

Peasant agency and peopling processes in Early Medieval Catalonia: Some thoughts and examples of rural landscape (5th-9th centuries)*

by Karen Álvaro Rueda, Esther Travé Allepuz

The historical and archaeological approach to peopling processes, landscape articulation and social organization during the Early Middle Ages is a complex issue that requires an integrated management of written and material sources. Under Frankish rule, Catalonia was a border area developing its own inner strategies of settlement based upon agrarian expansion. Habitat structures and habitat nuclei show an evolution in parallel to the formation of Counties. Archaeological record of late *villae*, early medieval settlements presenting diverse features, and agrarian landscapes with silos are some examples which illustrate the impact of peasant agency on the landscape during this period. Examining material culture and the evolution of pottery in this area during the early medieval and medieval periods is also a valuable tool to understand the local and regional networks of peasant communities. This paper aims at offering an updated state of the art, together with some reflections about the methodological strategies used in order to explore the role of peasantry during this period in the Catalan area.

Early Middle Age, Catalonia, Peasantry, Rural Settlement, Agrarian Landscape.

1. Introduction

Early medieval Catalonia is a genuine area of study with particular geographic features that have played a role in the historical development of the

* This study is part of the current research tasks carried out by the Medieval and Postmedieval Archaeology Research Group GRAMP-UB (2021-SGR-00236) at the University of Barcelona, to which the authors belong, and it is included in our Landscape Analysis research line.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Karen Álvaro Rueda, Esther Travé Allepuz, *Peasant agency and peopling processes in Early Medieval Catalonia: Some thoughts and examples of rural landscape (5th-9th centuries)*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0562-7.10, in Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (edited by), *Local Societies and Peasantry Agencies in Medieval Iberia*, pp. 233-263, 2024, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0562-7, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0562-7

region. Since it is a traditional crossroads between Europe and the Iberian Peninsula through the Pyrenees, its variable orography, with both mountain and coastal landscapes in a relatively narrow area, might have not been deterministic, but it has certainly conditioned the interaction of the human communities inhabiting the region. People in Catalonia have exploited the landscape adapting the environment to their needs and transforming it in accordance with novel requirements and expectations. During the Roman period the coastal region was – and still is to some extent – a main route between Hispania and Gaul, whereas the Pyrenees became a place of shelter for some social groups.

Muslim and Frankish presence involved the arrival of new social, economic and cultural elements that turned the area into a mosaic of different people, open to change and mixing communities that – due to landscape heterogeneity – developed different forms of occupation and settlement in the coastal area, central Catalonia or the Pyrenean region respectively. Hence, the Catalan landscape shows an idiosyncratic evolution depending on a wide variety of factors, especially during the Late Antiquity, including highly Romanised areas, usually under the Frankish domain in the subsequent decades, and other more peripheral landscapes as well. This broad panorama involves a diversity of peasant settlements, with specific features and different occupation strategies.

In this chapter, we aim at introducing the population and social organization processes in the Early Middle Ages in Catalonia, after the fall of the Roman Empire and until the formation of the Catalan Counties, in accordance with archaeological studies. Our goal is to offer an overview of peasant strategies in the formation of Medieval Catalonia within a transition period, bearing in mind the complexities and diversity of rural settlements. Certainly, the evidence of rural settlement and the global interpretation of peasant agency in the period comprised between the 5th and the 8th centuries AD still lacks a global analysis focusing on the interpretation of social structures and landscape articulation according to the material record. Despite this, some settlements have been excavated as part of rescue archaeology and funded research projects. Our contribution will explore the general background of the archaeology of rural settlement in Catalonia, and its main features and transformations occurred in the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, until the 8th and 9th centuries AD. This period proves to be a turning point in the political and social articulation of the Catalan territory, once Catalonia was under Frankish domain.

2. The archaeological background: state-of-the-art and methodological concerns

A broad overview of the archaeological fieldwork carried out in the latest decades in Catalan rural areas is still under way, with partial and discontinu-

ous descriptive attempts. Current knowledge about the peasant and farming settlements scattered throughout the region is still limited. The archaeological approach to peasant villages in other areas in the Iberian Peninsula has outlined the importance of an extensive approach to these kinds of settlements in order to build a complete and exhaustive record of the stratigraphic complexity resulting from successive alterations, demolitions, cleaning and reuse of ancient elements in order to build newer structures.¹

There are a few examples of extensive and intensive excavations in Catalonia, including those in the earliest periods of medieval archaeology, such as El Bovalar and Puig Rom, which pioneered in the methodological approach to Visigoth settlements. This earlier work is partially known and has been object of further and renewed research in the last few years as part of more consolidated research projects.² There is an assemblage of medieval excavations in different areas included within long-lasting research projects,³ such as the sites of L'Esquerda, Olèrdola, Santa Creu de Llacunes, Sidillà or Santa Margarida, most of them still under study.

The number of settlements properly integrated within a research plan focusing in peasant agency is scarce, and the global view on peasant settlements in Catalonia between the Late Antiquity and the medieval era is sometimes uneven and confusing. In other regions, in Spain and abroad, scholars have developed a theoretical and methodological approach, the so-called *Archaeology of Villages*, addressing the topic from new research perspectives, reinforcing the inner comprehension of the archaeological record in order to build the historical discourse, and avoiding preconceived models and sweeping statements. The analysis of this period in Catalonia has frequently focused on written evidence, possibly because of the abundance of this kind of data. The approach to the early medieval archaeological record of villages allows for an updated interpretation of rural communities, and for a critical reading of documents in search of integration between written and material evidence.⁴

This review of peasant agency and the identification of its imprints onto the Catalan agrarian landscape presents a more advanced state of the art for the Muslim regions around the sites in Balaguer, Lleida or Tortosa,⁵ and for the Barcelonense County in a slightly later period.⁶ The Visigoth and Frankish occupations in the cities of Barcelona and Girona respectively have also been studied, but little is known about rural settlements after the disappearance of roman *villae*. It should be taken into account that most of the fieldwork carried out in the last decades in rural settlements in northern and central

¹ Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, "Arqueología de los paisajes rurales," 85.

² Subias, et al., "El castrum visigòtic de Puig Rom."

³ Ollich, "Arqueologia i patrimoni a Osona" and Travé, et al., "De l'església paleocristiana a la sagrera medieval."

⁴ Azkarate and Quirós Castillo, "Arquitectura doméstica altomedieval," 18.

⁵ Alonso, et al., "Novelties and legacies" and Puy, et al. "The evolution of Mediterranean wetlands."

⁶ Mauri, *La configuració del paisatge medieval*.

Catalonia have been part of rescue excavation. Such work is often disconnected from academic research spheres, and developed in a rush, under the time pressures imposed by the agenda of infrastructure building. The methodological requirements of extensive excavation and the detailed record required by the archaeological record are occasionally jeopardized by tight budgets and deadlines and, despite the quality of some archaeological reports, the general perception is that the picture of rural settlement arising from these data is partial and fragmentary, and mostly concentrated in the Barcelonense metropolitan area.

The topic of rural settlement within a global approach does not seem to be in the spotlight of basic research projects, usually focusing on one-single-site studies within a wide diachronic perspective,⁷ with very few exceptions. Extensive archaeological excavations in Catalonia at sites from the 5th to the 8th centuries are scarce. This fact does not allow us to get detailed knowledge about the general structure of rural settlements as a whole, because only some examples are available. Most of the fieldwork in rural sites from the 8th and the 9th centuries AD is part of ongoing projects and complete monographs have not been published yet. In addition, other methodological considerations such as transport routes or toponymy should be included as well as a data sources for rural landscape analysis.⁸

Another challenge to take into account is the development of pottery studies once the main circuits of Roman products disappeared and utilitarian pottery production became the most common artefact spreading in regional distribution areas. The characterization of these products, particularly in the transition period between the 6th and the 9th centuries AD, will enlighten the chronological adscription of some sites and their main occupation phases.⁹ As a matter of fact, a standardization of the ceramic register for early medieval productions and the regular inclusion of archaeometric characterization of the materials in research protocols will enable researchers to obtain a more accurate view of peasant agency and rural settlement. First steps in this direction are being taken,¹⁰ whereas archaeological sciences are contributing to the absolute dating of sites as part of current research.¹¹

Amongst the challenges posed by this topic, there are methodological issues in common with other areas in Spain and Europe. The period between the 5th and 8th centuries AD comprises the dawn of the Roman Empire and its consequences, with uneven effects depending on several factors: the presence of Roman *villae* and their concentration in each area, the occupation of new

⁷ Ollich, "Arqueologia i patrimoni a Osona," 44-5.

⁸ Bolòs, "La formació del hàbitat medieval." Particularly for the northern area of Catalonia, the collection by Bolòs and Hurtado "Atles de la Catalunya Carolíngia" are reference volumes with regard to this topic.

⁹ Riutort, et al., "Archaeometric characterisation" and Travé, et al., "Sampling strategies."

¹⁰ Riutort, et al., "Cooking and common wares."

¹¹ Molist, et al., "Olèrdola (Baix Penedès)," 175.

hillforts, and the appearance of new peasant communities within a framework of semi-autonomous organization.¹² Yet, recent studies have focussed on the role that strongholds had with regard to the territorial control, particularly in the development of borders between Muslim and Christian areas of influence,¹³ and the precedents of the castral network,¹⁴ notwithstanding the fact that –in terms of lords’ domain – it does not seem well-formed until later.

Hence, the interpretative attempt to explain peasant agency in Catalonia must take into account these factors together with the research specificities of our area of study. These are the singularities of the territory, with significant orographic differences between areas; the variable and heterogeneous degree of completeness and quality of the archaeological record; and the need to review earlier research, carried out in the sixties and seventies, under new parameters and methods.¹⁵ Bearing this in mind, in the following sections we will present a summary view of our reflection on the transformation of peasant settlements in medieval Catalonia, together with some examples of currently known settlements.

3. *Peasantry in the Late Antiquity*

3.1. *The end of Roman villae*

The area delimited by the northern shore of rivers Llobregat and Cardener until the eastern slope of the Pyrenees, including part of the province of Barcelona and the entire province of Girona, shows a structure of rural settlement organized as a network of sites appearing at the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century AD. They were progressively scattered throughout the territory and consolidated throughout the 7th century AD until the implantation of Frankish rule in the 8th century AD. Then, the territory was reorganized under a new political framework, and most of the ancient settlements were progressively abandoned or integrated in the Carolingian landscape structure.

Around the beginning of the 5th century, new forms of settlement gradually replaced the Roman *villae*. From this moment on, a new rural landscape began to form and mostly carried on with the productive and economic activities inherited from Roman times. As soon as the ancient Roman structures collapsed, a more modest production led towards an agricultural economy of local and autarkic character. Then, these rural *villae* continued in use, but as

¹² Tejerizo, “The end of the world as we know it,” 383.

¹³ Pratdesaba, “Les fortificacions osonenques del període medieval.”

¹⁴ Caixal and Fierro, “El Castell d’Eramprunyà,” 504-5.

¹⁵ Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, “Un ensayo de interpretación.”

farms for agricultural and herding purposes where various productive and artisanal activities took place.¹⁶

Some of the general transformations in the Mediterranean area are visible in the Catalan landscape as well. The end of Antiquity implied far-reaching transformations that affected the internal organization of the territory, both in rural and urban areas, especially for some central and more interconnected areas of the Roman Empire. The political substitution in Catalonia of Tarraco with the modest Barcino as capital of the Frankish counties must be considered along with the gradual weakening in the collective mindset of the idea of the classical city, traditionally perceived as a focus of civilization opposed to the unsophisticated countryside. The role of the countryside, where Roman elites concentrated their rural extensive properties in the Late Roman Empire, changed when these elites disappeared –or rather transformed their forms of domain into more local and fragmented leaderships– giving rise to new ways of organization, and a brand new reality of evolution and endurance.

Some of these settlements reduced their economic activity, in parallel to the transformation of habitat structures, which underwent readjustments in the function and use of some of their buildings. This restructuring took place particularly in those of smaller dimensions, in order to expand the production or storage spaces. Elements such as deposits, *dolia*, or presses, are reported in the archaeological record in rooms decorated with mosaics or in thermal complexes, such as Vilauba,¹⁷ Els Munts,¹⁸ Torre Llauder,¹⁹ or Can Sans²⁰ (Fig. 10.1). This productive adaptation was characteristic of the end of the 4th and 5th centuries – occasionally lasting until the 6th century AD – when most of the structures were reused for these new productive purposes.

The *villa* of Vilauba (Camós, Girona) is an interesting example of reuse and rebuilding of such facilities. It was transformed at the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century AD to become a productive centre of wine and oil enduring until the 7th century. The ceramic record at the *villa* of Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona) and its necropolis point towards the continuity of this *villa* (Fig. 10.2a) until a similar date. A considerable part of the residential area was adapted for productive activities at this site as well. Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) also remained active during the 5th and 6th centuries after the reuse of some residential structures for productive tasks, as evidenced by the presence of some storage rooms and deposits.²¹ As shown by the archaeological evidence, a considerable part of the known Roman sites did not endure as fully residential settlements, but survived in the Post-Ro-

¹⁶ Roig, “Vilatges i assentaments pagesos,” 228-30.

¹⁷ Castanyer and Tremoleda, *La vil·la romana de Vilauba*.

¹⁸ Tarrats, et al., “Noves intervencions.”

¹⁹ Puerta and García, “La vil·la romana de Torrellauder.”

²⁰ Peña, “Producción de vino y aceite,” 106; Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,”

²⁷.

²¹ Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 91.

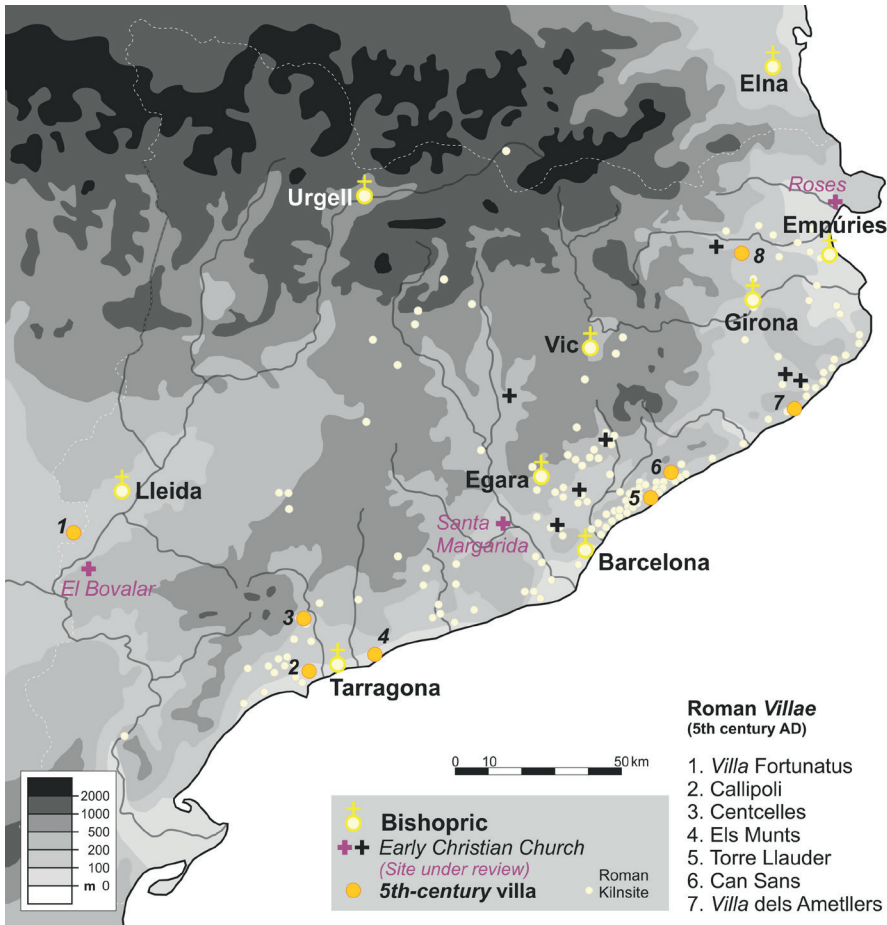


Figure 1. Location map of 5th century AD villae enduring in Late Antiquity.

man period after being adapted in appearance and inner distribution to the new farming and production practices that were at the core of peasant life.

This dynamic was common but not general to all villae. A period of new liveliness began for some of them, as documented by complex and sumptuous decoration in their domestic architecture. Particularly in the western part of the Empire, residential complexes were rebuilt in a less classical style. That was the case of villa of Centcelles (Constantí, Tarragona)²² or in the villa of Els Ametllers (Tossa de Mar, Girona).²³ Probably this phenomenon occurred in some of these villages as a consequence of a process of concentration of

²² Remolà, “La vil·la romana de Centcelles.”

²³ Palahí and Nolla, “Felix Turissa.”

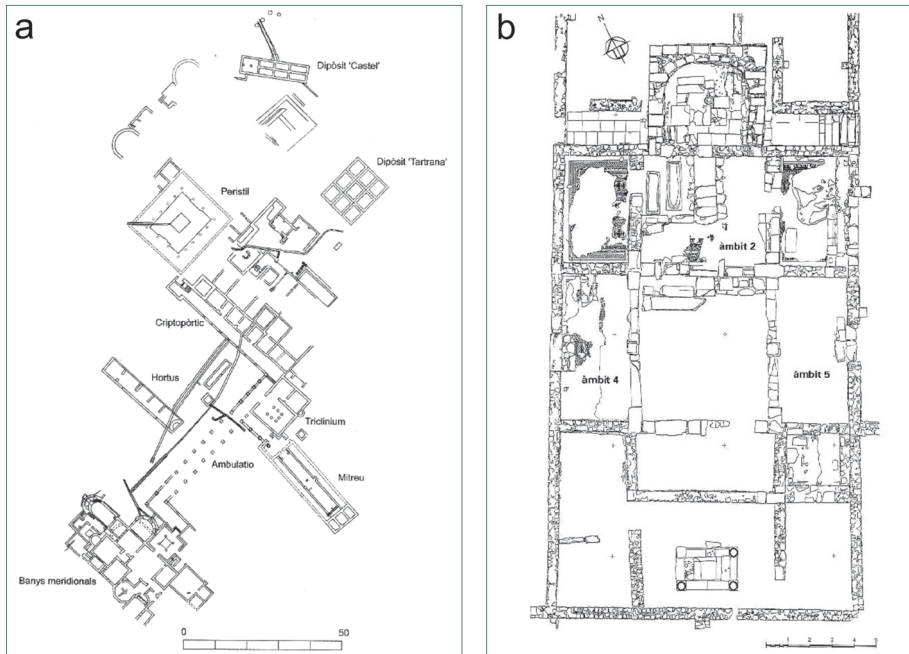


Figure 2. Examples of Roman *villae* enduring in Late Antiquity. Layouts of Els Munts in the Late Roman period in Tarrats and Remolà, “La vil·la romana dels Munts,” 107 (a), and Villa Fortunatus by F. Tuset in Palol and Pladevall, “Del Romà al Romànic,” 193 (b).

rural property in some specific areas, which led to the memorialization of some settlements, the reuse of some others, or the final abandonment of other sites.²⁴ The presence of Late Roman Fine Wares in this kind of *villae* enduring as residential complexes suggests that they were still connected to some nodal centres of trade, receiving and distributing fine products for ceramic consumption.²⁵

Perhaps some of these *villae* remained as the property of richer echelons of society and their owners were wealthy enough to afford these luxury products, despite the economic changes observed within these settlements. However, we might wonder if economic activity should be always related to these wealthy dominant groups. It might well be otherwise, as new forms of property and – probably peasantry-mediated – land exploitation might have already arisen.²⁶ Nevertheless, according to the archaeological evidence as it stands today, it is difficult to determine the extent of continuity of the residential use of these *villae* exactly, since a considerable part of their surface

²⁴ Chavarría, *El final de las villae*, 112–6.

²⁵ Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,” 29.

²⁶ Schneider, “Structures du peuplement,” 21.

and structures underwent major modifications towards their conversion into production areas. An exception would be the *villa* of Callipoli (Vila-Seca, Tarragona) where a large part of its residential structures was preserved until the 6th century AD, together with its thermal complex.²⁷

The analysis of rural settlement in the inlands of Catalonia and the river Ebro basin is far more complicated. Pottery remains are scarce and it is difficult to know the evolution of settlements beyond the 5th century AD. The materials found in the few sites which have been studied prove the existence of residual occupation. The presence of fireplaces, sometimes directly onto the mosaics, and the dismantlement of a considerable part of the ancient structures advocate for an early abandonment of these *villae*. This was the case of the *villa* Fortunatus, in Fraga (Aragon) (Fig. 10.2b), which had been abandoned by this time. The buildings were demolished, a church was built, and the thermal complex was partially reused as a habitat area, where some fireplaces were found. The building of worshipping structures –not always chronologically related to the rural settlement– is a common feature of some sites as well, such as the church of Sidillà built upon an earlier mausoleum.²⁸ This is another interpretative problem, because the relationship between the church and the surrounding cemetery, if any, and the habitat structures is not always self-evident. Frequently, the world of the living and the world of the dead do not show a clear confluence in the archaeological record, and it is difficult to determine if the settlement was inhabited at the time the church was built.²⁹ Further research is needed in order to clarify these issues.

3.2. *New forms of settlement*

According to the transformation of Roman structures after the collapse of the Empire, the documented coastal settlements had a longer duration and received importation products until the mid-6th century AD, while the endurance of economic or political elites is difficult to see in the inlands of Catalonia. Despite the gradual disappearance of imported pottery, it is adventurous to determine when those settlements were abandoned by their owners and reoccupied under new forms of territorial control. Furthermore, it is basic to consider the fact that *villae* were only a small part of the archaeological elements attested in the rural landscape. From the 5th century AD onwards, new evidence of settlement, such as newborn villages and hillforts, frequently re-occupying ancient pre-Roman sites, were increasingly configuring the picture of Late Antique settlements.

²⁷ Macías, “La vil·la romana de Cal·lípolis,” 215.

²⁸ Ripoll, et al., “Sidillà”, 47.

²⁹ Brogiolo and Chavarría, “Chiese e insediamenti” and Ripoll and Molist, “Cura mortuorum.”

The proliferation of rural settlements at this time, densely concentrated in some areas, points towards a clear transformation of the rural landscape, which was occupied by a network of villages and peasant habitat nuclei showing a great diversity of forms throughout the region. An explicit definition for these villages, their social classification and property regimes is still to be determined. The challenge of establishing territorial models cannot be addressed in the absence of complete corpora of datasets considering a heterogeneous and diverse region. Instead, the models should arise from significant advances in regional and microregional realities, in order to establish precise comparisons between them in the future.³⁰ The analysis should be performed in transitional terms, paying attention to the eldest forms of occupation and their evolution, and identifying the regional particularities that transformed and enriched the ancient forms of Roman settlement.³¹

The features of these new forms of settlement reveal the existence of habitat and production structures. Their interpretation in archaeological terms is complex, not only in Catalonia but in the Iberian Peninsula, Western Europe and beyond, for several reasons. Amongst these, the use of perishable materials, especially clay and wood for their construction,³² led to the total disappearance of these buildings some decades after their abandonment. The relationship between the building techniques, the functionality of different areas within a site, and the socioeconomic dynamics of the moment do not contribute to clarify the explanation of these sites.

The change occurred in building techniques and traditions, visible from the 5th century AD onwards, relates to the new forms of landscape occupation, territory management and exploitation and the control of settlement and production systems. Traditional arguments linking this process to the arrival of Barbarian migrants *exclusively* is no longer accepted.³³ Despite this, this narrow interpretation should not be a reason to avoid the search for ethnicity or identity in order to identify Visigoth or Frank population in Catalanian settlements, for instance.³⁴ However, generalizations about the presence of newcomers and the concomitant transformation of the space should be avoided.

Actually, archaeological literature published in the last two decades offers a wide range of examples about wooden and perishable buildings not directly related to a specific social, economic or political group. Likewise, new building techniques and materials, together with storage and production structures, were found in the archaeological contexts of Roman *villae* after the 5th century AD, as discussed in the previous section, which are not related to

³⁰ Wickham, "Sobre la mutación socioeconómica," 19; Martín Viso, "Tumbas y sociedades locales," 25-30.

³¹ Gutiérrez, "Sobre los orígenes," 177.

³² Hamerow, *Rural settlements*; Peytremann, "The archaeology of early medieval rural settlements."

³³ Quirós Castillo, "La arquitectura doméstica," 77; Quirós Castillo, and Vigil-Escalera, "Dove sono i visigoti?"

³⁴ Ferrando-Bernal, et al., "Mapping co-ancestry connections."

Barbarian presence. The change in the building features of these sites have occasionally been interpreted as evidence for the production being controlled by peasant agency, to some extent autonomous from the power system.³⁵

The heterogeneity of archaeological evidence for rural settlement –despite the rustic appearance of most constructions– is related to the change in uses and the emergence of new needs and purposes for the communities that occupied these areas.³⁶ A wide variety of hut-like or sunken featured habitat buildings, storage structures like silos or granaries, or artisanal and productive areas, together with a necropolis or a church, follow a certain planning or pattern for each settlement, which points towards a deliberate organization of the space at the site.

The best-known sites in Catalonia occupy one to two hectares at most, with a considerable number of structures of different size and four or five families in the larger ones.³⁷ These sites have a basic organizational structure, with properly-defined functional areas –perhaps for communitarian exploitation– linked to the productive purpose of the settlement. The habitat structures are at the core of the site, with sunken featured buildings of different sizes. They have occasionally been interpreted as wooden huts, but their interpretation is still being debated and questioned in the contexts of early medieval Catalonia and beyond. This is due to the fact that the term *hut* itself, its meaning, the functionality attributed to the structure and its formal characterization are not clear at all.³⁸

As a general statement, we can identify these structures from a pit or sunken surface, cut into the bedrock or natural soil. Their surface is roughly regularized, and their extension is wider than its depth, usually with a circular, oval, or quadrangular shape. The walls and roofs would have been built with wood, unfired clay or vegetal matter forming an assemblage of perishable materials. To that extent, the nature of these structures in the Catalonian sites is not significantly different from other examples.³⁹ Having been earlier identified in French and British archaeological contexts, there is a vast literature about their features and general distribution.⁴⁰ Dry stone buildings or cob structures were frequent particularly in mountain areas, covered with some type of vegetal roof.

In addition to the habitat spaces, these sites originated well-delimited production areas for specialized economic activities. The production of wine and oil is frequently attested by the presence of deposits, presses, tanks, and cellars, and some of these settlements include bread-baking ovens in the more

³⁵ Tejerizo, “The end of the world as we know it,” 390; Quirós Castillo, “Aristocracias, poderes y desigualdad,” 148.

³⁶ Tejerizo, 387.

³⁷ Roig, “Asentamientos rurales,” 212.

³⁸ Azkarate and Quirós Castillo, “Arquitectura doméstica altomedieval,” 28.

³⁹ Tejerizo, “Estructuras de fondo rehundido,” 217; Alvaro, Travé, and López, “Construcciones altomedievales,” 6.

⁴⁰ Gardiner, “An Early Medieval tradition,” and literature therein.

complex structures. Nevertheless, the most frequent practice is the growth of agricultural products for the consumption and subsistence of the inhabitants of the settlement, which requires adequate storage areas. These spaces featured the presence of large numbers of silos, scattered throughout the site, usually not following any regular pattern and concomitant with less frequent holes to fit large containers and jars.⁴¹ The presence of burial areas, not always associated to a church or any form of worshipping structure, is also common at these sites, with some exceptions such as the site of Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) or Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona), with Early Christian basilicas being at the core of cemeteries on a slightly later chronology.

The chronology of these settlements is a controversial aspect to deal with, especially because of the difficulties arising from their interpretation, stratigraphic dating and the analysis of their material vestiges. Despite this, it is possible to identify successive phases or generational cycles among the entire assemblages or rural settlements. Whereas the origin of these sites is at the end of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century AD, a second generation of sites with similar features and later chronology (from the second half of the 6th century to the end of the 7th century AD) appears in the Catalan landscape. Some of them appear at this later moment, and others transform the previous sites within a long-lasting history of change and continuity.

4. *Permanence and change in early medieval rural settlements*

The structure and organization of rural settlements at the end of Antiquity evolved unevenly but were consolidated between the 6th and 8th centuries. The previous organization system of residential *villae* transformed into agrarian and productive complexes evolved towards the scenario of a new peasant society that developed new forms of settlement. The archaeological evidence of these sites was heterogeneous, and the organizational system around residential villages was soon replaced with new peasant establishments introducing different forms of settlement. The archaeological record for this period was varied and diverse. The classification of sites follows a similar structure to that shown in the previous centuries: those sites born from the transformation of an earlier roman *villa* were then consolidated as productive exploitations, once the productive and the residential areas were no longer related. New settlements were born *ex novo* in the 7th century, most of them including wider necropolises.

At the beginning of the early medieval period, the transformation of those ancient *villae* considerably intensified, as they were converted into productive exploitations in order to increase their production. That was the case of the *villa* Can Sent-Romà (Tiana, Barcelona), where the productive structures

⁴¹ Roig, "Formas de poblamiento rural," 125.

of a *villa* were still in use in the 6th century AD, and suffered an increase in production during this period. In addition, the structures and internal distribution of the abovementioned Vilauba were entirely transformed between the 6th and 7th centuries AD.⁴² This phenomenon of reoccupation and increase in production in those sites with precedents in the Roman *villae* was related to the consolidation of a social structure based on peasantry. Organized and more mature peasant communities were now living in villages or farms, together with other settlements located next to a Roman site but built in a nearby area, without occupying or modifying the precedent Roman buildings. The concomitance of these two phenomena –the increase in production in ancient *villae* and the appearance of new peasant settlements– was probably a result of the very same dynamic of landscape occupation and social organization, in a new context where the Roman political structures were almost extinct, and the new early medieval peasantry was a fact.

4.1. *The increase in production: evidence and examples*

One of the most evident facts to prove the break between the classic Roman *villa* model and the new forms of peasant settlement in the Early Middle Age is the reuse of structures for productive and funerary purposes at some sites, usually after a shorter or longer period of abandonment. This process affects a significant number of rural establishments –particularly medium and small in size– that were restructured with the aim of expanding the production areas rather than the habitat structures, which usually disappeared.⁴³ A considerable number of rural settlements with small habitat areas intensely developed productive activities from this period onwards. The *villae* of Vilauba (Camòs), Els Ametllers (Tossa de Mar), Can Sans (Sant Andreu de Llavanes), Pacs (Pacs del Penedés), Vinya del Crispí (Guissona), Sant Amanç (Rajadell), L’Espelt (Òdena), Can Terrés (La Garriga), L’Aiguacuit (Terrassa), Torre Llauder (Mataró), among others, are good examples of this transformation (Fig. 10.3).

A new layout was identified at these sites, where sunken featured buildings had to be interpreted in the archaeological record from a series of post-holes and carvings designing a new distribution of structures, only visible and properly identifiable by means of an extensive excavation. The remains of ancient buildings inherited from the Roman period, with lime mortar partially reused in the earliest transformation of these sites, were finally substituted by simpler structures with an optional stone-made underpinning structure and wooden walls and covers. The presence of productive facilities among these structures changed the physiognomy of the sites. Settlements from this

⁴² Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 88.

⁴³ Chavarría, “Reflexiones sobre el final de las villas,” 27.

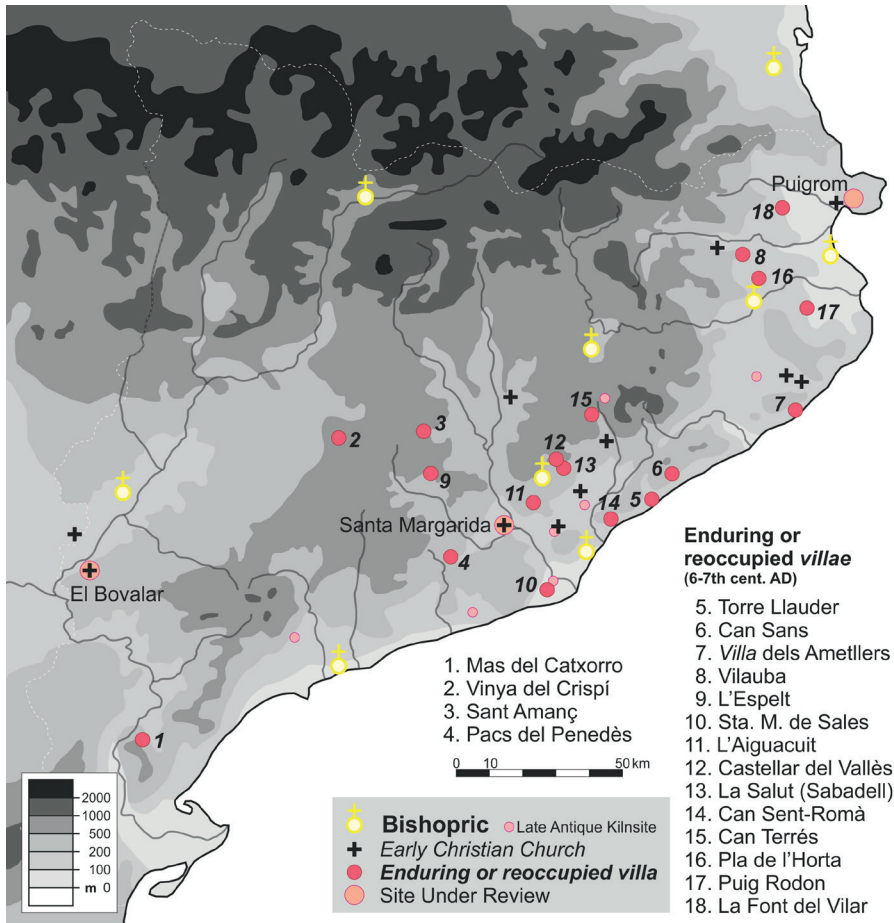


Figure 3. Settlement pattern during the 6th and 7th centuries AD, when some abandoned *villae* were reoccupied. The presence of Early Christian churches scattered throughout the landscape proved the increasing role of the Church.

period might recall those of the Pre-roman landscape; and the archaeological approach requires similar methods.

Some sites developed an increasing activity. The production of wine became an intensive and specialized industry at the sites of La Font del Vilar (Avinyonet de Puigventós), Can Sans (Sant Andreu de Llevaneres), Can Sent-Romà (Tiana), Santa Maria de Sales (Viladecans), La Salut (Sabadell), Mas del Catxorro (Benifallet), among others. The site of Vilauba (Camós, Girona) is, again, an example of endurance and transformation of the earlier structures to intensify the production of wine and oil. Two ovens were built in the village of Puig Rodon (Corçà, Girona) in the same period; and some deposits were installed in Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona), together with a cellar with *dolia* for wine storage.

4.2. *Necropolises and new settlements: towards new ways of life and death*

The funerary evidence is another element to consider in the analysis of rural settlement, and it is not exempt of knowledge gaps and methodological limits. The references to necropolises associated to early medieval villages are not very precise, and considerations regarding their connection with habitat structures are poor. Funerary elements have rarely been the object of an extensive excavation, and archaeological works have traditionally addressed typological aspects in search of a precise chronology, rather than the general layout of cemeteries and their role within the village. There are some examples of *villae* with an associated necropolis such as Pla de l'Horta (Sarrià de Ter, Girona), Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) or Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona).

Pla de l'Horta had several burial phases, one of them attributed to the Visigoths according to the burial goods found in some of the tombs. In this phase, burials combined different typologies (single pits or pits with stone slabs, among others) but they were not related to any particular inhabited area.⁴⁴ Funerary complexes in Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) and Els Munts (Altafulla, Tarragona) were placed 400 metres and 100 metres away from the habitat buildings respectively. The necropolis of Els Munts occupied an area that had previously been a storage space with silos that were abandoned in the second half of the 3rd century AD. This necropolis included 170 graves cut into the rock or soil and covered with slabs, all of them arranged in a radial distribution. At this site, children were usually buried inside *tegulae* and *amphorae*. Different types of burial coexisted in the period between the 5th and 8th centuries, which makes the chronological attribution of types to specific phases very adventurous. Certainly, the presence of one type of burial or another might have been the result of socio-economic criteria rather than the chronological evolution of burial structures.

Cemeteries are present in those settlements without Roman precedents. The new settlements born in this period are frequently located next to Roman areas which had been abandoned. New settlers did not reoccupy any Roman structure, but they could occasionally preserve and adapt some of the production areas. The plunder of Roman building materials from abandoned sites –when available– and its use for building these new settlements was a frequent practice. The best-known example of this phenomenon in Catalonia is the site of Plaça Major de Castellar del Vallès (Castellar del Vallès, Barcelona) (Fig. 10.4a). The site excavated in this town is dated between the 6th and the 8th centuries. There were remains of a small village built *ex novo* with sunken featured domestic structures once there was no further activity in the Roman *villa* close to the site. The main elements at this site were a wine production area with presses, an annexe with bread-baking ovens, a wide storage

⁴⁴ Llinàs, et al., “Pla de l'Horta.”

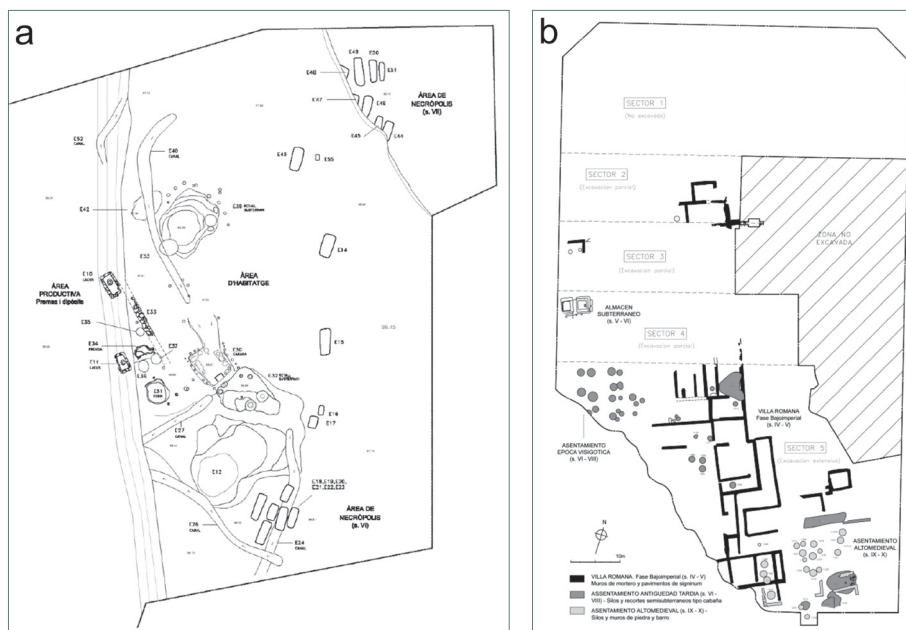


Figure 4. Examples of reoccupied *villae* in the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Layouts of the site in Plaça Major de Castellar del Vallès after Roig, “Vilatges i assentaments pagesos,” 231 (a); and L’Aiguacuit in Roig and Coll, “Los palatia altomedievales del Vallès,” 241 (b).

area with plenty of silos corresponding to different phases, and a funerary area with twenty graves, arranged in a well-delimited space.⁴⁵ A similar case was found in L’Aiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) (Fig. 10.4b), where the site was reoccupied in the 6th and the 7th centuries AD and the materials from the Visigoth phase resemble those from Merovingian and Germanic necropolises.⁴⁶ A particular topic to be explored with regard to funerary practices is the presence of deviant burials of people and animals thrown in silos, which are not an isolated phenomenon. They usually are interpreted as anomalous practices related to excluded or marginalised groups.⁴⁷ These practices in early medieval Catalonia might point towards the endurance of slavery, according to some interpretations.⁴⁸

In this section we discussed the elements of permanence and change visible in this period. Enduring *villae* from the Roman period were transformed into production complexes, those which were abandoned were occasionally reoccupied with the same purpose, and other villages without earlier precedents appear at this moment. The fact is that the settlement forms inherited

⁴⁵ Roig, “Asentamientos rurales.”

⁴⁶ Roig, “Formas de poblamiento rural,” 128.

⁴⁷ Holloway, “Charcoal Burial: A Minority Burial Rite in Early Medieval Europe,” 131.

⁴⁸ Ripoll and Molist, “Cura mortuorum,” 25.

from the Roman Empire seemed to disappear completely in the 8th century when new forms of peasantry existed in most parts of the Western Mediterranean.⁴⁹ Consequently, the progressive abandonment and disarticulation of rural settlements after the end of the Roman Empire, and the beginning of new forms of peasant agency and people-landscape entanglement, arising from new social organization and needs, should be understood as coexisting processes without a clear rupture between them.

4.3. The transformation of the ceramic record: early medieval greyware production

The change in ceramic artefacts in these later contexts is also remarkable. The latest remains of Roman pottery had almost disappeared, and a lack of materials is clearly ascribed to a well-determined timespan. The material record at these sites no longer corresponds to the well-known imported pottery from the previous period, which was mostly substituted by common and cooking coarse wares usually fired under reducing atmosphere. Their morphology adopted simpler and more functional shapes which remained unchanged for long periods. This new ceramic panorama demands new methodological approaches in order to develop systematic programs of archaeometric characterization, particularly for pottery from those sites with better stratigraphic records and contextual ascription.

The increasing absence of amphorae and other standardized containers for food transport across the Western Mediterranean led to the spread of more local and regional productions. The earliest excavation of some of these sites, during the early 1980s and before, evidenced the unspecified character of early medieval greywares at that time within a scientific context in which the consolidation of medieval archaeology as a discipline was still under way. The ceramic material recovered from excavations by P. de Palol at the site of El Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) was a well-studied dataset that, unfortunately, was never published.

However, the study of the ceramic series dating from the Late Roman period to the Middle Age were very complex. More recent excavation on these sites has provided new information about this pottery, updating previous studies. The analytical characterization of pottery from La Bastida site (Rubí, Barcelona) revealed the existence of eighteen different fabrics of local or regional origin.⁵⁰ The abovementioned case of LAiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) revealed the existence of common wares and cooking greyware coexisting with some imported fabrics and oxidizing pottery from the Visigoth period.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 383-8.

⁵⁰ Gurt and Navarro, "Les transformacions en els assentaments," 89.

⁵¹ Roig, "Formas de poblamiento rural."

5. *New forms of peasant agency: Hillforts and sites on the plains*

During the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century AD, an important development of villages and fortified settlements in medium-high places took place. These new 8th-century sites were devoted to farming and herding activities in some areas that had been considered barren or peripheral in earlier periods (fig. 10.5). New habitat structures, usually with a sunken featured base and delimited with stone plinths or short walls supporting adobe or wooden walls and perishable covers, occupied a heterogeneous assemblage of natural environments and started a long-lasting occupation that will be at the basis of landscape articulation from the 9th century onwards. Simultaneously, other settlements appeared *ex novo* on the plains.

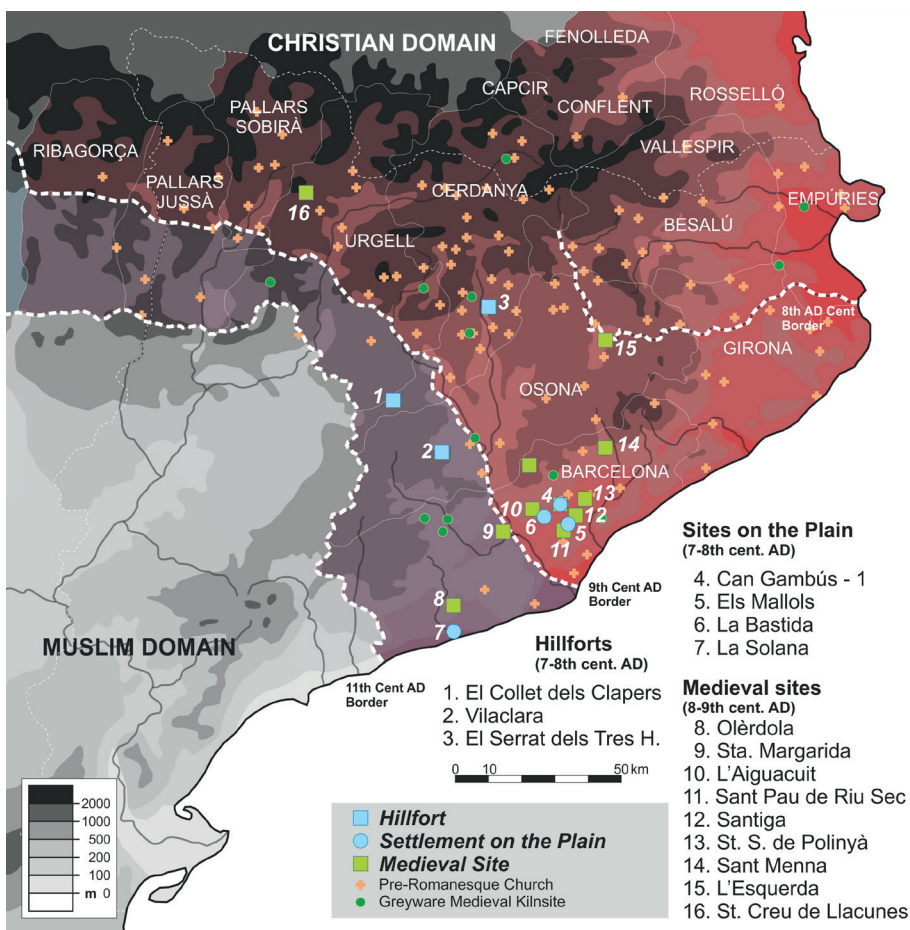


Figure 5. Catalonia in the 8th and 9th Centuries AD, with hillforts and settlements created *ex novo* within the increasing influence of Frankish domain. Pre-romanese temples in this period are indicated after Roig Buxó, "Asientamentos rurales," 240.

These sites prove the existence of an economic change and a new phase in peasant agency, when new farming strategies defined agrarian exploitations with clearly planned inner structures and layout. In this section we will discuss some examples of both type of settlements consolidated during the 8th century AD.

Recent work in the regions of Bages, Solsonès, Berguedà and Andorra have provided information about an assemblage of *ex novo* sites located between 400 and 800 metres of altitude. These sites occupied some extensions of irregular terrain in rocky or mountain environments which were not suitable for cereal growth and, consequently, had not been exploited in the Roman period. This new research outcome offers a good and contrasted reference for comparison in some other sites excavated in the earliest years of medieval archaeology that should be reviewed now, in a renewed epistemological context. These sites are formed by different units of disperse settlement, assembling a few small family households depending on the area. Domestic structures were made with dry stone walls, occasionally covered with mud at the joints, and wooden roofs. Storage structures at these sites were very rare, which reinforces the interpretation of the secondary role played by agricultural practices in high places. The economic activity widely documented at these sites is a subsistence wine-making industry, attested by the presence of presses and cellars, probably for communitarian use. Combined with herding activities, the exploitation of vineyards was a common practice in the Catalan Pyrenees. Written vestiges provide valuable information about the existence of vineyards for self-consumption in rough and hard-to-reach areas in the County of Pallars.

Some examples of these high or medium-high places were found in the northern part of the province of Barcelona, dating from the 6th to the 8th centuries AD, usually devoted to wine production as their main activity. Ten silos were found at the site of Vilaclara (Castellfollit del Boix, Barcelona). This area presented some structures and deposits of dry stone and perishable building material. An oven and a winemaking press were found at this site,⁵² in which farming seems to have been a secondary activity. The hillfort of Serrat dels Tres Hereus (Casserres, Barcelona), was located on a hill previously occupied by an ancient Iberian town and abandoned during the Roman and post-Roman periods.⁵³ Amongst the various structures identified in this site, no storage elements were recorded, although a complete study of the settlement has not been published yet. A similar case was found in the small village of Collet dels Clapers de Seguers (Pinós, Lleida), with a similar chronology to that of the sites in Barcelona. A small building consisting of four different spaces included a press and did not have any silo.⁵⁴

⁵² Enrich, Enrich and Pedraza, *Vilaclara*.

⁵³ Folch, et al., "L'ocupació de l'alta Edat Mitjana."

⁵⁴ Guàrdia, "El Collet dels Clapers del Seguers."

Archaeological remains of settlements on the plain for this period are unevenly scattered throughout the Catalan territory, and they are mostly concentrated in the Barcelonense metropolitan area, with some areas being more densely populated than others are. Probably this distribution is the result of the current state-of-the-art, which is partial and will be modified as soon as more sites are extensively excavated and published. The sites we already know, usually without defensive walls or protective structures, were dedicated almost exclusively to intensive agricultural tasks. Together with the circular or elliptical sunken featured buildings, present in rural settlements since the 6th century AD, buildings with a rectangular or square base were found at these sites in a more recent period. The largest buildings were frequently divided into several rooms with underpinning stone structures and clay walls. These seemed to be storage buildings including granaries, ovens or silos. The presence of manual rotation mills in some sites proved the processing of wheat for obtaining flour to be one of the usual domestic activities. These sorts of production and storage areas were found in the nearby areas attached to the main buildings as well. Small necropolises, not usually related to a church, were also part of these sites.⁵⁵

The amount and features of storage systems in these settlements on the plain are significant enough to stand for a clear and deliberate agricultural purpose. The storage capacity exceeds the need for self-consumption and points towards the production of surpluses for regional trade, which is attested in the territory of Barcino and the former bishopric of Egara, where a high concentration of settlements was documented.⁵⁶ The specific territory of Vallès forms a corridor between the Coastal and Pre-coastal mountain ranges, where several sites illustrate this specific form of peasant agency. Analytical studies carried out in some of these deposits are still scarce, but the existing analyses reveal the growth of cereals –mainly wheat and barley– and the exploitation of vineyards and olive trees.⁵⁷ The intensification of agriculture and the diversity of products and supplies are also documented in other settlements with similar features found in other areas at the north and centre of the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁸

Can Gambús-1 (Sabadell, Barcelona) and Els Mallols (Cerdanyola del Vallès, Barcelona), with 232 and 139 silos respectively, are eloquent examples of these kinds of sites (fig. 10.6a). The extension of Can Gambús-1 has been completely excavated. The total area occupied by this site is estimated in 2 hectares. The stratigraphic sequence of silos, production structures, a wine-pressing area, and several ovens determines the existence of three different phases of settlement.⁵⁹ A little beyond the village, there was a small

⁵⁵ Roig, “Asentamientos rurales” and Folch, et al., “L’ocupació de l’alta Edat Mitjana.”

⁵⁶ Roig, “Formas de poblamiento rural,” 128.

⁵⁷ Fortó et al., “Los yacimientos del Pla del Serrador,” 267-8.

⁵⁸ Quirós Castillo, “La arquitectura doméstica.”

⁵⁹ Roig, “Asentamientos rurales,” 225-6.

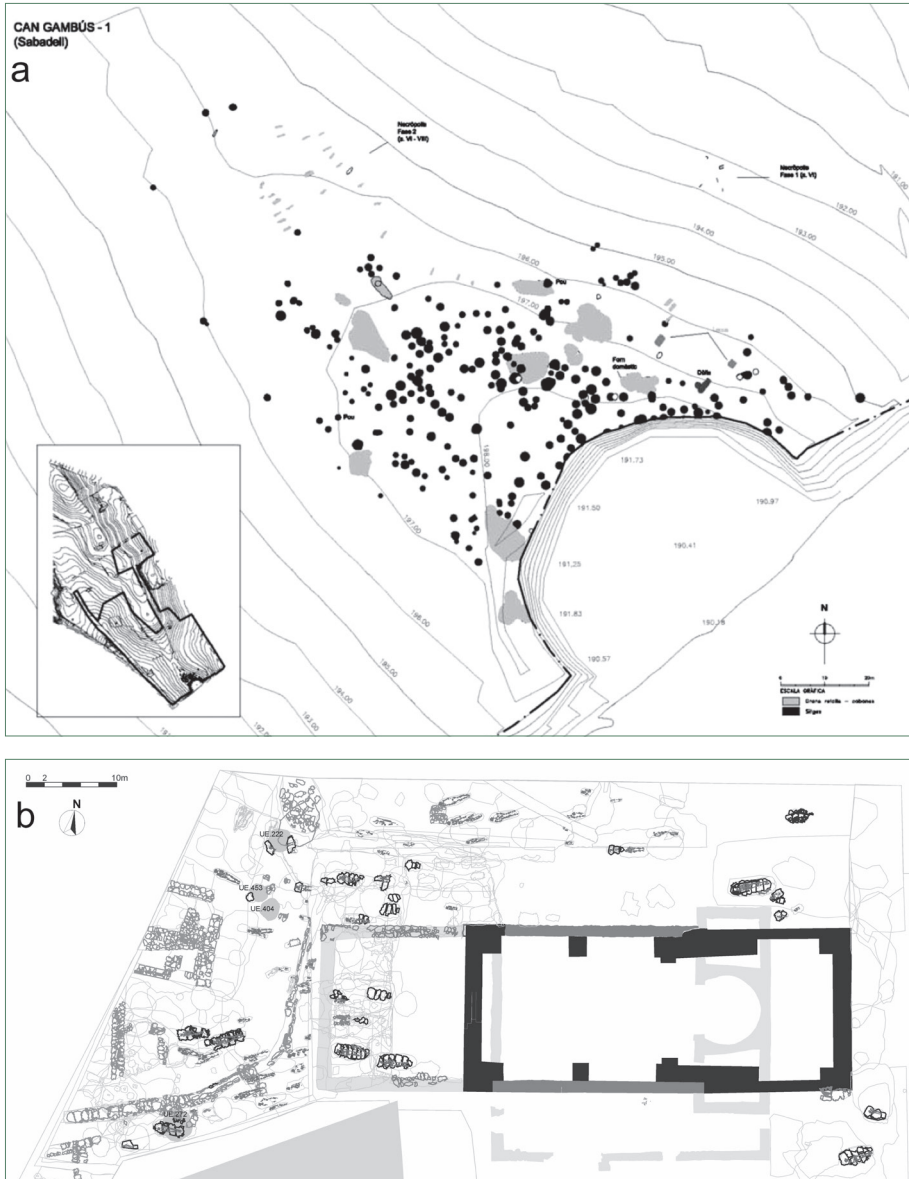


Figure 6. Examples of early medieval settlements with silo fields. Layouts of Can Gambús-1 in Roig, “Vilatges i assentaments pagesos,” 233 (a) and the *sacraia* phase of Santa Margarida, in Travé et al. “De l’església paleocristiana a la sagrera medieval,” 185 (b).

necropolis of 35 graves. The anomalous burial of 15 people without any ritual of funerary tribute and several animals thrown inside silos were found. The abandonment of silos by filling them with pottery, bone remains or garbage in general was a common practice documented in many other contemporary sites with similar features.

Also in the territory of Barcino, Els Mallols⁶⁰ was a similar but smaller settlement. It occupied a bit more than one hectare on the plain as well. The general layout of the site when compared to Can Gambús-1 shows a similar arrangement of sunken featured structures and production or storage areas. A small necropolis is located near the village and anomalous human burials were found inside some silos. The very same pattern is also found in other sites such as La Solana or La Bastida, both in Barcino, until the 8th century AD.

6. *Reinterpreting peasant agency at reference sites*

Among the gaps and uncertainties of the archaeological record at the moment, there are two emblematic settlements which represent the transformation of peasant agency along the early medieval period. The sites of El Bovalar⁶¹ and Puig Rom⁶² have been known for a very long time and have been considered as reference examples in archaeological literature. Ongoing research in both sites might still provide updated information as part of current research projects. Despite of the fact that the information available is partial, both of them have some particularities deserving special attention.

The archaeological complex of El Bovalar (Serós, Lleida) was discovered in the first half of the past century, when a basilica and a small part of the surrounding habitat structures were excavated; it was not until later when archaeological excavation focused on the necropolis and the village. The site, located at the right shore of river Segre, is an interesting example of the period between the 5th and the 8th centuries AD. The church, dating from the 5th century, contains a tripartite apse, and was in use until the abandonment of the settlement. A baptistery and a necropolis were associated to the main building. According to the relation existing between the religious complex and the habitat buildings, the monastic function has been suggested at least in some phases of the site.⁶³ The settlement was inhabited until an unknown moment between 711 and 723 AD, when it was destroyed by a fire as a result of the Muslim invasion. A coin from Visigoth king Achila II determines the chronology for the abandonment of the site.

⁶⁰ Francès, *Els Mallols*.

⁶¹ Palol, *El Bovalar*.

⁶² Palol, *El castrum del Puig*; Subias, et al., "Nuevos datos."

⁶³ Gurt, "Complejos eclesiásticos."

Habitat structures in El Bovalar included three different rooms, one of them containing the fireplace and usually some silos. Walls were built out of clay and stone, as usual, under a wooden roof, since tiles were absent in most sites from this period. Iron and bronze materials, tools, and coins in use at that time were found under a layer of ashes. The archaeological interpretation of a wine-pressing area and two cellars suggests the production of wine for self-consumption at the village, and some working areas for food processing were suggested to be spaces for communitarian use.⁶⁴

The earliest excavation at the village of Puig Rom (Roses, Girona) started in 1917, when J.M. Folch investigated the site. Later on, uninterrupted archaeological research took place in the second half of the past century, when P. de Palol completed a first update and review of the archaeological site.⁶⁵ A few years later, a new collaborative research project performed by the University Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona) and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona started another phase of study in 2010. This later phase of research challenged the earlier interpretations of the site. This village – located on a fortified hill at 230 metres high, on the Bay of Roses – had been considered a defensive settlement but, more recently, an alternative interpretation has been suggested. The fortified character of the site might have been related to the fact that it was private and restricted property, rather than having a defensive role.⁶⁶

Despite the presence of thick walls surrounding the settlement, the archaeological record proves that the inhabitants were peasants. The vast number of farming-tool remains, common cooking wares, imported late amphorae and glass point towards the existence of a peasant community living in this site and exploiting its nearby area. In some areas, rectangular habitat structures are arranged in streets. An occupation period between the 7th and 9th centuries AD is estimated in recent literature,⁶⁷ which is a broader timespan than suggested in the earliest stages of research at the site. Further work will contribute to clarify and adjust the chronological attribution of the habitat structures.

Regardless of the fortified or unfortified character of these sites, their areas of location – on the plain or on medium-high places –, the more or less luxurious features of material culture, and the presence or absence of religious structures, all of them prove the presence of a new peasant population. Apparently, some of these sites might not have had a clear hierarchical structure yet, but their economy and function were clearly different from the settlement in the previous post-Roman period. The leading role of the Church as an institutional agent of reorganization and territorial control was not consolidated yet – as it would be in forthcoming centuries – but its presence and increasing capability of landscape arrangement is shown by the presence of

⁶⁴ Palol, *El Bovalar*.

⁶⁵ Palol, *El castrum del Puig*.

⁶⁶ Subias, et al., “Nuevos datos.”

⁶⁷ Subias, et al., “Nuevos datos” and “El castrum visigòtic de Puig Rom.”

rural churches and necropolises scattered throughout the region. The presence of sites like Sant Menna (Sentmenat, Barcelona), Sant Cugat (Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona), or Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona), among others, indicate that the Christianization of the rural world is a fact, and that the Church would have played a significant role in landscape organization. The archaeological evidence at the site of El Bovalar corroborates the economic role that the church played in early medieval territory.⁶⁸

7. *The 8th century: a crossroads*

From the 8th century AD onwards, the arrival of Muslims and the subsequent expansion of the Frankish Empire gave rise to the Catalan Counties. Since Catalonia was a permanent border at this moment, the interests and goals of archaeological research move towards the excavation of fortified settlements, towers, and churches, in an attempt to identify the border shift between Muslim and Frankish domains.⁶⁹ The richness of written vestiges have contributed to the interpretation of these research topics. As a result, peasant agency has been overlooked for some time and there are few rural settlements excavated in extension for this period. Notwithstanding these knowledge gaps, similar dynamics beginning in the 8th century AD transformed the rural landscape across the Western Mediterranean,⁷⁰ although the particular processes might differ in different regions. Catalonia does not seem an exception. New strategies focusing on landscape control and the strategic placement of sites were developed as the Frankish influence increased in Catalonia.

From this moment on, scattered settlements started to spread on the top of hills and rocky environments with natural features and physical conditions favouring successful defence. The occupation of hills and the establishment of wall-fortified settlements, although common in pre-Roman Iberia, had not been usual in the previous centuries. Several sites with a long-enduring occupation such as Olèrdola (Sant Miquel d'Olèrdola, Barcelona) or L'Esquerda (Roda de Ter, Osona) are emblematic examples of this phenomenon. Both examples are part of ongoing research projects and have provided updated information in recent years. The long-lasting occupation of Olèrdola, from prehistoric until medieval times, provides information about the transformation of the site⁷¹ and its role as a power centre in the region until it became the focus of the feudal uprisings in the County of Barcelona.⁷²

In particular, the defensive features of L'Esquerda – placed on a strategic meander of the river Ter – have been explored since 2012. Recent materials

⁶⁸ Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments.”

⁶⁹ Pratdesaba and Ollich, “La civitas visigoda.”

⁷⁰ Wickham, *El legado de Roma*, 243.

⁷¹ Molist et al., “Olèrdola (Baix Penedès).”

⁷² Lluç, “El conflicte de Mir Geribert.”

found at the site, such as Frankish pottery and a coin from Louis the Pious associated to the wall stratigraphy, prove the Frankish influence in the building of a massive wall protecting the weakest natural defence of the site. This finding suggests a new role of this site in the definition of borders in early medieval Catalonia.⁷³ Another example was found at the site of Castellar Vell (Castellar del Vallès, Barcelona), located on a small hill with rough and rocky sides and protected by a moat on its most vulnerable side. Although it has not been fully excavated, a chronology between the 9th and the 11th centuries has been suggested.⁷⁴ The abovementioned site of L'Aiguacuit (Terrassa, Barcelona) was inhabited intermittently. After the abandonment of the late antique settlement,⁷⁵ a small village was discovered close to the earlier remains, and it endured until its abandonment in the 11th century AD.

After the 8th and 9th centuries AD, habitat structures changed their features significantly. Sunken featured structures disappeared, and larger, new, square constructions were built. Perishable materials such as wood or unfired clay were no longer used and substituted by stone walls and tiled roofs. The production and farming areas were not so clearly defined, and, in some cases, it is difficult to determine where the production tasks were carried out. In some cases, firing structures and metallurgical complexes were identified and recorded. These settlements developed subsistence agriculture, with cattle or livestock as a complimentary activity depending on their location.

Some changes are visible as well in the material record: material remains and artefacts were not as diverse as in the previous period. The general lack of glass materials or metallic ornaments –frequent in earlier periods– is also a feature of these sites. In the absence of amphora-type containers, which transported food across the Mediterranean, greyware cooking pottery with a very limited repertoire of pots, casseroles and jugs was the main artefact found in this period. Coarse greyware fired under reducing atmosphere replaced earlier local productions, along with other types of containers made of wood, leather or textile, which left no traces in the archaeological record.⁷⁶ The great homogeneity of the ceramic record for this period occasionally leads to misinterpreted chronological attributions. The radical change in the study of ceramic from this period is a new and exciting challenge for material science, since the archaeometric characterization of well-contextualized materials within the stratigraphic sequence of these sites is an essential strategy in order to understand the new local and regional contexts producing and consuming these materials.⁷⁷ Regional cases of study focusing on the pottery production and distribution mechanisms between the 5th and 10th centuries

⁷³ Ollich, et al., “Visigots i Carolingis a Osona.”

⁷⁴ Coll, Roig and Molina, “El conjunt arqueològic de Sant Esteve.”

⁷⁵ Barrasetas, Palet and Martín, *La vil·la romana de l'Aiguacuit*.

⁷⁶ Gurt and Navarro, “Les transformacions en els assentaments,” 90.

⁷⁷ Travé, “Los hornos medievales,” 125-9.

AD have been carried out in the Iberian Peninsula.⁷⁸ First summary views about the typological features of these pottery materials in Catalonia for the same period have been recently published, together with some petrographic characterizations at some sites.⁷⁹ Broadening the scope of published pottery assemblages from well-defined stratigraphic contexts will significantly contribute to obtaining a precise chronology for this period.

Most of these sites include a necropolis with anthropomorphic tombs of various sizes and a religious building with different phases of construction. The relation of the cemetery with a Romanesque or Pre-Romanesque church is self-evident in this period, even though the church might have originated later than the necropolis. That could be the case of Sant Menna, Santiga, Sant Salvador de Polinyà, or Sant Pau de Riu-sec, among others.⁸⁰ In contrast, the Early Christian church at the archaeological site of Santa Margarida (Martorell, Barcelona) was the earliest remain in the site, so that the necropolis grew around the temple. Nevertheless, two different phases of refurbishment – Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque – affected the burial yard layout and different phases in the necropolis are associated to different building phases in accordance with the stratigraphic sequence⁸¹ (fig. 10.6b). However, regardless of the origin of the temples and their temporal relationship with the village and the cemeteries, the Church established a clear control of the territory and reorganized the rural areas since the 9th and the 10th centuries AD. This was a new scenario in which feudalism began to be the predominant social and economic system, and peasant agency was subjected to the landlords' desires and goals, so that peasants lost most of their previous freedom.

8. Concluding remarks

The role of peasant agency between the 5th and 9th centuries contributed to the transformation of rural settlement, and the construction of medieval society. The political and economic transformation resulting from the collapse of the Roman system set the bases for the formation of medieval peasantry, developing new forms of settlement and landscape exploitation. These new rural communities, their social organization, and the control over the production systems grew in parallel conditioned by different factors such as the degree of Romanisation, the political role of new powers, and the environmental features of landscape.

Catalonia as a crossroad between the Iberian Peninsula and Europe developed in these centuries a peripheral character with regard to central – Visigoth, Muslim or Frankish – powers. The development of peasant agency

⁷⁸ Vigil-Escalera and Quirós Castillo, *La cerámica de la Alta Edad Media*.

⁷⁹ Travé, et al., "Sampling strategies."

⁸⁰ Róig, "Asentamientos rurales," 244.

⁸¹ Travé, et al., "De l'església paleocristiana a la sagrera medieval."

was determined by this situation and still must be approached from a holistic perspective. The strengthening of medieval archaeology in Catalonia boosted the study of feudal Middle Age, usually encouraged by the richness of written evidence and the challenge of integrating these vestiges with the material remains. The analysis of the previous period is more complex as data are partial and unevenly scattered throughout the territory.

The close relation between the number of settlements known and the incidence of rescue archaeology leaves significant gaps in the knowledge of these processes, although some efforts have been made to provide syntheses views of the evolution of rural settlement. The transformation of late Roman *villae* into production areas were the chance of survival for some of them, while many other were abandoned in the 5th century AD. During the 6th and 7th centuries, new sites were created *ex novo* and the production intensified considerably. A new generation of sites was born within a more heterogeneous and diverse scenario, and more variegated settlements displaced progressively from the coastal areas to the inner valleys between the pre-coastal and coastal mountain ranges.

Ancient early-abandoned *villae* were partially reused as second-generation sites together with other settlements placed in medium-high places from central Catalonia or in the pre-coastal plains. The increase of the production provided material vestiges of wine and oil-making structures, bread-baking kilns, silos or other storage facilities, and sunken featured habitat buildings occupied by peasants. The role of the Church, though permanently present as evidenced by the early Christian churches related to some of these sites, is not clear for the initial period. Some of the most emblematic sites such as El Bovalar or Puig Rom are under study and review in order to clarify confuse chronologies and to explore the relation between new forms of social power and the peasant society. On-going research projects at these sites and some others like Santa Margarida, with long-lasting occupation sequences will shed some more light on the studies of rural settlement in Catalonia.

The occupation of hillforts from the 7th and 8th centuries onwards and the appearance of first pre-Romanesque churches encompassed the arrival of new political powers, and the development of new strategies for territorial control. The consolidation of the Catalan counties, first under Frankish domain and progressively ruling the Catalan landscape on their own, developed the settlement and landscape exploitation manners that would consolidate the feudal domain. Throughout this paper, we attempted to offer a summary view of these processes, paying attention to the methodological needs of further research and offering some examples of the most emblematic sites.

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