Javier Martínez Jiménez, Isaac Sastre de Diego, and Carlos Tejerizo García

The Iberian Peninsula between 300 and 850

An Archaeological Perspective

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Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia

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Acknowledgements

When I was first approached by Jamie Wood to contribute a volume on aqueducts to this great initiative of the Amsterdam University Press which is the series on Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia, I thought it would be quite a better idea to involve Isaac in writing something a bit broader in scope. We thought that despite the irresistible appeal of Late Antique aqueducts we could write something which we thought was very necessary: a summarised and updated archaeological overview of Late Antique Spain. The idea for this book (which you are currently reading) was very welcome, and we soon embarked ourselves on drafting ideas, putting together sites, images, interpretative models, and so on and so forth. Little were we to know that four months into our writing project we both would find ourselves in very difficult personal and work situations, which kept us from finishing this book, into which we had to draw (or fool) Teje in order to be able to put everything together on time. We will never be thankful enough to Jamie Wood and Erin Dailey for their never-ending patience and encouragement in those months when we kept delaying and delaying our final draft. Even after that first fair-but-harsh evaluation report came back.

Continuing with our topoi, there are many people we would like to thank for their help, support and suggestions, which have greatly improved the book (and caused us no shortage of headaches). In our list we necessarily have to mention Santiago Castellanos, Bryan Ward-Perkins, Alfonso Vigil-Escalera, Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, Jamie Wood, Miguel Alba, Marcos García García, José Cristóbal Carvajal, Patricia González, José Carlos Sánchez Pardo, Guillermo García-Contreras, Óscar Bonilla, Rodrigo García-Velasco, and Robert Portass, who viewed different parts of early versions of the text. Without them, this book, which on more than one occasion we thought would be too big a project, would not have come in to being. Also we want to thank our friends and families for keeping us sane and on track with their encouragement. All the shortcomings, omissions, and sticks of which we may have got the wrong end of belong solely to us.

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Preliminary notes

All dates used in the book will be AD.

Regarding the names of sites and towns, ancient names will be used only for a) those archaeological sites which can be identified (such as *Reccopolis* or *Clunia*), b) those that do not really correspond to their modern equivalent (like *Lucentum* with Alicante or *Bilbilis* with Calatayud), and c) sites mentioned in the sources which cannot be identified (such as *Victoriacum*). Modern Spanish/Portuguese names will be kept for other archaeological sites (such as the villa of Noheda or Gózquez) and for those Roman towns which are modern settlements, such as Mérida (instead of *Augusta Emerita*) or Barcelona (*Barcino*), with the only exceptions of Seville (for Sevilla) and Lisbon (for Lisboa), which are (by far) more common in the English language than, for instance, Saragossa or Cordova.

Translations of texts and inscriptions are, unless mentioned, by the authors.

Spanish conventions have been used to indicate the province to which every site belongs. This information has been tabulated in the reference appendix.

Preface

This is an important book for two reasons. Firstly because, over the last thirty years or so, a considerable amount of sophisticated and important work has been done in Iberia on the archaeology of its late Roman and early medieval phases. But because most students, and indeed most medieval archaeologists, are poor linguists (at least in the anglophone world), and because the vast majority of Iberian research is written in Portuguese, Spanish or Catalan, it is almost completely ignored by university courses elsewhere in Europe, and passed over even in the scholarly literature. Here we have a book that provides a detailed overview of the late Roman and post-Roman archaeology of Iberia in the language that, for better or worse, is rapidly becoming the *lingua franca* of scholarship. Furthermore it is a serious book, with excellent illustrations, a full bibliography, and a confident awareness of archaeological developments elsewhere in Europe, written by three young scholars who are all actively involved in the archaeology of Spain, and who between them bring detailed first-hand knowledge on many of the central aspects of their subject, such as urbanism, rural settlement, water-supply, church architecture, and burial archaeology. With the publication of this book, Iberia in the crucial period AD 300-850 can no longer be ignored by archaeology courses, nor side-lined in general discussions of developments in post-Roman Europe.

Secondly, understanding what happened in Iberia in this period from an archaeological perspective is peculiarly interesting and important, because, unlike most of the Roman Empire, the peninsula witnessed two major take-overs of power, and the formation of two new states, based on very different foundations: the Visigothic kingdom established in the fifth and sixth centuries, which of course paralleled developments in Gaul and Italy; but also a Muslim invasion from the Maghreb in 711 (that later evolved into an independent caliphate), which took most of Iberia in a very different direction from the other European former provinces of Rome. Did these momentous political changes, which are poorly documented in the written sources, have an impact on the ground, such that they show up in the archaeological record?

Probably the most important conclusion of this book is that change was gradual and that, from an archaeological perspective, the 410s (when the Visigoths first became involved with Spain) and 711 (when the Muslims invaded) do not constitute sudden dramatic breaks – there is some evidence of violent destruction in both periods, but there is much more

evidence of continuities across these supposed breaks. There was however very significant change within Iberia, though it happened over decades or centuries, rather than suddenly. In particular, the peninsula underwent transformations already familiar in much of Europe, but only recently well documented in Iberia: a simplification of the economy (with some imports and some craft skills disappearing, and others becoming severely restricted); a rise in regional difference; a definitive end of Roman patterns of rural settlement (with the disappearance of villas, some of which had been palatial in scale in the fourth century, and the emergence of villages and hilltop settlements); a shrinkage in urban life (with many minor towns disappearing and those that persisted losing their 'classical' form); and a gradual christianisation of both the urban and the rural landscapes. But within these changes, that broadly follow patterns documented in Italy and Gaul, there are also fascinating developments peculiar to the peninsula: for example, the evidence of powerful Visigothic monarchy in the sixth century, revealed by impressive new settlements like Eio and Reccopolis, the latter even provided with a newly built aqueduct, and the impact of Muslim rule on the principal cities of al-Andalus, with the building of urban fortresses and the introduction of an entirely new religious architectural form, the mosque.

The authors are of course careful not to solve all the questions that the evidence poses, and they make it clear that the peninsula's archaeology deserves our attention, not just for the answers it has already provided, but also for important questions that still remain – for instance, the real dating of the tiny, but impressively solid and well-decorated 'Visigothic' churches; and, perhaps most puzzling of all, the significance of burials with 'Visigothic' jewellery. What were the people buried with this jewellery trying to tell their contemporaries about their identity, and how can we, a thousand-five-hundred years later, and with only the burials themselves to go on, most sensibly understand them?

Bryan Ward-Perkins
University of Oxford, Trinity College

Introduction

An archaeological perspective on the Iberian peninsula between Rome and the Middle Ages

This book aims to put together in a single publication a comprehensive summary of the results of over 25 years of archaeological scholarship on Late Antique and Early Medieval Spain and Portugal, together with an overview of previous research on the topic. In recent years, there has been a remarkable increase in the quantity of available data covering these historical periods as a result of minor interventions, unexpected finds, long-term research projects, and the development of commercial archaeology.[1] This huge amount of fresh data has enabled the development of new avenues of archaeological research for Late Antique and Early Medieval contexts. It has also opened the ground for wholly original, previously ignored or difficult to assess, areas (e.g. peasant societies or agricultural spaces), and also enabled the revisiting of old topics (e.g. the role of the Church or the transformation of Roman urban spaces). The long chronological scope of these processes prompted by the transformations of the late Roman world is the main narrative axis of this book.

This publication is, to the best of our knowledge, the only general comprehensive archaeological approach to the material culture of the Iberian Peninsula for this period, not only in English, but in Spanish as well. Juan Antonio Quirós and Belén Bengoetxea have published recently (2010) a useful handbook of Medieval archaeology, which covers most of the material discussed here, but the scope of their publication is wider in terms of chronology and geography (as it includes Western Europe as well). Rose Walker has, similarly, published in this same series a book on Early Medieval art (Walker 2016), which partially addresses the Roman and Visigothic periods. Besides these, the only general and recent publications that cover this period in Spain have been produced by historians who, despite the various uses they give to the material record,

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1   Development which has taken place in Spain as a consequence of the enactment of the Heritage Law (1985), which created an unstable commercial archaeology whose development caused the excavation of hundreds of sites (Demoule 2007; Parga-Dans 2010), including Early Medieval ones. In the case of Portugal, commercial archaeology has its origins in the late 1980s and early 1990s, related to some big projects on the river Alqueva, but we can consider 1997 to be the institutional starting point with the creation of the *Instituto Português de Arqueologia* (*IPA*) (Bugalhão 2011).

produce their publications from document based perspectives (e.g. Arce Martínez 2011; Collins 2005). As noted above, this material culture based perspective, elaborating a coherent narrative of the Iberian peninsula between the fourth and the ninth centuries, is the main novelty of this book.

Recent finds in Spain and Portugal, and the scientific discussions that have developed from them, have only slowly made their way into wider academic circles. Some twenty years ago in these same circles the main archaeological references for Late Antique material were North Africa, Gaul and Italy, with the Iberian examples relegated to mere appendixes (e.g. Lavan 2001; Salzman 2002). Thankfully, due to the work of Spanish and Portuguese scholars, and the increasing interest of foreign academics, this situation has changed and the Iberian material currently features in most current discussions (e.g. Arbeiter 2014, 2015; Esmonde Cleary 2013; Gelichi and Hodges 2015; Wickham 2005). Despite this availability and interest, there is no comprehensive work in English that addresses the transition of Roman Hispania into the Middle Ages from an archaeological viewpoint (Diarte Blasco 2016).[2]

Furthermore, we ought to stress that this is, fundamentally, an archaeological account of the Late Antique and Early Medieval centuries in the Iberian peninsula. This material culture based perspective does not equate to a voluntary ignoring or leaving aside of written sources, which are fundamental to understand most of the topics discussed in this book. We believe that the stress given to material culture in this book enables the answering of new questions, which are difficult to address solely from a documentary perspective (Barceló Perelló 1988). This emphasis on the material culture, on an empirical basis, needs its own set of questions and perspectives. Due to this archaeological emphasis, the chronological framework of the book is not led by historical dates, but rather by cohesive materialities, whose chronologies and processes of evolution and consolidation move at different paces than historical events as recorded in the documentary sources do. That is why the period we cover stretches from the fourth up to the mid-ninth century. This challenges mainstream publications, which look for historical dates of military events to set their limits, such as the late Roman period (Arce Martínez 2009; Kulikowski 2004), the beginning

2   In this aspect, we have to thank Amsterdam University Press and Jamie Wood, the editor of the Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia series (in which there are currently some works in preparation on this same topic), not only for inviting us to write this, but also for the initiative shown in setting it up.

of the Visigothic kingdom after the defeat at Vouillé in 507 or of the Muslim period after 711 (e.g., Arce Martínez 2007, 2011; Collins 2005, 2012; Manzano Moreno 2006). Whereas the starting point is clearly defined in the fourth century (transformation of classical townscapes and reorganization of the villa economy as a result of political transformations in the Late Roman period), the closing date we propose is more controversial. We have included the eighth and the early ninth centuries in our book because these two centuries, especially following the Umayyad invasion, form the interphase with Early Medieval material culture. The attention here is to processes, and not specific episodes or historical landmarks. It is only as a result of the archaeological developments of the last two decades that it has been possible to move a step beyond these interpretations and focus on *longue durée* narratives more than on accounts and material representation of particular events.

We propose an alternative to these views, one in which the five-century period covered in this book will be divided into three main processes of transformation that will be addressed globally for the Iberian peninsula (in rural and urban contexts): the end of the Roman system, the development of Late Antique regional responses, and the final political and social reorganisation that lead to the Early Medieval world. These three broad divisions better reflect, in our opinion, the technological and material changes seen through archaeology. Added to this, we will lay out the basic theoretical approach which nowadays we feel gives a more cohesive and comprehensive explanation of the period: the dialectical processes of regionalization and centralization which framed post-Roman Iberian societies. Lastly, we want to underline the fact that other than presenting the evidence and a summary of the available material culture, we are also presenting our own interpretations based on them.

I   Setting the frame: Geographical and chronological scope of the book

Before addressing the material evidence, it is perhaps necessary to lay out the geographical and chronological framework that we are dealing with in this book. Far from a central geologic unity, the Iberian peninsula has a very particular and varied geography. As a consequence, the peninsula is divided into various clearly-defined regions (figure 0.1), which play an important role in the processes of regionalization that characterize the period we discuss.

Figure 0.1   Map of the Iberian peninsula, showing the main geographic elements referred to in the text
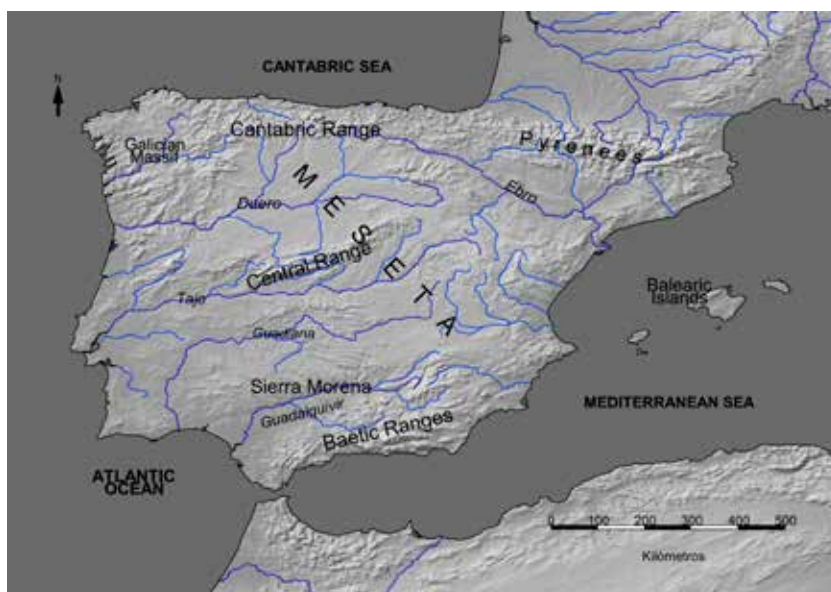
The main one is the central plateau, or central Meseta, which occupies most of central Spain. Old mountain ranges divide it into two halves (Northern and Southern Mesetas) along a south-west – north-east line. The Meseta itself is surrounded by high mountains on three of its sides (north and north-west, south, and east), the west being open towards the Portuguese lowlands and the Atlantic Ocean. Three main rivers cross this plateau from the mountains in the east into Portugal and the ocean: The Duero on the north (in fact, it is common to find the Northern Meseta referred to as the Duero basin) and the Tagus and the Guadiana in the south. These rivers form fertile valleys surrounded by drier high ground. These flat highlands are very rich in agricultural terms, but suffer from extreme climatic conditions. Furthermore, the high mountains that border it isolate the Meseta from the wealthier and better-connected coastal regions.

The mountains bordering the Meseta descend very rapidly into the sea on its north face, creating a thin strip of land from the Pyrenees down to Portugal that is crossed by deep valleys. This area is the Cantabric region, also referred to as 'Green Spain' (*la España verde*), due to its abundant vegetation and high rainfalls. The Cantabric region, which includes the Galician massif and the western valleys of the Pyrenees, is very rugged and rough, and

settlement patterns favour small disperse communities even to this day. In the south, the mountains separate the Meseta from the Guadalquivir valley, what is now Andalucía, a region of Atlantic orientation but Mediterranean in climate with very fertile soils. Similarly, the mountains that border the Meseta on the east are separated from the Pyrenees by the second main valley in the peninsula, that of the Ebro.

In this book we will use these geographic names, but it is necessary to outline the political regions, historically and chronologically biased as they may be, because they are ever present in the literature. In the late and post-Roman periods, provinces and other administrative areas are the most common names. The north-west region is the *Gallaecia*, mostly separated from the Meseta by mountains and deep valleys. South of the Duero, and encompassing the western edge of the Meseta and modern Portugal is *Lusitania*, which was crossed by the Tagus and the Guadiana, and seat of the last Roman capital of Hispania, Mérida. The Guadalquivir valley roughly coincides with the Roman province of *Baetica*, a region which preserved its contacts with the rest of the Mediterranean area, even after the fall of Rome, whereas the Ebro valley mostly fits in *Tarraconensis*, the last province under Roman control. The large, irregular territory left out (the east half of the Meseta and the south-eastern coast) forms the *Carthaginensis*. In the Visigothic period the Eastern Meseta was divided into two smaller regions, *Carpetania* and *Celtiberia*, while the southern coast between the Straits of Gibraltar and the territory of Alicante became the 'Byzantine province' or *Spania*. This territorial distribution was abandoned after the Islamic invasion, and two main blocks emerged: al-Andalus (the Muslim territories) and the Christian north. The former was itself divided into three defensive marches (the Lower march to the west, the Middle march in the centre, and the Upper march in the north), whereas the latter was progressively divided into smaller political entities such as the Asturian Kingdom, Castile, Navarre, or the Hispanic March.

The chronologies and period labels used in Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia are varied and confusing as a direct consequence of the historiography on the topic. In some cases, the confusion is produced by the use of some generic terms (such as 'Byzantine' or 'early Islamic') which do not correspond to the chronologies usually linked to them in the wider Mediterranean context, neither to their cultural nor original meaning (figure 0.2). In other cases, it is a consequence of the use of regional names, widely accepted by specialists in this area, but potentially obscure to laymen in the subject. Moreover, it is quite common to use multiple terms, coming from different spheres (political, cultural and religious), when talking about

Figure 0.2   Graph outlining the span and overlap of the various chronological periods used in the literature dealing with the period 300-900 in the Iberian peninsula
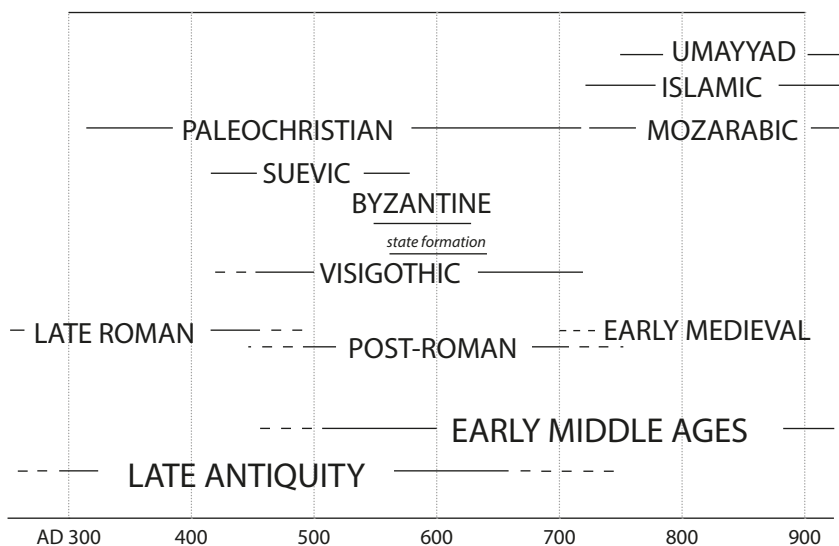
the same period and its material culture. This is particularly the case for sixth century evidence, which can be considered at the same time Visigothic, Late Antique, post-Roman, and early Christian – all of them terms which were used interchangeably in, for example, the prolific bibliography of Pedro de Palol.

   To start with, 'Late Antiquity' is a very broad term covering roughly the time between the third or fourth centuries up to the mid-eighth century. A chronology set used, for instance, by leading research clusters such as the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity. It overlaps with the 'Early Middle Ages', which range from the end of Roman power in the fifth century to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The choice between these two concepts with regard to the chronological overlap is usually a reflection of the background of the authors, whether he or she believes there was rupture or continuity with the Roman past. In the Spanish case-study, it is not uncommon to find rural settlements and burial practices referred to as 'Early Medieval' (*altomedieval*), whereas urban contexts in the same chronology are 'Late Antique' (*tardoantiguo*).[3] Traditionally, the term 'early Christian' (*paleocristiano*)

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3   For instance, compare Fuentes Domínguez 2006 with Vigil-Escalera 2007 and 2009, where these two different labels are applied to the same territory and the same chronologies.

has also been very prominent to refer to the material culture and monuments of the period (especially churches and other liturgical elements), as the name chosen for the first National Conferences of early Christian Archaeology – *Reunió d'Arqueologia Paleocristiana Hispànica* – show (the last took place in 2003). However, Christian contexts dated to the Islamic period are usually referred to as 'Mozarabic' (*mozárabe*).

One way to avoid these terminologies is to use 'late Roman' (*tardorromano*) or 'post-Roman', the former referring usually to the fourth and fifth centuries, and the latter to the sixth century and beyond. This is a chronological and political division, using the presence or absence of the Roman state and its characteristic material culture, as a marker, can be put around 450. Other chrono-political labels are 'Visigothic' (*visigodo*), 'Byzantine' (*bizantino*), 'Suevic' (*suevo*) and 'Umayyad' (*omeya*), which currently (although this was not always the case) have no ethnic connotation. '(Visi)gothic' refers to any given element which is geographically and chronologically inside the Visigothic kingdom or its area of influence. This ranges between historic dates such as 418 and 711, and although the Visigothic control over part of Iberia only really begins in the 450s, it is not until the sixth century that it can be considered to be effective (the 'early Visigothic period'). Within the Visigothic period, the years 570-630 are usually referred to as the period of state formation. After 630, and into the eighth century, it is not unusual to see the terms 'late Visigothic' and 'Hispano-Visigothic' or 'Hispano-Gothic'. Similarly, 'Suevic' refers to the kingdom established by the Sueves in north-western Iberia between 411 and 580, so this term is not only chronological, but also geographical. In Spain, the 'Byzantine period' covers the seventy years between the 550s and the 620s, during which imperial troops controlled parts south of the peninsula. The presence of many lingering Roman cultural elements at various levels (monuments, material culture, law, etc.) makes post-Roman a generic and adequate term to cover these three periods.

Finally, the 'Islamic period' starts in 711, and it only came to an end in 1492, although for the purpose of this book, only the Umayyad period will be taken into account. The years in between the Islamic conquest (711) and the establishment of the Umayyads (754) can be referred to as 'early Islamic' (*paleoandalusí*, although this would cover usually the whole eighth century) or 'pre-Umayyad', which is rare. The 'Umayyad period' covers the years between 754 and 1031 (whereas in the rest of the Mediterranean it finishes in 750); 'early Umayyad' or 'emiral' covers the period between 754 and 929 and 'late Umayyad' or 'caliphal' (*califal*) between 929 and 1031.

In order to avoid this confusing palimpsest of terms and concepts, most of them not exempt from theoretical problems and substantial critiques,

we will use general broad and general terms throughout the book. Thus, so as to establish a wider frame for the analysis, we will refer to the fourth and early fifth centuries as the 'late Roman' period (covered in Part 1: Chapters 1-4), the late fifth and into the early eight will be referred as the 'post-Roman' period (Part 2: Chapters 5-7), and the last phases, from the eighth into the ninth centuries, as the 'early medieval' period (Part 3: Chapter 8).

II   20th century approaches to the period

As in the rest of Europe, scientific approaches to the medieval period began during the nineteenth century as a consequence of the development of Romanticism, nationalism and imperialism (Trigger 1995). In the Spanish case, the evolution of the understanding of the Late Antique and the Early Medieval archaeology has to be seen as a sequence of historiographic models with strong ideological components behind them, which have only been analysed very recently (Olmo Enciso 1991; Salvatierra Cuenca 2013). Long-held interpretations based on historical accounts or art history, such as the intrinsic ethnic meaning of 'Visigothic' and 'Suevic' grave goods, or the Byzantine nature of Late Antique Iberian Christianity, have weighed heavily on past researchers. Similarly, and completely dissociated from Late Antique studies, research on the Islamic and the 'Christian' areas during the Early Middle Ages have been heavily text based. These pivoted around the reach and impact of Islamization and of Feudalism, the origins of the Christian kingdoms and, above all, the spirit of the *Reconquista*, the conquest of the Islamic lands by the Christian kings of the north, who were to become the founders of 'Spain'. It was only when archaeology emerged and developed as an independent science that these monolithic concepts could be questioned. In Portugal, the evolution of historical and archaeological research has followed similar paths, although with key differences, such as the search for the Suevic origins of Portugal, or its own characteristic individualities that marked it as distinct from Spain (as summarised in Díaz Martínez 2011: Introduction, or Ferreira Fernandes 2005).

Focusing now on the evolution of the academic understanding of the late and post-Roman world, the first approaches to this topic in Spain developed as a result of three main events. The first of these was the discovery of the Treasure of Guarrazar (figure 0.3). This Treasure consists of a collection of golden votive hanging crowns, donated or dedicated by the Visigothic kings Swinthila (r. 621-631) and Recceswinth (r. 653-672), together with

some other minor crowns, hanging crosses and other elements of liturgical jewellery (Perea Caveda 2001). It was first identified in the year 1858 at the church of Guarrazar, 13km outside Toledo, when torrential rains uncovered a sepulchre containing the objects, which were retrieved between 1858 and 1861.[4] These finds were immediately linked to the legendary 'hall of crowns' of the Visigothic kings mentioned in the Islamic sources (Hernández Juberías 1996: 194-8; Ibn Habib, 44), soon leading to the first studies of Visigothic jewellery and Visigothic art (cf. Åberg 1922; Schlunk and Hauschild 1978; Zeiss 1934).

These early approaches were still influenced by Romantic views on the Visigothic kingdom (Cortés Arrese 2012), but the sudden interest on the material culture was unprecedented. The second and third events are interconnected, as they both derive from the work of Amador de los Ríos (1818-1878): firstly, he coined term *latino-bizantino* ('Latin-Byzantine') and secondly, he carried out a first classification of Early Medieval sculpture. *Latino-bizantino* was the term used by Amador de los Ríos to describe the finds at Guarrazar (1861), and used it again in a later publication to describe the Late Antique monuments of Mérida (de los Ríos Serrano 1877). As for the classification of Early Medieval sculpture, his conclusions and typological classification set the grounds for later, art-historical interpretations while, at the same time, setting the architecture and sculpture of this period aside from later and earlier typologies. Following Amador de los Ríos's work, many scholars gave (de Palol Salellas 1950; Palol and Ripoll 1988), and still give (Morín and Barroso 2010), a preeminent role to the Byzantine element in their descriptions of Late Antique Hispanic culture. These scholars define this period as a cultural 'Renaissance' in which, thanks to the Visigothic kingdom, a 'new Constantinople' was created on the other side of the Mediterranean. According to these authors, this transforming movement likely began at the second half of the sixth century, when the cultural presence of Byzantium would have been intensified in Spain, due to the military occupation of the south-eastern region under Justinian (555). As a result of the accumulation of new Byzantine features, Visigothic Art reached its aesthetic height in the second half of the seventh century. Mérida was considered to be the main centre at which Byzantine influences entered the peninsula, and from there it would have spread to the rest of the Visigothic kingdom. A notable number of Spanish scholars defend the idea that these 'Byzantine influence and innovations' found in the material culture from Mérida gave rise to a revolution in Visigothic society, culture and religion.

4   Currently under excavation by Juan Manuel Rojas.

Figure 0.3   The Hanging Crown of King Swinthila, a circlet of gold encrusted with precious stones and pearls, and a votive declaration in hanging letters ('*Suintilanus Rex offeret*') in gold and cloisonné, together with a hanging cross

Retrieved from the excavations at Guarrazar (copy preserved at the Museum of Guarrazar; photograph by Dr. Patricia González, used with permission)

In Portugal, this early interest in Medieval archaeology came first as a by-product of other archaeological investigations (with the first catalogues of material culture by José Leite de Vasconcelos or Estácio da Vega) and as a result of the listing of Medieval monuments in the Comissões dos Monumentos Nacionais. Most of these were Later Medieval churches, castles and monasteries, but Islamic monuments were also included (Ferreira Fernandes 2005).

The next great development in Late Antique archaeology was carried out by Manuel Gómez-Moreno (1870-1970), who first classified and categorized

the pre-Romanesque Mozarabic churches, and the material culture associated with them (Gómez-Moreno 1919; 1966). He was also the first person who attempted to understand the Islamic material culture, beyond the standing monuments, from an archaeological point of view, during his time as director of the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan in Madrid. In his long research life Gómez-Moreno was always interested in the study of Late Antique and post-Roman material, such as the Visigothic slates and the corpus of early Christian epigraphy.

It was, however, after the 1920s (and especially in the 1940s) that the first general interpretative paradigms were developed, partly based on Gómez-Moreno's and de los Ríos' work, but also partly due to the direct archaeological intervention in post-Roman sites. In this aspect, the creation of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (*DAI*) in Madrid in 1943 was of paramount importance, as it prompted the introduction of 'modern' archaeological methodologies into Spain as a part of the influence of German archaeology and the culture-historical approach (Olmo Enciso 1991). It is then that two main trends emerged around the archaeology of this period: the first trend, which was also promoted by most Spanish archaeologists, aimed to identify the Christian (or, as it was termed, *paleocristiano*) origins of the Spanish culture. The excavations of Serra i Ràfols at the early Christian sites of Casa Herrera, of Serra i Vilarò at the churches of the Francolí, and those of Juan Cabré at *Reccopolis* or El Bovalar (which would eventually be excavated by Pedro de Palol) are all good examples of this Spanish-Christian research (figure 0.4).

Parallel to this, and very closely linked to the lines of research which were normative in Germany at that time, there was a great interest in identifying the ethnic Visigoths and to establish a direct racial and national link between Germany and the Goths (from whom allegedly derived the kingdom of Spain), as, for example, in the work of J. Werner (Werner 1946; 1948) or W. Reinhart (Reinhart 1945; 1952). On this issue, Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla was of capital importance in developing this archaeological theory, because of his direct links between both the Spanish fascist party (*FET de las JONS*) and Nazi Germany (Martínez Santa-Olalla 1934). These links were ultimately the cause of his fall and the demise of this archaeological paradigm after the end of World War II (Olmo and Castro 2011; Tejerizo García 2012a). As elsewhere in Europe, these theses were mostly based on grave goods and the 'national typologies' of brooches, belt buckles and other items recovered from burial sites like Duratón or Carpio del Tajo, understanding these objects as individual items, and works of art, outside their archaeological context.

**Figure 0.4   Photograph of the *Reccopolis* excavations in the 1950s, with part of the
                'palace complex' unearthed**

Olmo Enciso 2008b: figure 9

These two approaches to the material culture dominated archaeological
research for most of the 20th century, especially as the political agenda of
Franco's regime encouraged the search for the racial and Christian origin
of the Spanish Nation. Both research avenues worked hand in hand, and

largely relegated the study of Islamic archaeology of this period to fine arts and architecture, disregarding archaeological finds, pottery typologies and even settlements, as they did not add to the approved political discourse. The main consequence of this was not just the conscious disposal and dismissal of post-Visigothic layers in many sites, but also the development of the concept of a lack of any truly datable material for the early Islamic period – an idea which was only dismissed at the turn of the century.

In Portugal, the military dictatorship established in 1926 pursued similar objectives to its Spanish equivalent, mostly to create a 'national discourse' which would identify the Early Medieval origins of Portugal. As in Spain, the Visigoths and the Sueves provided archaeological material which fuelled these interpretations, and they were subject to the first monographic studies, both by archaeologists and art historians. The two main researchers were Abel Viana and Fernando de Almeida (de Almeida 1962; Viana 1959), who carried out the first excavations at 'paleo-Christian' sites (such as Idanha-a-velha) and carried out the first classifications of their material culture.

In this context, from the late 1950s and until the 1980s, the main researcher who dealt with post-Roman archaeology in Spain was Pedro de Palol. His work focused mostly on church architecture and the archaeology of Christian objects, working on the typologies developed by Gómez-Moreno and expanding them in scope and chronology (de Palol Salellas 1958, 1966). Palol was also involved in the excavation of new sites (many of them located in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands), opening up a large new body of material later studied by his students and successors, such as Josep Maria Gurt and Gisela Ripoll. Perhaps Palol's main contribution was to insert Hispanic-Visigothic materials and architecture into broader Mediterranean scholarly trends. For the first time, Spanish Late Antique archaeology was not studied in isolation, and the first points of comparison emerged. In fact, one of the main consequences of Palol's research was the establishment of the *Reunió d'Arqueología* (*Paleocristiana*) *Cristiana Hispànica* (figure 0.5), the first scientific forum in which early Christian archaeology was discussed (Gurt and Tena 1995; 2000; Gurt and Ribera 2005).

It was, however, in the 1980s that Late Antique and Early Medieval archaeology fully developed, especially after the concept of 'Late Antiquity', as established by Peter Brown, was introduced into the newly emerging university system. The end of the Franco's dictatorship (1975) and the subsequent arrival of parliamentary democracy (1978) brought a new political system based on regional developments. As a consequence, several universities and other research institutions were founded. This context allowed the development of regional research projects focused on their own territories. Moreover, the

**Figure 0.5   Front cover of the *III Reunió d'Arqueologia Cristiana hispànica,* held in
Menorca in 1988 and published in 1994**

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CRISTIANA HISPÀNICA

BARCELONA
1994

establishment of new autonomous regions in Spain prompted the creation
and consolidation of regional research groups and technical teams, promoted
and held by either local or territorial administrations. These groups had
particular interests in post-Roman material culture, which seemed to be
more politically profitable and easier to define specifically for each region
than the homogeneous and universal Roman culture. Amongst these are
ground-breaking theses and works produced by, amongst others, Manuel
Acién, Agustín Azkarate, Rafael Azuar, Ramón Bohigas Roldán, Miquel
Barceló, Pablo Díaz, José Avelino Gutiérrez González, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret,
Antonio Malpica, Lauro Olmo, Eduardo Manzano, Gisela Ripoll, or Juan
Zozaya, which in many cases were directly linked to large new excavation
projects on late Roman, post-Roman, and early Islamic sites such as El Tolmo
de Minateda, *Reccopolis*, *Segobriga*, and other smaller sites in the Basque
Country (Quirós Castillo 2009; Quirós and Bengoetxea 2010). Similarly, the

transition to a democratic government in Portugal prompted the creation of research groups in Medieval archaeology in the main universities of Oporto and Lisbon, or in key sites such as in Mértola. Researchers such as Carlos de Almeida, Fernando Branco, Mário Barroca, Santiago Macías, Claudio Torres, Virgilio Lopes or Luis Fontes began their prolific careers in this context. These works set the basis for new archaeological interpretations which moved away from traditional historical approaches.

This change in attitude was further accelerated in the 1990s when the Harris excavation methodology was definitively introduced into Spain, parallel to an exponential increase in the number of archaeological interventions linked to new construction projects, which has been the main motor of the Spanish economy in the last two decades (Parga-Dans 2010). The main result of this was not only that the volume of excavated material multiplied considerably, but also (and more importantly) that Early Medieval rural contexts were properly identified and excavated. New sampling techniques became widespread, so that for the first time bioarchaeology, microscopic and isotopic analyses became common, triggering the emergence of the first publications on archaeometric analyses of archaeological material. New local centres of archaeological research and heritage management emerged in this period, such as the Consorcio de Mérida (CCMM), the Servicio de Información Arqueológica Municipal (SIAM) in Valencia, or the Taller-Escuela de Arqueología (TEDA) in Tarragona, to mention some outstanding examples, which devoted a lot of work to Late Antique and Early Medieval phases. Their work was very important in improving our knowledge of the material culture, constantly refining the chronologies given by ceramic typologies (Aranda González 2014). It was at this time that Spanish archaeologists and historians first developed close academic links with foreign scholars with regards to the archaeology of this period; first with the Italians and later with the British. Derived from these contacts, Spanish archaeology first started to ask questions which differed from traditional documentary perspectives, whilst historians also began to introduce material culture into their investigations (cf. Quirós and Bengoetxea 2010).

III   New theories and new data: archaeology in the 21st century

As a result of the large body of evidence generated during the previous decade and based on the new theoretical perspectives developed by the earlier generation of scholars, in the early years of the 21st century there

**Figure 0.6   Photograph of one of the open-area excavations of the early 21ˢᵗ
              century: The site of Gózquez (Madrid)**

Photograph by AREA S.C., used with permission

were considerable changes in the study of the archaeology of the period
between the fourth and ninth centuries. Furthermore, these years saw the
consolidation of long-lasting ongoing projects and the discovery of new
sites: *Reccopolis*, El Tolmo, el Castellar of Elche, Zaballa, Aistra, Morería in
Mérida, La Almoina in Valencia, Gózquez de Arriba or Can Gambús-1 and
the rest of the villages of Madrid and Catalonia, *Madinat Ilbira* in Granada,
La Encarnación in Seville, Vega Baja in Toledo, Santa María in Vitoria, the
pottery finds of Vigo and many others (figure 0.6). Also occurring at this
time was a reassessment of old sites and monuments, such as the so-called
Visigothic and Asturian churches, the monumental remains of Barcelona
and the later phases of *Conimbriga*. These excavations and re-assessments
have produced a large volume of new data, which have added to the even
larger amount of large and small-scale rescue excavations which were
carried out before the economic crisis and the collapse of large construction
projects. This implies that, as of this date, there are an incalculable number
of boxes with Late Antique finds stored in museums which are only very
slowly (if at all) being processed. The corpus of literature produced in this

period is vast (e.g. Ferreiro 2006; 2008; 2011; 2014), as are current trends and discussions (Wood and Martínez 2016). We will only highlight the main current archaeological debates.

As a consequence of this lengthy period of ongoing research, new critical lines of argument began to be developed amongst archaeologists, as a result of the realisation that the large amount of new data did not correspond with the paradigms and systems which had been previously proposed. These new approaches aimed, necessarily, to reconsider traditional explanations. One of the main concerns of research in recent years has been the rural world and the peasant societies in this period, which have blurred some established paradigms (for example those who saw peasant societies as 'simple' and 'miserable') and opened new paths of research (Kirchner Granell 2010a; Quirós Castillo 2009; Tejerizo García 2017).[5]

Beyond old historic perspectives of collapse and decline (cf. Ward-Perkins 1997), the study of Late Antique urbanism has also involved a large group of researchers, mostly archaeologists, who have engaged with the subject of what towns were really like in the Late Antique period, and how a new type of urbanism emerged (mostly compiled in Olmo Enciso 2008a). Another clear example of this new trend in research on the Early Medieval period are the new chronologies assigned by Luis Caballero and his team (María Ángeles Utrero, Fernando Arce, José Ignacio Murillo, and Francisco Moreno) to a number of churches that Art History had traditionally assigned to the Visigothic period. Caballero's research led him to investigate new questions about the monuments, questions that could only be answered by a consideration of the archaeology, and that directly collided with traditional interpretations when he pushed the chronology of some of these churches into the eighth-ninth centuries (Caballero Zoreda 2000; further discussed below, in Chapter 6). These interpretations have been very problematic and are not widely accepted amongst the Spanish academic community. However, beyond Spain and particularly amongst British scholars Caballero's arguments are being more widely accepted (Collins 2012; Walker 2016; Wickham 2010).

Despite these years of constant research and debate, and acknowledging the various contributions to our understanding of the period provided by the new archaeological research, there are still dividing lines. To provide some examples, the main divisions are those between scholars dealing with urban and rural contexts in the Visigothic period and those separating late and post-Roman from Islamic and Umayyad perspectives. Only in the last few years have these lines begun to be blurred, following various attempts to

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5   Not without opposition and criticism, see Chavarría Arnau 2012.

put together research groups in discussion fora such as *Visigodos y Omeyas* (organized by the National Research Council – CSIC), or the '711 congress' held at Alcalá de Henares which commemorated the 1300th anniversary of the Islamic conquest of the Iberian peninsula.[6]

However, one of the residual ideas from earlier interpretative paradigms which still has considerable weight in current interpretations is the idea of a dark and unknown eighth century. AD 711, the year of the Islamic invasion of Spain, has for many decades been a dividing line that could hardly be crossed, either by historians or archaeologists, and many publications have defined it as an inflection point after which things really changed. This idea is only very slowly being revised, as new structures and finds are excavated that can be dated to these chronologies. It is only now that archaeological interpretations covering the long term can be given about the transition between the Visigothic and early Islamic periods, and the results show that, unsurprisingly, there was no real archaeological rupture in 711. It is this idea of a longer continuity of late and post-Roman structures into the first decades of the Islamic period that we want to underline in this publication, dismissing historicist approaches to the topic.

Lastly, it should be noted that in recent years foreign scholars have begun to pay attention to the Late Antique and Early Medieval archaeology of the peninsula, not only from theoretical points of view, but also by taking active part in excavations in the Iberian peninsula. This demonstrates the internationalization of the topic and the engagement of post-Roman and Early Medieval Iberian material culture with broader historical questions.[7]

IV   The long and short of the evidence

As already noted, the body of available archaeological material is large, and it has expanded massively in recent years, but a short *caveat* should be introduced regarding the extent of the evidence available and the depth and range of interpretations. Whereas this is not the place in which to discuss the different approaches to understating the past from a material and textual perspective, it is important – this being a work based on the analysis of material culture – that we underline its shortcomings.

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6   Caballero and Mateos 2000; Caballero *et al*. 2012a and b; VV. AA. 2012.
7   See, again, Esmonde Cleary 2013 and Wickham 2005, but also Bowes and Kulikowsi 2005, Reynolds and Quirós 2010.

First and foremost, due to the nature of most excavated sites, the evidence is only partial. In only a very few examples we have access to a whole site, so conclusions and interpretations have to be made based on narrow windows into the stratigraphy. It is true that there are some extraordinary examples, such as Morería, Zaballa, *Reccopolis*, *Eio*, or Gózquez, in which the excavated area is quite extensive, but in most cases the dug areas do not offer a view of the whole site. Furthermore, in many cases modern truncations and earlier archaeological approaches to Late Antique levels have either destroyed or left these contexts unrecorded. Despite this, by putting together the small snippets of information within a large urban site (as it is the case in Mérida, Córdoba or Barcelona, where there are many small interventions with Late Antique phases), or by comparing and contrasting various similar sites (as can be done with the rural villages in the province of Madrid), it is possible to reach solidly-based conclusions and interpretations.

Furthermore, the different amount of information available from various sites and regions causes some examples and case studies to appear overrepresented in our interpretations (e.g., Mérida). This sometimes causes problems with what the written sources may say, a point which historians usually make when addressing the material culture. This issue, however, when seen from an archaeological perspective, is not that important. The Aristotelian fallacy that 'absence of evidence is not evidence for absence' clearly applies to the archaeology of this period, and we can only make strong claims when dealing with fully excavated sites. This does not, however, prevent us from making general interpretations, comparisons and extrapolations based on the available evidence (or backed by theoretical explanations or comparisons from other regions), as long as these are indicated and highlighted.

Another issue that the archaeology of this period faces is the lack of proper and well defined chronological sequences, and that the regional fragmentation of the material culture makes inter-regional chronological comparisons problematic. While this was a valid point perhaps ten or fifteen years ago, current understandings of pottery sequences and technologies have massively improved, not just in the Iberian peninsula, but in Europe as a whole.[8] It is still difficult to spot-date contexts to particular chronologies, as can be done in the Roman period with the well-dated typologies of Samian wares, but we are dealing with a corpus of evidence that can be sequenced within 30-year margins, which is an incredible step forward compared to the situation just a decade ago.

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8   Aranda González 2014; Caballero *et al*. 2003; Vigil-Escalera and Quirós 2016. Cf. Jervis *et al*. 2017.

Finally, a more controversial issue that this book also considers is the standard and quality of the grey literature. Due to the combination of the urgent character of many of the archaeological interventions in the past decades, the period of crisis of 2008, administrative issues, or lack of contact between academics and professional archaeologists, most of the recent commercial excavations have been only partially (if at all) published. Sometimes, the technical reports are still to be finished years after the excavation or are so misleading that little useful information can be found in them. This problematic assessment of the primary evidence has been addressed very carefully in this book: as it is a problem with secondary literature, we have tried to focus only on the archaeological data, analysing the proposed interpretations with care.

V   The nature of the transformations: Regionalism vs centralization

One of the mainstream topics in recent research is the idea that centralization and regionalization are the two dialectical processes that explain the nature of Late Antiquity in the Iberian Peninsula. These interpretative paradigms of material culture have sprung from recent general studies, led mostly by British scholars (Ward-Perkins 2005; Esmonde Cleary 2013; Wickham 2005, 2008), soon followed by specific analyses on Iberian case-studies by Spanish scholars (Castellanos and Martín 2005; Escalona and Reynolds 2011). These two processes can be used to effectively answer the questions that arise from the new archaeological interpretations of the evidence, especially as they go beyond traditional teleological approaches. These traditional approaches defined a linear sequence of different material cultures succeeding each other, a model that is applicable to the entire peninsula. Throughout most of the 20th century, the political unity of Spain and the Spanish nation was an essential part of the political agenda that backed this scholarship. Nevertheless, this explanation is too simplistic.

It is impossible to give general, homogeneous, and all-encompassing views about the archaeology of the Iberian peninsula in either this or any other period, because there were many different regional and local realities. The same happened in many other parts of the Mediterranean, which were formed by a series of geographical and social regions. These regions needed to interact with each other in order to secure stability. As a result, as political relations become more complex, the relationships between regions and

local communities increased (an issue raised for this period in Wickham 2005, but more broadly defined in Horden and Purcell 2000).

For the Iberian peninsula these processes of regionalization became more acute after the crisis of the fifth century, closely related to the collapse of the Roman political system. The various geo-economic areas that Roman politics had merged into single larger units had to rely on local resources and alternatives when the imperial administration ceased to protect and promote these interactions (Esmonde Cleary 2013: 398-417; Kulikowski 2004). Up to a certain extent, it could be said that in some regions of the peninsula, inter-regional interactions and territorial models of the imperial period were Roman constructs that could not survive without the centralizing Roman infrastructure. Often the nature of these alternative systems of territorial control and regional interaction remind us of, and seem similar to, pre-Roman systems. The speed with which these were adopted may hint at some sort of return to previous patterns (Martínez and Tejerizo 2015). This may indicate how superficial the imperial system had been in peripheral areas such as the Cantabric coast or the Northern Meseta. In fact, many rural and fortified sites which had traditionally been dated to the Iron Age turned out to be, after careful study, post-Roman in date (e.g., Tejado Sebastián 2011).

To counter these trends, there were also up to five different political entities, beyond the final attempts of the late Roman Empire, which carried out centralizing policies: the Visigothic kingdom, the Suevic monarchy, the Byzantine Empire, the Umayyad emirate, and the Asturian kingdom. Of these polities, only the Umayyads managed to fully achieve a strong centralizing force similar to the Roman Empire. Similarly, the Catholic Church managed to form a structured (not necessarily centralized) system that outlasted the other polities – perhaps because it was based on urban and local elites, rather than the imposition of a top-to-bottom centralized system. Throughout this book we will see how both centralizing models (political and religious) carried out their agendas, and how this can be seen through the archaeological record.

The material culture of this period is a reflection of the various degrees of success and failure that these centralizing forces had on regional dynamics and the attempt to get a comparative picture of the different social regions will be one of the major aims of this book.

With this in mind, as the starting point for our narrative we introduce the archaeological material and its related discussions by looking first at the situation in Roman Hispania by the beginning of the fourth century. The

book is structured into three parts, each of them chronologically labelled according to the phases and nomenclature stated above: Part 1 (Chapters 1-4) will deal with the Late Roman period, Part 2 with the post-Roman period (Chapters 5-7), and Part 3 with the Early Medieval period (Chapter 8). Each part will be divided into thematic chapters, so Chapter 1 deals with the transformations of the Roman world, Chapter 2 with the transformations of the urban world, Chapter 3 with those of the rural world, and Chapter 4 with the Christianization and Germanization of the material culture. In Part 2 there is a chapter on towns (Chapter 5), the countryside (Chapter 6) and the characteristics of the material culture (Chapter 7). The last part contains only one specific Chapter (8) on the substitution of Late Antique material culture by newer, Early Medieval alternatives. All of this will be followed by a final chapter containing general conclusions, and the appendices with maps and lists of sites, as well as other useful reference tables.