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The creation of a Visigothic past and the territorial expansion of the Kingdom of Asturias-León

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Abstract

The expansion of the Kingdom of Asturias over vast territories between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Duero river was a complex creation process as a consequence of a political breakdown. Different methods were used to legitimise the new Kingdom, and one of the most interesting was to attempt to connect the Kingdom with a Visigothic past. This ‘neo-Gothic’ idea has been analysed in the chronicles written in the royal court, but other forms were used to create memories and link territories and areas of the Visigothic past with the *regnum*. This paper seeks to analyse these very diverse memories, such as the connection with ancient urban sites, as opposed to the plurality of the activity of rural ‘central places’. The renewal and promotion of monumentality using *spolia* and the reconstruction of former buildings to create new monasteries, such as the monastery of San Miguel de Escalada, shaped the stories that intended to connect ill-defined political areas with the Visigoths (the *Campi Gothorum*).

Keywords

Neo-Gothic; memories; legitimization; use of the past; monumentality

1. A new ancient kingdom

As Innes stated, ‘The past was a very real presence in early medieval societies’ (Innes 2000: 1). This statement clarifies the importance of the past and its use in the Early Middle Ages. Memories were influenced by the presence of people who remembered and were reminded of the past. As a result, those memories could be part of the discourses of the legitimisation of power. For example, Early Anglo-Saxon kings used prehistoric monuments as a tool to legitimise their new dominion (Semple 2013). In the case of the Asturian Kingdom, a polity that emerged during the 8th–9th centuries in Northern Iberia, the past was related to the Visigothic Kingdom.

Throughout the second half of the 9th century and the first decades of the 10th century, the Kingdom of Asturias underwent a territorial expansion. This process was carried out in areas of southern Galicia, the northern region of present-day Portugal or the Northern Duero plateau, a region that, since the middle of the 8th century, had not experienced any influence of any central authority. Although Sánchez-Albornoz’s (1966) research spread the idea that these areas had been depopulated in the 8th century, research over the last four decades has demonstrated that this idea can be rejected (Escalona and Martín Viso 2020). At the end of the previous century, some studies sustained the idea of an enduring population, but they emphasised the colonisation promoted by foreign peasants as the main factor in understanding the socio-political development before Asturian control (Martínez Sopena 1985; García de Cortázar 1985; Mínguez 2000). However, other theories call into question this colonisation; these areas would have been populated by local people organised in small-scale structures and with little or no presence of external communities. Territorial expansion was then a political integration of populations who had their own small-scale organisation (Pastor Díaz de Garayo 1996; Escalona 2006; Castellanos

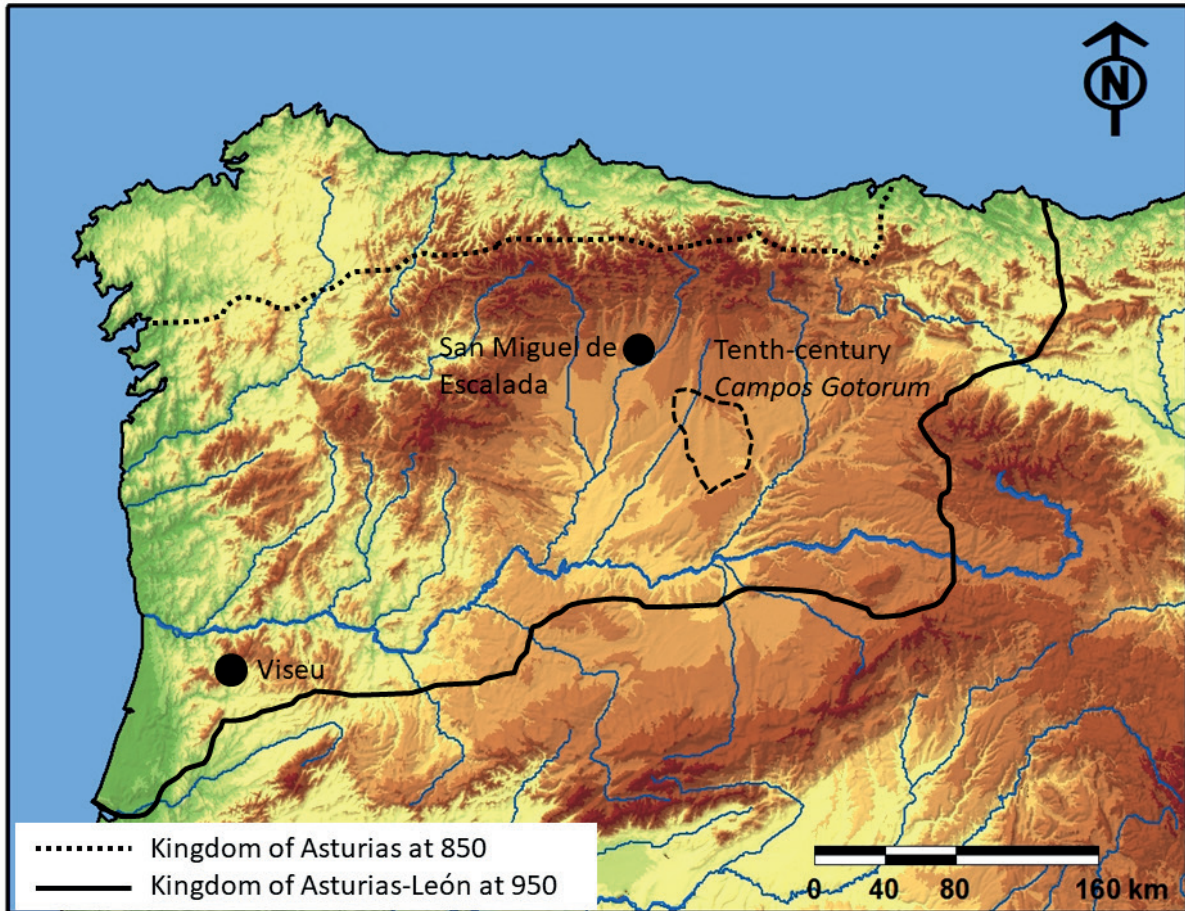


Figure 7.1. The tenth-century kingdom of Asturias-León and the location of the sites discussed in the paper.

and Martín Viso 2005; Martín Viso 2016). In both cases, the Asturian Kingdom did not occupy an empty region, but one that was inhabited and organised, and this implies the implementation of a new polity.

This new authority required legitimacy, in order to justify its existence and would provide it with a historical background. One of the keys was the link of the Kingdom of Asturias with the ancient Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo, which disappeared in 711 after the Islamic conquest. The Asturian kings represented themselves as the successors of that Kingdom and claimed the territory as their own. This Asturian ‘neo-Gothicism’ (Barbero and Vigil 1978; Isla Frez 1999) was central in the chronicles written at the end of the 9th century in the royal entourage, in particular, the *Albeldense* and *Crónica de Alfonso III*, although these texts may reflect an ideology that was already present since the early 9th century. However, during the reign of Alfonso III (866-910), they became the fundamental axis of the royal discourse (Deswarte 2003: 20). It is also interesting to note that the chronicles appeared at the very moment of political and territorial expansion of the Asturian Kingdom. This link persisted over time, and the identification between Castile and the Goths remained a primary element in the reflections of medieval chroniclers (Díaz 2013).

Studies in recent decades have underlined the role of ‘neo-Gothicism’ in the theory and practice of Asturian power. Undoubtedly, the chronicles were read and heard in the court and among a large part of the elite that were part of the political scene of the Kingdom. However, it is necessary to go beyond

and wonder by which means the Visigothic past was created and used in local areas. Three different case studies will be analysed to understand how local arenas were influenced by implementing new narratives about the past controlled by the monarchy. Each of them is very different, but they are linked through the use of a past and the link to the Visigothic times. They were located in territories that were integrated by the Asturian Kingdom during the second half of the 9th century due to its political expansion. The first is the legend of a burial of a Visigothic king at Viseu; the second is the narrative of the (lost) epigraphy of a church near the city of León; and the third is a study of the creation of a name to call a whole region.

2. *Ciuitates* with a historical past: Viseu and King Rodrigo

The chronicles that were written in the Asturian court underline the role of the kings in political expansion, although other texts, of a more local scope, highlight the importance of the initiatives of a part of the elite not necessarily acting on the order of the monarchs (Isla Frez 2010: 137-148). The expansion is described as the occupation (*populare*) of cities such as León, Tuy, Astorga, Amaya, Braga, Oporto, Oca, Eminio-Coimbra, Viseu, Lamego, Tuy, Astorga, and León in the second half of the 9th century (Gil Fernandez, Moralejo and Ruiz de La Peña 1985, *Rotense* § 25, *Albeldensis* § 12). All of them had been episcopal sees in the Visigoth period, except for Amaya and León. The *nomina sedium episcopalium*, a text from the 8th century, identifies Amaya as an episcopal see, but it is the only data available stating that fact (Sánchez-Albornoz 1970). However, we should not forget Amaya's role as the main site of the *Cantabri* conquered by Leovigildo in 574. However, the archaeological data from this site do not prove an 8th–9th century occupation (Quintana López 2017). Therefore, the quote referring to the integration of Amaya in the Asturian Kingdom could be due to a claim of the royal authority over the Castilian area, west of the Duero Plateau, using the memory of a prestigious site. In the *Annales Castellani Antiquiores*, written in Castile around the mid-10th century, the initiative of the integration of Amaya rests, however, with Count Rodrigo (Martín 2008: 208, § 7). He was the most powerful of a group of regional aristocrats that enjoyed a political hegemony in that area. The presence of Oca, a former Visigoth episcopal see, would serve to strengthen the demand of increased Asturian authority in Castile that was until then, an area acting as an autonomous suburb (Estepa 2009). A reference made to León would derive from the fact that this location was taking on interest as the centre of power of the Asturian court on the plateau.

The few archaeological data available verify the scarce dynamism of these cities before their integration in the Asturian Kingdom (Gutiérrez González 2017: 58-61). However, reports of Andalusian military expeditions against some of these places, such as León, Astorga, or Coimbra (Ibn Ḥayyān 2011: 119, 289 and 322) prove that the cities were populated. The mentions could be understood as some ancient political hubs that were used by Muslim chroniclers because they were not familiar with the very fragmented political geography of the North-western Iberia. Subsequently, the mentions of Coimbra and Astorga were related to geographical areas and not necessarily well-shaped cities. The primary value of these *ciuitates* was their link to the Visigothic Kingdom, something that was shared and recognised by Arabs and Asturians. Their presence in Christian chronicles could be related to the claim of Asturian kings as the proclaimed heirs of the Visigoths.

Furthermore, the political geography was much more complex and included a diverse set of small 'central places', many of them fortified (*castros*), as well as some places that acted as the centre of the biggest districts, such as Zamora, Coyanza, Cea, Dueñas, Simancas, Toro, and Trancoso. These places quickly became important political centres, and from here, Asturian authority projected authority on its surrounding. However, the Asturian chronicles, the two versions of *Crónica de Alfonso III*, and the *Albeldense*, all written at the end of the 9th century and so contemporaries to the events, do not mention its integration. The chronicle of Sampiro written in the beginnings of the 11th century is the first to mention the occupation of some of those places by the Asturian kings (Pérez de Urbel 1952, *Silense* § 1

and 14). This information was known rather late, even though we know that some of these places, such as Zamora, were occupied by royal initiative in 893 according to Arabic sources (Ibn Ḥayyān 2017: 204–205). A plausible explanation for this gap is that the occupation took place after the Asturian chronicles were written (in the 80s of the 9th century). However, another interpretation could be the need to link just the old cities to the Asturian kings; the other places could be seen as ‘secondary’ because they did not have a stable relationship with the Visigothic Kingdom. The growing importance of some of those sites in the 10th century would explain the integration in a later chronicle and the absence in a late 9th-century royal view, as the analysis of Dueñas seems to prove (Justo Sánchez and Martín Viso 2020).

It is interesting to analyse the particular case of Viseu, an episcopal see at the time of Suebi and the Visigothic Kingdom – 6th and 7th century – (Jorge 2002), which also appears as a mint in the 7th century (Pliego Vázquez 2009: 126). The chronicle of Ibn Ḥayyān, written in the first half of the 11th century (using previous sources), mentions the military campaign of 825–826 of the lieutenants of Abderrahman II against Coimbra and Viseu, and in particular, the attack of al-Walid against Viseu and his region in 838 (Ibn Ḥayyān 2001: 285 and 292). According to the *Crónica Albeldense*, Alfonso III integrated Viseu in the Asturian Kingdom between 866 and 883, most likely in 872 and 873 (Gil Fernández, Moralejo and Ruiz De La Peña 1985, *Albeldense*, § 15, 12). The *Crónica de Alfonso III* adds the fact that the tomb of the last Visigothic king, Rodrigo, was found in a church in Viseu (Gil Fernández, Moralejo and Ruiz de La Peña 1985, *Rotense*, § 7).

The relationship between Viseu and the burial of the Visigoth king defeated by the Muslims cannot be separated from the legitimization discourse of the new Asturian rule (Real 2005: 277). This legend has been perpetuated in the local memory, and the burial place has been identified as the Church of São Miguel de Fetal, located outside the town walls. The 12th century *Vita Theotonii* relates the life of this monk, who was one of the founders of the monastery of Santa Cruz at Coimbra and prior of the see of Viseu. In the hagiography, Teotonio held a mass every Sunday at the church of São Miguel, located outside of the walls in the cemetery (Nascimento 2013: 103) The site has been excavated and has provided some interesting data. Around the 4th century, a small building was built, and a tomb was embedded indoors made of reused Roman materials. Subsequently, a more significant temple was built that respected the

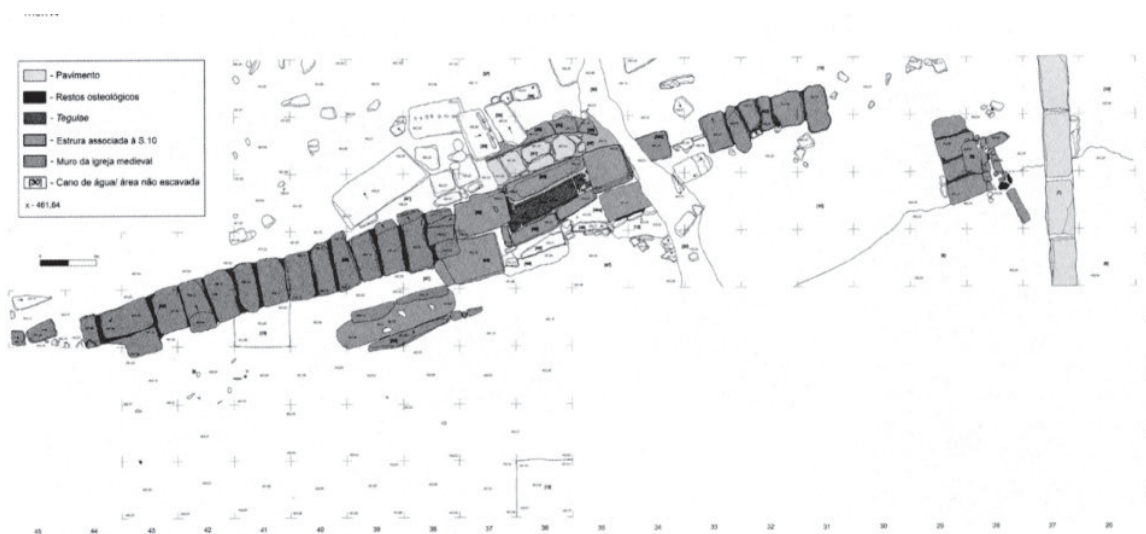


Figure 7.2. Plan of the excavated area of S. Miguel de Fetal (Viseu). From Tente et al. 2018.

main tomb. It has not been possible to define the date of the second construction, and it may have been after the Asturian occupation (Tente *et al.* 2018).

It is difficult to establish the connection with the chronicles as we cannot be sure that this church was in fact, the one mentioned in the texts as the burial site of the last Visigothic king. The identification could be created in the 12th century when the church was mentioned in the *Vita Theotonii* (Tente *et al.* 2018). However, the hypothesis of its identification in the Asturian period cannot be discarded when the burial of King Rodrigo is first cited. The legend could be linked to the existence of a Late Roman burial building, whose presence would be well-known in a suburban environment, as the archaeological data seem to prove. Some stories could have been created in relation to the person buried there, which could have led to the conclusion that he was, in fact, King Rodrigo. The creation could have been either through a local story or a reworked version by the Asturians. The latter would be more plausible. While the explanation is speculative, it allows us to better understand the process of identifying the Viseu as a place strongly related to the Visigothic past and the construction of a church.

The question, then, is why this legend could be depicted in Viseu and not in other places. The key could be in the royal initiative for political integration, versus the increased role of aristocrats such as Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and their descendants who controlled Oporto and Coimbra. Viseu provided a platform for royal power, and the future King Ramiro II lived here in the 20s of the 10th century. To this end, the legend intends to present Viseu as a prestigious location directly linked with the loss of the Gothic Kingdom. This prestigious location was related to the Asturian royal court, whose intention was to be considered the successors of the Goths. Consequently, the ‘neo-Gothicism’ sought to exalt royal action and take over other aristocracies that had a significant presence at the time of territorial expansion.

3. *Post Ruinis Abolitus*: Ruins and Monks

The Asturian Kingdom’s claim on the new regions under their control came with a demand for the church’s role. The acceptance of the ‘neo-Gothicist’ ideal led to accepting, in equal terms, the leadership role of the bishops as the leading representatives of the church in the creation of the Kingdom (Ruiz de La Peña 2014). The Asturian kings encouraged the creation of episcopal sees, aiming to restore the ancient Gothic order, especially in the *ciuitates*. However, both the ideological and political relevance of the bishops encouraged the designation of prelates in places without episcopal tradition, as was the case of Zamora (Luis Corral 2009).

Some of these bishops may have been court clerics, especially those whose sees were not so strongly related to the kings. Others, especially those in charge of some prestigious sees, were prestigious monks, such as Rosendus or Cixila. Genadius is the most outstanding example (Escudero Manzano 2019). He was a monk, probably in the monastery of Ayóo in Vidriales. He went to the region of Bierzo, where he re-founded the monastery of San Pedro de Montes, the former monastery of Rufiana. This monastery was previously founded by Fructuosus at the beginning of the 7th century. However, Genadius also created several monasteries in the area. Subsequently, Alfonso III named him the Bishop of Astorga in 909 until 919-920, where he performed various notable activities; thereof, he retired again to the monastic life (Gallon 2010; Martín Viso 2012).

This ‘holy man’ pattern was associated with a reformed monastic life, which pursued a return to a moderate hermitism based on the tradition of the great Visigothic reformist monks, such as Fructuosus. Why did the Kings support these reformist monks? Written documentation illustrates that many churches and monasteries belonged to aristocratic families, local elites, and even to local communities.

Some researchers have argued that it was a fact deeply rooted in the Visigoth past; this is the case of Galicia (Sánchez Pardo 2013). On the Duero plateau, however, the archaeological data do not reveal the presence of a strong framework of churches or monasteries (Moreno Martín 2011). Therefore, the emergence of this phenomenon must be placed at a stage immediately before the expansion of the Asturian kingdom. This trend was the expression of the interests of elites or local groups, which invested in churches and monasteries, which were almost indistinguishable at the time. The reason for this social investment was the social prestige, need to have a family grave or control of a unified heritage. The consequence was plural monasticism with few guidelines made up by small constructions with solid local roots.

In this context, the kings sought to enhance certain foundations with several goals. They promoted monastic institutions in the region, such as Sahagún (Agúndez San Miguel 2019). This was a way to create prestigious local hubs linked to royal patronage, which allowed them to enter local sites and create social and political networks. This policy was implemented with the support and initiative of these 'holy men', who seem to have enjoyed a remarkable social prestige. Monks from al-Andalus also supported this cause and brought along the tradition of the Visigoth church. Additionally, they promoted 'neo-Gothicism' and were part of these reformist actions (Aillet 2010). A good example could be Cixila, the founder of the monastery of Santos Cosme y Damián de Abellar, near León, who was also bishop of León at the beginning of the 10th century; he seems to be a monk from al-Andalus (Carbajo Serrano 1987)

The royal patronage allowed for a more monumental pattern of monasteries, including epigraphy. The consecratory inscription of San Pedro de Montes relates the new church to the reconstruction of a previous church and with the tradition of Fructuosus, who had found it after the foundation of the monastery of Compludo, and Valerius del Bierzo, who would have expanded the building. Three bishops, among them the prominent Genadius, were witnesses (Gómez-Moreno 1919: 214-215; González Rodríguez 2017). Another example of the use of epigraphy is the abbey of San Miguel de Escalada, whose consecratory inscription could still be read in the 18th century, but whose whereabouts are unknown. The inscription mentions the existence of a former place of worship, dedicated to Saint Michael, which remained abandoned (*Hic locus antiquitus Michaelis Archangeli honore dicatus, brevis opere instructus, post uinis obolitus diu mansit dirutus*). An abbot from Cordoba, Alfonso, came to this place with his *sociis* (monks or laypeople) and built a new building, with King Alfonso's support (Alfonso III). The momentum created by this monastery attracted many monks, and it was necessary to expand the building, which was completed during the reign of García I in 913. The church was consecrated by Bishop Genadius, despite being of Astorga and not of the near see of León (García Lobo 1982: 41-46 and 64-65; Caveró 2014). Although some reasonable doubts have been raised over the evidence of the lost inscription known only through an 18th century copy (Anedda 2004), its similarity with the consecrations of San Pedro de Montes and San Martín de Castañeda advocates for their authenticity (Caveró 2014).

The studies have proved that the primitive construction (before the abbot Alfonso's arrival) could be dated in Visigothic times, due to the existence of two inscriptions presumably of the 7th century. The presence of two Roman inscriptions would be evidence of *spolia*, possibly from the former Roman *ciuitas* of *Lancia* (García Lobo 1982: 59-61). Still, we have a range of archaeological interventions that shed light on the past of this place. A building composed of three rooms has been discovered (although one of them is very disturbed), which, due to the presence of soils of *opus signinum*, can be dated between the 4th and 6th century. Sometime after that, this building underwent a renovation, splitting one of the rooms into two. Simultaneously, several graves have been dated as after the Late Roman period and before the early medieval place of worship was found. The archaeologists doubt that this building was a church before the 10th century and they have proposed an interpretation of this as part of a rural settlement (Larrén Izquierdo and Campomanes Alvaredo 2014).

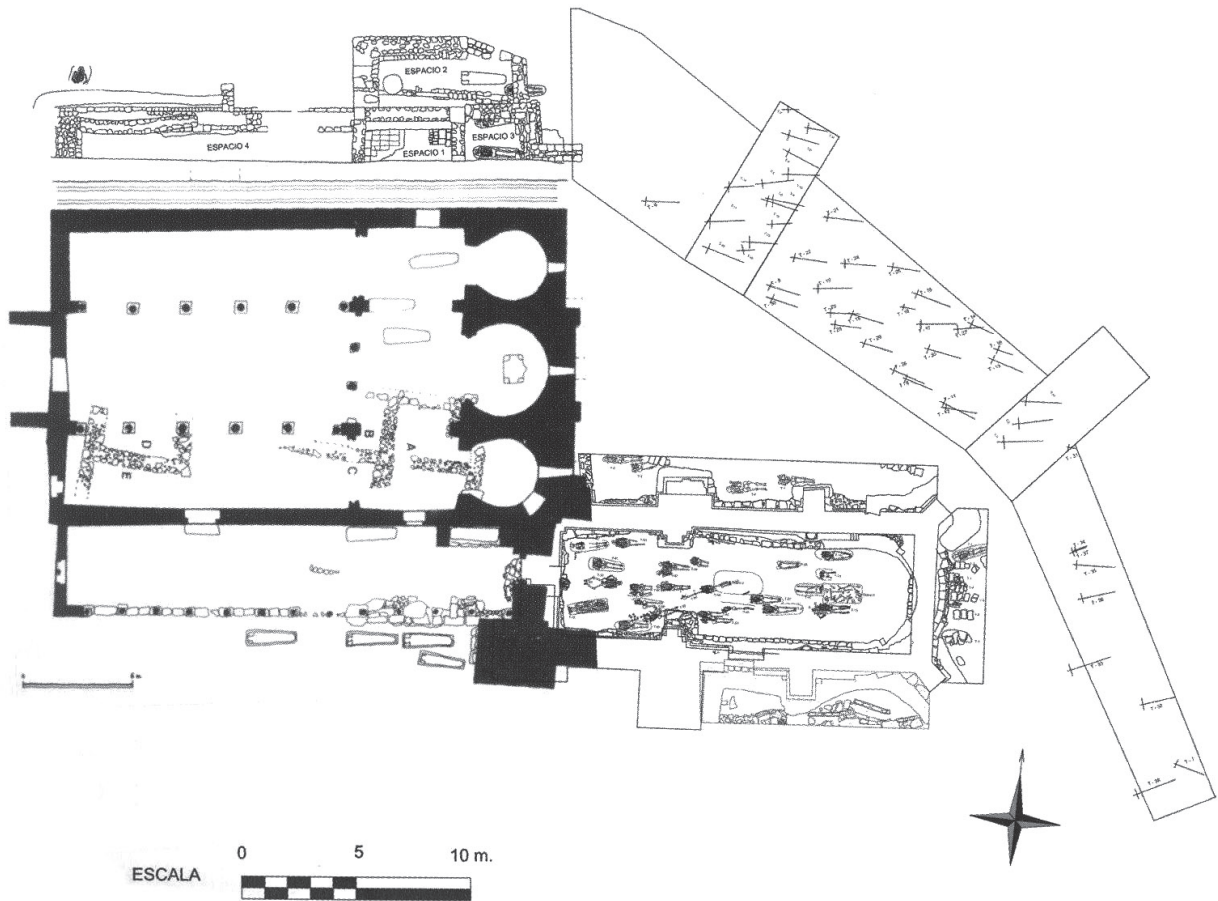


Figure 7.3. Plan of the excavated area of S. Miguel de Escalada (Gradefes, León). From Larrén Izquierdo and Campomanes Alvarado 2014: 87.

In the light of this data, the existence of a church and far less a monumental type building cannot be confirmed. If the Roman inscriptions can be considered *spolia*, the same argument can be used for the allegedly Visigothic inscriptions. The occupation sequence seems to be a Late Roman building, after a burial place, and finally a 10th century phase. The presence of burials does not necessarily imply that there was a church because there are many medieval cemeteries that were not connected to any Christian place of worship (Martín Viso 2014). A possible interpretation is that rural buildings of the late Roman period were left and used later as a burial ground for a local community in the 7th century or in the centuries that followed; this is most likely, as evident in the nearby Marialba de la Ribera (Candelas González *et al.* 2016). When monks arrived at the initiative of Alfonso III, they could have built their abbey in a previous and prestigious burial area and rewrote the history of the place, by creating a primitive church, in truth non-existent. This explanation is hypothetical, but it solves the problem of the relation between epigraphical and archaeological data. The narrative links to the Visigothic past, and we must consider the possibility that at that moment, the *spolia* was brought to the place. If interpreted correctly, this would entail creating a discourse that links facts that occurred at the time of growth of the Asturian power with the Visigothic Kingdom. Consequently, a possible burial area used by local people was changed into a monastery and was then promoted and monumentalised by the kings.

4. A New Ancient Region: The *Campi Gothorum*

The case of San Miguel de Escalada could display the materiality of the re-creation of a Visigothic past related to a church and the ideology of the Kingdom. However, there were other ways of inventing the past. One method was the creation of new names in some regions. The *Campi Gothorum* (Gothic fields) is a very interesting and intriguing case because it was identified as the region of the ancient settlement of Goths, whose memory was preserved. That new ancient geography would be a part of a discourse to understand the past and legitimise the present.

The *Crónica Albeldense*, a chronicle written towards the year 883 in the court of Oviedo, refers twice to a region called the ‘Gothic fields’. In a description of Hispania, it mentions, as one of the most outstanding elements, the wheat from *Campis Gotis* (Gil Fernandez, Moralejo and Ruiz de La Peña 1985, *Albeldensis* § VII, 2). Another chapter refers to the campaigns in the mid-8th century of Alfonso I against the territories south of the Cantabrian Mountains that would have devastated that region. León, Astorga, and the ‘Gothic fields’ (*campos quos dicunt Gothicos*) are mentioned (Gil Fernandez, Moralejo and Ruiz de La Peña 1985, *Albeldensis* § XV, 3). Those are the first times that the ‘Gothic fields’ are known; there is not any mention in the Visigothic texts about them, despite the scarcity of the preserved information. Due to subsequent records that indicate the existence of sites in the *Campi Gothorum*, the territory is identified as Tierra de Campos, a vast region in the heart of the Duero plateau, a sedimentary plain traditionally known for cereal cultivation.



Figure 7.4. The region of Tierra de Campos from Uruña (Valladolid). © author

According to the most common explanation, the name originated from an early occupation of the Goths, before the reference of the *Chronica Caesaraugustana*, which dates their arrival in Hispania at the end of the 5th century (Abadal 1960, 46). Sánchez-Albornoz (1966: 146) thought that the region was devastated by the Visigothic King, Theodoric, in the mid-5th century, during his campaign against the Suebi. The area was emptied and only partially occupied by ‘a youth bloodstream’. However, this concept does not correlate with the existing evidence. If we accept the idea that graves with Visigothic burial goods are tangible proof of the presence of a Visigothic settlement (a hypothesis not currently accepted; Tejerizo 2011), we must state that no such burial sites have been found in Tierra de Campos. Another approach is that the ‘Gothic Fields’ were the current Segovia site and the entire plateau, where this type of burial has been found in several sites. Therefore, the original place-name of the 5th century could have shifted to the Tierra de Campos (Díaz 1994: 460). The former assumption must face the fact that there are no sources after the Roman period that link this area or any other Hispania area with the *Campi Gothorum*.

An alternative explanation is that the label was imposed by northern communities whose tribalism kept them separated from the Duero Plateau communities, heirs of gothic identities and institutions. The aim would be to point out the differences between social patterns, as it would be a way to label the people who remained on the Duero’s basin during the 8th and 9th centuries (Barbero and Vigil 1978: 220). This interpretation is rooted in the theories of both authors who thought that feudalism in Northern Iberia was a result of the evolution of Cantabrian communities with very few Roman influences and out of the Visigothic control. The current data deny the endurance of supposed tribal organisations and remark the romanisation of communities in this area. This region was part of the Visigothic Kingdom, but as a political periphery (Díaz and Menéndez Bueyes 2016). However, the identification using a new label created in a post-Visigoth period is useful for unravelling the problem, because there is no evidence of the term before the Arab conquest.

The identification arose in the royal court and can be seen as a neologism that served to identify all the areas up to the Duero river. It is quite significant that the *Albeldense* separates two places taken by

Table 1. 10th century charters with mentions to *Campi Gothorum*

Date	Reference	Localities	Royal charter
920/05/25*	MÍNGUEZ 1976, doc. 19	Boadilla de Rioseco	X
970/06/23	SÁEZ and SÁEZ 1987, doc. 413	Villanueva de la Condesa	
977/03/12	MÍNGUEZ 1976, doc. 287	Villa de Pedro	X
982/01/18	MÍNGUEZ 1976, doc. 313	Villa de Domno Iohannes	X
985/11/16	SÁEZ and SÁEZ 1988, doc. 508	Berrueces, Raitores, Romeses Santa María and Santa María on Valderaduey near Castro de Azebal. In the river Cea: Zancos, Castroverde, Villa Garlón and Uilla de Abduz. In the Valley of Madrigal: Castrovega and Castrotierra. In Valle Maior: Fictiliones. In Oteros de Rey: Villasinda, Gusendos, Rebollar and Villanueva In Paiolo: Santas Martas, Uilla Exone, Reliegos, Cornelios, Uillamarco and Uilla Edan. Valle de Asnarios Valle de Rateiro with its <i>uillas</i> : Uilla Uelasco, Santa María, Uilla de Egas, Uilla Reuelle, Perales, Uilla Mahmudi, Galleguillos and Kaydos.	X
987/05/29	RUIZ ASENCIO 1987, doc. 521	San Pedro de Arenales	
994/01/11	RUIZ ASENCIO 1987, doc. 560	Fuentes de Carbajal	

* The editor of this charter has serious doubts about its authenticity.

Alfonso I: Astorga and León (the main axes of the Asturian Kingdom at that time in the Duero plateau) of the ill-defined area of the devastated ‘Gothic fields’. The distinction can be understood as the existence of Asturian control when the chronicles were written: places where the Asturian Kingdom existed and a large area that was claimed as its own, although this control was not created until around 883. To justify the claim to conquer this area, they called it the ‘Gothic fields’ to link it with the Visigothic past. As the Kingdom of Asturias was the rightful heir of the Visigothic past, this would provide the right to claim all the territories to be under its control.

The concept does not appear in the *Rotensis* version of the contemporary Chronicle of Alfonso III. It included a list of cities, in what can be understood as a description of how the political geography of the Duero plateau and the area between the Miño and the Duero Rivers was seen from the Asturian point of view (Fernández, Moralejo and Ruiz De La Peña 1985, *Rotensis* § 13; Escalona 2004). Thus, it appears that ‘Gothic fields’ was a new name and had not been accepted by the whole royal *entourage*. This neologism oddly enough only appears in the last quarter of the 10th century charters (Table 1), as the earliest reference appears in a text dated in 920, but there are doubts about its authenticity. As soon as the place names were identified, the label was applied to a large region: the current Tierra de Campos. However, not all sites of Tierra de Campos could be identified with it. For instance, no mention is made to a large area of the Cea river valley, well documented in the 10th century. The reverse process is also the case: some places mentioned as part of the *Campos Gotorum* were not mentioned before. This is the case of Valley of Ratarío (Val de Ratarío) and its villages or *villas*, which were part of the *comisso* handed over by Ordoño III to the Cathedral of León in 952 (Sáez and Sáez 1987: doc. 301). Another striking fact is that all the references were related to royal charters or documents linked to members of a high aristocracy, such as Count Almundus (Ruiz Asencio 1987: doc. 521) or Fraila, who donated Fuentes de Carbajal, a place he inherited from his uncle Zuleimán, servant of Queen Teresa, who was the mother of Ramiro III (Ruiz Asencio 1987: doc. 560).

In the second half of the 10th century, the *Campos Gotorum* are identified with a specific large area, defined by the lack of important centres of power, like cities (*ciuitates*). However, there were some fortified sites, named *castros*, that did not organise wide territories. Another absence is a royal interest, in terms of charter evidence until that period and it was not the focus of royal politics. In the first third of the 11th century, the identification was a fact. The chronicler Sampiro stated the integration in the Asturian Kingdom of the *Campi Gotorum*, along with several places that were not identified as cities, such as Zamora and Dueñas, although they played a vital role in the creation of a political network in the 10th century (Pérez de Urbel 1952: § 14; Martín Viso 2016; Justo Sánchez and Martín Viso 2020). Why was this label used to refer to a larger area than in the 9th century, when the term was invented? We only can make a hypothesis using all the data available. The key could be the claim of the Visigothic past: territories with no evidence of cities, marked by a strong fragmentation, and where the monarchs have a less prominent role than in other areas, as was the case of León. These could be seen as Gothic regions, the fields of those people, and thus, part of the territory that the Asturians, heirs of the Visigoths, could claim. The term sought to legitimise the presence of the Asturian and later Asturian-Leonese monarchy. This situation took place at a later stage due to the absence of powerful centres (cities or episcopal sees). If there was any clear and strong ‘central place’, like the valley of the river Cea, which geographically was Tierra de Campos, the term was not applied (Pérez Rodríguez 2015).

5. Conclusion: legitimisation through the past

The three case studies are very diverse: a legend about a church, the epigraphy and archaeological remains of another church near León, and the possible reconstruction of the name of a region. In all cases, there is only a new hypothesis based on the analysis of the written and archaeological data. However, all of them seem to be narratives that attempted to link the Visigothic past to legitimising the Asturian

Kingdom's expansion. The Asturian Kingdom's ideology is strongly based on its supposed continuity from the former Kingdom of Toledo. Consequently, the Visigothic past must be appropriated, but also created, in a form that implied that all Post-Roman or Early Medieval remains must be 'Visigothized'. The new authority used the narratives of the chronicles and adapted specific local conditions to the Visigothic past. The narratives did not have a passive approach to elements of the Visigothic past, as has been mentioned in the cases studied (a tomb of a Visigothic king, an ancient Visigothic church, and a region). Rather, an innovation task existed, where new narratives were written, creating new stories with a direct link between the Asturian kings and the Visigothic past. The Asturians did not discover the remains of a wrecked Kingdom; they created these remains for their own aims. The past was 'Visigothized' in the 9th and 10th centuries, legitimising the new political control of the heirs of the Visigoths, including the transformation of the removal of other memories about the past.

A noteworthy aspect of the discursive creation of a past was the role of the landscape, a significant component in the memory of preindustrial societies (Fentress and Wickham 2003). We can see how the remains of old buildings could be endowed with a new meaning, which happened in Viseu and San Miguel de Escalada. In both cases, the past was deleted, and a new story was invented. A tool to achieve this was the monumentality, which should be understood as a strategy to legitimise authority in a framework where monuments were considered exceptional. The current view is distorted because these monuments were preserved and not the other reality that is less striking from a material point of view. However, as a cultural construction, the landscape had relevance in the creation of the name of the 'Gothic fields', a new term that connected a region to a political meaning.

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The 10th Century in Western Europe

Change and Continuity

edited by

Igor Santos Salazar
and Catarina Tente

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São Gens rock-cut graves necropolis from the 10th century. Celorico da Beira, Portugal. ©Danilo Pavone
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