.

Our principal texts, the Chronicle of Hydatius and the *Parrochiale*, give the impression of tension between central aspirations and local interests. Resistance is evident in certain local areas or regions of the north-west, based around specified *castra*. Hydatius tells how, around 430, the Suevic king Hermeric launched an offensive against the central part of *Gallaecia*, meeting with forceful resistance from people who lived in *castella*.¹⁹ The expansionist policies of the Sueves in the north-west reveal, thanks to Hydatius's testimony, the appearance of the names of communities which we may conceive of as 'peoples'. Such is the case of the *Auregenses*, c.460, in the reign of Rechimund,²⁰ and of the *Aunonenses* a few years later.²¹ A century after Hydatius the Suevic *Parrochiale* also provides information that seems to reflect the presence of named human communities, that is to say, specific 'peoples', in the north-west.²² Another example, described by John of Biclar, is the campaign of Leovigild in 573 against the *Sappi*, of *Sabaria*, probably in the west of the present-day province of Zamora.²³ This is a zone for which we have scanty but important testimony from the Roman period, which points to the presence of indigenous structures which were incorporated into the network of Roman political control. This latter development may above all be traced in the intensification of production and its inclusion in networks of commercial activity, in peripheral zones such as Trás-os-Montes in present-day Portugal, and the Zamoran districts of Aliste and Sayago.²⁴ Resistance to the expansionist intentions of central power came also from groups further north, such as the *Ruccones*. In 572 the Suevic king, Miro, began a campaign against them and,²⁵ half a century later, in c.613, the Visigothic king, Sisebut, embarked on an

¹⁹ Hydat. 81. We have used the edition of R.W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana. Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1993), which differs from the traditional numeration.

²⁰ Hydat. 197.

²¹ Hydat. 229; 235.

²² On this topic, P.C. Díaz, 'Gallaecia: de reino suevo a provincia visigoda', in G. Pereira Menaut (ed.), *Gallaecia fai dous mil anos, I, Historia* (Santiago de Compostela, 1997), p. 266.

²³ John of Biclar, 573.5 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH AA II*, pp. 211–20). P.C. Díaz, 'El territorio de la actual provincia de Zamora en el contexto de la Antigüedad tardía (siglos IV–VI)', in *I Congreso de Historia de Zamora I* (Zamora, 1990), p. 375.

²⁴ At the textual level, the 'Pacto de los Zoelas' stands out: see an edition in G. Bravo, *Hispania y el Imperio* (Madrid, 2001), p. 192. At the archaeological level, see F. de Saude Lemos, *Povoamento romano de Trás-os-Montes oriental* (Braga, 1993). See in addition the reflections of I. Sastre Prats, 'Estructura de explotación social y organización del territorio en la *civitas Zoelarum*', *Gerión* 17 (1999), pp. 345–59.

²⁵ Biclar. 572.3; Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum* (hereafter Isid. *HG*), *HS* 91. *HS* and *HG* ed. C. Rodríguez, *Las Historias de los godos, vándalos y suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla* (León, 1975).

important offensive in the north, in which the *Ruccones* were again mentioned.²⁶ Recently the area of the *Ruccones* has been located to the Cantabrian coast. These episodes, together with Leovigild's campaign of 574 against Cantabria²⁷ (its southern part, where there is evidence for a landed aristocracy, as we shall see), show that this area was by now fully part of the framework of the Visigothic *regnum*, especially after the consolidation of the duchy of *Cantabria*.²⁸ Therefore the largest units of human association in this region were either foci of resistance to attempts to expand or maintain central power, or the bases of the organization of central power itself.

In the north-west, the Suevic polity had to adapt to the existence of established aristocracies. These had parallels in the rest of *Hispania*, but this area presented certain social peculiarities which can be detected in monastic documentation of the sixth and seventh centuries, which begin in the Suevic period and continue after the region's inclusion within the orbit of the Visigothic kingdom after 585. Family ownership of property found in monasticism a new form of expression,²⁹ which both safeguarded earlier practices and preserved a degree of autonomy with respect to the structures which central powers (first Suevic, then Visigothic) tried to impose. Monastic observance was not uniform: alongside private and family foundations there existed regular communities following a rule, as in the foundations of figures such as Martin of Braga in the sixth century and Fructuosus in the seventh, and also the individual routes followed by intellectual ascetics such as Valerius of Bierzo at the end of the seventh century.³⁰ Large-scale private property can sometimes clearly be seen as well, both in the archaeological record³¹ and in written sources, especially in the unusual documentation associated with Valerius of Bierzo. The phenomenon of private chapels represents a change of direction for the political structure, for it was a

²⁶ Isidore has '*Roccones*': see Isid. *HG* 61–2.

²⁷ *Bicl.* 574; Braulio, *Vita Aemiliani* 26.33, ed. J. Oroz, 'Vita Sancti Aemiliani. Hymnus in festo Sancti Aemiliani Abbatis', *Perficit* 9 (1978), pp. 119–20, 165–227; Isid. *HG* 49.

²⁸ On these aspects, see J.J. García González and I. Fernández de Mata, 'La Cantabria trasmontana en épocas romana y visigoda: perspectivas ecosistémicas', *Estudios sobre la transición al feudalismo en Cantabria y la cuenca del Duero* (Burgos, 1999), pp. 7–35.

²⁹ P.C. Díaz, 'Comunidades monásticas y comunidades campesinas en la España visigoda', *Los Visigodos. Historia y Civilización, Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 3 (1986), pp. 189–95; *idem*, 'El monacato y la cristianización del NO. hispano. Un proceso de aculturación', *Cristianismo y aculturación en tiempos del imperio romano, Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 7 (1990), pp. 531–39.

³⁰ A. Ferreiro, 'The Westward Journey of St. Martin of Braga', *Studia Monastica* 22 (1980), pp. 243–51; *idem*, 'The Missionary Labors of St. Martin of Braga in 6th. Century Galicia', *Studia Monastica* 23 (1981), pp. 11–26; R. Frighetto, *Panorama económico-social del Noroeste de la Península Ibérica en época visigoda. La obra de Valerio del Bierzo*, Tesis Doctoral, Universidad de Salamanca (1997).

³¹ For the region of León, see J.A. Gutiérrez González, 'El Páramo Leonés. Entre la Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 14 (1996), pp. 47–96.

move towards the *segregatio* of local areas from episcopal power. This strengthened the position of those local magnates upon whose support the central authority depended, especially in peripheral areas. In the second half of the seventh century, Valerius mentions such chapels in the *territorium* of the diocese of *Asturica*.³² At that period, *Gallaecia* had been within the political orbit of the Visigothic kingdom for almost a century, and we can apply to it the general statements about private chapels in sources deriving from central authorities (especially church councils³³). Nevertheless, chapels had already appeared in Suevic church records. The Acts of the second council of *Bracara* (572) show that private chapels were already a common feature of the landscape. The figure of the *fundator* of this kind of church was distinct from the official ecclesiastical bodies, although the bishops attempted to ensure that there was a landed endowment of such *basilicae* before their official recognition through consecration.³⁴ This occurrence must have been frequent, if episcopal legislation had to cover it. It was precisely the question of economic control that most exercised the bishops: ecclesiastical authorities were exhorted to be alert to those foundations attempting to make a profit from donations made to churches on private property, for this was a way in which the landowners sought to control the income of bodies which lay *in terra sua*, on their land.³⁵ In this part of the north-west, *civitates* such as *Bracara*, *Asturica* or *Lucus* were the key to the exercise of central power. The latter depended on the collaboration of officials (*comites* and *iudices* at the local level in the Visigothic period), and above all on the bishops. The complexity of the dialogue between central initiatives and local realities crystallized with the emergence of a series of reference points for the local articulation of power. This is represented by the association of mints and churches in these central points, as we have already seen,³⁶ although we should note that such an institutional equivalence hides a great diversity in which *civitates* and *castra* could coexist, and in which both could operate as foci for private or extended-family communities, 'peoples'. The basis of the restructuring of central power remained highly diverse.

We have now considered the basic factors in the political situation of the north-west at a time when the episcopal sees took on, in addition to

³² P.C. Díaz, 'Iglesia propia y gran propiedad en la autobiografía de Valerio del Bierzo', in *I Congreso Internacional Astorga romana* (Astorga, 1986), pp. 297–303.

³³ M. Torres, 'El origen del sistema de "iglesias propias"', *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 3 (1926), pp. 307–475; R. Bidagor, *La Iglesia propia en España. Estudio histórico canónico* (Roma, 1933); G. Martínez Díez, *El patrimonio eclesiástico en la España visigoda. Estudio histórico-jurídico* (Comillas, 1959).

³⁴ *Conc. II Brac.* c. 5, ed. J. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos* (Barcelona and Madrid, 1963).

³⁵ *Conc. II Brac.* c. 6.

³⁶ See above, p. 6.

their religious functions, an active role as the representatives of central power. The Acts of the Suevic councils in *Gallaecia* (the councils of Braga in 561 and 572) confirm the link between central power and the church – the latter being not only a universal institution but also a network of local bodies (as we have seen) which thus gave it political significance. The Suevic *Parrochiale* shows the coincidence of the ecclesiastical framework with political and administrative centres, subsequently (from 585) preserved by the Visigothic kingdom.³⁷ The association between the Catholic church and the kingdom was, of course, an institutional necessity, but it had also to function at the local level. As far as the former is concerned, it is very clear that it was the monarchy that promoted the episcopal assemblies in Galicia: according to the Acts, Ariamir and Miro summoned the councils of 561 and 572. The workings of the episcopal structure are also visibly hierarchical; this can be seen in the leading role of Lucretius, the metropolitan of *Bracara*, in the first council and of the metropolitans of the same see (Martin) and of *Lucus* (Nitigius) in the second, a division that seems to represent a bipartite structure at the heart of the Galician Catholic church. The conciliar Acts of 561 and 572 also give us a glimpse of the shape of political structures at the regional and local level. Economic factors, notably landowning were important in the dialogue between local and central power; both levels were taken into account in the apportioning of ecclesiastical wealth between bishops, clergy and churches. Issues of physical upkeep illustrate the versatility of the system. To take one example, the section of the Acts dealing with the maintenance and illumination of churches shows dispersal of rights and resources at the level of the various *loca* scattered over the territory of each diocese.³⁸ At the same time, the management of such resources had implications for the workings of local power, since local administrators had to appear before the bishop.³⁹ Another important aspect of this dynamic was the peripatetic character of the bishops, who travelled round their *territoria* on visitations⁴⁰ which, judging from the provisions of the Suevic councils, sometimes included the seizure of surplus resources.⁴¹

In this way, the dioceses on the periphery of *Hispania*, which included most of the northern third of the peninsula, took on a

³⁷ Cf. above, p. 7 and n. 22, Diaz, pp. 253–78.

³⁸ The connection between such apparently trivial matters as the illumination of churches and the basic structures of political and economic articulation has been demonstrated for the Merovingian world by P. Fouracre, 'Eternal Light and Earthly Needs: Practical Aspects of the Development of Frankish Immunities', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 53–81.

³⁹ *Conc. I Brac.* c. 7.

⁴⁰ *Conc. II Brac.* c. 1.

⁴¹ *Conc. II Brac.* cc. 2, 3, 5.

particular character. We have already considered the north-west; let us now turn to other areas. In the northern part of the Meseta, the collapse of Roman order at the end of the fifth century provided the impetus for local political change.⁴² The Duero valley provides a high percentage of the material evidence for local power structures, even if it is now clear that similar features are found elsewhere. A number of sites here, especially cemeteries, have been dated to the late Roman period; more important for us is that others are post-Roman, from the Visigothic period. We cannot here discuss the classification of these finds, nor enter into archaeological debates on this matter;⁴³ what interests us here is their local significance. Firstly, there is a connection, in many instances, with large estates, probably the main social focus in the northern Meseta in the post-Roman period. That these landed estates were so characteristic of this area does not mean, however, the complete breakdown of centralized political power. Current archaeological scholarship has suggested that such a breakdown had occurred,⁴⁴ but it has recently been convincingly argued that the supposed weakness of central power in the Duero valley has been overstated.⁴⁵ We suggest that, in practice, the nature of political power is more complex than simple labelling suggests: historians' use of concepts such as 'the public' to denote central power and bureaucratic control are in our view not applicable to late antique societies. In the case of the northern Submeseta, the tracing of each political centre as evidence of organized power, based on episcopal sees and mints, shows that they were widely

⁴² Bearing in mind that this zone was not rich in *civitates*, and that even some of its most important political centres, such as *Clunia*, practically disappeared in late antiquity; cf. P. de Palol *et al.*, *Clunia O. Studia varia cluniensia* (Burgos, 1991), p. 17 ff. For a recent archaeological overview of the urban centres of the northern Submeseta see J.A. Abásolo, 'La ciudad romana en la Meseta Norte durante la Antigüedad tardía', in L.A. García Moreno and S. Rascón Marqués (eds), *Complutum y las ciudades hispanas en la Antigüedad tardía* (Alcalá de Henares, 1999), pp. 87–99.

⁴³ For the problems posed by these sites, see, amongst others L. Caballero Zoreda, *La necrópolis tardorromana de Fuentespreadas (Zamora). Un asentamiento en el valle del Duero* (Madrid, 1974); *idem*, 'Zamora en el tránsito de la Edad Antigua a la Edad Media', in *Historia de Zamora, I, De los orígenes al final del Medioevo* (Zamora, 1995), pp. 339–430, esp. p. 352 ff; A. Fuentes Domínguez, *La necrópolis tardorromana de Albalate de las Nogueras (Cuenca) y el problema de las denominadas 'necrópolis del Duero'* (Cuenca, 1989); G. Ripoll López, *La ocupación visigoda a través de sus necrópolis (Hispania)*, Colección Tesis Microfilm n° 912, Universitat de Barcelona (1991); G. Ripoll López, 'The Transformation and Process of Acculturation in Late Antique Hispania: Select Aspects from Urban and Rural Archaeological Documentation', in A. Ferreiro (ed.), *The Visigoths. Studies in Culture and Society* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 1999), pp. 263–302, esp. p. 277 ff; A.M^a. Jiménez Garnica, 'Consideraciones sobre la trama social en la Hispania temprano visigoda', *Pyrenae* 26 (1995), pp. 189–98.

⁴⁴ E. Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito de la Antigüedad al Feudalismo. Poblamiento, poder político y estructura social del Arlanza al Duero (siglos VII–XI)* (Valladolid, 1996), p. 36 ff.

⁴⁵ J.J. García González and I. Fernández de Mata, 'Antropología, arqueología e historia. La desestructuración de la cuenca del Duero en la transición de la Antigüedad a la Edad Media', *Estudios sobre la transición al feudalismo en Cantabria y la cuenca del Duero* (Burgos, 1999), p. 94.

scattered, and suggests that each of the places which had some form of political importance controlled a wide area.⁴⁶ The dispersal of the centres of political power is the main characteristic of the northern zone of the Meseta.

Episcopal organization in the northern Meseta was undergoing consolidation in the post-Roman period.⁴⁷ A clear example of this is the emergence of the province of *Celtiberia*. When Toledo became important, even before it became a royal capital, it was a focus for political affirmation in this area. The letter collection of the sixth-century bishop Montanus of Toledo describes a series of changes in Toledo's ecclesiastical fortune, such as the loss of some areas (such as Segovia and Coca) from the diocese, the mission of Toribius to Palencia, and the formation of *Celtiberia* as a diocese.⁴⁸ Montanus's letters give a glimpse of a process of rapprochement between the church and the *domini*, the large landowners who, in the Meseta (or at least in the Tierra de Campos, for which both documentary and archaeological evidence survives), constituted the main local focus of political power.⁴⁹ This information is significant, because its date (c.530) coincides with the first steps towards the consolidation of the Visigothic kingdom in *Hispania*. From Toledo, Montanus supported the dealings between Toribius and the local aristocracies. These helped to cement the mechanisms of political power over a vast territory where the collaboration of the bishops was vital to the interests of the incipient kingdom; it formed a channel of communication between the centre and the locality, and vice versa. It is highly significant that Montanus could count on the support of the Visigothic monarchy to maintain his authority in the face of the upheavals glimpsed in the sources. This support was, of necessity, reciprocal, since the monarchy itself had been established in *Hispania* for less than a quarter of a century, and Montanus's activities were essential in furthering links with the north. In the area where Toribius had been active, another see, Osma, emerged, probably between 589 and 597.⁵⁰

Local dynamics and the attempt on the part of central power to assert political control make up a double game, which can again be seen

⁴⁶ P.C. Díaz, 'La ocupación germánica del valle del Duero: un ensayo interpretativo', *Hispania Antiqua* 18 (1994), p. 471.

⁴⁷ For the area to the east of the one we are considering here, see S. Castellanos, 'La implantación eclesiástica en el Alto Ebro durante el siglo VI d.C.: la *Vita Sancti Aemiliani*', *Hispania Antiqua* 19 (1995), pp. 387–96.

⁴⁸ For the framework of this problem, see the recent work of C. Martín, 'Las cartas de Montano y la autonomía episcopal de la Hispania septentrional en el siglo VI', *Hispania Antiqua* 22 (1998), pp. 403–26.

⁴⁹ Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 50 ff.

⁵⁰ This area also seems to have been the boundary of an ecclesiastical province, eliminated only by Gundemar's decree of 610. P.C. Díaz, 'La diócesis de Osma en la Antigüedad', in *Arte e historia de la diócesis de Osma* (El Burgo de Osma, 1998), pp. 215–25.

in the case of a very unusual see, that of *Auca* (near Villafranca de Montes de Oca, Burgos). This see, attested from 585, did not correspond to a *civitas*.⁵¹ It lay in the transitional zone between the valleys of the Duero and Ebro and the mountains of the north. Here there seems to have been a convergence of interests between the local aristocracies and the political aspirations of the Visigothic *regnum*.⁵² The see of *Auca* established the basic structure of this strategic territory through its role in the foundation of churches. These, in addition to their religious function, acted as a conduit between local and centre, via the episcopal see itself. An inscription from the church at Mijangos, recording its dedication by Asterius, the first known bishop of *Auca*, illustrates this situation.⁵³

The surroundings of the sea of *Auca* contributed further to the complexity of local territorial structures. The fortress of Tedeja undoubtedly functioned as a political centre,⁵⁴ as did *castros* such as Amaya and Monte Cildá for their immediate surroundings; the first of these two was probably an episcopal see from the end of the seventh century or the beginning of the eighth,⁵⁵ and the second had obvious strategic value for central power.⁵⁶ The hill of the present-day city of Burgos first became important at the end of late antiquity and especially at the dawn of the early Middle Ages, when it evolved into a fortification of the first rank.⁵⁷ In the hinterland of modern Burgos, in Lora and Valdivielso, *castros* also functioned as the main 'hierarchical spatial element'.⁵⁸ In the post-Roman period, a number of *loca* also formed points of reference at the micro-regional or local level. Some of these, and not just the principal *oppida*, have been excavated, revealing such features as churches, hermitages, cemeteries and inhabited caves, either grouped together or isolated find-spots. In the see of *Auca*, for example, at San

⁵¹ Bishop Asterio attended the third council of Toledo (Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 31).

⁵² I. Martín Viso, 'Organización episcopal y poder entre la Antigüedad tardía y el Medievo (siglos V–XI): las sedes de Calahorra, Oca y Osma', *Iberia. Revista de la Antigüedad* 2 (1999), p. 159.

⁵³ The inscription dates to the reign of Reccared: cf. J.A. Lecanda, 'El epígrafe consagratorio de Santa María de Mijangos (Burgos). Aportaciones para su estudio', *Letras de Deusto* 65 (1994), pp. 173–95.

⁵⁴ J.A. Lecanda Esteban, 'De la Tardoantigüedad a la Plena Edad Media en Castilla a la luz de la arqueología', in *VII Semana de Estudios Medievales* (Logroño, 1997), p. 314.

⁵⁵ J.J. García González, 'Iglesia y religiosidad en Burgos en la Alta Edad Media', in *II Jornadas Burgalesas de Historia, Burgos en la Alta Edad Media* (Burgos, 1991), p. 290.

⁵⁶ The mint of *Mave* was nearby; cf. on this site M.A. García Guinea, J. González Echegaray and J.A. San Miguel Ruiz, *Excavaciones en Monte Cildá. Olleros de Pisuerga (Palencia)* (Madrid, 1966); R. Bohigas Roldán and A. Ruiz Gutiérrez, 'Las cerámicas visigodas de poblado en Cantabria y Palencia', *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval* 3 (1989), pp. 31–51, esp. p. 42 ff.

⁵⁷ J.J. García González, 'Del castro al castillo. El cerro de Burgos de la Antigüedad a la Edad Media', *Cuadernos Burgaleses de Historia Medieval* 2 (1995), pp. 71–166.

⁵⁸ I. Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales en el Norte de la Península Ibérica (siglos VI–XIII)* (Salamanca, 2000).

Juan de la Hoz (Cillaperlata), cave dwellings coexisted with a church of probable late antique origin and a necropolis that continued in use into the early Middle Ages.⁵⁹ Similar *loca* have been excavated in this area.⁶⁰ A diachronic study of these micro-regional points of reference is occasionally possible, and allows us to visualize them as sites of continuous use at least from the Roman to the early medieval periods, some of which were endowed with an ecclesiastical function at a post-Roman date.⁶¹ The see of *Auca* in particular needed a strong dynamism, given the complexity of its *territorium*. The leading role played by *castros* and other smaller units combined with that of other long-standing sites, the *villae*, where late antique aristocratic organization, based on the ownership of land and personal dependence, was focussed. Both in the countryside close to the valleys of the Arlanzón, the Arlanza and the Duero,⁶² and in the Rioja east of the diocese of *Auca*, these local aristocracies appear in the archaeological and textual sources.⁶³ Aristocratic collaboration proved of fundamental importance in upholding de facto episcopal power, something of which Montanus and Toribius in the northern Meseta were aware, as we have seen. The processes of convergence between the aristocracy and central power had a wider framework that was integrated with local and regional patterns. In this wider context, the potential of the monarchy as an institution was both dependent upon, and limited by, collaboration with local aristocracies: a state of 'constant tension'.⁶⁴ It is clear, however, that an association developed between the Catholic church and central political power, which was to the advantage of both. In addition, the monarchy tried to maintain its territorial base through the collaboration of the aristocracy. Thus in our view, there were two main networks of central political power, expressed

⁵⁹ J. Andrio Gonzalo *et al.*, *El conjunto arqueológico de San Juan de la Hoz en Cillaperlata (Burgos)* (Burgos, 1992).

⁶⁰ For example, the site of San Nicolás at La Sequera de Haza, with a hermitage and necropolis which have late antique and early medieval material, cf. F. Reyes Téllez and M^a.L. Menéndez Robles, 'Excavaciones en la ermita de San Nicolás. La Sequera de Haza (Burgos)', *Noticiario Arqueológico Hispánico* 26 (1985), pp. 163–213. Another interesting case is the church of San Pedro in Hortigüela, with material from the Visigothic and post-Visigothic periods; cf. L. Caballero Zoreda *et al.*, 'La iglesia prerrománica de S. Pedro el Viejo de Arlanza (Hortigüela, Burgos)', *Numantia* 5 (1991–2), pp. 139–65.

⁶¹ See the methodological arguments of J. Escalona Monge, 'Problemas metodológicos en el estudio de los centros de culto como elemento estructural del poblamiento', in *III Jornadas Burgalesas de Historia, Burgos en la Plena Edad Media* (Burgos, 1994), pp. 573–98.

⁶² In certain cases, archaeologists have provided broad chronological contexts; see for example J.L. Argente Oliver, *La villa tardorromana de Baños de Valdearados (Burgos)* (Madrid, 1979).

⁶³ For references and discussion, see S. Castellanos, 'Aristocracias y dependientes en el Alto Ebro (siglos V–VIII)', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 14 (1996), pp. 29–46.

⁶⁴ P.C. Díaz, M^a.R. Valverde, 'The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weakness of the Visigothic Monarchy of Toledo', in F. Theuws and J.L. Nelson (eds), *Rituals of Power. From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2000), p. 90.

in terms of its local political articulation.⁶⁵ The church supplied an ideological framework, which could also use propaganda to salvage any position of de facto weakness. One example of this was the emergence of royal anointing, which set up the sacrality of the monarchy in the context of the crisis of hereditary accession or the problems of the electoral system in the selection of kings. Apart from its ideological role, the church also gave the *regnum* a local territorial access, which was essential to the articulation of political power. The network of *ecclesiae* was, by definition, a system of basic reference with their hinterlands, especially in the periphery of the peninsula where central power was less directly present. We have seen that in the north-west the equation between political-administrative and ecclesiastical centres was already significant in the Suevic period, and was maintained under Visigothic rule from the end of the sixth century. A dynamic two-way channel of communication was established in which both central power and the localities continued in dialogue. Ecclesiastical assemblies represented the apex of this system, with the clearest links to central power, but with a local aspect provided by the participation of the bishops, the true rulers of their *territoria*.

Partnership with the church was balanced by collaboration with the aristocracy. Landownership was in our view the defining feature of social hegemony, and it gradually permeated not only social and economic structures but politics, ideology and psychology as well. This role was linked with changes in tax structures, one of the turning points of the transformation of late antiquity.⁶⁶ The tributary system of appropriating surplus goods was modified under the influence of, among other factors, new power relations.⁶⁷ In spite of this, as we have seen in the north-west of the peninsula, the presence of local hegemonies did not undermine the workings of central power. We want to stress this point. Aristocratic decision-making in the political sphere could manifest itself as a centrifugal force. While Visigothic *Hispania* provides some good examples of this,⁶⁸ it nevertheless was not always the case. The data we have presented for the north-west, the northern Meseta, and the Upper Ebro, seem to point to the existence of two-way political channels that

⁶⁵ R. Collins, 'Julian of Toledo and the Royal Succession in Late Seventh-Century Spain', in P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (eds), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 30–49; P.C. Díaz, 'Rey y poder en la monarquía visigoda', *Iberia. Revista de la Antigüedad* 1 (1998), pp. 175–95.

⁶⁶ C. Wickham, 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism', *Past and Present* 103 (1984), pp. 3–36; *idem*, 'La transición en Occidente', in C. Estepa and D. Plácido (coordinators.), J. Trias (ed.), *Transiciones en la Antigüedad y Feudalismo* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 83–90.

⁶⁷ J. Haldon, 'El modo de producción tributario: concepto, alcance y explicación', *Hispania* 58, 3 (1998), pp. 795–822.

⁶⁸ This is Collins's view for Mérida; cf. R. Collins, 'Mérida and Toledo: 550–585', in E. James (ed.), *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 189–219.

were more or less dynamic. The fundamental basis of the structure of post-Roman political power in *Hispania*, we believe, was not the antagonism between central power and the aristocracies, but the construction of avenues of collaboration. Whether or not the majority of these were successful is another matter, but without at least their existence, it would be impossible to account for the survival of the *regnum* over two centuries. It was clearly a question of give and take in which factors such as royal donations on the one hand, and *fidelitas* to kings on the other, played a major role.⁶⁹ It is not possible to draw a map for the Visigothic kingdom of the frequency of royal donations to local aristocracies,⁷⁰ and this might anyway be too rigid a way of analysing these processes. But cooperation with central power brought not only economic benefits to local aristocracies, but also political-administrative ones, such as the conferring of local (*comes civitatis*) and regional (*dux provinciae*) political office. The construction of consensus lent versatility to the mechanisms of central power in a local setting. It allowed the *regnum* local territorial access (which helps to explain its survival⁷¹), but at the same time impeded direct control in many areas, as is shown by the absence of real territorial divisions which would have enhanced its functioning at the regional level (Fig. 2).⁷²

One other important factor in political articulation should be briefly mentioned: the use of force. Opinion on this subject is, speaking very generally, divided between those who see the army as belonging to the Visigothic *regnum* as a whole, sometimes defined in 'public' terms,⁷³ and those who regard military obligations as related to aristocratic patronage.⁷⁴ The *Leges Visigothorum*, our chief source on this, suggests that a 'public army' as it has been represented by 'fiscalist' historians did not exist. The laws of King Wamba (672–80) and King Ervig (680–7) are conclusive here.⁷⁵ They represent the central power's drive towards

⁶⁹ For different approaches, see C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes del feudalismo, I, Fideles y gardingos en la monarquía visigoda. Raíces del vasallaje y del beneficio hispanos* (Mendoza, 1942); A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978), pp. 126–54, 170–86.

⁷⁰ Such as the work of J. Barbier, 'Aspects du fisc en Neustrie (VIe–Xe siècles). Résultats d'une recherche en cours', in H. Atsma (ed.), *La Neustrie. Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850* (Sigmaringen, 1989), pp. 129–42.

⁷¹ For the Merovingian world, see P. Fouracre, 'The Nature of Frankish Political Institutions in the Seventh Century', in I. Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: an Ethnographic Perspective* (San Marino, 1998), pp. 285–301.

⁷² This impossibility has already been demonstrated by I. Wood, 'Kings, Kingdoms and Consent', in Sawyer and Wood (eds), *Early Medieval Kingship*, pp. 6–29.

⁷³ J. Durliat, *Les finances publiques de Diocletien aux Carolingiens (284–889)* (Sigmaringen, 1990), p. 123 ff.

⁷⁴ D. Pérez Sánchez, *Ejército y sociedad en la sociedad visigoda* (Salamanca, 1989).

⁷⁵ LV 9.2.8, 9. ed. K. Zeumer, *MGH Legum Sectio I, 1, Leges Visigothorum*, (Hannover and Leipzig, [1902] 1973).

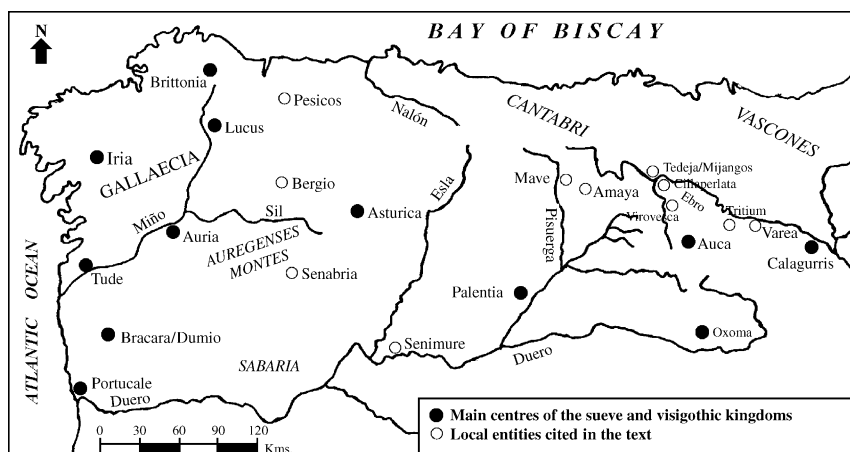


Fig. 2 The articulation of the power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (seventh century).

collaboration with the aristocracy in military affairs, which we mentioned earlier. The formal swearing of oaths gave this collaboration a quasi-religious tone.⁷⁶ Documents emanating from the monarchy show how dependent it was on the goodwill of local magnates, whose own networks of dependants had a military component.⁷⁷ These dependants nevertheless made up only a minority of the permanent military units,⁷⁸ and the frequent references in the legislation to military organization have to be understood as just that, rather than read as the local basis of the contribution of men to the *exercitus*. The army relied on goodwill and the functioning of the mechanisms of consensus rather than legal prescription. An additional factor, sometimes overlooked, must be stressed: the promulgation of laws was closely related to the ideological projection of central political aspirations.⁷⁹ Abels has emphasized with regard to Anglo-Saxon England that the concept of lordship was more important than kingship in accounting for the *fyrð*, the army led by the king.⁸⁰ We can see a clear parallel with the Visigothic kingdom: the

⁷⁶ D. Claude, 'The Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of the King in the Visigothic Kingdom', *Classical Folia* (1978), pp. 3–26.

⁷⁷ See Pérez Sánchez, n. 74 above.

⁷⁸ This is one of the main criticisms of Durliat's line of argument on the armies of the Germanic kingdoms; see C. Wickham, 'La chute de Rome n'aura pas lieu', *Le Moyen Age* 99 (1993), p. 119.

⁷⁹ The work of P. Wormald in this area is particularly useful, including 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship, from Euric to Cnut', in Sawyer and Wood (eds), *Early Medieval Kingship*, pp. 105–38; and *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999).

⁸⁰ R.P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988), p. 36.

king was the military supremo; an *exercitus* existed; military command structures and organization are detailed in the official sources. But the makeup of these forces depended on the participation of the magnates and the involvement of areas under the control of local aristocrats. Julian of Toledo's narration of Wamba's campaign against the revolt of Paul (673) is an excellent example of the way these matters functioned in practice, and at the same time, of disfunctions and tensions.⁸¹ Once again in the make-up and operation of the army we find channels of political articulation between centre and periphery which explain both the existence of the power of the *regnum*, but also its limits.

Locally, this convergence between centre and periphery may perhaps have been behind the events that already in the middle of the fifth century had forced Pope Hilary to pronounce on the uncanonical ordinations which, according to the bishops of Tarraconensis, Silvanus of *Calagurris* had carried out. *Honorati* and *possessores* from the middle and upper reaches of the Ebro, some from the area around *Auca* (such as *Virovesca*), had written to Hilary in support of Silvanus.⁸² Another striking feature of the Upper Ebro area is the cave dwellers that archaeologists have identified in large numbers in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This phenomenon cannot be explained simply as a result of eremitical religious practices: some of the cave dwellers were hermits but others were members of the general population.⁸³ Even where hermits are known from the written sources such as the *Vita Aemiliani*, the seventh-century life of Aemilianus (d. c.575) by Bishop Braulio of Saragossa, the social panorama seen from the *locus* of the hermit is of a stratified society, identified by the hagiographer with illustrative terms such as *senatores* or *servi*.⁸⁴ In this complex network, the principal expressions of political power were two-fold. On the one hand there was the military element, which is mentioned specifically with respect to Leovigild's campaign of 574. Later in the course of Visigothic expansion towards the Cantabrian coast, this eventually gave shape to an administrative territory, the duchy of Cantabria. On the other hand, the implementation of the aims of central power remained in the control of its local agents, above all of the see of *Auca*. We can see the

⁸¹ Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae*, ed. J.N. Hillgarth, *CCSL* 115 (Turnhout, 1976).

⁸² On these episodes, see U. Espinosa, *Calagurris Iulia* (Logroño, 1984); K. Larrañaga, 'En torno 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), pp. 171–91.

⁸³ For the Upper Ebro and the south of the Basque country, see A. Azkarate, *Arqueología cristiana de la Antigüedad tardía en Alava, Guipúzcoa y Vizcaya* (Vitoria, 1988); L.A. Monreal Jimeno, *Eremitorios rupestres altomedievales (el Alto Valle del Ebro)* (Bilbao, 1989).

⁸⁴ On the social structure revealed by this text and its ideological implications, see S. Castellanos, *Poder social, aristocracias y hombre santo en la Hispania visigoda. La Vita Aemiliani de Braulio de Zaragoza* (Logroño, 1998).

actions of the see both in its participation in central officialdom (taking part in councils of the *regnum* in Toledo), and in the transmission of its local presence in the complex territory south of the Cordillera Cantábrica and further south still. The mixture of spheres of influence of *castros* and the successors of *villas* made for a complicated scenario. The archaeological record of the sixth and seventh centuries provides ever more detailed information, not only about *castros* and *villas*, but also about the emergence of other *loca* which were spatial reference points and which probably had some relationship with political interests. The bishops were a central channel of power; even though they had to deal with the so-called *segregaciones* (i.e. chapels and private monasteries), the church also had at its disposal a network of local churches which were responsive to its own interests, as the dedicatory inscription from Mijangos demonstrates.

The end of Visigothic power and its reorientation

The existence of varied channels of communication between local powers and the central political apparatus was altered in form, but not in content, by the destruction of the Visigothic *regnum* and the brief period of Berber domination that followed. The Islamic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, initiated in 711, introduced a new apparatus of political control in place of the Visigothic. This does not seem, however, to have been the original intention of the Muslims, which was rather to channel outwards the tensions existing in the recently conquered North Africa.⁸⁵ This accounts for the lack of any clear idea at the outset of how to organize a new central power. It is also to be explained by the presence of a considerable number of Berbers among the conquerors, including Tariq, who led the first expedition. It is interesting that the apparatus of Visigothic power fell apart without any preconceived plan to substitute a new framework for the old *regnum*. Yet the defeat of the Visigoths did not result in the breakdown of the nuclei of local power. The Muslims tried on several occasions to reach agreements with local leaders,⁸⁶ or with important aristocrats such as Theodimir, who controlled seven cities in the south-east of the peninsula (in the south of the modern province of Alicante and the region of Murcia, which then formed the district or *qura* of *Tudmir*, the Arabicized version of Theodimir). Theodimir made a pact with the invaders in c.713, by

⁸⁵ P. Chalmeta, *Invasión e islamización. La sumisión de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus* (Madrid, 1994).

⁸⁶ This is shown by certain local leaders who, emerging from the disasters of Guadalete and Écija, formed pacts with the invaders, thus taking the place of the Visigothic administration. Chalmeta, *Invasión e islamización*, pp. 151–2.

which the Muslims allowed him to hold on to power, and the inhabitants of the region to keep their religion, in return for loyalty to the new rulers and the payment of an annual tribute.⁸⁷ His resolute support was given in exchange for a certain share of power. The new masters of the situation thus sought to uphold their unstable dominion over the local societies formerly subject to the Visigothic *regnum*. This process was repeated in the north of the peninsula. Around 714, without meeting any resistance, Muza subdued the region of *Gilliqiya*, roughly the north-west of Spain.⁸⁸ Dominion over the north, too, was generally achieved through the collaboration of local leaders.

During this period, the Berbers were used as the Muslims' shock troops. They were in a position of subordination to the Arabs. It has been thought that they were settled in the areas of the peninsula of lesser economic and political interest, the richest areas being reserved for the Arabs. At the same time, it is believed that they attempted to find ecological niches that offered living conditions like those they had left behind.⁸⁹ This would explain why they settled in the north, especially in the Duero valley. To the north of the Cordillera Cantábrica, the Berbers were practically non-existent. It is possible that this reflects the distribution of natural resources, but it may also reproduce the relationship between central power and local agencies in existence at the end of the Visigothic period. The economically active sectors of the Cantabrian coast probably suffered a decline since they had been dedicated to maritime commerce, which, with the notable exception of Gijón in the Asturian future kingdom, was reduced to a minimum after the breakdown of the commercial network sponsored by Rome.⁹⁰ Sparsely populated, they posed problems to the establishment of central power. They could supply little in the way of tribute, and in the Visigothic period control of these regions had already amounted to little more than a recognition of superior authority and the payment of a small levy. Other groups survived that were relatively autonomous. A similar situation probably existed in the most peripheral areas of the Duero valley, such as the Zamoran west or the highlands.

⁸⁷ J. López Pereira, *Crónica mozárabe de 754* (Zaragoza, 1980).

⁸⁸ Barbero and Vigil, *La formación*, p. 211.

⁸⁹ T.F. Glick, *Cristianos y musulmanes en la España medieval (711–1250)* (Madrid, 1991), p. 48; Chalmers, *Invasión e islamización*, pp. 160–2.

⁹⁰ The presence of numerous ports on the Atlantic and Cantabrian coast has been confirmed by archaeology, which links them with maritime trade. The collapse of the commercial networks of the Roman period, although this was gradual, resulted in the withdrawal of the inhabitants to other areas and the abandonment of these sites or, at least, a considerable reduction in their population, which did not recover until the early Middle Ages, with the exception of Gijón. See *Tabula Imperii Romani. Hoja K-29, Porto* (Madrid, 1991); *Tabula Imperii Romani. Hoja K-30: Caesaravgusta-Clunia* (Madrid, 1993); C. Fernández Ochoa (ed.), *Los Finisterres atlánticos en la Antigüedad. Época prerromana y romana* (Gijón, 1996).

However it was elsewhere, there was certainly a nucleus of power in the centre-west region of the present-day Asturias based on a group of landowners, who considered that integration into the new polity would be prejudicial to their interests, and who rebelled against the Muslim governor of Gijón: this was the core of the emergent kingdom of the Asturias. The development of social hierarchies, including aristocratic groups, was greater here than elsewhere in the north, and coincided with agricultural expansion.⁹¹ The opposition of the leaders of this area to the new rulers was not inevitable; the Rioja, where a similar aristocracy existed,⁹² collaborated with the Muslims. It was more an issue of local choices, which led to resistance against the new rulers by leaders who, at least at the beginning, were not seeking to create centralized power. Asturian propaganda of the ninth and tenth centuries was to create an image of state foundation in order to justify the expansion of the monarchy, but everything appears to indicate that initially the sole object was to resist Arab–Berber supremacy. The battle of Covadonga in 718 later became the paradigm of the crystallization of Asturian power, although the account given by the Asturian chronicles is closely linked to a myth of Gothic continuity of the end of the ninth century.⁹³ In any case, in the 720s an autonomous Asturian power emerged with an organizational capacity superior to that of the other local magnates of the Cantabrian area,⁹⁴ which had been practically abandoned by the Muslims. In the Duero valley and in Galicia, by contrast, the Berbers remained in control for some time, based on local power structures, especially the *civitates*. Their control was tenuous there, and life continued with little change from the way it had been in the Visigothic period. In fact, the weakness of Berber dominion and their unfamiliarity

⁹¹ Menéndez Bueyes, 'Algunas notas'; P. Caldentey *et al.*, 'Relaciones entre la nobleza territorial del reino de Asturias y la geografía de la romanización', *Lancia* 2 (1997), pp. 165–80.

⁹² S. Castellanos, *Poder social*.

⁹³ The Christian chronicles – the *Crónica de Alfonso III, versión Rotense* (=Rotense), 9–10 as well as the *Crónica Albeldense* (=Albeldense), XV, 1 – set this event in a pro-Asturian perspective. (We are using the edition of both chronicles in J. Gil *et al.*, *Crónicas asturianas* (Oviedo, 1985.)) Muslim historians, however, make no mention of the incident; and neither does the *Chronicle of 754*, the closest to the events and compiled by a Mozarab opposed to Muslim domination. The figure of Pelagius (Pelayo), quite apart from his actual existence, can best be seen as a political archetype engendered by a real event, later embellished with legendary elements. See A. Dacosta Martínez, 'Notas sobre las crónicas ovetenses del siglo IX. Pelayo y el sistema sucesorio en el caudillaje asturiano', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 10 (1992), esp. pp. 13–24; and *idem*, 'Pelayo vive! Un arquetipo político en el horizonte ideológico del reino asturleonés', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Historia Medieval* 10 (1997), pp. 89–135; A. Isla Frez, 'Los dos Vitzas. Pasado y presente en las crónicas asturianas', in M^a.J. Hidalgo, D. Pérez and M.J.R. Gervás (eds), *Romanización y Reconquista*, pp. 303–16.

⁹⁴ This explains the alliance between the Asturians and Peter, *Cantabrorum dux* in *Rotense*, 11 and *Cantabrie* in *Albeldense*, XV, 3. This shows local leaders seeking the support of an emergent power, the Asturians; such leaders were perhaps earlier linked to the Visigoths, but had a less developed organization than the Asturians.

with the terrain would have meant that the former *civitates* and other local powers had to play a greater role in central politics. But anyway, the Berbers revolted in the 740s, affecting the whole of the northern third of the Iberian Peninsula, which ceased to be effectively controlled by the Arabs.⁹⁵ In these circumstances the involvement of local power structures increased, illustrative of the way in which they responded to the needs of their communities.

The campaigns upon which Alfonso I and his brother Fruela embarked around the year 750 illustrate the situation in the north of the peninsula. Their principal objective was a series of *civitates* in present-day Galicia and along the whole of the Duero valley.⁹⁶ These localities formed the principal units of authority for the whole of this region and had developed out of the close links between local and central power discussed earlier. The weakening of the latter resulted in the gradual increase in the autonomy of the *civitates* and in their organizational power at a local level. Lacking the support of a strong central apparatus, however, they were attacked by a new power which saw in them a possible competitor. Nevertheless, the *civitates*, although the most powerful political foci, were not the only ones, for the *Rotense* chronicle makes it clear that there were also incursions against 'castris et villis et vinculis suis'. This shows that there was a hierarchy of political structures of lesser importance, prominent among them *castros* and *villas* (lowland settlements of some significance), with their subordinate territories. These centres of local power had existed for some time; certainly in the Visigothic period, and sometimes perhaps with their roots in earlier epochs, Roman or pre-Roman. The chronicle thus reveals the great variety that characterized the local situation in the north of the peninsula.

We need to look more closely at which regions were the focus of attacks by the Asturian leaders. The list of *civitates* in the *Rotense* chronicle may not be accurate, given its late redaction, at the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth centuries, but it is still valuable, and coincides in part with the information given in another version of the 'Chronicle of Alfonso III', the *Albeldense*. The list covers the Galician north-west, the whole of the Duero valley and the Rioja, while other regions such as present-day Asturias and Cantabria, which formed the nucleus of

⁹⁵ E. Lafuente Alcántara (ed.), *Ajbar Machmuâ (Colección de tradiciones)* (Madrid, 1867), p. 66 and ff. Barbero and Vigil, *La formación*, pp. 213–15.

⁹⁶ *Rotense*, 13: 'Qui cum fratre Froilane sepius exercitu mobens, multas civitates bellando cepit. Id est, Lucum, Tudem, Portugalem, Anegiam, Bracaram metropolitanam, Viseo, Flavia, Letesma, Salamantica, Numantia qui nunc vocatur Zamora, Abela, Astorica, Legionem, Septemmanca, Saldania, Amaia, Secobia, Oxoma, Septempública, Arganza, Clunia, Mabe, Auca, Miranda, Revendeca, Carbonarica, Abeica, Cinisaria et Alesanzo, seu castris cum villis et vinculis suis. Omnes quoque arabes gladio interciens, christianos autem secum ad patriam ducens.'

Asturian sovereignty, the northernmost sector of the province of Burgos and the Basque country, were left out. It was precisely these latter regions that were the principal areas of 'repopulation' by the Asturians in this period, as the *Rotense* states, together with the coastal area of Galicia.⁹⁷ This 'repopulation' was thus carried out in territories that had never been depopulated, indicating the political character of the process.⁹⁸ Its significance lies in the articulation of central political power and its relation to the units of local power. We could hypothesize an integration of the political structures of these territories, which, being mainly small *castros* and weakened *civitates*,⁹⁹ lacked the organizational capacity of the Asturians; they thus came to be part of a new political system. The Asturian leadership therefore gained a certain superiority in these regions, but not an unproblematic one. Probably the socio-economic development of the Asturian heartlands was not yet sufficient to sustain a central apparatus capable of controlling the whole of this wide area. Rebellions are recorded during this period affecting these 'peripheral' areas which had the greatest socio-political development.¹⁰⁰ It is possible that, after a brief period of domination during the reigns of Alfonso I and Fruela, some more marginal areas regained a certain degree of de facto autonomy from the Asturians, and simply stopped paying tribute to them because the Asturians were unable to make their

⁹⁷ *Rotense*, p. 37: 'Eo tempore populantur Asturias, Primorias, Livana, Transmera, Subporta, Carrantia, Bardulies, qui nunc vocatur Castella, et pars maritimam, et Gallecie.' The same text adds later: 'Alabanque, Bizcai, Alaone et Urdunia, a suis reperitur senper esse possessas, sic it Panpilonia, Degius atque Berroza'. These latter areas were under the control of their own leaders.

⁹⁸ R. Menéndez Pidal, 'Repoblación y tradición en la cuenca del Duero', in *Enciclopedia Lingüística Hispánica* (Madrid, 1955), I, xxix–lviii; Barbero and Vigil, *La formación*, pp. 226–7; J.M^a. Mínguez, *Las sociedades feudales*, pp. 74–5.

⁹⁹ The example of the part of Castille in the Ebro valley, identified with the *Bardulies*, seems to make this clear, since this was a zone, at least in its most northern part, organized around this kind of *castros* and also former *civitates*, which were sometimes the same places. *Area Patriniani* is described in 800 as a *civitas*, surrounded by a wall, and also as 'desolate' ('in civitate Area Patriniani . . . et fecimus culturas et laborem et cum illa omnia hereditate quam cludit muris circuito de ipsa civitates . . . Et in Area Patriniani ad Sancti Martini invenimus ipsa civitate ex ruina desolata'); A. Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de San Millán de la Cogolla (759–1076)* (Valencia, 1976), doc. 2. This site is to the north of Burgos, in the present-day Merindades, possibly in San Martín de Agüera (Merindad de Montija); R. Bohigas Roldán, J. Campillo Cueva and J.A. Churruca Pérez, 'Carta arqueológica de la provincia de Burgos. Los partidos judiciales de Sedano y Villarcayo', *Kobie* 14 (1984), p. 68. Although this text was copied into a document in which information from different periods was inserted to form a narrative, it is possible that there was actually a *civitas* there and that the text corresponds with ninth-century reality. In Cantabria the situation was very similar, although there were also other forms of organization there such as the 'valley communities'; C. Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad feudal en Cantabria. La organización del territorio en los siglos IX al XIV* (Santander, 1989).

¹⁰⁰ Thus, before the reign of Alfonso II (791–842), which marks the reorganization of the Asturian kingdom: during the reign of Fruela I (757–68) there was a rebellion of the Basques, who identified themselves with the territory of Álava; and during the reign of Silo (774–83) there was a rebellion in Galicia.

dominion effective. Indeed, it is likely that in such areas there was a tendency to reproduce a form of loose political organization already visible in earlier periods, given how difficult these areas were to subjugate and how little reward they offered to the central apparatus. Nevertheless, in other areas, such as in Alava or in parts of Galicia, where the principal rebellions against the Asturian leadership of the second half of the eighth century are recorded, there were aristocratic groups capable of generating political frameworks of some importance.¹⁰¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of different structures of local power emerged at the end of the eighth century, some of which provided the impetus for the political patterns which crystallized in the ninth century and which were the target of frequent attacks by the Muslims.¹⁰²

Importance of the regions

The destruction of the central political apparatus of the Visigothic period and the inability of the Asturian leadership to establish a new one, thus favoured the local activity of an extremely heterogeneous set of political units. The model of the *civitas*, closely linked to the presence of central power, was seriously weakened, although it did not necessarily disappear; *castros*, *villas* and monasteries must have continued to play a role, however, because their economic and social organization was more closely identified with the self-regulation of local communities.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The central area of the county of Álava, which crystallized in the ninth century, is the valley of the Zadorra, where numerous Roman remains have been found, and where the former *civitas* of Veleia (Iruña de Oca) remained occupied; A. Llanos (ed.), *Carta arqueológica de Álava*, 1 (Vitoria, 1987), pp. 174–6. The county of Álava is made up of a network of smaller territories, reflected in the so-called ‘Reja de San Millán’, in which several appear: see G. Martínez Díez, *Álava Medieval* (Vitoria, 1974), I; J. Caro Baroja, ‘Álava en la llamada *Reja de San Millán*’, in J. Caro Baroja (ed.), *Historia General del País Vasco* (San Sebastián, 1983), III, 109–49. In Galicia, the revolt that followed the ‘repopulation’ of the Miño was caused by groups of leaders who were insufficiently integrated into the Asturian monarchy. C. Balañas, *Defensores e traditores: un modelo de relación entre poder monárquico e oligarquía na Galicia altomedieval (718–1037)* (Santiago de Compostela, 1988), pp. 24–6; and *idem*, *Do mito á realidade. A definición social e territorial de Galicia na Alta Idade Media (séculos VIII e IX)* (Santiago de Compostela, 1992), pp. 84–8.

¹⁰² The Muslim campaigns against the north are described in E. Lévi-Provençal, *España musulmana hasta la caída del califato de Córdoba (71–1031 de J.C.)*. *Historia de España Menéndez Pidal*. IV (Madrid, 1982). The aim of these attacks was both to weaken centres of political articulation which were autonomous from the power of al-Andalus and to capture booty; locally, they must have favoured the development of a political organization that was independent of the Asturian leadership, one of aristocratic groups capable of defending the territory.

¹⁰³ ‘Self-regulation’ is defined as the capacity of a certain form of social and spatial organization to maintain itself over time owing to the ability of the model to reproduce itself, since it adapts itself to the needs of the inhabitants and to geographical factors. See D. Pumain and S. Van der Leuw, ‘La durabilité des systèmes spatiaux’, in F. Durand-Dastès (ed.), *Des ‘oppida’ aux métropoles. Archéologues et géographes en vallée du Rhône* (Paris, 1998), pp. 13–44.

The lack of reliable information for the eighth and ninth centuries is a problem here; written documentation is practically non-existent except for a few chronicles and heavily interpolated documents, and the archaeological record is opaque and difficult to interpret.¹⁰⁴ A brief analysis of several different zones will demonstrate the political situation and its heterogeneity before the ‘repopulations’ of the second half of the ninth century, based on retrospective readings of tenth-century data. The absence of a strong central power, which was not established until the first half of the ninth century with the formation of the Asturian monarchy, put into relief the diversity of local power bases and of the socio-economic structures that sustained them. This can be clearly seen along the Cantabrian coast. In regions such as the Cantabrian Basque country the mechanisms of power were only weakly consolidated and remained small-scale; they were in the hands of indigenous leadership groups who probably did not have a strong grip on local communities. It has been proposed that Guipúzcoa was organized in *valles* which only much later (in the middle of the eleventh century) crystallized into a greater unity: *Ipusco*.¹⁰⁵ In central Vizcaya and in Orduña, which seem to have been separate and controlled by their own inhabitants, a larger scale political structure does not seem to have been created either. It is possible that the spatial logic of indigenous political organization survived here (*castros, valles*), but it was not the basis of any wider or more substantial structure.¹⁰⁶ Only in the tenth century, in c.925, is there a reference to a certain Momo, count of Vizcaya, whom some scholars have identified as an independent local ruler.¹⁰⁷ It is possible that this was a person of local standing to whom the Navarrese chronicles gave a spurious title in order to boost his position and link him to the royal house. The difficulty in establishing a central political apparatus in these areas is explained by socio-economic conditions which militated against the development of a strong aristocracy: demographic weakness; the suitability of small-scale units for the exploitation of their economy

¹⁰⁴ The presence of local ceramics, which replaced Roman industrial production, is generalized throughout early medieval Europe and makes this period hard to interpret. C. Wickham, ‘Overview: Production, Distribution and Demand’, in R. Hodges and W. Bowden (eds), *The Sixth Century. Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leyden, 1998), pp. 279–92.

¹⁰⁵ M. Achúcarro, ‘La Tierra de Guipúzcoa y sus “valles”: su incorporación al reino de Castilla’, *En la España Medieval, IV. Estudios dedicados al profesor D. Ángel Ferrari Núñez* (Madrid, 1984), I, 13–46; E. Barrena Osoro, *La formación histórica de Guipúzcoa. Transformaciones en la organización social de un territorio cantábrico durante la época altomedieval* (San Sebastián, 1989).

¹⁰⁶ J.A. García de Cortázar, ‘La sociedad vizcaína altomedieval: de los sistemas de parentesco de base ganadera a la diversificación y jerarquización sociales de base territorial’, in *Vizcaya en la Edad Media* (Bilbao), pp. 63–81; J.A. García de Cortázar *et al.*, *Vizcaya en la Edad Media* (San Sebastián, 1985), I, 25–49; A. Azkarate Garai-Olaún and I. García Camino, *Estelas e inscripciones medievales del País Vasco (siglos VI–XI). I. País Vasco occidental* (Bilbao, 1996).

¹⁰⁷ A. de Mañaricua, ‘Momo, conde de Vizcaya. A propósito de un texto del *Códice Rotense*’, *Estudios Vizcaínos* 3 (1972), pp. 249–301.

(mainly a pastoral one); limited opportunities to levy tribute; and so on. This had the effect of limiting local power, which impeded the development towards centralized political structures.

A very different situation seems to have developed in Alava, where in the ninth century a county formed as a result of the political growth of the ruling groups of the valley of the Zadorra, particularly the Vela family which was based around the old *civitas* of *Veleia*.¹⁰⁸ This variability is also evident in Cantabria, if we consider the differences between the Liébana and the Trasmiera.¹⁰⁹ Both regions followed a similar pattern, with the territories being structured by *castros*¹¹⁰ and, above all, by the presence of monasteries (Santo Toribio and Santa María de Puerto¹¹¹). Yet their political activity was very different, since the Liébana was to develop a strong relationship with central power and saw the rise of important ruling groups; whereas the Trasmiera remained on the margins. Even sharper were the variations in present-day Asturias, where the most important polity of the north of the peninsula was based. In the eastern mountains particular *castros* maintained themselves, with strategies of spatial organization which went back a long way, which were perfectly adapted to the needs of local communities, and which represented a political self-regulation to a large extent marginal to the Asturian monarchy.¹¹²

In all these regions, local forms were still a fundamental element of political articulation, although it is also clear that these were not always linked to central power. The *castros* were one of the most important of these local forms, and survived in many areas. It is not surprising that when Mahamut, an Andalusian prince taking refuge in the Asturias, rebelled in Galicia during the reign of Alfonso II, he occupied the *castro*

¹⁰⁸ M. de Meñaca, 'El linaje vasco de los Velas y la Castilla primitiva', in *II Congreso Mundial Vasco. II. Instituciones, economía y sociedad (siglos VIII–XV)* (San Sebastián, 1988), pp. 161–80.

¹⁰⁹ J.A. García de Cortázar and C. Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad hispano-cristiana del Cantábrico al Ebro en los siglos VIII a XI. Planteamiento de una hipótesis y análisis del caso de Liébana, Asturias de Santillana y Trasmiera* (Santander, 1982).

¹¹⁰ The presence of *castros* is visible in numerous sites in present-day Cantabria. In Trasmiera there was early medieval occupation at 'Pico Mizmaya' (Hoznayo), and 'Pico del Castillo' (Solares y San Miguel de Arás); this situation is replicated, perhaps with less intensity, in Liébana, at 'Pico del castillo' (Piasca) and at Castro Cillorigo. See R. Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos arqueológicos medievales del sector central de la montaña cantábrica* (Santander, 1986); and *idem*, 'La organización del espacio a través de la arqueología medieval: veinte años de investigaciones', in *Primer Encuentro de Historia de Cantabria* (Santander, 1999), I, 401–41.

¹¹¹ L. Sánchez Belda, *Cartulario de Santo Toribio de Liébana* (Madrid, 1948); M. Serrano Sanz, 'Cartulario de Santa María del Puerto (Santoña)', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 73 (1917).

¹¹² M. Fernández Mier, *Génesis del territorio en la Edad Media. Arqueología del paisaje y evolución histórica en la montaña asturiana* (Oviedo, 1999); F.J. Fernández Conde, M.J. Suárez and J.A. Gutiérrez González, 'A transición en Asturias. Aproximación historiográfica e percepción do territorio astur na Alta Idade Media', in Pereira (ed.), *Galicia foi dous mil anos*, pp. 391–412.

Sancte Cristine as his headquarters.¹¹³ The *castros* were not only defensive, but also foci for political control over local territories. They continued to function even in the tenth century, for example the *castrum Baroncelli*, near Verín (Orense), which continued to be the focus of a territory even though it was probably no longer inhabited.¹¹⁴ Indeed, in present-day Galicia, there appears to have been a dense network of *castros*,¹¹⁵ which probably survived into the early Middle Ages as the defining elements of small territories which became *mandaciones* from the middle of the ninth century, as a result of the intervention of the Asturian kings.¹¹⁶ This evolution was not uniform; several *castros* with few links to central power survived in the most peripheral areas. *Castros* also survived in other regions along the north coast, as has already been remarked for parts of the Asturias. In present-day Cantabria a model of 'valley communities' has been proposed,¹¹⁷ but other analyses reveal the presence of *castros* as well, many of which were reconverted into *castillos*.¹¹⁸ At the beginning of the eleventh century some of these would become the centres of *alfoces*, small territories based on local indigenous power, which would be recognized as such by central authority.¹¹⁹

Another local unit that survived was the monastery, whose importance grew in this period; indeed, late ninth- and tenth-century evidence indicates the height of their power, by comparison with other forms of religious organization. The monasteries were the centres of indivisible blocks of landowning, and, at the same time, they were the foci for the small territories that surrounded them, in which local communities were subsumed. Their widespread leadership may have responded to initiatives from the whole community, or else from ruling groups,

¹¹³ *Albeldense*, XV, 9. This site was probably the *castro* of Santa Cristina in Sarria (Lugo). This event galvanized the Galician aristocracy in favour of the Asturian monarchy; Baliñas Pérez, *Do mito*, p. 93.

¹¹⁴ M^a.C. Pallares Méndez and E. Portela Silva, 'Galicia, á marxe do Islam. Continuidade das estruturas organizativas no tránsito á Idade Media', in *Galicia fai dous mil anos. O feito diferencial galego, I. Historia* (Santiago de Compostela, 1997), pp. 444–6.

¹¹⁵ A. Isla Frez, *La sociedad gallega en la Alta Edad Media* (Madrid, 1992), pp. 142–3; López Quiroga and Rodríguez Lovelle, 'Poblamiento rural' and 'Castros y castella tutiora'.

¹¹⁶ The earlier 'repopulations' such as that of the Miño during the reign of Fruela (*Rotense*, p. 39), probably did not produce so strong a central influence over local power. The strengthening of the Asturian monarchy made this influence possible, and it can only be shown in our documentary sources.

¹¹⁷ Díez Herrera, *La formación*; E. Blanco Campos, 'Valles y aldeas: las Asturias de Santillana', in J.A. García de Cortázar (ed.), *Del Cantábrico al Duero. Trece estudios sobre organización social del espacio en los siglos VIII a XIII* (Santander, 1999), pp. 157–87.

¹¹⁸ Bohigas Roldán, 'La organización del espacio', pp. 417–20. The case of *Cutelium Castrum*, identified as the *castrum* of 'Pico del Castillo' (Solares) is interesting as a step towards the geographical demarcation of power; Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos*, pp. 127–9.

¹¹⁹ The example of the *alfóz* of Camesa Castro is the most relevant, since it appears as early as 1022. See Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos*, p. 157.

particularly in later periods.¹²⁰ In general, the active involvement of monasteries is seen in nearly all areas, including the most peripheral, such as Santa María del Puerto (Santoña). Monasteries also provide most of our evidence for the late ninth and tenth century, and frequently illustrate their own importance in local political relationships.¹²¹

By contrast, the structures most closely linked to central power (especially *civitates* and bishoprics) suffered a sharp decline. Either the urban centres of the region collapsed, particularly those on the coast, or were restructured, as happened in Lugo.¹²² Such restructuring required a local aristocracy of some prominence, capable of commanding a wide area, unified with the active participation of the central political apparatus. When the latter was weakened, the survival of urban centres was seriously damaged, although this did not entail the depopulation of these sites. Not until there was a new implantation of Asturian power could urbanism regenerate itself, although before the intervention of central power, towns were able to survive as places that dominated their immediate surroundings. Some bishops were able to maintain local power bases too, as happened in parts of Galicia (the diocese of Iria), but in much of the Cantabrian coast they were either absent or 'bishops without a see', usually abbots.¹²³ Once again, it was the reconstruction of the central political apparatus that revitalized episcopal authority, even though, as we have seen, that authority survived in certain areas.¹²⁴

In the Cantabrian region a new apparatus of central power emerged, the Asturian monarchy. During the eighth century it may have been little more than a chiefdom, although it had a strong socio-economic base in the central areas of its rule. Only in the reign of Alfonso II (791–842) was a clear central mechanism of power consolidated. Before this date, as we have seen, attempts at political reorganization can be

¹²⁰ On the role of monasteries as a focus for local communities, see J.M^a. Mínguez, 'Ruptura social e implantación del feudalismo en el Noroeste peninsular (siglos VIII–X)', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 3 (1985), pp. 7–32; and I. Álvarez Borge, 'El proceso de transformación de las comunidades de aldea: una aproximación al estudio de la formación del feudalismo en Castilla (siglos X y XI)', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 6 (1987), pp. 145–60.

¹²¹ These monasteries were fundamental elements in areas such as Galicia, el Bierzo or the Asturias. See Isla Frez, *La sociedad gallega*, pp. 105–28; M^a.C. Rodríguez González and M. Durany Castrillo, 'El Bierzo en la época de Alfonso III', in Fernández Conde (ed.), *La época de Alfonso III*, pp. 151–63; F.J. Fernández Conde and M^a.A. Pedregal Montes, 'Evolución histórica del territorio de Santo Adriano y génesis del poblamiento medieval', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 16 (1998), pp. 129–72.

¹²² López Quiroga and Rodríguez Lovelle, 'Ciudades atlánticas en transición'.

¹²³ Martín Viso, 'Organización episcopal', pp. 172–3.

¹²⁴ The formation of the Galician sees was part of the new political structure sponsored by the Asturian monarchy and it is thus not surprising to find a biased account emphasizing the existence of an earlier 'depopulation' and the disappearance of the sees; Isla Frez, *La sociedad gallega*, pp. 69–71. On the other hand, there is little doubt that the dioceses were one of the 'islands of authority' that the Asturians implanted in Galicia, as seems clear in the case of the see of Iria; Balañas, *Defensores e traditores*, p. 28.

identified in certain areas, through what would be known in the tenth century as 'repopulation'. The kings also exercised some influence over relatively distant areas, but the framework of dominion was in no way homogeneous. In the course of the first half of the ninth century, Alfonso II implemented a policy directed towards imposing a monarchy, to a large extent utilizing familiar mechanisms. The king, who at the beginning of his reign had to flee to Alava (a sign of the limited ability of the Asturian power to control peripheral areas),¹²⁵ created a new *sedes regia* in Oviedo, which from this moment became the seat of government. In order to raise the status of Oviedo, which lacked an earlier tradition of authority, Alfonso founded a brand new diocese, and called on the bishops to confirm his decision and to recognize the superior authority of the new prelate.¹²⁶ Thus Alfonso reproduced the diocesan hierarchy of the Visigothic kingdom, which was closely linked to royal power. At the same time, he built churches and palaces with the aim of projecting the new monarchy outside the *sedes regia*.¹²⁷ It was at this point that there developed a policy of strengthening the links between local power structures and the centre. Santa María del Puerto had links with Alfonso's successor, Nepotiano;¹²⁸ and a similar pattern holds for Galicia, where the ruling parties integrated themselves into the structures of the regime in exchange for institutional protection, recognition of their property and social status, and the donation of land and honours.¹²⁹ This consolidated a political situation which allowed for expansion in the second half of the ninth century, during the reigns of Ramiro I (who is documented as in control of *Lucense civitas*, Lugo¹³⁰), Ordoño I and Alfonso III. The basis of this political development may be found in the socio-economic dynamism not only of the central zones of the Asturian kingdom, but also in other areas. Such circumstances meant that there were more resources to be channelled towards the central apparatus, which in turn enabled more efficient means of levying tribute. It was necessary to create a common interest for the monarchy and the ruling aristocracies, because in the absence of competitors for power the latter had previously been prominent. This development did not pass unnoticed by the Muslims, who began to make more

¹²⁵ *Rotense*, 41.

¹²⁶ *Rotense*, 43. Its foundation should be dated between 791 and 812; see A. Floriano Cumbreño, *Diplomática española del período astur. Estudio de las fuentes documentales del reino de Asturias (718–910)* (Oviedo, 1949), I, 118–22. For an analysis, see D. Mansilla Reoyo, *Geografía eclesiástica de España. Estudio histórico-geográfico de las diócesis* (Roma, 1994), II, 24–30.

¹²⁷ M. Núñez Rodríguez, 'La arquitectura como expresión de poder', in F.J. Fernández Conde (ed.), *La época de Alfonso III y San Salvador de Valdediós* (Oviedo, 1994), pp. 113–26; C. García de Castro Valdés, *Arqueología cristiana de la Alta Edad Media en Asturias* (Oviedo, 1995).

¹²⁸ Serrano Sanz, 'Cartulario de Santa María del Puerto', doc. I (863.12.13).

¹²⁹ Balañas, *Defensores e traditores*, p. 28.

¹³⁰ *Rotense*, 47.

frequent incursions with the sole aim of preventing the rise of this new authority, which might alter the balance of power in the Duero valley.

It is the region of the Duero valley that poses the greatest problems. The long held conviction that there was a depopulation here as a result of Alfonso I's campaigns, with the formation of a 'strategic desert',¹³¹ has complicated our understanding of early medieval political structures. Various studies have by now highlighted demographic continuity in these areas,¹³² while continuing to stress its marginality, which it would not lose until the 'repopulation' of the tenth century. A theory of colonization has also been developed, which minimizes the capacity of the inhabitants for political organization outside the limits of their own small communities.¹³³ Here too, although starting from differing assumptions, recent studies are modifying this position.¹³⁴ It is clear, all the same, that this wide area remained at the margins of political structures, and constituted a political 'no man's land'.¹³⁵ This situation allowed the emergence of new chiefdoms, possibly linked closely to military elements, in a context of instability and competition.¹³⁶ Some earlier political units also seem to have continued to function, which were the basis of the later 'repopulation'.¹³⁷ Conversely, structures of local implementation of central power, such as bishoprics and *civitates*,

¹³¹ C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación y repoblación del valle del Duero* (Buenos Aires, 1966).

¹³² Barbero and Vigil, *La formación*, pp. 220–3; Caballero Zoreda, *La necrópolis*; Á. Barrios García, 'Toponimástica e Historia. Notas sobre la despoblación de la zona meridional del Duero', *En la España Medieval, II. Estudios en memoria del profesor D. Salvador de Moxó* (Madrid, 1982), I, 115–34; Reyes Téllez and Menéndez Robles, 'Excavaciones en la ermita de San Nicolás'; F. Reyes Téllez and M^a.L. Menéndez Robles, 'Aspectos ideológicos en el problema de la despoblación del valle del Duero', in J. Arce and R. Olmos (eds), *Historiografía de la arqueología y de la Historia Antigua en España (siglos XVIII–XX)* (Madrid, 1991), pp. 199–207.

¹³³ Despite many differences, this is now a commonly held position. See J.M^a. Mínguez, 'Innovación y pervivencia en la colonización del valle del Duero', in *Despoblación y colonización del valle del Duero. Siglos VIII–XX. IV Congreso de Estudios Medievales* (León, 1995), pp. 45–79; and *idem*, 'Vellas e novas formas da organización productivo ó norte do Douro', in Pereira (ed.), *Galicia fai dous mil anos*, pp. 359–89; J.Á. García de Cortázar, 'Del Cantábrico al Duero', in J.Á. García de Cortázar *et al.*, *Organización social del espacio en la España medieval. La Corona de Castilla en los siglos VIII a XV* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 43–83; and *idem*, 'Las formas de organización social del espacio del valle del Duero en la Alta Edad Media: de la espontaneidad al control feudal', in *Despoblación y colonización*, pp. 11–41; J.J. García González and I. Fernández Mata, *Estudios sobre la transición*.

¹³⁴ J. Escalona Monge, 'Algunos problemas relativos a la génesis de las estructuras territoriales de la Castilla altomedieval', in *II Jornadas Burgalesas de Historia. Burgos en la Alta Edad Media* (Burgos, 1991), pp. 491–506; and *idem*, 'Acerca de la territorialidad en la Castilla altomedieval: tres casos significativos', in M^a.I. Loring García (ed.), *Historia social, pensamiento historiográfico y Edad Media. Homenaje al profesor Abilio Barbero de Aguilera* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 217–44; Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito*.

¹³⁵ M^a. Mínguez, *Las sociedades feudales*, pp. 92–4.

¹³⁶ C. Díez Herrera, 'La organización social del espacio entre la Cordillera Cantábrica y el Duero en los siglos VIII al XI: una propuesta de análisis como sociedad de frontera', in J. García de Cortázar (ed.), *Del Cantábrico al Duero*, pp. 129–36.

¹³⁷ Thus the monasteries and, to a lesser extent, some *castros*, served to implant Leonese power in the Leonese uplands. See Gutiérrez González, 'El Páramo leonés', pp. 69–80.

were visibly weak. The first seem not to have survived, although their rapid restoration allows one to suppose that some degree of ecclesiastical organization was maintained, perhaps outside canonical frameworks. As for the *civitates*, it seems that the fortresses (where the functions of the central apparatus had been concentrated since Suevic and Visigothic times) were abandoned, although the urban sites were still inhabited,¹³⁸ in some cases moving towards the fertile plains by the rivers.¹³⁹ It is possible that local powers used the old walls for defence, but the difficulty in obtaining resources prevented the carrying out of improvements.

A specific case illustrating some of these factors is that of the area around Zamora, in the valley of the Duero.¹⁴⁰ Zamora had risen to prominence in the Visigothic period and was one of the *civitates* attacked by Alfonso I. Neither written evidence nor the archaeology are very informative for the eighth and ninth centuries, but several hypotheses may be put forward. Firstly, we are looking at a continuously inhabited region. Proof of this is the large number of Arabic toponyms, generated by an autochthonous Mozarab population.¹⁴¹ To these may be added the persistence of pre-Roman toponyms¹⁴² and, above all, the coincidence between the former sites of local power in the Visigothic period and those of the tenth century: Zamora, Sanabria, Tábara and perhaps Polvoraria. Surveys of zones such as Lampreana reveal demographic continuity.¹⁴³ There is evidence from the tenth century of a network of *castros* that functioned as local power centres, including Castrogonzalo, Polvoraria, Camarzana de Tera, Alba de Aliste, Sanabria and Peñausende. The archaeological record confirms that they were occupied, but, because of the dearth of material datable to other periods and the lack of evidence for rebuilding, this survival is usually explained by the reoccupation by the Leonese monarchy (the successor to that of

¹³⁸ P. Barraca Ramos, 'La ciudad de Ávila entre los siglos V al X', in *IV Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, II, 29–46.

¹³⁹ The same may also be seen in Salamanca, according to N. Benet and A.I. Sánchez Guinaldo, 'Urbanismo medieval de Salamanca: continuidad o reconstrucción?', in *El urbanismo de los estados cristianos peninsulares* (Aguilar de Campo, 1999), pp. 133–4.

¹⁴⁰ See I. Martín Viso, 'La articulación del poder en la cuenca del Duero: el ejemplo del espacio zamorano (siglos V–X)', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 31.1 (2001), pp. 75–126.

¹⁴¹ Toponyms of this type make up 21.7% of the names documented before 1125, concentrated in certain areas (the lower Tera, around Zamora and Tierra de Campos). See C. Estepa Díez, *Estructura social de la ciudad de León (siglos XI–XIII)* (León, 1977), p. 65 ff.; Á. Barrios García, 'Repoblación de la zona meridional del Duero. Fases de ocupación, procedencias y distribución espacial de los grupos repobladores', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 3 (1985), pp. 45–6 and 58–9; E. Manzano Moreno, *La frontera de al-Andalus en la época de los omeyyas* (Madrid, 1990), pp. 161–3; V. Aguilar, 'Onomástica de origen árabe en el reino de León (siglo X)', *Al-Qantara* 15:2 (1994), pp. 351–64; F.R. Mediano, 'Acerca de la población arabizada del reino de León (siglos X y XI)', *Al-Qantara* 15:2 (1994), pp. 465–72.

¹⁴² Making up 12.4% of all the toponyms known before 1125.

¹⁴³ E. Rodríguez Rodríguez, 'El poblamiento medieval del entorno de las lagunas de Villafáfila', *Anuario del Instituto Estudios Zamoranos Florián de Ocampo* (1996), pp. 227–77.

Asturias) after centuries of abandonment.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, both these factors may be the result of the difficulty in interpreting the archaeological record. Early medieval ceramics can be confused with those of the Iron Age, which present the same typology. Similarly, the absence of rebuilding can be explained as being because the *castros* were adequate for local needs, and because of the expense of the work. It is easier for us to envisage the continuity of some *castros*, whose existence served to organize land at the sub-county level; some of these were to emerge as territories in the tenth century.

A large number of monasteries in this area were once assumed to be of Visigothic origin, although it is now difficult to be certain of this.¹⁴⁵ Certain indications, such as their dedications or the use of non-canonical formulae, taken together, suggest an autochthonous expansion that preceded the 'repopulation'. In fact, the latter seems merely to have introduced canonical organization to the monasteries, with the appointment of several Mozarabic abbots closely linked to the monarchy.¹⁴⁶ The Asturo-Leonese monarchs recognized the potential of the monasteries to structure local power relationships, as happened in the territory of Tábara. Here two monasteries were founded, at Tábara and Moreruela de Tábara, reflecting the previous division of the zone between two *castros*, and they included a large number of local inhabitants.¹⁴⁷ San Pedro de la Nave may be another example. This has traditionally been considered of Visigothic origin, but recent investigations have redated the building to the early medieval period.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, this may have been a later building on an earlier cult site, which was maintained throughout the eighth and ninth centuries as a centre of power, and was quickly recognized by the Leonese kings.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ J.A. Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo en el origen y formación del reino leonés (siglos IX–XIII)* (Valladolid, 1995), pp. 28–9.

¹⁴⁵ A. González Blanco, 'La cristianización de Zamora', in *Primer Congreso de Historia de Zamora* (Zamora, 1990), II, 267–99.

¹⁴⁶ This is true of San Martín de Castañeda, where an earlier monastery was refounded by an abbot coming from Córdoba, according to the dedicatory inscription; M. Gutiérrez Álvarez, *Corpus Inscriptionum Hispaniae medievalium, II. Zamora*, (Turnhout, 1997), pp. 17–18. Traces survive of a church dating to the ninth century, according to F. Regueras Grande and L.A. Grau Lobo, 'Nuevas evidencias sobre una vieja iglesia mozárabe: San Martín de Castañeda', *Brigecio* 3, pp. 83–113.

¹⁴⁷ 'Vita Sancti Froilani episcopi', in M. Risco, *España Sagrada* (Madrid, 1784), XXXIV, 424, gives an account of Froilán's foundation of the two monasteries by order of Alfonso III, with 600 and 200 monks respectively.

¹⁴⁸ L. Caballero Zoreda and F. Arce, 'La iglesia de San Pedro de la Nave (Zamora). Arqueología y arquitectura', *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 70 (1997), pp. 221–74.

¹⁴⁹ Emergency excavations of the original floor of this church have revealed the remains of a beam dating from the fourth century, hinting at the presence of an earlier building on the site. L. Caballero Zoreda *et al.*, 'San Pedro de la Nave (Zamora). Excavación arqueológica en el solar primitivo de la iglesia y el análisis por dendrocronología y carbono-14 de su viga', *Anuario de Estudios Zamoranos Florián de Ocampo* (1997), pp. 43–57. In 907, scarcely fourteen

Castros and monasteries were the main centres of local power in the Duero valley, and they survived the collapse of the central political apparatus because they met the needs of the local communities. There were also *villas*, probably including Villafáfila, which controlled a small territory, Lampreana. The fortress of Zamora, in contrast, situated on a low hilltop dominating the Duero, seems to have been abandoned, although the settlement may have moved down to the plain, to Olivares. In any case, it was still a site of some importance that would become the focus of the Leonese 'repopulation'. Such local centres remained active, and defined the communities that continued to inhabit the lands around Zamora. Yet their actual role in this period is unknown, and one must rely upon evidence dating from after the tenth century. The Leonese 'repopulation' of the tenth century occurred at a moment of expansion of Asturian-Leonese society. A new central power structure was established in the Duero, at León itself, thanks to the impetus of the monarchy after Alfonso II's reorganization. Ordoño I (850–66) was responsible for the occupation of *civitates* such as León, Astorga, Tuy and Amaya, as well as many smaller *castros*.¹⁵⁰ The *civitates* were former centres of power which had retained some functions, which also explains why they were the object of Muslim attacks before their 'repopulation' – for example, Astorga in 796, León in 845 and 846. The reign of Alfonso II was the period of greatest expansion, reaching the River Duero and thus creating a boundary for the new political structures. To consolidate their authority, the Leonese monarchs took control of the *castros* and monasteries. The former appear at the head of royal territories and underwent a series of transformations of their defensive structures,¹⁵¹ whilst Mozarabic abbots were appointed to the monasteries to implement reforms designed to subordinate them to royal power. Other nuclei acquired the status of *civitates*, awarded not so much because of their urban activity, but because the apparatus of central power was once again based in them. In order for this to occur, there must have been a pre-existing infrastructure with both a military and a tributary aspect. It is striking that one of the Leonese kings' first actions was the restoration or creation *ex novo* of episcopal sees, a

years after the 'repopulation' of Zamora, the monastery received the *villa* of Valdeperdices from Alfonso III, an acknowledgement of the monastery's important role in the political structure of the territory. Its relatively rapid appearance also suggests that it had survived through the eighth and ninth centuries. J.M. Andrade, *O Tombo de Celanova* (Santiago de Compostela, 1995), doc. 429.

¹⁵⁰ *Albeldense*, XV, 11: 'iste christianorum regnum cum Dei iubamine ampliavit. Legionem atque Asturicam simul cum Tude et Amagia populavit multaque et alia castra muniuit.'

¹⁵¹ See P. Martínez Sopena, *La Tierra de Campos occidental. Poblamiento, poder y comunidad del siglo X al XIII* (Valladolid, 1985), pp. 118–25; Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*, pp. 99–121.

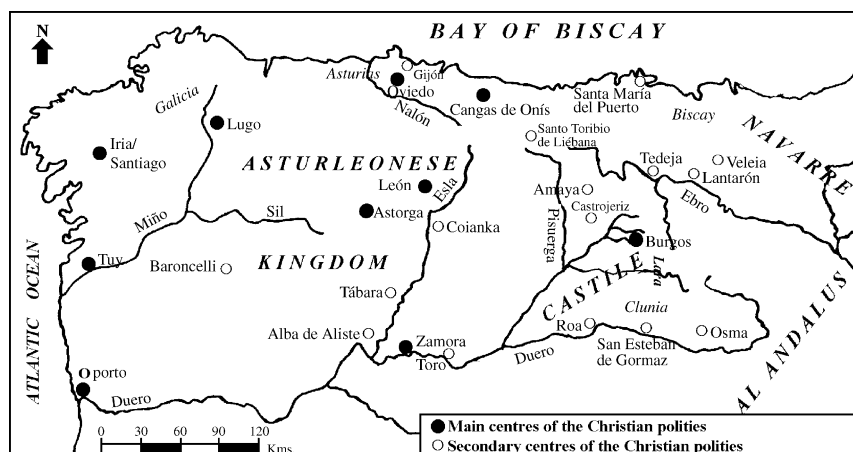


Fig. 3 The articulation of power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (tenth century).

cornerstone of closer ties between the central apparatus and local interests.¹⁵² In fact, the few *civitates* of the tenth century coincide with episcopal and military centres, two fundamental elements, to which should be added the presence of a hinterland which was capable of sustaining their local hegemony (Fig. 3).¹⁵³

A further look at the case of Zamora may be useful here. The *castros* were the dominant element in the Zamoran countryside, even though outnumbered by villages. Some *castros* functioned as territorial centres, although they do not seem to have been controlled directly by the Leonese monarchy, and are not identified as *mandaciones*.¹⁵⁴ These were nuclei from which power was exercised over the surrounding area. Their defences arose partly in response to possible external threats, but above all as a result of the monopolizing of these sites by a militarized aristocracy. These places were in fact chosen not for their geo-strategic capabilities, but because they were the principal nuclei of communities,

¹⁵² León, for example, a new see created to strengthen this centre, emerged in 860 with a donation of Ordoño I. Astorga seems to have been restored between 852 and 854, when the bishop, Indiselo and the count Gatón repopulated the city. Mansilla Reoyo, *Geografía histórica*, I, 37–8.

¹⁵³ C. Estepa Díez, 'La vida urbana en el norte de la península ibérica en los siglos VIII y IX. El significado de los términos *civitates* y *castrá*', *Hispania* 139 (1978), pp. 257–73, Díez Herrera, 'La organización', pp. 137–8.

¹⁵⁴ E.g. Castrogonzalo, Polvoraria or Camarzana de Tera, all centres of territories lacking royal representatives, which suggests that it was the local ruling groups that exercised the functions of central power. Sanabria is an obvious example, since there are references to its territory in the tenth century, but a count was not documented in the valley until 1033. See I. Martín Viso, 'La feudalización del valle de Sanabria (siglos X–XIII)', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* II (1993), p. 41.

and as such, their domination was a precondition for taking control of these communities.¹⁵⁵ A series of tributes, possibly of a military nature, was channelled towards them, as in Alba de Aliste.¹⁵⁶ The monarchy's control of resources other than tributes is not so visible, although the *castros* seem also to have acted as places where legal processes and the payment of fines were enforced, moderated by the presence of local ruling groups who exercised effective power there. Although monasteries, such as Tábara,¹⁵⁷ might also have a defensive function, the principal source of their power derived from their role of controlling religion over the greater part of the territory. As such, they received numerous donations from their protectors, some of whom established ties of patronage with them as a result. In order to exercise control, in some of these monasteries the monarchy imposed abbots tied to the king. At other times the kings resorted to generous donations which enabled them to exercise influence through patronage.¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that in some areas monasteries seem to have substituted for the former *castros* as the foci of local power structures; this is symptomatic of their importance.

Central power was mediated through the filter of local structures. Although there is no concrete evidence, it is likely that the intensity of control varied from area to area. The heterogeneity of local conditions affected the monarch's ability to exercise his prerogatives.¹⁵⁹ The locus of greatest control must have been the *civitas* of Zamora. Situated in a fertile area, heavily colonized by Mozarabs, in 893 it was 'repopulated' with the help of Mozarabs from Toledo.¹⁶⁰ From this date, until Almanzor's attack of 986, it became the key stronghold of the Duero frontier. This status may be attributed not only to its military importance, but to its central role in a frontier territory opposite the 'no man's land',

¹⁵⁵ Thus in the territory of los Valles several *castros* are documented, some of them quite close together, which represented the needs of local communities rather than geo-strategic considerations.

¹⁵⁶ Sancho I gave to Sahagún the villa of Pensum in the territory of Zamora, which 'nunc adiuncta est deserviendi ad Alba Castello'; J.M^a. Mínguez, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún (siglo X)* (León, 1976), doc. 175 (960.04.26). This expression must imply the presence of obligations, perhaps military, destined for the castle of Alba de Aliste, a former *castro*.

¹⁵⁷ F. Galtier Martí, 'O torre tabarense alia et lapidea . . . Un saggio d'iconografia castellologica sulla miniatura della Spagna cristiana del secolo X', in *XXXIV Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* (Rávena, 1987), pp. 253–89.

¹⁵⁸ The king gave *villas* (villages) to particular monasteries, which should be interpreted as the ceding of some of his rights over these communities. Apart from the example of San Pedro de la Nave, already mentioned, in 940 San Martín de Castañeda received the locality of Vigo de Sanabria; A. Rodríguez González, *El tumbo del monasterio de San Martín de Castañeda* (León, 1973), doc. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Thus, the lawsuit concerning the fishing rights and *villa* of Galende, between San Martín de Castañeda and Ranosindo and his *gasalianes*, was resolved in 927 by a tribunal at which no representative of the king was present. L. Anta Lorenzo, 'El monasterio de San Martín de Castañeda. En torno a los orígenes y la formación de la propiedad dominical', *Studia Zamorensia*, 2^a etapa 3 (1996), pp. 31–52.

¹⁶⁰ F. Maíllo Salgado, *Zamora y los zamoranos en las fuentes árabes* (Zamora, 1990), p. 20.

closely integrated with Leonese power. This situation could only have developed where a pre-existing local centre of some importance retained some of its capacity for organization. Alfonso founded a see *ex novo*, in order better to connect the area to central power. The example of Zamora clarifies the way central power developed out of local structures in the tenth century. The local institutions in the Duero valley had survived the collapse of the previous regime and now they were determining factors in the composition of a new power structure. This new authority had to yield to the particular and different conditions of each place; the lack of interest in more 'peripheral' zones, such as Aliste and Sayago within the Zamoran region, is striking. The localized institutions filtered central power, which developed its ability to obtain tribute, exercise justice and organize the army in different ways in different places.

The situation in Castile was similar in many respects, but with one qualification: in the Duero, the reassertion of central power emerged from the communities themselves. It has generally been thought that the plain of Castile suffered a process of depopulation similar to that of the rest of the Duero basin. Only the most northern areas, in the north of the modern province of Burgos, supposedly retained their population and social organization, constituting the original Castile, the *al-Qila* of the Muslim sources. From this nucleus, there was a gradual migration towards the south, following the routes of repopulation, which would crystallize as the county of Castile in the tenth century. This view, however, is now in doubt.¹⁶¹ It is certain that the name *Castella Vetula* refers to the northern sector mentioned above, but this does not necessarily imply that political activity was carried out only in this area, but rather that a pre-existing name was given to it. In fact, it is striking that the family that would eventually rise to be counts of Castile came from the south, from Lara. The scanty evidence for the ninth century nevertheless documents a plurality of political units. Counts are mentioned on several occasions, in connection with political structures of greater than average complexity.¹⁶² One of these seems to have been at Mijangos, near Tedeja, in the north of Castile, the *Castella Vetula*. In the Visigothic period the Mijangos–Tedeja axis had been the main political focus in the north. This suggests its continuity as a political unit, even

¹⁶¹ See Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito*; and Escalona Monge, 'Acerca de la territorialidad'.

¹⁶² Ibn Idari's account of the campaign mounted by the Muslims in 865 is very interesting. C. Sánchez-Albornoz, 'La campaña de la Morcuera', *Anales de Historia Antigua y Medieval* 1 (1948), pp. 31–2, cites the translation by E. Fagnan: 'il ne resta plus intact un seul des châteaux forts appartenant à Rodrigue, prince des Forts, à Ordoño [d'Alava], prince de Toúk'a, à Ghandelchelb, prince de Bordjia, à Gomez, prince de Mesáneka'; i.e. Álava, Oca, Burgos, Mijangos and 'Los Castillos' (not identified).

though it will have been transformed by the vicissitudes related to the collapse of the central political apparatus.¹⁶³ Other foci of local power were Lantarón (which was a county at the end of the ninth century), the area around Burgos, and Lara. In spite of Asturian propaganda, Castile remained outside the orbit of the monarchy. Documents are not dated with Asturian regnal years, except in texts that are interpolated or clearly falsified. Continuity with the earlier period may be observed, since some of the *civitates* that had been attacked by Alfonso I in the middle of the eighth century were close to the new centres of power: *Revendeca*, *Miranda*, *Arganza* and *Clunia*. Nevertheless, the shifting of such centres is noticeable, and also the development of new ones, such as the hill of Burgos.¹⁶⁴

The second half of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth witnessed different types of 'repopulation', sponsored by men described as counts.¹⁶⁵ This phenomenon was concentrated in local political units, many of which had existed previously. In reality, this was a reassertion of authority by the most powerful ruling groups of the period. Local infrastructures had continued to function after the collapse of Visigothic power; they were affected but not destroyed by that event. This explains the importance that the region of *al-Qila* acquired from the outset, whilst at the same time, that name 'the castles' implies the absence of a central power. Of course, not all the local political units were the same: different socio-economic development produced different patterns. The areas where there had been *civitates*, that is, those areas with an aristocracy capable of maintaining this type of power structure, suffered most from the disappearance of central authority, but were able to create new political formulae, which crystallized as counties. Their emergence in the second half of the ninth century brought with it a stronger internal complexity, together with the struggle

¹⁶³ Excavations at Tedeja and Santa María de los Godos (Mijangos) have found traces of continuous occupation from the Visigothic to the early medieval periods. See Lecanda Esteban, 'De la Tardoantigüedad', pp. 316–20 and *idem*, 'Mijangos: arquitectura y ocupación visigoda en el norte de Burgos', in *II Congreso de Arqueología Peninsular* (Zamora, 1999), IV, 415–34.

¹⁶⁴ Burgos was 'repopulated' in 884 by Count Diego Porcelos. However, it appears that in 865 there was already an established power structure, if one accepts the existence of the counts referred to by Ibn Idari (see above n. 162). This would suggest a political unity in the area prior to the integration of Burgos into the county of Castile. J.J. García González, 'Construcción de un sistema: la ciudad de Burgos en la transición al feudalismo', in García González and Fernández de Mata, *Estudios sobre la transición*, pp. 155–324.

¹⁶⁵ The *Anales Castellanos Primeros* mention the 'repopulation' led by Count Rodrigo de Amaya in 860. Count Diego Porcelos 'repopulated' Burgos and Ubierna by order of Alfonso III in 884; and in 912 Count Munio Núñez 'repopulated' Roda, Count Gonzalo Téllez 'repopulated' Osmá, and Count Gonzalo Fernández repopulated Haza, *Clunia* and San Esteban de Gormaz. M. Gómez-Moreno (ed.), *Anales Castellanos Primeros* (Madrid, 1917), pp. 23–4. The Asturian chronicles give a larger role to the Asturian kings, e.g. Ordoño I led the 'repopulation' of Amaya (*Rotense*, 49; *Albeldense*, XV, 11).

to attain greater power, so that some centres, the strongest militarily, politically and economically, swallowed up others. This explains the process of 'repopulation', carried out by various counts, which did not follow a north-south route, but coincided instead with the spheres of influence of the stronger centres. A later phase, at the beginning of the tenth century, was the rise of one of these units, and of a single family, uniting the different counties under Count Fernán Gonzalez.¹⁶⁶ All the same, internal diversity was still the norm throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries. The larger units, based on places with previous status, coexisted with other, smaller, political units, primarily *castros* and monasteries. This typology seems to have survived in later political structures: an analysis of the *alfoces* of the tenth and eleventh centuries confirms that we are looking at the territorial development of *castros*, closely linked to communal relationships.¹⁶⁷ Many *alfoces* documented in this period in fact had fortified centres,¹⁶⁸ often evolving out of primitive *castros*. This has been characterized by some as a pattern generated in the Iron Age, although with clear modifications.¹⁶⁹ Other scholars see it as the evolution of Roman or Visigothic models, with strong ties to the central political apparatus.¹⁷⁰ It is most helpful, however, to see this pattern as a set of local political units, smaller than those that gave rise to counties and subordinate to them, but which had a capacity for self-regulation that met the needs of their communities. Their origin may be deduced from the pre-Romance toponyms that the majority bear, and they continued to be the principal units of control in Castile until the twelfth century.

¹⁶⁶ There are important parallels with the formation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; see S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1986); and S. Keynes, 'England, 700–900', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History, II, c.700–c.900* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 18–42. The mechanism is also similar to 'peer polity interaction', which allows change to take place within states, although the theory does not adequately explain the social forces which upheld such changes. C. Renfrew, 'Introduction: Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change', in C. Renfrew and J.F. Cherry (eds), *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 1–18.

¹⁶⁷ J. Escalona Monge, 'Poblamiento y organización territorial en el sector oriental de la cuenca del Duero en la Alta Edad Media', in *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española* (Oviedo, 1989), II, 448–55; and *idem*, 'Algunos problemas'; J.Á. García de Cortázar and E. Peña Bocos, 'De alfoces, aldeas y solares en la Castilla de los siglos IX a XI: una formalización – feudal – del espacio?', in *Miscel·lània en homenatge al P. Agustí Altisent* (Tarragona, 1991), pp. 183–202; I. Martín Viso, 'Poblamiento y sociedad en la transición al feudalismo en Castilla: castros y aldeas en la Lora burgalesa', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 13 (1995), pp. 3–45.

¹⁶⁸ However, territorialization did not necessarily demand the presence of *castros*, even if it is certain that most territories had them. See C. Estepa, 'El alfoz castellano en los siglos IX al XII', in *En la España Medieval, IV. Estudios dedicados al profesor D. Ángel Ferrari Núñez* (Madrid, 1984), II, 305–41; I. Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal y organización territorial. Alfoces y merindades en Castilla (siglos X–XIV)* (Madrid, 1993). The existence of these fortified centres is made clear by Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito*, p. 20 ff.

¹⁶⁹ Escalona Monge, 'Algunos problemas'; Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales*.

¹⁷⁰ Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito*.

*The reorientation of central power from the localities:
the example of Castile*

The internal society of the *castros* was multifaceted, but their incorporation into the county of Castile implies a link with central power. This was structured in various ways, reflecting the heterogeneity of the local conditions. Whilst in some places control by a landowner was established, in others collective rights remained dominant. One has also to appreciate that it was in these latter units that local ruling groups developed, as in the case of the *infanzones* of Espeja.¹⁷¹ Thus, comital power was filtered through the concrete power relations of each *castro*, which modified the actions of the central political system. With regard to military organization, it is probable, as the *fuero* of Castrojeriz implies, that these centres were responsible for military levies, which varied from one area to another and were, once again, controlled by local ruling groups.¹⁷² Tribute would have been different for each territory too, reflecting earlier patterns. The acquisition of resources was also affected by the unequal composition of the comital patrimony, much more abundant in the central parts of their dominions (especially the counties between the Arlanzón and the Arlanza), but less in the parts added to this central area.¹⁷³ One can see, all the same, a general development in Castile, the substitution of rent for tribute. The weakness or disappearance of central power after 711 entailed an alteration in the gathering of tribute, with the retention of the part that was collected and managed by the local aristocracies and justified by specific needs of their communities, such as military operations. The formation of the new political power structure in the tenth century did not centralize all tribute, but left some of it to magnates and local elites; the latter turned tribute into rent, as was appropriate to the new social situation, where social differentiation of a feudal or feudalizing nature had emerged, protected by

¹⁷¹ A. Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de San Juan de la Peña* (Valencia, 1962), doc. 54 (h. 1017). For Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal*, pp. 20–4, this is an example of the count of Castile's recognition of the power of an emerging local aristocracy. Pastor Díaz de Garayo, *Castilla en el tránsito*, pp. 147–54 argues for the supposed fiscal origins of the counts' holdings. The *fuero* of Castrojeriz, dated 974, recognizes the social and political role of the local aristocratic groups; G. Martínez Díez, *Fueros locales en el territorio de la provincia de Burgos* (Burgos, 1982), doc. I and I. Álvarez Borge, *Poder y relaciones sociales en Castilla en la Edad Media. Los territorios entre el Arlanzón y el Duero en los siglos X al XIV* (Salamanca, 1996), pp. 34–6.

¹⁷² J. Escalona Monge, 'Las prestaciones de servicios militares en fortalezas y la organización de la sociedad feudal castellana: los infanzones de Espeja', *Castillos de España* 94 (1987), pp. 55–60. On the typology of military service, see E. Peña Bocos, *La atribución social del espacio en la Castilla altomedieval. Una nueva aproximación al feudalismo peninsular* (Santander, 1995), pp. 185–200.

¹⁷³ In the area where the comital family originated, the central political apparatus had land and relatively extensive rights, based on local units called *alfoces*. I. Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal*, pp. 17–54.

an ever-growing aristocratic landed patrimony. In the exercise of justice, comital tribunals seem to have acted only in particular cases, especially those involving monasteries with close ties to central power. It was normally persons of some local prominence who undertook this task, but some places were covered by immunities, such as those of the *potestates* of a number of places in Lantarón.¹⁷⁴ These were vestiges of local organization that the new central power had to accept.

The panorama we have surveyed was not a centrally designed power structure. The *castros* had functioned as local units of power during the eighth and ninth centuries, based on an earlier model. The new Castilian polity recognized their existence and, rather than destroying them, simply sought the recognition of its superiority and the handing over of resources, especially in the form of tribute. The other major point of reference was the monasteries, which feature in all the Castilian documentation of the ninth and tenth centuries. These monasteries reached a zenith in this period, helped by the destruction of most of the framework of episcopal organization. The bishopric of Oca would not appear again in the sources until the tenth century. Nevertheless, that of Osma probably survived the preceding period, in spite of the theory that the latter was moved to Valpuesta. The formation of Castilian power did not entail the construction of a network of dioceses subject to central power. The see of Oca certainly re-emerged at this period, and was later moved to Burgos and subordinated to the counts of Castile, at least until 1037. However, other foci of episcopal organization survived as well, some of which, such as Valpuesta, were not linked to the count of Castile, but perhaps to the count of Lantarón, and remained at the margin of the power of the former during the tenth century. Valpuesta was also the site of a monastery, which likewise suggests the formation of a new centre. Conversely, it is possible that in the tenth century Osma lost its bishop, who had previously been at the head of that political unit. Perhaps the 'repopulation' of 910 marked the end of the latter as a political force, maintaining episcopal tradition but without a bishop.¹⁷⁵

The weakness of the distribution of sees is an indication of the difficulty we have if we seek to visualize the county of Castile as a strong and consolidated political unit. On the contrary, the counts were forced to resort to the foundation of monasteries or the control of the

¹⁷⁴ Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de San Millán*, docs 67, 144, 145. On justice in this period for the León region, we can accept the conclusions of J.M^a. Mínguez, 'Justicia y poder en el marco de la feudalización de la sociedad leonesa', in *La giustizia nell'alto medioevo (secoli IX–XI). XLIV Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 1 (Spoleto, 1997), pp. 491–546.

¹⁷⁵ Martín Viso, 'Organización episcopal', p. 169.

latter via patronage in order to create new foci of local power tied to their own.¹⁷⁶ This was the case at San Pedro de Cardeña, San Pedro de Arlanza, Covarrubias and San Salvador de Oña. The policy was an adaptation to the fact that monasticism was locally very strong. Numerous small monasteries covered Castilian territory, organizing and colonizing local territories.¹⁷⁷ Their origin may have been in peasant communities, but, by the time they were recorded, they were normally under the control of single named individuals. Control of these small monasteries by the count of Castile may have been signs of former communal control. On the other hand, others emerged as a result of an initiative of a local aristocrat, who sought to generate a focus of patrimonial and social control over a given area. This situation was more common in the central, more developed, zones. In any case, these monasteries were certainly centres of local power, from which a policy of appropriation of the landscape, in the form of *presuras*, could be organized. Their large number and sudden appearance in the sources after 900 indicate their importance in the eighth and ninth centuries, an importance which is newly visible in the tenth century, when they had come under aristocratic domination and had become political elements in the hands of these leading groups. Analyses of monastic buildings suggests in some cases continuity with earlier religious foci. Some were built over Roman constructions, perhaps *villas*, in a process that began in late antiquity.¹⁷⁸ The remains of other monasteries can be dated to the Visigothic period, or to the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁷⁹ In the tenth century, these monasteries experienced their greatest expansion, and it is at this period that we can see patrimonial control being added to religious dominion. They were also significant organizational centres for village communities. The monasteries received immunities, especially from the counts, which suggests that the latter had to adapt to the reality of local situations in order to make their control effective. Thus the monastic establishments also acted as a filter of comital powers.

¹⁷⁶ Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁷ The documents for the foundation of Santos Emeterio and Celedonio de Taranco, and Santa María de Valpuesta, are problematic. They are dated 800 and 804 respectively, but they are made up of a set of different texts written much later. This does not totally invalidate the information given, only the chronology and details. The role assigned to the *presuras* is striking. Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de San Millán*, doc. 2 and M^a.D. Pérez Soler, *Cartulario de Valpuesta* (Valencia, 1970), doc. 1.

¹⁷⁸ See A. Azkarate Garai-Olaun, 'Aportaciones al debate sobre la arquitectura prerrománica peninsular: la iglesia de San Román de Tobillas (Álava)', *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 68 (1995), pp. 189–214.

¹⁷⁹ This is true of San Juan de la Hoz de Cillaperlata and of the monastery of Valeránica in Berlanga del Duero, and, above all, of Quintanilla de las Viñas, a Visigothic building that survived throughout the early Middle Ages.

Conclusion

This review of the concrete processes of political articulation in the north and centre of the Iberian Peninsula throws up many questions and a few answers, and allows us new avenues of investigation. Political power is always a dynamic phenomenon, not an abstract or monolithic entity. This dynamism was expressed through the dialogue that power established with the local scene, which allowed for both opportunities and limitations. There is no doubt of the importance of the relationship between local powers and the central political apparatus. It generated various channels of communication, which were very diverse, as much in the mechanisms employed (bishops, *castros*, monasteries, *civitates*) as in the typology of the links established (resistance, peaceful integration, forced integration). The collaboration of local ruling groups enabled the central apparatus to survive, but also imposed and defined limits, and provided, within the dynamic that characterizes the dialogue between the two sides, possible transformations, as well as breakdown. It is thus important to note the presence of central zones, which created complex political structures, and peripheral zones, normally resistant to the development of those structures. This disparity of basic social conditions resulted in the non-uniformity of central power, with the expression of central authority being profoundly affected by the local context, even if local restraints on central power are not always successful. The heterogeneity seen in specific local areas thus invalidates the monolithic impression the sources seem to convey. This impression comes from the elites most closely linked to central power, who sometimes managed to obscure real social diversity in favour of a monolithic, public image of power, based on Roman traditions.

A diachronic survey, extending from the sixth to the tenth centuries, reveals the complicated play of continuities, transformations and ruptures in the channels of dialogue between central and local, in which all the protagonists were involved. But to pose this period as one of either continuity or rupture would be to create an artificial problem, since a continuity of the basic elements of central–local relationships (*castros*, monasteries, dioceses, *civitates*) coexisted with a transformation, moving towards feudalism, which in the end encompassed all other social changes. There was neither violent rupture, nor a nebulous continuity, but a complicated intertwining which, like Ariadne's thread, serves us, once it has been disentangled, to comprehend better the articulation of political power in the north and centre of the Iberian Peninsula.

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