

## Cemeteries and State Formation in the Early-Medieval Northwestern Iberian Peninsula

Alejandro García Álvarez-Busto & José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo

To cite this article: Alejandro García Álvarez-Busto & José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo (2021) Cemeteries and State Formation in the Early-Medieval Northwestern Iberian Peninsula, *Medieval Archaeology*, 65:1, 1-29, DOI: [10.1080/00766097.2021.1923895](https://doi.org/10.1080/00766097.2021.1923895)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00766097.2021.1923895>



Published online: 05 Aug 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Cemeteries and State Formation in the Early-Medieval Northwestern Iberian Peninsula

By ALEJANDRO GARCÍA ÁLVAREZ-BUSTO<sup>1</sup> and JOSÉ CARLOS  
SÁNCHEZ-PARDO<sup>2</sup>

*BASED ON A SIGNIFICANT REVIEW of the literature on early-medieval burials in the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula, this paper aims to offer, for the first time, a comprehensive interpretation of funerary practices and their transformations between the 8th and 10th centuries AD, and to discuss their role as useful indicators of the non-linear processes of state formation in this area. Despite some important regional differences, a general trend toward uniformity and centralised control of funerary behaviours can be detected during this period. However, cemeteries also inform us about the complexity and diversity of social agency at local levels behind the wider trend towards uniformity. It is argued here that both local and regional elites in the Kingdom of Asturias promoted this important change in funerary practices, as they did with the network of churches, given the importance of cemeteries as places of power, and the implications that lay behind the creation and control of a common place of inhumation for local communities.*

The archaeology of early-medieval funerary practices in north-west Spain has experienced significant growth in recent years thanks to the publication of several regional studies. Among the most relevant are the reviews of Cantabria, the north of Burgos, Asturias, Basque Country, Galicia and northern Portugal.<sup>3</sup> These works offer important information for the current debates about local communities, social complexity and life conditions in the early-medieval Iberian Peninsula.<sup>4</sup>

However, this topic has rarely been approached from a holistic and systematic point of view, which takes into account the role of cemeteries in the construction of a new socio-political framework in the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula during the Early Middle Ages. We will consider here particularly the Kingdom of Asturias (AD 718–910), which at its moment of greatest expansion, at the start of the 10th century, stretched from the Cantabrian Sea to the River Duero, and from the Atlantic coast to the upper River Ebro and Biscay (Fig 1).<sup>5</sup> The lack of study is perhaps explained by current Spanish medieval archaeology rejecting traditional nationalist approaches that were

<sup>1</sup> Department of History, University of Oviedo, C/ Amparo Pedregal, 5, Campus de Humanidades, 33011, Oviedo, Spain. [garciaalejandro@uniovi.es](mailto:garciaalejandro@uniovi.es)

<sup>2</sup> Department of History, University of Santiago de Compostela, Praza da Universidade, 1, 15703 Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña, Spain. [josecarlos.sanchez@usc.es](mailto:josecarlos.sanchez@usc.es)

<sup>3</sup> Cantabria: Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015; Burgos: Lecanda Esteban 2015; Asturias: García de Castro Valdés 1995; García Álvarez-Busto and Muñiz López 2010; Basque Country: Azkárate Garai-Olaun and García Camino 1996; García Camino 2002; Galicia and northern Portugal: López Quiroga 2004; Rodríguez Resino 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Quirós Castillo 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Martín Duque 2002; Monsalvo Antón 2005; Gutiérrez González 2007.

predominant during much of the 20th century, and which tried to justify the origins of the current Spanish state in the Visigoth and Asturian kingdoms and in the ‘Reconquista’ against the Muslims. Nevertheless, recent approaches understand these early-medieval Iberian kingdoms as complex networks of social relations and political interactions between local and supra-local spheres during the processes of state formation.<sup>6</sup> This conceptual change has underlined the importance of regional variety and the diversity of social agency — including the often neglected peasantry — behind state formation in this area, with transformations in the scales of power resulting from both bottom-up and top-down forces.<sup>7</sup>

It will be argued here that studies of the creation and consolidation of cemeteries during the 8th to 10th centuries are a powerful tool allowing us to undertake complex analyses of state formation in the early-medieval Northwestern Iberian Peninsula. The creation of the cemetery in the Early and High Middle Ages, as shown by Michel Lauwers, was a broadly European trend which helped to shape new social and psychological frameworks.<sup>8</sup> Northwestern Iberia was not an exception to this process, and we will show here how cemeteries contributed to non-linear state formation in this area.<sup>9</sup> Following the work of Heinrich Härke, cemeteries can be conceived as real places of power in which different social and political relations converged and were publicly displayed.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the archaeological study of cemeteries can provide interesting information about early-medieval local societies.

This article will explore the formation process of medieval cemeteries in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, paying special attention to their relationship with both settlement patterns and the configuration of an ecclesiastical network, as well as with the mechanisms of social differentiation and the construction of hierarchies that occurred within the local communities. It is hoped that this approach will shed new light on the strategies of power used by the local and regional elites of a kingdom which lay on the periphery of early-medieval Europe and outside of the Carolingian realm, but which, as a ‘secondary state’, also maintained many links with its Roman and Visigothic past.<sup>11</sup>

This study is based on a recently (2019) published review of 227 early-medieval burial sites from the territory of the old Kingdom of Asturias.<sup>12</sup> It is important to highlight that in many cases the archaeological evidence is limited, deriving only from surface surveys and casual finds, and only a fraction of the sites have been subject to archaeological excavation. While the archaeological description and typologies of the burial sites can be found in that publication, this paper aims to discuss a multi-scalar interpretative framework for this corpus of data, paying special attention to the cases for which deeper archaeological research has been carried out.

<sup>6</sup> Carvajal 2017; Escalona 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Quirós Castillo 2016, Escalona Monge 2011; Castellanos and Martín Viso 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Lauwers 2005. Obviously, the creation of cemeteries was a long process occurring during the 11th and 12th centuries, but its origins in northwestern Spain can be found between the 8th and 10th centuries (Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Following the work of Escalona, the concept of non-linear state formation emphasises the irregular and non-teleological character of the processes behind the creation of state structures in early-medieval western Europe (Escalona 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Härke 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Escalona 2019. The concept of ‘secondary state’ refers to territories which had were part of statal structures in the previous centuries.

<sup>12</sup> García Álvarez-Busto 2019, in Spanish.

## THE STANDARDISATION OF FUNERARY PRACTICE IN THE NORTHWESTERN IBERIAN PENINSULA (8TH–10TH CENTURIES AD)

BACKGROUND: BURIAL SITES DURING LATE ANTIQUITY (5TH TO 7TH CENTURIES AD)

Before turning to our period of focus, it is important to evaluate known funerary practice in the preceding centuries, so as to better understand the continuities and transformations which occurred between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. For the period between the 5th to 7th centuries AD, our 2019 review has shown that the majority of burial spaces do not point to the existence of a well-defined ecclesiastical organisation in most of the Iberian north-west.<sup>13</sup> As a general estimate, our 2019 review has shown that approximately 56% of the known burial sites from this period were not associated with contemporary churches. The only exception is in the westernmost strip integrated into the Suebi Kingdom, especially southern Galicia and Northern Portugal, in which there seems to have been a higher density of late antique churches according to certain texts like the *Parrochiale Suevorum*.<sup>14</sup> If this density was present throughout the region, we would expect greater funerary centralisation specifically around churches. On the contrary however, throughout the late antique Iberian north-west there are a wide variety of functioning burial spaces which can be grouped into three basic categories: a) ecclesiastical cemeteries; b) necropolises not linked to churches; and c) isolated burials.

In cities, we see the development of intramural cemeteries linked to cathedral spaces and churches, and in the suburbs, cemetery areas associated with *martyria* or monasteries.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, in rural areas it is rare for churches to be found with funerary functions, and they usually do not show a uniform pattern with regards to settlement organisation.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, although it is likely that in the coming decades new excavations will bring more funerary churches to light, it is much less likely that they will be revealed as the main type-site for burial between the 5th and 7th centuries. On the contrary, most of the peasant communities of late antique northern Spain were buried in rural necropolises, without any evidence of a Christian religious building. The characteristics of these necropolises vary, as their size can range from large groupings that exceeded 100 burials, which were more common in the central plateau, to small groups of ten graves or fewer, which were frequent along the Cantabrian coast.<sup>17</sup> Isolated burials and cave burials are also a well-documented phenomenon throughout the study area, especially in the foothills of the Cantabrian mountain range.<sup>18</sup>

In many of these late antique burial sites there is no sign of Christianisation, and some of the practices seem to correspond to pagan funerary patterns. The wide range of funerary behaviours is also reflected in the diversity of the types of tombs used, with no single dominant sepulchral form. There were tombs combining slabs and *tegulae*, slab

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sánchez-Pardo 2013 and 2014

<sup>15</sup> Gurt i Esparraguera and Ribera i Lacomba 2005; Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2007. Martyria are Christian religious buildings that were built from the late Roman period with the purpose of preserving the relics of a saint and being a place for his/her cult and memory.

<sup>16</sup> Utrero Agudo 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Blanco-Torrejón 2019; Vigil-Escalera Guirado 2009 and 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez González 1982; García Valdés 1982; Azkárate Garai-Olaun 1984; Sáenz de Urturu 1990; García Álvarez-Busto and Muñiz López 2010; Hierro Gárate 2011.

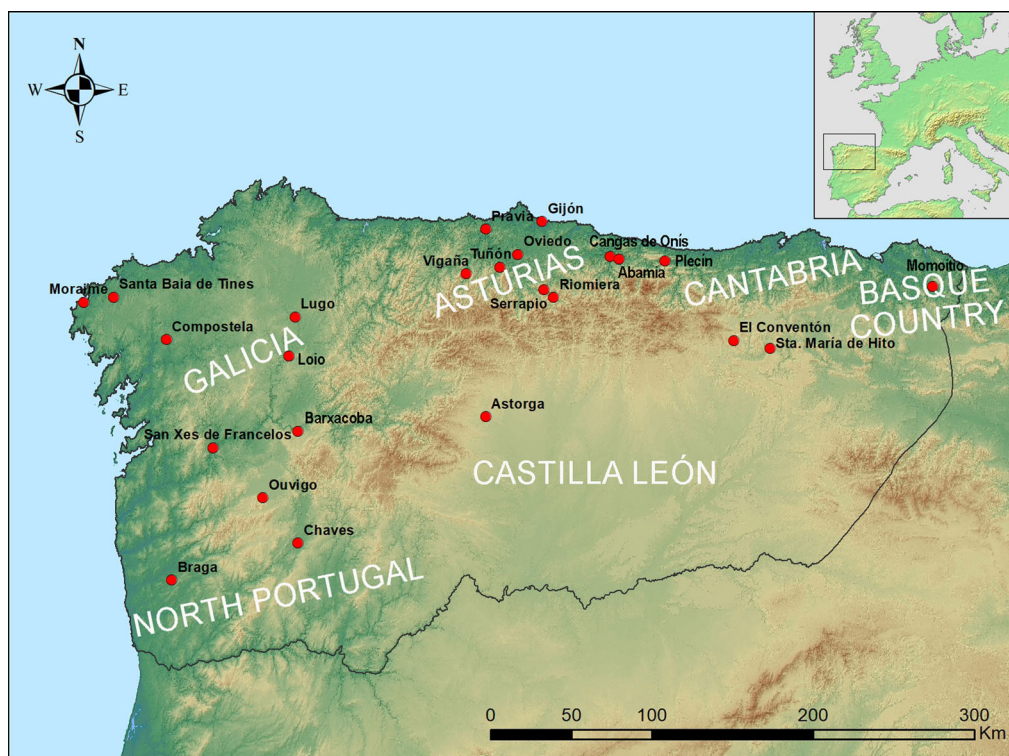


FIG 1

The Northwestern Iberian Peninsula. The main sites mentioned in the text are shown with red dots. The black line indicates the approximate extension of the Kingdom of Asturias at the beginning of the 10th century. *Map by the authors.*

tombs, or tombs using bricks and mortar;<sup>19</sup> pit graves, some of which were lined, and others that contained coffins.<sup>20</sup> Sarcophagi were also used in burials of high-class individuals;<sup>21</sup> while in the caves, bodies were usually placed in natural cavities.<sup>22</sup>

While in the case of funerary churches there can be no doubt that we are dealing with Christianised environments, one of the main questions regarding the necropolises and isolated burials is whether they represented Christian or pagan practice.<sup>23</sup> While both southern Galicia and northern Portugal appear to have seen earlier ecclesiastical development, often represented by stone sarcophagi with ‘estola’-decorated covers, in other areas of Northwestern Iberia, peasant communities would not have had any churches within dozens or even hundreds of kilometres from their places of settlement.<sup>24</sup> The funerary customs which have been identified point towards an unequal, and in

<sup>19</sup> Cepeda Ocampo and Martínez Salcedo 1994.

<sup>20</sup> Slab tombs: Cepeda and Martínez 1994; pit graves: Azkárte Garai-Olaun 1999; Loza and Niso 2011; Vigil-Escalera 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Vidal Álvarez 2007; Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015: 526–35.

<sup>22</sup> Adán Álvarez et al 2004; Hierro Gárate 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Pérez Rodríguez-Aragón and Abásolo Álvarez 1995; Zadora-Rio 2003; Hernández García 1998; Sánchez Ramos 2007; Marcos and Reyes 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Sánchez-Pardo 2013 and 2014. See López Quiroga 2018 for ‘estola’ decoration, which refers to a set of carved lines which seems to represent the shape of a Christian prayer.

some areas quite late introduction of Christian mortuary practices.<sup>25</sup> This panorama of social and religious diversity formed the backdrop to the 8th- and 9th-century territorial expansion and consolidation of the Kingdom of Asturias: a process which entailed a considerable transformation of funerary behaviours, to whose characteristics and drivers the analysis now turns.

#### CEMETERIES AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL NETWORK WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF ASTURIAS

The early-medieval political and religious re-organisation carried out by the elites of the Asturian kingdom promoted a common model of funeral behaviour in the territories they controlled, thereby attempting to overcome the heterogeneity of the preceding period. While in the north-west of the peninsula between the 5th and 7th centuries a large part of the population was buried in necropolises that were not linked to churches, this behaviour was clearly reversed during the time of the Kingdom of Asturias, when the vast majority (95%) of burials were associated with churches.<sup>26</sup>

The transformation of funerary behaviour during the time of the Kingdom of Asturias was feasible because an intense building programme of churches took place between the 8th and 10th centuries, unlike anything that had been seen in previous centuries. The boom in the construction of churches was driven by three primary forces. Firstly, it was linked to a royal policy of large-scale territorial re-organisation, whose two main principles were the construction of fortifications — which are not the object of this work but which have been studied elsewhere — and churches.<sup>27</sup> The development of this ecclesiastical network was closely intertwined with the pre-existing network of villages, which had been consolidated at the very least since the 8th century.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, the network of churches helped to territorially frame the peasant population. In a recent paper we have suggested that the location of these early-medieval churches in north western Spain is related to visual and territorial control over some specific areas of the landscape (mainly settlements and natural resources) and that some kind of collective planning of the church network did happen in this area.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, the creation of this ecclesiastical network was related to a new dynamic of economic re-activation and exploitation of the landscape, through which the agrarian and livestock areas of these ecclesiastical centres became a primary basis of economic power for the kingdom's magnates.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the construction of churches such as Nora (Fig 2, top) or Bendones around Oviedo by Alfonso II has been interpreted as having an ideological meaning, entailing the sacralisation of the surroundings of the royal palace, but this behaviour by the monarchy would also have had a more pragmatic facet aimed at acquiring greater wealth, laying the foundation for a fiscal and ecclesiastical territoriality by the monarch in his immediate domain. Another example is the monastery of Santa María de Loio (Lugo), which was in existence before the 10th century, when it fell under the control of the powerful Count Gutier. This coveted monastery

<sup>25</sup> García de Castro Valdés and Ríos González 2013.

<sup>26</sup> García Álvarez-Busto 2019.

<sup>27</sup> See Gutiérrez González 1995; Muñiz López and García Álvarez-Busto 2010 for fortifications, and García Álvarez-Busto 2019; Sánchez-Pardo et al 2018; López Alsina 2002 for churches.

<sup>28</sup> Quirós Castillo 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Sánchez-Pardo et al 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Sánchez-Pardo 2015.





FIG 2

The church of San Pedro de Nora, near Oviedo (top), and of Santa María de Loio (southern Lugo province) (bottom), are still important landmarks in the surrounding agrarian landscapes. *Photo of Nora by the authors. Photo of Loio, <[1000-lugares-en-galicia.blogspot.com/2017/03/ruta-del-rio-loio-3-paradela-provincia-de-lugo.html?pref=pi](http://1000-lugares-en-galicia.blogspot.com/2017/03/ruta-del-rio-loio-3-paradela-provincia-de-lugo.html?pref=pi)>.*

was placed in the heart of a rich and productive valley, near the river Loio, in a landscape currently surrounded by agrarian terraces probably of medieval origin (Fig 2, bottom).<sup>31</sup> Within this context of lordly interest in the exploitation of the territory, the construction of certain major churches, such as those of Santa Cruz de Cangas de Onís or Santa Eulalia de Abamia over tumuli containing dolmens, or many others on Roman and late-Roman necropolises, can be interpreted not only physically but also symbolically, as one of the mechanisms used to legitimise the occupation and control of the land, by appropriating the previous territorial markers of reference for the rural communities that inhabited these spaces.<sup>32</sup>

Thirdly, and finally, in the peripheral areas of the Kingdom the construction of churches also responded to a process of Christianisation of the territory via the evangelisation of the populations under the auspices of the main elites of the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> This would mean, at the same time, the imposition by the Church of a religious and administrative control over populations and territories. This allowed kings and bishops, but also aristocratic magnates, to control the collection of taxes in the churches, which became one of their main sources of income. This convergence of interests crystallised in a new legitimating programme for the monarchy offered by the Church.<sup>34</sup>

The process of founding churches during this period was not simply a top-down imposition across the kingdom, but rather had both local and regional origins and drivers. However, the churches were eventually integrated and assimilated by the ecclesiastical structures of the kingdom as it expanded and consolidated its domains, and the churches were used as a mechanism for the integration of local populations within the power structures of the monarchy.<sup>35</sup>

The standardisation of burials around the churches also became a key component of this political strategy. Based on the current archaeological information, it is not possible to determinate whether the creation of churches and cemeteries was promoted by the same forces (ie the bishops), or rather whether they were a parallel but independent processes. In any case, as we will see below, the archaeological study of cemeteries reflects a heterogeneous panorama with a diversity of social agents and different degrees of political and territorial control within the Kingdom of Asturias. This leads us to think that we are dealing with complex and multi-faceted processes, in which the foundation of churches and the consolidation of cemeteries were the result of a variety of interconnected social dynamics.

#### CEMETERY-SETTLEMENT RELATIONSHIPS

In the 8th to 10th centuries, unlike in the preceding period, the vast majority of burials shifted to cemeteries situated around the new churches, and this shift was accompanied by changed relationships between burial sites and settlement. By this time, in urban centres across the Iberian Peninsula, funerary spaces had become located within the city walls, overcoming the previous separation between the settlement and the ring

<sup>31</sup> Sánchez-Pardo et al 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Williams 1997; Hamerow 2012; Vigil-Escalera 2013; Martín Viso 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Ruiz de la Peña Solar 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Fernández Conde 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Quirós Castillo 2011; Quirós Castillo and Fernández Mier 2012; Sánchez-Pardo 2015; Carvajal 2017, 207–58; Escalona 2019.



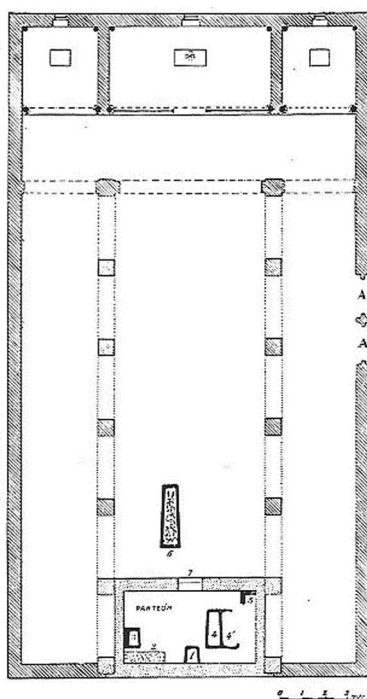


FIG 3

Plan of the funerary basilica of Santa María del Rey Casto de Oviedo, according to the excavations carried out by Aurelio de Llano in 1926. In a small enclosure located at the foot of the basilica were the sarcophagi that comprised the royal pantheon founded by Alfonso II. *Image from Llano 1928, 337.*

of necropolises outside the walls.<sup>36</sup> These topographical transformations illustrate a profound, permanent change in mentality and in funerary customs, despite the fact that the First Council of Braga in AD 561 attempted to maintain burial spaces outside of the city walls.<sup>37</sup> Some of these churches and their accompanying cemeteries formed the seeds of future urban parishes, and in settlements with episcopal seats, specific churches within the cathedral complexes took on a funerary role, focusing on privileged burials for members of the clergy. In the first half of the 9th century, the first unified royal funerary pantheon was built in the court of Oviedo against a backdrop of consolidating political structures in the kingdom (Fig 3).<sup>38</sup> Up until that point, the first Asturian monarchs had been buried in their own churches, imitating the behaviour of the Roman nobility or the Visigothic kings, who were buried in their rural estates, and continuing long-term trends in the expression of power through architecture and funerary spaces from Late Antiquity.<sup>39</sup> In turn, the bishops attempted to emulate the monarchy in their funerary customs, as although they were initially buried in their private churches, at a later stage

<sup>36</sup> Gurt i Esparraguera and Sánchez Ramos 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2007; Vives 1963.

<sup>38</sup> Llano y Roza de Ampudia 1928; García de Castro Valdés 1995.

<sup>39</sup> For burial on rural estates, see Alonso 2007; García Álvarez-Busto and Muñiz López 2010. Sánchez Ramos 2019 discusses trends in the expression of power, as shown, for example, in the funerary building of Los Hitos, Toledo (Barroso et al 2017).

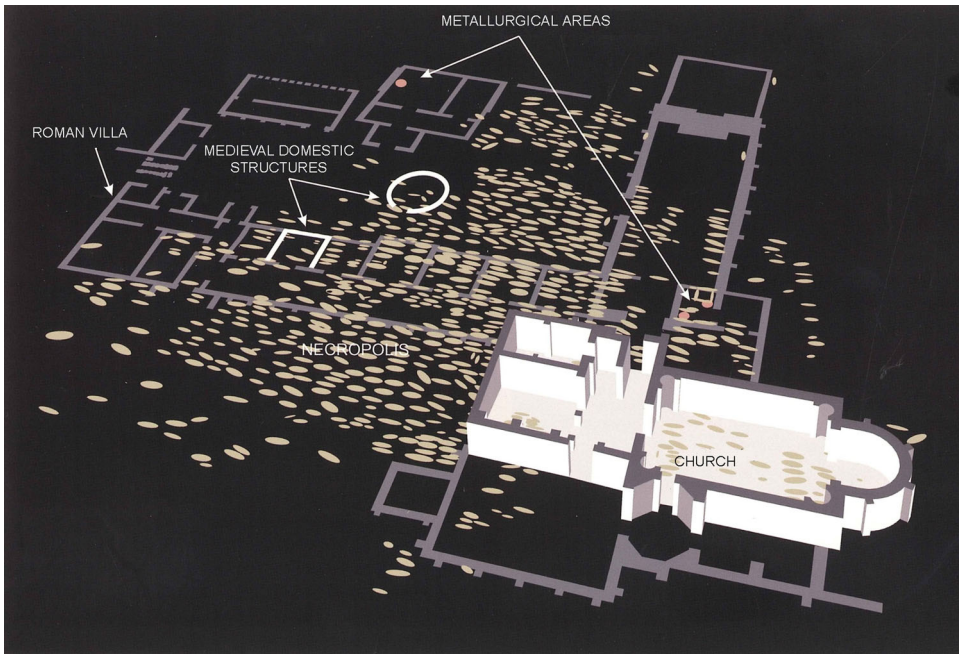


FIG 4

Plan of the archaeological site of Veranes, Asturias showing the structures of the late-Roman villa, the late antique necropolis and the early-medieval church. *Image from Fernández Ochoa and Gil Sendino 2007, 143.*

they supported the construction of episcopal pantheons that would serve to strengthen the origin and memory of each of the sees.<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen, in rural areas a considerable number of these new churches and cemeteries were planted in previously inhabited areas, reflecting a continuity in the occupation of rural spaces from Roman times to the 10th century. In both Asturias and the north-west more widely, in the same way as in the rest of Iberian Peninsula, the reuse of old Roman *villae* as funerary spaces was a regularly occurring phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> They likely served as the burial places of the peasant communities which continued to occupy and exploit the old settlements once the *villae* had lost their original function and meaning as private rustic haciendas.<sup>42</sup> A paradigmatic example is the Roman villa of Veranes (Gijón), monumentalised between the 4th and 5th centuries, where we can see the creation of a necropolis from the 5th or 6th century and, later, the conversion of the old *triclinium* into a church, probably from the 8th century onwards (Fig 4).<sup>43</sup>

On other occasions, however, churches and cemeteries appeared on land where there are no signs of previous occupation, signalling the exploitation of new sites in

<sup>40</sup> García de Castro Valdés 1999; Carrero Santamaría 2003.

<sup>41</sup> For Asturias: Fernández Ochoa and Gil Sendino 2007; Requejo Pagés and Álvarez Martínez 2008; Cid López et al 1991. For the north-west, Miguel Hernández and Benítez González 1996; Crespo Díez 2009; Fernández Mier 2009; Cruz Sánchez and Martín Rodríguez 2012; Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Arce Martínez and Ripoll López 2001; Chavarría Arnau 2007; Chavarría Arnau and Brogiolo 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Fernández Ochoa and Gil Sendino 2007. The *triclinium* was one of the main architectural spaces in a Roman villa. It was used for banquets and leisure, and was a symbol of the social status of the landowner.

spaces which had suffered little or no anthropogenic pressure during Roman times. As a result, throughout the Cantabrian mountain range, and with especially numerous concentrations in Cantabria, Palencia, Burgos and Álava, we find groups of burials in many cases linked to cave churches, and which are identified as the religious and funerary manifestations of peasant settlements which worked raising livestock, together with some other sites that would have been hermitages or monasteries.<sup>44</sup> In conjunction, the advance of the kingdom's frontiers towards the south led to the incorporation of peripheral populations that had previously enjoyed a significant level of independence, and which became integrated into the official ecclesiastical structure. This context largely explains the creation of new bishoprics such as Valpuesta and Zamora during the 9th century, which organised the territorial and ecclesiastical structure of the eastern and southern frontiers, respectively.<sup>45</sup>

#### MORTUARY RITUALS

Together with the creation of cemeteries, a general trend of standardisation in the treatment of the deceased took place between the 8th and 10th centuries, both physically and symbolically. Previously, between the 5th and 7th centuries, the dead were usually buried with garments and objects (*vestimenta* and *ornamenta*);<sup>46</sup> they were accompanied by deposits of vessels, foodstuffs, coins, amulets, and relics. The customary worship and care of the dead also mandated carrying out the funerary libations and feasts in the necropolis itself, in clear continuity with Roman funerary rites.<sup>47</sup> At first, these customs were carried out in Christian cemeteries despite being questioned by some Council decrees, although their use was progressively abandoned from the 7th and 8th centuries onwards, as occurred throughout the whole of Western Europe.<sup>48</sup> In our specific area of study, Canon LXIX of the Second Council of Braga expressly forbade taking food to the tombs, a custom that still must have been deeply embedded among the populations of the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 6th century.<sup>49</sup>

The Church's relationship with pagan funerary customs was always complex. Initially, it attempted to eliminate the most obvious signs of pagan worship, such as altars and idols, although burial with grave goods was more difficult to eliminate, mainly because of its social significance.<sup>50</sup> Funerary deposits from the 5th to 7th centuries were instruments through which family groups intended to perpetuate their social relevance, reflecting the process of the strengthening of the power of local elites during this period. From the 8th century onwards, the Church managed to impose its own rules, and the emerging aristocracy replaced grave-good burials with other types of behaviour, such as written wills, post-mortem donations, and the founding or endowment of churches or monasteries as mechanisms of social re-affirmation within the community.<sup>51</sup> These practices may also have been influenced by a new emphasis placed on the values of humility and Christian charity, thanks to which the goods of the deceased passed into

<sup>44</sup> Quirós Castillo 2006; Monreal Jimeno 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Valpuesta: Fernández Conde 2000; Zamora: Gutiérrez González 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Abascal Palazón 1991.

<sup>48</sup> Zadora-Río 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Vives 1963; Ripoll López 1989; Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid; Williams 2006; Martín Viso 2014.

the hands of the Church through donations *pro remedio animae*, for the salvation of souls.<sup>52</sup> However, they may also relate, from a more pragmatic point of view, to a desire to prevent the plundering of the tomb and the corpse.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, this change in funeral behaviour on the part of the aristocracy reflects a greater economic capacity of the elites of the 9th century than those of the 7th century, resulting in the ability to pay for more costly funerals and build more visible and longer-lasting architectural structures.<sup>54</sup>

The Church not only imposed its views on the treatment of the deceased, but also established the exterior of the church as the sole legitimate burial place. This yielded direct economic benefits by reconverting the old mortuary alms into an obligatory charge for the funeral mass and burial, which has been evidenced in the north-east of the peninsula.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore highly likely that the ecclesiastical institutions encouraged this change, which brought them a much more direct economic benefit. These processes can also be seen in the Carolingian world, where from the 9th century onwards the tomb consolidated its value as a promoter of memory, and there was greater institutional control of death rites, resulting in greater economic profitability.<sup>56</sup> The result was that churches became important sources of income for their owners, regardless of whether they were kings, bishops, abbots, or merely members of the local gentry.

At the same time, there was a change in the way that the funerary ritual was conducted, as the imposition and standardisation of the treatment of the bodies of the deceased by the clergy resulted in the transfer of responsibilities from the family circle to the ecclesiastical authorities. While at the end of the 6th century Saint Martin of Dumio referred in his work *Capitula* to numerous funeral superstitions with pagan roots, such as the celebration of the services on the tombs of the dead,<sup>57</sup> from the 8th to the 10th century onwards the church would fully assume and monopolise the funeral liturgy, which was laid out in a series of prescribed steps. These involved the preparation of the body by washing and perfuming it before dressing or wrapping it in a shroud; a vigil lasting three days; its transfer to the cemetery and its sealing in the tomb; and concluding with a mass for the soul of the deceased.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, this institutional intrusion into mortuary ritual did not result in the absolute eradication of deeply rooted pre-Christian atavistic behaviour, and when early-medieval cemeteries have been excavated, evidence related to the celebration of ritual banquets or bonfires are sometimes documented, as has been seen in both Cantabria and in the Basque Country.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, from the 8th century onwards, death was no longer solely dealt with by the family, but instead became a public, institutional process. This change can also be seen in the progressive standardisation of the cemetery, through the imposition of individual burial to the detriment of double, family, and collective burials.<sup>60</sup> Christianity imposed a comparatively austere burial — without offerings and adornments, with the body

<sup>52</sup> Treffort 1996.

<sup>53</sup> Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2007; Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Wickham 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2002.

<sup>57</sup> *Capitula* is a compilation of canon laws from different episcopal councils carried out by Saint Martin of Dumio, which became of the main basis of the Visigoth Ecclesiastical Law.

<sup>58</sup> Riu 1982; Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015; García González 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Cantabria: Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015; Basque Country: Azkárate Garai-Olaun and García Camino 1992

<sup>60</sup> Álvaro Rueda 2012.

wrapped in a shroud — thereby communicating the symbolic equality of all the deceased.<sup>61</sup> According to the *Liber Ordinum*, only the clergy, bishops, and presbyters could be buried with all of their ecclesiastical trappings.<sup>62</sup> From the 7th/8th centuries onwards, the use of grave goods and deposits declined in favour of markers on the surface, such as sarcophagi, grave slabs, inscriptions, and stelae, which defined the social status of the individual within the community.<sup>63</sup> From this point, personal items and grave goods seem to have lost their significance in the funerary context, at least in most of the Kingdom of Asturias, and only persisted in peripheral territories of the kingdom, like Biscay. Here, specifically in the cemetery of Momoitio (Basque Country), three silver rings decorated with astral motifs and 25 glass necklace beads have been recovered, which seem to suggest that ancient funerary rituals persisted in geographical areas that were further away from the centralised control of the ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>64</sup>

The evidence also clearly demonstrates that from the 7th–8th centuries onwards, the tombs of privileged members of society employed other forms of differentiation. These could include the quality of the materials used in the tomb, the standards or types of workmanship or decoration, an outstanding topographical location with respect to the church or the atrium, or their ability to attract the construction of other tombs around them. There were even differences in the ceremonial nature of the funerary ritual according to the status of the individual.<sup>65</sup> However, other types of behaviour were shared between the rich and the poor. All bodies were oriented on an E/W alignment, usually with the feet to the east and the head to the west. This had been the most common positioning since the 4th/5th centuries, but it came into nearly universal use in the Early Middle Ages, as demonstrated in both the archaeological and written record.<sup>66</sup> The body was placed in a supine position, wrapped in a shroud, and the arms were placed parallel to the body, or with the hands on the hips. The supine position seems to be the most frequent posture used in the Early Middle Ages.<sup>67</sup> For Christians, it was fundamental that the body should only be buried in the ground, and it was considered an extraordinary punishment if this was not the case.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, along with the canonical burials in Christian cemeteries, there are burials in other territories which did not follow the generally established rule, characterised as atypical or marginal burials, and which in France at the time were referred to as *more asini* burials.<sup>69</sup> In these cases, certain individuals (eg those who had not been baptised, those who had been excommunicated, suicides, or slaves) were refused the right to receive funerary rites and be buried in the churchyard, although to date we do not have any clear archaeological evidence of this activity in the territory of the Kingdom of Asturias.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Vizcaíno Sánchez 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Azkárate Garai-Olaun 2007; Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015; Vigil-Escalera 2013.

<sup>64</sup> García Camino 2002.

<sup>65</sup> For example, references to the names of some of the deceased in the first memorial books, which were used in the funerary prayers for the salvation of their souls (Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Treffort 1996; Vizcaíno Sánchez 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015; Husi et al 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Fernández Conde 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Also known as *asini* burials, in which bodies are dumped in pits or placed on the ground without receiving Christian rites (Treffort 1996).

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds 2009; Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.



## LOCAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL AGENCY IN EARLY-MEDIEVAL CEMETERIES

As we have seen in the previous section, the creation of cemeteries in Northwestern Iberia coincides with the expansion of a network of churches, the increasing ecclesiastical control over the territory and the consolidation of the new socio-political framework of the Kingdom of Asturias. All this leads us to think that cemeteries represented an important element in the local articulation of the power relations that supported the process of state formation in this area. In order to better understand this complex process in each place, we need to move from a macro perspective to a micro-scale of analysis.

### INSIDE THE BURIAL SPACES: FUNERARY TOPOGRAPHIES AND TYPOLOGIES

Close examination of the cemeteries reflects the existence of a clearly established social hierarchy.<sup>71</sup> Inequality and internal competition within early-medieval populations led to positioning, prestige, and pre-eminence in burial location becoming a key concern of dominant groups, in turn leading to the existence of privileged burials which were segregated and differentiated from the rest of the community. The result is a highly planned funerary topography which had profound secular social significance, beyond the religious desire to be buried as close as possible to altars and relics.<sup>72</sup>

Archaeological excavations have revealed a number of proprietary churches used as burial sites for the aristocracy, demonstrating that during this period magnates often chose to be buried in sarcophagi located under their own churches, clearly differentiating themselves from the peasants who would be buried in the *atrium* set aside for this purpose outside the church. It is therefore possible that the prohibition of burials inside churches, which had been decreed by the Council of Braga in AD 561, continued to be in place during the period of growth of the Kingdom of Asturias.<sup>73</sup> This decree should perhaps be understood as an attempt by the bishops to prevent the pre-eminence of private funerary churches associated with the lay aristocracy, which was one facet of an ambitious attempt by the ecclesiastical institutions to re-organise funerary behaviour.<sup>74</sup>

A good example of this funerary hierarchisation can be found in the Conventón de Rebolledo (Cantabria). Here, a church dedicated to St Andrew was built between the 8th and 9th centuries, overlying a late-Roman settlement and an earlier necropolis from Late Antiquity. This modest, rectangular church had a single apse facing to the east, and did not take advantage of the underlying Roman structure. Beneath the paving of the nave, two trapezoidal sarcophagi were found, one with a trapezoidal cover and decorated with concentric circles, belonging to a male, and another with a cover semi-circular in cross-section, together with the tombs of seven children. A large cemetery was uncovered outside the church, with 95 graves, most of which were marked by slabs, together with three sarcophagi and five walled graves, potentially indicating the expression of a social hierarchy through burial practice (Fig 5).<sup>75</sup> The privileged burials inside

<sup>71</sup> Härke 2001

<sup>72</sup> Ariès 1983; Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015; Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Vives 1963.

<sup>74</sup> Martín Viso 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.



FIG 5

The Conventón de Rebolledo (Cantabria). A magnificent example of a necropolis, significant for its large number of burials, and belonging to a village that developed from the 6th century onwards over a Roman villa. The village was the seat of an aristocratic family which founded the oratory in the 8th century, within which its members were buried in sarcophagi. *Image from Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015, 254.*

the church have been interpreted as being those of the founders of the church, and are a magnificent example of a private family oratory used as an aristocratic burial site, numerous similar examples of which have been found throughout Europe.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, most members of the aristocracy were buried in the church atriums, which became large-scale burial spaces during the 8th–10th centuries, and which occurred across the north-east of the peninsula during the same centuries.<sup>77</sup> The atriums featured an internal topography, with the arrangement of wide steps towards the entrances of the church that facilitated the circulation of people, while defining a series of priority locations for privileged graves. Archaeological research has been able to define in some detail how these cemeteries were managed and organised internally: the entire area around the church was used, although with more preference for the western and southern areas, which are usually located opposite the entrances to the church. This resulted in an irregular distribution of burials, with some areas being more densely occupied than others.<sup>78</sup> It is likely that these atriums had some kind of external boundary as well, as has been proposed for the cemeteries in the north-east of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> La Rocca 2007; Sánchez-Pardo and Shapland 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Roig Buxó 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Ripoll and Molist Capella 2015.

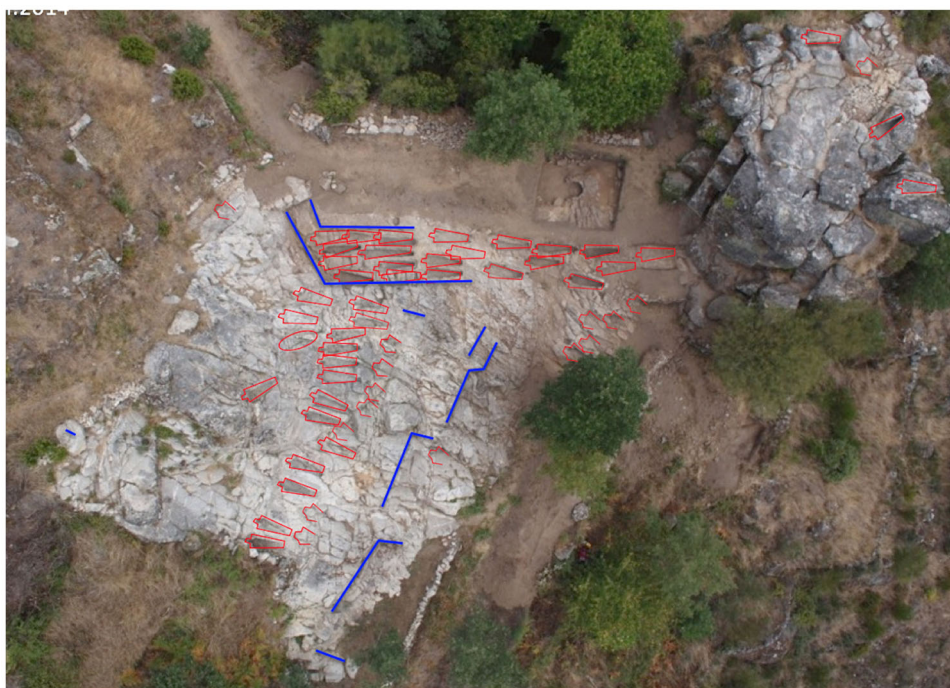


FIG 6

Aerial view of the excavation of the early-medieval necropolis of San Vitor de Barxacoba (Parada do Sil, Ourense). The excavated tombs are shown in red, while the carved lines that seem to spatially distribute the necropolis are shown in blue. *Image kindly supplied by Eduardo Breogán Nieto Muñiz.*

Archaeological evidence for these physical limits is still uncertain, although in Rebolledo itself a section of wall has been documented that seems to be delimiting the external burial space to the south-west of the church.<sup>80</sup>

An interesting example of this kind of spatial hierarchy found at an extensively excavated site is on the necropolis of San Vitor de Barxacoba (Ourense) (Fig 6). It is composed of at least 47 tombs around a chapel built in a prominent location on the top of high ground above the river Mao. The tombs have been radiocarbon dated to between the 9th and 11th centuries AD and were distributed in three areas: there were 43 anthropomorphic rock carved tombs in the northern and southern sectors, three of the same type at the entrance of the chapel, and a possible 'privileged' burial of a different typology (the only one marked by reused carved stones) in the interior of the chapel.<sup>81</sup>

Funerary stelae are also a good reflection of the hierarchies that existed in the social structure of these rural communities, since the most elaborate, bearing epitaphs, are mainly associated with families with a certain economic solvency, while those without epigraphs probably identify the burials of humbler inhabitants of the village. The stelae usually appear associated with the slab tombs, and functioned as signalling elements that stood over the head of the grave.<sup>82</sup> Their shape and workmanship is far

<sup>80</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Nieto Muñiz and Rodríguez Muñiz 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

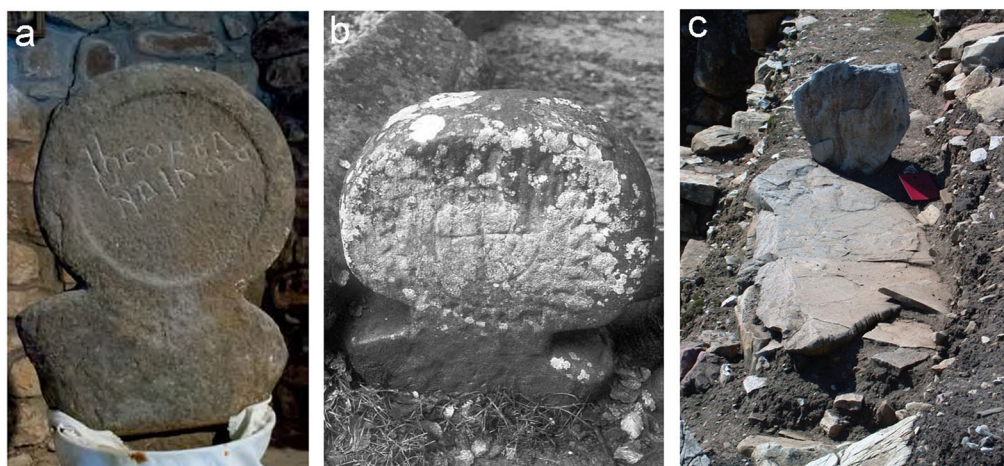


FIG 7

Examples of stelae used as markers for some early-medieval tombs. (a) Selaya (Cantabria); (b) Argiñeta (Basque Country); (c) Veranes (Asturias). *Image credits: (a) Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015, 239; (b) García Camino 2001, 202; (c) Veranes by Fernández Ochoa and Gil Sendino 2007, 144.*

from consistent, as they range from simple amorphous and irregular slabs to prismatic or well-carved discoid shapes (Fig 7). The former usually lack any kind of epigraphy, while the latter are more elaborate, featuring brief epitaphs or decorative and symbolic motifs associated with the world of death carved on one side. In Galicia and the Basque Country, some of the most outstanding are the discoidal stelae with engravings of astral motifs and concentric rings, dated from the 7th to 8th centuries, with some even including the date of death and the name of the deceased.<sup>83</sup> This is the case of the grave of Laguardia (Basque Country), with an epitaph from the year 762, dedicated to a person called *Piego*.<sup>84</sup>

However, it is in the typology of burials used during these centuries where we find the clearest indicators of social status. Simple graves, mixed graves and slab tombs, whose more-or-less predominant use responds to regional varieties that are currently difficult to interpret, would seem to be the typical burials of the humbler social groups, both freemen and dependent peasants (Fig 8). This hypothesis should be tested in the future by means of comparative studies between the skeletons that occupy these and other types of burial, based on the results of isotopic and anthropological analyses and the possible detection of social and economic differences among the deceased. Nonetheless, these methods are not entirely consistent, and the presence of some slab tombs with epigraphic carvings may indicate the graves of wealthy peasants, local aristocrats or clerics. These are generally very simple inscriptions, but they nevertheless reflect some basic cultural and calendrical knowledge, probably linked to ecclesiastical communities.<sup>85</sup>

At the apex of early-medieval sepulchral typology is the sarcophagus, the use of which was generally associated with the highest-ranking political and religious spheres

<sup>83</sup> García Camino 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Azkárte Garai-Olaun and García Camino 1996.

<sup>85</sup> García de Castro Valdés 1995





FIG 8

Examples of non-elite burials in the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula. (a) Simple earth-cut graves at Santa María de Hito (Cantabria); (b) Slab tomb at the Conventón de Rebolledo (Cantabria), radiocarbon dated to the mid-9th century AD; (c) Anthropomorphic rock-cut tombs in the cemetery of the church of San Tirso de Oviedo (Asturias); (d) Slab tomb with incised 'monograms of Christ' at San Pedro de Veranes (Asturias). *Image credits: (a, b) Gutiérrez Cuenca, 2015, 345 and 502; (c) Estrada García, 2013, 322; (d) Fernández Ochoa et al 2014, 395.*

of the kingdom; only ecclesiastical dignitaries, the most important lay magnates and members of the royal family would have had the socio-economic capacity to pay for this type of burial. The early-medieval examples are characterised by their coarse quality and lack of uniformity in the typology of the sarcophagi (Fig 9), which may offer a reason why the Asturian kings chose on occasion to use *spolia* in which to be buried, utilising late-Roman sarcophagi as a symbolic instrument for the political legitimisation of their power.<sup>86</sup> The most frequent types of *spolia* were reused monuments from the Roman period or Late Antiquity, as is the case of the sarcophagus of Itacio

<sup>86</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.





FIG 9

Examples of sarcophagi used in the tombs of high-ranking individuals. (a) Teodomiro (Compostela); (b) Poza de la Sal (Burgos); (c) Argiñeta (Duranguesado); (d) Itacio (Oviedo); (e) Lamiña (Cantabria); (f) Bárcena de Ebro (Cantabria); (g) Aroaldo (Compostela). *Image credits: (a, g) by the authors; (b) Martínez 1925, 336; (c) <www.nekatur.net>; (d) <www.superstock.com>; (e, f) Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015, 212 and 281.*

of Oviedo, originally carved in the 6th century, and which was reused in the funerary pantheon of the kings of Asturias in the basilica of Santa María, in Oviedo, or the early-Christian 4th-century sarcophagus from the cathedral of Astorga, within which Alfonso III was supposedly buried until his body was taken to Oviedo.<sup>87</sup> However, both are pseudo-historical traditions that are difficult to verify. In addition to its beauty and ornamentation, the reused sarcophagus was a symbolic instrument of political legitimisation, connecting the deceased's power with the past. In other cases, new tombs were made using fragments of early-medieval graves, as a type of contemporary *spolia*. The best example of this can be seen in Santa María de Hito (Cantabria), where one of the tombs has been remade using pieces of a sarcophagus.<sup>88</sup> Another example is the already mentioned 'privileged tomb' at San Vitor de Barxacoba, which was constructed from reused carved stones.<sup>89</sup>

#### SOCIAL AGENCY, CEMETERIES AND THE UNEVEN GEOGRAPHY OF POWER IN THE KINGDOM OF ASTURIAS

In addition to the evidence for social differences within the cemeteries, differences in the local and regional contexts in which the cemeteries were created are indicative of the diversity of social agents and the irregular political and territorial control within the Kingdom of Asturias. Let us start with the cemeteries in Oviedo and Compostela, the two main centres of power of the kingdom. It is not surprising that these burial places reflected the presence of major elites, who consciously decided to be buried in close

<sup>87</sup> García González 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Nieto Muñiz and Rodríguez Muñiz 2016.

association with the legitimating symbols of the kingdom. Following the 9th-century establishment of an episcopal see in Oviedo, a delimited space emerged containing churches other than the cathedral, such as the funerary basilica of Santa María del Rey Casto, or the palace chapel of San Tirso. Accompanying the various ecclesiastical buildings that appeared, different cemetery spaces were also created to the south and north of the cathedral of San Salvador. One of the most important is around the crypt of Santa Leocadia, built at the end of the 9th century to house the relics of the Cordovan martyrs Eulogio and Leocricia when they were moved from the Andalusian capital by order of Alfonso III. Inside and around the crypt are several privileged burials that use tombs excavated in the rock, some of an anthropomorphic nature, which are sometimes covered with slabs. A primitive pantheon of the bishops of Oviedo was also discovered in this area, dating to between the 9th and 11th centuries.<sup>90</sup>

At Santiago de Compostela, the primary religious centre of the kingdom, a cemetery space appeared around the first basilica built by Alfonso II, which was later extended by Alfonso III. The cathedral stands over the *Locus Sancti Iacobi*, consisting of the martyr's tomb and a necropolis, probably from Late Antiquity, over which the early-medieval cemetery was built.<sup>91</sup> The tomb of Bishop Teodomiro, covered with an epigraphic slab carved with an 'Asturian cross', was located in a small rectangular room annexed to the S side of the building, next to its side entrance, and in parallel with a second tomb. It should be noted that the original location of the bishop's tomb is unknown, as it was relocated when the original basilica had been replaced by that of Alfonso III (866–910 AD).<sup>92</sup>

In rural areas we can identify two main categories of cemetery. There are those that were created in large churches sponsored by the kings and by the high lay and ecclesiastical powers. In these cases, the oldest burials seem to be contemporaneous to the foundation of the church, with no previously documented tombs, so that the building and the early-medieval cemetery are not superimposed over a previous necropolis. This is the case of monastic churches sponsored by the king or high aristocrats such as Tuñón or San Xes de Francelos, both of which have evidence of significant architectural investment from the end of the 9th to the beginning of the 10th century AD.<sup>93</sup> Therefore it seems likely that these major churches aspired to a greater territorial scope than the small rural churches, as they were located in strategic geographical locations, and sought to configure a network of new central ecclesiastical sites with important baptismal and funerary functions for the pre-existing peasant population. This theory remains inconclusive at present unless opportunities arise to excavate the interiors of these churches and undertake systematic studies. Nevertheless, it is significant that Santianes de Pravia, the church of King Silo, had a small baptismal pool around the year 780, and that by the 9th century the most archaic type of baptismal font was mainly concentrated in royal or episcopal dependent churches; while the types with more advanced chronologies from the 10th–11th centuries were located in churches of a different nature, many of which are smaller. In addition to this is the baptistery built by Alfonso II in Oviedo

<sup>90</sup> García de Castro Valdés 1999; Carrero Santamaría 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Suárez Otero 2003.

<sup>92</sup> García González 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Tuñón: Adán Álvarez and Cabo Pérez 1989; Ríos González and Muñiz Álvarez 2018; San Xes de Francelos: Sánchez-Pardo et al 2017.

cathedral, and the configuration of spaces consigned for the baptism in the narthex of many of the larger churches in the kingdom.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, there is an extensive list of churches in smaller rural areas that cannot be considered as parishes, as such, which are not usually equipped with baptismal fonts, but did begin to be used as spaces for large-scale burial by peasant communities, thereby putting an end to the funerary practices of Late Antiquity. Characteristically, contrary to what we have observed for the larger churches, most of these small churches were built over previous burial sites. Most of them are very simple buildings, with a single nave and a simple four-sided chancel. Good examples of these first early-medieval cemeteries associated with smaller churches can be found in Asturias in San Juan de Riomiera, Vigaña, Abamia, Serrapio, or Plecín.<sup>95</sup> In the Basque Country, a network of small private churches and monasteries with cemetery areas was created in the 9th and 10th centuries.<sup>96</sup> Also in Galicia, many of the early-medieval churches were built over previously existing necropolises, in areas economically more dynamic and linked to communication routes such as the examples of Santa Eulalia de Tines, San Xiao de Moraime or San Breixo de Ouvigo.<sup>97</sup> In all of these cases, the link between new churches and old settlements seems to be closer.

Moreover, we find significant differences in the size of the cemeteries that arose around these early-medieval churches, which reflected very different population contexts, and as also happens in the late antique period.<sup>98</sup> By establishing a demographic classification, a distinction could be made between cemeteries that contain fewer than 50 burials, corresponding to small rural communities, and larger cemeteries, sometimes with more than a 100 graves, indicating that these were larger villages or areas with a higher population density, as has been proposed for the upper Arlanza region in Burgos, or to the south of the River Duero.<sup>99</sup> In some areas this distinction is extremely clear, with the larger population centres that generally exploited more propitious spaces being located on the coast, or in valleys that had been occupied since Roman times, while the much smaller settlements were located in mountainous foothills and in areas that previously suffered less anthropogenic pressure. Together with these main sites, the small necropolises of fewer than ten individuals and the isolated burials may well be related to smaller, more scattered settlements.

Shifting back to the macro scale, it is also possible to envisage the presence of certain concentrations of cemeteries in some areas of the kingdom, which seem to reflect 'hot spots' of political control in the context of state formation in Northwestern Iberia. From west to east, we find the first in the area of Braga-Chaves, the second in Santiago de Compostela, the third around the episcopal see of Lugo, the fourth in the central part of Asturias, with the court of Oviedo, the fifth in the upper valley of the River Ebro, and finally those in Duranguesado, in the Basque Country.<sup>100</sup> In most cases there

<sup>94</sup> García de Castro Valdés 1995.

<sup>95</sup> San Juan de Riomiera: Requejo Pagés et al 2007; Vigaña: Fernández Mier 2015; Abamia: Ríos González 2009; Serrapio: Requejo Pagés 1995; Plecín: Adán Álvarez 1995.

<sup>96</sup> García Camino 2002; Quirós Castillo 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Sánchez-Pardo 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Vigil-Escalera 2013; Quirós Castillo 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Padilla Lapuente and Alvaro Rueda 2010; Martín Viso 2007 and 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Braga-Chaves: López Quiroga and Rodríguez Lovelle 1997; Santiago de Compostela: Suárez Otero 1999 and 2003; Lugo: Rodríguez Lovelle and López Quiroga 2000; Oviedo: García de Castro Valdés 1995; River Ebro: Gutiérrez Cuenca 2015; Gutiérrez Cuenca and Hierro Gárate 2003; Martínez Santa-Olalla 1925; Lecanda Esteban 2015; Ealo de Sá 1984; Duranguesado: Azkárate Garai-Olaun and García Camino 1996; García Camino 2001.

is a clear connection between the local elites of these areas and the preference for sarcophagi for their burials. The most outstanding of these is the collection of sarcophagi from the area around Lugo, revealing the presence of a large, densely connected aristocratic hierarchy. This evidence suggests that Lugo played a major role as a centre of power in the Kingdom of Asturias, specifically in its Galician sector, and served as a counterweight to the Asturian and Basque territories; its significance has not yet been fully appraised. There is likely a link between the presence of this dense network of aristocratic families around the episcopal see of Lugo, whose members chose to be buried in sarcophagi, and the active military role played by the urban centre in the Kingdom's politics, mainly as a location where armies gathered and rebellions by members of the nobility started. Effective control of the city would also be essential as a bridgehead in the process of firstly integrating the area as far as the River Miño in the expanding kingdom, and secondly, at a later stage, the Rivers Duero and Mondego. However, many areas have not so far provided evidence of elite burials, a fact that seems to reflect the uneven political control within the kingdom and the diversity of legitimating strategies employed by the local elites with regard to the state formation process.

Finally, there is also a distinction between the behaviours identified in the territories of Galicia and Asturias, from those in the eastern territories of Cantabria, northern Castile and Biscay. In the western area, sarcophagi are primarily associated with ecclesiastical dignitaries (bishops, abbots and priests), so they are usually located in major churches and monasteries, and we also see a high level of standardisation, with a significant number of sarcophagi with trapezoidal covers and epitaphs on their central section. Yet in the eastern area, where episcopal administration was less developed, we find a wider typological variety of sarcophagi which are more often associated with the secular aristocracy, and which therefore tend to be located at smaller rural churches and private oratories.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the previous pages, we have seen how, between the 8th and 10th centuries, an important transformation took place in funerary practices in the territory of the Kingdom of Asturias. Despite many important local differences, the systematic review of a large number of early-medieval funerary sites across Northwestern Iberia indicates a clear general trend towards control of and uniformity in burial spaces and funerary practices between the 8th and 10th centuries. In opposition to the heterogeneity that burial customs showed during the previous centuries, a progressive concentration of the inhumations around the ecclesiastical buildings as well as the standardisation of mortuary rituals can be detected in most of the archaeological sites taken in consideration in this vast area. This standardisation can be defined as the creation of the cemetery, as a common burial place for the communities, in a similar way to that observed in other European regions.<sup>101</sup>

The close link between the processes of centralisation of state power and cemetery foundation and control was not a phenomenon isolated to the Kingdom of Asturias or even the Iberian Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages; similar trends can be seen in other

<sup>101</sup> Lauwers 2005; La Rocca 2007; Zadora-Rio 2003.

European regions during the same period.<sup>102</sup> For example, in northern Italy, the foundation of private churches and family cemeteries became strictly controlled by the Carolingian kings from the 9th century, while in France the consolidation of the cemetery was clearly related to the configuration of the parish system as a territorial network of political control from the 10th century onwards.<sup>103</sup> Here, the creation of the cemetery as a common burial place for local communities functioned as an important vector at a local scale for a complex and non-linear evolution of state structures in Northwestern Iberia, as it has been proposed for other elements like churches and castles.<sup>104</sup> Cemeteries were powerful arenas for socio-political manifestations and legitimating claims, but it is precisely this factor which demands that they be understood in local terms.<sup>105</sup>

Our study has shown that a wide variety of local solutions and social agents lay behind the apparently uniform trends of the creation of cemeteries and standardisation in funerary customs across the Kingdom of Asturias. At many cemetery sites, though not all, social hierarchies were clearly expressed through the distribution patterns and types of tombs, and burial proximity to the church and relics functioned as another social and political marker of status. The use of different kinds of burials (eg simple graves, slab tombs, sarcophagi) and funerary stelae also appears to have reflected and also to have actively helped embed social stratification. However, each one of these indicators must be considered and interpreted within its local context, and no easy generalisations can be made from one area to other.

The use of symbolic and politically legitimating items in some burial sites, such as *spolia*, epigraphy and ‘Asturian crosses’ demonstrates the introduction of supra-local forces of the kingdom into the local levels. However, there are vast swathes of territory within the kingdom in which these items are simply non-existent. In these areas, the implementation of local and regional networks of power can only be evaluated by analysing the impact of the creation of a church or monastery in the local realm: continuity or not of a previous burial site, size of the necropolis, or relation to settlement structures.

While the social agency which lay behind the creation and consolidation of cemeteries can be difficult to evaluate, in many cases the analysis of burial sites reveals the important role played by local elites in promoting the social stratification and spatial organisation of the cemetery. The different degree of political articulation of these local elites with the main aristocracies of the kingdom can be explained in terms of an uneven geography of power, with scattered but well-connected ‘hot spots’ of central political control across the studied territory. These results are coherent with recent interpretations of early-medieval Iberian kingdoms as ‘relational states’ characterised by non-hierarchical and non-centralised power systems based in dense political networks.<sup>106</sup>

Future research on early-medieval cemeteries from these perspectives, combining multiple scales of analysis, and especially the results of bioarchaeological approaches that have the potential to inform us about living conditions and social inequality within the

<sup>102</sup> Lauwers 2005.

<sup>103</sup> La Rocca 2007; Zadora-Rio 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Escalona 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Härke 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Carvajal 2017; Escalona 2019.



buried communities, will be key to improving our understanding of this complex process of political transformation in the early-medieval Northwestern Iberian Peninsula.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study forms part of ASTURMETRÍA research project: *Formas de ocupación y organización del espacio en el norte peninsular: el territorio astur entre época antigua y medieval a través del registro arqueológico y paleoambiental*, [MINECO-17-HAR2016-78036-P], led by Professor J Avelino Gutiérrez González of the University of Oviedo, and funded by the Ministry of Economy; and of TERPOMED research project: *Territorio y poder monástico en la Alta Edad Media*, funded by a project of excellence of the Consellería de Cultura, Educación e Ordenación Universitaria de la Xunta de Galicia (PG-065, convocatoria Consolidación e Estructuración 2016). The authors are very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, as well as the editor for her valuable revision of the text and interesting suggestions that have greatly improved the paper. Of course, responsibility for any error remains our own.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abascal Palazón, J M 1991, 'La muerte en Roma: fuentes, legislación y evidencia arqueológica', in D Vaquerizo, *Arqueología de la Muerte: metodología y Perspectivas Actuales*, Córdoba: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Córdoba, Area de Cultura, 205–45.
- Adán Álvarez, G 1995, 'San Salvador/San Pedro de Plecín (Alles). Actuación arqueológica y síntesis histórica', *Excavaciones Arqueológicas en Asturias 1991–94* **3**, 308–17.
- Adán Álvarez, G and Cabo Pérez, C 1989, 'La necrópolis medieval de Santo Adriano de Tuñón (Santo Adriano, Asturias). Análisis de una solución arquitectónica prerrománica', *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española. II. Comunicaciones v* **2**, 207–11.
- Adán Álvarez, G, García, A, Arbizu, M 2004, 'Del Paleolítico a los enterramientos tardorromanos, la construcción na Isla y la caza de ballenas nel medievu', *Asturies. Memoria Encesa D'un País*, **18**, 16–23.
- Alonso Álvarez, R 2007, 'Los enterramientos de los reyes de León y Castilla hasta Sancho IV. Continuidad dinástica y memoria regia', *e-Spania. Revue Interdisciplinaire D'études Hispaniques Médiévales et Modernes*, <[e-spainia.revues.org](http://e-spainia.revues.org)> [accessed 16 December 2019]
- Álvaro Rueda, K 2012, *El Poblamiento Altomedieval y Las Manifestaciones Funerarias en la Cuenca Del Alto Arlanza*, Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona.
- Arce Martínez, J and Ripoll López, G 2001, 'Transformación y final de las "villae" en Occidente (siglos IV–VII)', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* **8**, 21–54.
- Arias Páramo, L 2007, *Enciclopedia del Prerrománico en Asturias* **I**, Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación Santa María La Real, Centro Estudios del Románico.
- Ariès, P 1983, *El Hombre Ante la Muerte*, Madrid: Taurus.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A 1984, 'Elementos de arqueología cristiana en la Vizcaya altomedieval', *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología* **2**, 55–62.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A 1999, *Aldaieta. Necrópolis Tardoantigua de Aldaieta (Nanclares de Gamboa, Alava). I. Memoria de la Excavación e Inventario*, Vitoria: Diputación Foral de Alava, Departamento de Cultura.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A 2002, 'De la tardoantigüedad al medioevo cristiano. Una mirada a los estudios arqueológicos sobre el mundo funerario', in D. Vaquerizo (ed), *Espacios y Usos Funerarios en el Occidente Romano*, Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 115–40.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A 2007, 'La muerte en la Edad Media', *La tierra te sea leve. Arqueología de la Muerte en la Edad Media*, Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 177–92.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A and García Camino, I 1992, 'Pervivencias rituales precristianas en las necrópolis del País Vasco durante el Medioevo. Testimonios arqueológicos', *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española. Actas. Tomo II. Comunicaciones*, Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 483–92.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A and García Camino, I 1996, *Estelas e Incripciones Medievales Del País Vasco*, Bilbao: Servicio Editorial de la Universidad Del País Vasco.
- Azkárate Garai-Olaun, A and García Camino, I 2012, 'El espacio circumpirenaico occidental durante los siglos VI al X d.C. según el

- registro arqueológico: algunos Interrogantes', in L Caballero, P Mateos and C García de Castro (eds), *Asturias Entre Visigodos y Mozárabes, Años Del Archivo Español de Arqueología* **63**, 331–51.
- Blanco-Torrejón, L 2019, 'Entre lo pagano y lo cristiano. Espacios funerarios romanos y tardoantiguos en Galicia', *Gall* **37**, 81–102.
- Barroso, R, Carrobes, J and Morín, J 2017, 'Los Hitos-Arisgotas, Orgaz (Toledo). Un palacio-panteón de época visigoda', in M Perlínes and P Hevia (eds), *La Meseta Sur Entre la Tardía Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media*, Toledo: Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, 373–98.
- Carvajal, A 2017, *Bajo la Máscara Del Regnum. La Monarquía Asturleonesa en León (854–1037)*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- Carrero Santamaría, E 2003, *El Conjunto Catedralicio de Oviedo Durante la Edad Media*, Oviedo: Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos.
- Castellanos, S and Martín Viso, I 2005, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula', *Early Medieval Europe* **13**:1, 1–42.
- Cepeda Ocampo, J J and Martínez Salcedo, A 1994, 'Conjunto arqueológico de Buradón (Salinillas de Buradón)', *Arkeotuskka* **1993**, 257–70.
- Cid López, R, Fernández Ochoa, C, García Díaz, P et al, 1991, *Asentamiento Romano y Necrópolis Medieval en Lugo de Llanera (Principado de Asturias)*, Lugo de Llanera: Ayuntamiento de Llanera.
- Crespo Díez, M 2009, 'Santa María de Matallana (Villalba de los Alcores, Valladolid). Ocupaciones tardoantiguas y medievales', in J A Quirós Castillo (eds), *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Villages in Europe*, Bilbao: Universidad Del País Vasco 375–82.
- Cruz Sánchez, J and Martín Rodríguez, E 2012, 'La ocupación medieval del yacimiento de La Aldea y sus niveles fundacionales (Baltanás, Palencia)', in C Fernández and R Bohigas (eds), *Duri Regione Romanitas. Homenaje a Javier Cortés*, Palencia: Deputación de Palencia, 421–45.
- Chavarría Arnau, A 2007, *El final de las villae en Hispania (siglos IV–VII)*, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive **7**.
- Chavarría Arnau, A and Brogiolo, G P 2008, 'El final de las villas y las transformaciones del territorio rural en el Occidente', in Fernández Ochoa et al, 193–214.
- Ealo de Sá, M 1984, 'Hallazgos prerrománicos en Cantabria: San Fructuoso de Lamiña', *Boletín Del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar* **17**, 119–26.
- Escalona Monge, J 2011, 'The Early Middle Ages: a scale-based approach', in J Escalona and A Reynolds (eds), *Scale and Scale Change in Early Middle Ages: Exploring Landscape, Local Society and the World Beyond*, Turnhout: Brepols, 9–30.
- Escalona, J 2019, 'Towards an archaeology of state formation in north-western Iberia', in J A Quirós Castillo (ed), *Social Inequality in Early Medieval Europe: Local Societies and Beyond*, Turnhout: Brepols, 33–53.
- Estrada García, R 2013, 'La villa medieval de Oviedo a la luz de las excavaciones', in C E Prieto Entrialgo (ed), *El Mundo Urbano en la España Cristiana y Musulmana Medieval*, Oviedo: Asturiensis Regni Territorium, 7, 303–37.
- Fernández Conde, F J 2000, *La Religiosidad Medieval en España. I. Alta Edad Media (s. VII–X)*, Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo.
- Fernández Conde, F J 2015, *Estudios Sobre la Monarquía Asturiana*, Gijón: Ediciones Trea.
- Fernández Mier, M 2009, 'La génesis de la aldea en las provincias de Asturias y León', in J A Quirós Castillo (ed), *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Villages in Europe*, Bilbao: Universidad Del País Vasco, 149–65.
- Fernández Mier, M 2015, 'La articulación social de la Alta Edad Media asturiana', in J A Quirós Castillo and S Castellanos, *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania. Propuestas teóricas y cultura material en los siglos V–VIII*, Documentos de Arqueología Medieval **8**, 181–200.
- Fernández Ochoa, C and Gil Sendino, F 2007, 'La villa romana del Torrexón de Veranes (Gijón)', in Arias Páramo, 134–48.
- Fernández Ochoa, C, García-Entero, V and Gil Sendino, F 2008, *Las villae tardorromanas en el occidente del Imperio. Arquitectura y Función*, Gijón: Ediciones Trea.
- Fernández Ochoa, C, Gil Sendino, F and Salido Domínguez, J 2014, 'Nuevas evidencias del cristianismo en Asturias: los crismones de la villa romana de Veranes (Gijón)', *Gerión* **31**:0, 385–416.
- García Álvarez-Busto, A and Muñiz López, I 2010, *Arqueología Medieval en Asturias*, Gijón: Ediciones Trea.
- García Álvarez-Busto, A 2019, 'Iglesias, cementerios, poblamiento y ordenación social y territorial en el Reino de Asturias', in A García Álvarez-Busto, C García de Castro and S Ríos González (eds), *Actas Del Congreso*

- Internacional 1300 Aniversario Del Origen Del Reino de Asturias. Anejos de Naitos* **5**, 483–512.
- García Camino, I 2001, 'La aportación de la arqueología al estudio del tránsito entre la antigüedad y el medievo en Bizkaia', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* **8**, 97–112.
- García Camino, I 2002, *Arqueología y Poblamiento en Bizkaia, Siglos VI–XII*, Bilbao: Diputación Foral de Bizkaia, Departamento de Cultura.
- García de Castro Valdés, C 1995, *Arqueología Cristiana de la Alta Edad Media en Asturias*, Oviedo: Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos.
- García de Castro Valdés, C 1999, 'Las primeras fundaciones', in Caso Fernandez, F and Tolin, R et al (eds), *La Catedral de Oviedo. Historia y restauración* **I**, Oviedo: Ediciones Nobel, 21–73.
- García de Castro Valdés, C and Ríos González, S 2013, 'Santa María de Villaverde y el valle del Güeña, Cangas de Onís y Onís (vertiente norte de los Picos de Europa). De la Antigüedad a la Edad Media', *Madridier Mitteilungen* **54**, 485–527.
- García González, S 2015, Espacios Funerarios y Liturgia de Difuntos en el Antiguo Reino de Asturias y León (Siglos VIII–XIII) (unpubl PhD Thesis, Universidad de Oviedo).
- García González, S 2017, 'La lauda del obispo Teodomiro en la catedral de Santiago de Compostela', in F J Fernández Conde and R Alonso Álvarez (eds), *Los Reyes de Asturias y Los Orígenes Del Culto a la Tumba Del Apóstol*, Santiago, Oviedo: Ayuntamiento de Oviedo, 73–91.
- García Valdés, L 1982, 'El jarro hispanovisigodo de Mañaria', *Acta Historica et Archeologica Medievalia* **3** 145–54.
- Gurt i Esparraguera, J M and Ribera i Lacomba, A 2005, *VI Reunió D'Arqueologia Cristiana Hispánica: les Ciutats Tardoantigues D'Hispania: cristianització i Topografia*, Barcelona: Institut D'Estudis Catalans.
- Gurt i Esparraguera, J M and Sánchez Ramos, I 2011, 'Topografía funeraria de las ciudades hispanas en los siglos IV–VII', *Madridier Mitteilungen* **52**, 457–513.
- Gutiérrez Cuenca, E 2015, *Génesis y Evolución Del Cementerio Medieval en Cantabria*, Santander: Universidad de Cantabria.
- Gutiérrez Cuenca, E, and Hierro Gárate, J A 2003, 'Necrópolis medievales al sur de Cantabria. Algunos ejemplos sobre sus problemas de conservación e interpretación'. *C.A.E.A.P., 25 años de Investigaciones sobre el Patrimonio Cultural de Cantabria*, Santander, 233–42.
- Gutiérrez González, J A 2021, 'Habitats rupestres altomedievales en la Meseta Norte y Cordillera Cantábrica', *Estud Humanist* **4**, 29–56.
- Gutiérrez González, J A 1994, 'La ciudad de Zamora entre el mundo antiguo y el feudalismo: morfología urbana', *IV Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española II*, Alicante: Asociación Española de Arqueología Medieval: Diputación Provincia de Alicante, 243–50.
- Gutiérrez González, J A 1995, *Fortificaciones y Feudalismo en el Origen Del Reino Leonés (ss. IX–XIII)*, Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, Secretariado de Publicaciones e Intercambio Editorial.
- Gutiérrez González, J A 2007, 'La formación del territorio de Asturias en el periodo de la monarquía asturiana', in Arias Páramo, 17–56.
- Hamerow, H 2012, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Härke, H 2001, 'Cemeteries as places of power', in F Theuws, C Van Rhijn and M de Jong (eds), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden: Brill, 9–30.
- Hernández García, J 1998, 'La necrópolis tardorromana de El Molino. Paganismo y cristianismo en un mismo espacio cementerial', *Memorias de Arqueología* **13**, 171–210.
- Hierro Gárate, J A 2011, 'La utilización sepulcral de las cuevas en Época Visigoda: los casos de Las Penas, La Garma y el Portillo del Arenal (Cantabria)', *Munibe. Antropología-Arkeología* **62**, 351–402.
- Husi, P, Lorans, E and Theureau, C 1990, 'Les pratiques funéraires à Saint-Mexme de Chinon du V au XVIII siècle', *Revue Archéologique du Centre de la France* **29**:2, 131–68.
- La Rocca, C 2007, 'Le élites, chiese e sepulture familiari tra VIII e IX secolo in Italia settentrionale', in P Depreux, F Bougard and R Le Jan (eds), *Les Élites et Leurs Espaces. Mobilité, Rayonnement, Domination (du VIe au XIe Siècle)*, Turnhout: Brepols, 259–71.
- Lauwers, M 2005, *Naissance du Cimetière: lieux Sacrés et Terre Des Morts Dans L'Occident Médiéval*, Paris: Aubier.
- Lecanda Esteban, J A 2015, Estudio arqueológico del desfiladero de La Horadada: la transición entre la tardorromana y la Alta Edad Media (ss. V–X d.n.e.), (unpubl PhD thesis, Universidad de Burgos).
- López Alsina, F, 2002, 'El encuadramiento eclesiástico como espacio de poder: de la parroquia al obispado', in J I De La Iglesia and J L

- Martín (eds), *Los Espacios de Poder en la España Medieval: XII Semana de Estudios Medievales*, Nájera: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 425–57.
- López Quiroga, J 2004, *El Final de la Antigüedad en la Gallaecia: la Transformación de Las Estructuras de Poblamiento Entre Miño y Duero (Siglos V al X)*, A Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza.
- López Quiroga, J 2018, 'Las laudas funerarias con la representación del orante y la estola. Élités eclesiásticas, jerarquía y territorio en la Gallaecia tardo-antigua', in J López Quiroga (ed) *In Tempore Sueorum. El Tiempo de Los Suevos en la Gallaecia. Volumen de Estudios*, Ourense: Deputación Provincial de Ourense, Servicio de Publicacións, 461–8.
- López Quiroga, J and Rodríguez Lovelle, M 1997, 'Un modelo de análisis del poblamiento rural en el valle del Duero (siglos VII–X), a partir de un espacio macro-regional: las Tierras Galaico Portuguesas', *Anu Stud Mediev* **27**:2, 687–748.
- Loza Uriarte, M and Niso Lorenzo, J 2011, 'Resultados preliminares de la intervención arqueológica en San Martín de Dulantzi (Álava)', in J A Quirós Castillo (ed), *Vasconia en la Alta Edad Media 450–1000, Poderes y Comunidades Rurales en el Norte Peninsular*, Bilbao: Universidad Del País Vasco, Servicio Editorial, 235–46.
- Llano y Roza de Ampudia, A 1928, *Bellezas de Asturias de Oriente a Occidente*, Oviedo: Diputación Provincial Oviedo Galiciana: Biblioteca Digital de Galicia.
- Marcos Herrán, F J and Hernando, R 2012, 'Análisis espacial de la necrópolis norte de La Olmeda (Pedrosa de la Vega, Palencia): orientaciones y depósitos rituales', in C. Fernández Ibáñez and R Bohigas Roldán (eds), *Durii Regione Romanitas. Homenaje a Javier Cortés*, Palencia: Diputación Provincial de Palencia: Instituto de Prehistoria y Arqueología Sautuola, 155–60.
- Martín Duque, A J 2002, 'Definición de espacios y fronteras en los reinos de Asturias-León y Pamplona hasta el siglo XI', in J I De La Iglesia and J L Martín (eds), *Los Espacios de Poder en la España Medieval. XII Semana de Estudios Medievales*, Nájera: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 315–39.
- Martín Viso, I 2007, 'Tumbas y sociedades locales en el centro de la península en la alta edad media: el caso de la comarca de Riba Coa (Portugal)', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* **14**, 21–47.
- Martín Viso, I 2012, 'Enterramientos, memoria social y paisaje en la Alta Edad Media: propuestas para un análisis de las tumbas excavadas en roca en el centro-oeste de la Península Ibérica', *Zephyrus* **69**, 165–87.
- Martín Viso, I 2014 'El espacio del más acá: las geografías funerarias entre la Alta y la Plena Edad Media', in E López Ojeda (ed), *De la Tierra al Cielo. Ubi Sunt Qui Ante Nos in Hoc Mundo Fuere?*, Logroño: Logroño Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 75–140.
- Martínez Santa-Olalla, J 1925, 'Cuestión de cronología: los sarcófagos de la Bureba (Burgos): continuación', *Boletín de la Comisión Provincial de Monumentos Históricos y Artísticos de Burgos* **11**, 334–40.
- Miguel Hernández, F and Benítez González, C 1996, 'Relectura arqueológica de la villa romana de Navatejera (León)', *Numantia. Arqueología en Castilla y León* **6**, 103–26.
- Monreal Jimeno, L A 1989, *Eremitorios Rupestres Altomedievales*, El Alto Valle Del Ebro, Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto.
- Monsalvo Antón, J M 2005, 'Espacios y fronteras en el discurso territorial del reino de Asturias (del cantábrico al Duero en las Crónicas Asturianas)', *Studia Histórica. Historia Medieval* **23**, 43–87.
- Muñiz López, I and García Álvarez-Busto, A 2010, 'El castillo de Gauzón (Asturias, España) y el proceso de feudalización entre la Antigüedad tardía y la Edad Media a través de las fortificaciones', *Munibe* **61**, 289–328.
- Nieto Muñiz, E and Rodríguez Muñiz, V 2016, 'A necrópole rupestre de San Vítor (San Lorenzo de Barxacova, Parada de Sil, Ourense): ¿grandes necrópolis en lugares desiertos?', in J López Quiroga (ed), *Concavis Petrarum Habitaverunt: el Fenómeno Rupestre en el Mediterráneo Medieval*, Brit Archaeol Rep, Int Ser **2591**, 84–116.
- Padilla Lapuente, J I and Álvaro Rueda, K 2010, 'Necrópolis rupestres y el poblamiento altomedieval en el Alto Arlanza (Burgos)', *En la España Medieval* **33**, 259–94.
- Pérez Rodríguez-Aragón, F and Abásolo Álvarez, J A 1995, 'Arqueología funeraria en Hispania durante el Bajo Imperio y la época Visigoda', in C Fernández, F Pérez and R Fábregas (eds), *Arqueología da Morte: arqueología da Morte na Península Ibérica Desde as Orixes Ata o Mediovo*, Vigo: Universidad de Vigo, 291–306.
- Quirós Castillo, J A 2006, 'La génesis del paisaje medieval en Álava: la formación de la red aldeana', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* **13**:1, 49–94.

- Quirós Castillo, J A 2009, 'Arqueología del campesinado altomedieval: las aldeas y las granjas del País Vasco', in J A Quirós Castillo, *Arqueología de Las Aldeas Altomedievales en Europa*, Bilbao: Universidad Del País Vasco, 385–403.
- Quirós Castillo, J A 2011, 'Las iglesias altomedievales en el País Vasco. Del monumento al paisaje', *Stud Hist Historia Medieval* **29**, 175–205.
- Quirós Castillo, J A (ed) 2013, *El poblamiento rural de época visigoda en Hispania. Arqueología Del Campesinado en el Interior Peninsular*, Bilbao: Universidad Del País Vasco.
- Quirós Castillo, J A (ed) 2016, *Social Complexity in Early Medieval Rural Communities. The North-Western Iberian Archaeological Record*, Oxford: Archeopress.
- Quirós Castillo, J A and Fernández Mier, M 2012, 'Para una historia social de la arquitectura monumental altomedieval asturiana', in L Caballero, P Mateos and C García de Castro (eds), 'Asturias Entre Visigodos y Mozárabes', *Anejos Del Archivo Español de Arqueología* **63**, 27–53.
- Requejo Pagés, O 1995, 'II Fase de restauración en la iglesia de San Vicente de Serrapio, Aller (1991–1992): resultados arqueológicos', *Excavaciones Arqueológicas en Asturias 1991–94* **4**, Oviedo: Servicio de Publicaciones, 293–6.
- Requejo Pagés, O and Álvarez Martínez, V 2008, 'Descubrimiento de la villa romana de Priañes (Oviedo)', in Fernández Ochoa et al, 681–91.
- Requejo Pagés, O, Arca Miguélez, C and Arias Páramo, L et al 2007 'Descubrimiento de la antigua iglesia de San Juan de Riomiera (Collanzo, Aller)', *Excavaciones Arqueológicas en Asturias 1999–2002* **5**, 347–56.
- Reynolds, A 2009, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ríos González, S 2009, 'Excavaciones arqueológicas en la iglesia de Santa Eulalia de Abamia (Cangas de Onís). 2005–2006', *Excavaciones Arqueológicas en Asturias 2003–2006* **6**, 201–8.
- Ríos González, S, Muñiz Álvarez, J R 2018, 'Nuevas aportaciones a la historia constructiva de Santo Adriano de Tuñón', *Excavaciones Arqueológicas en Asturias 2003–2006* **8**, 327–36.
- Ripoll López, G 1989, 'Características generales del poblamiento y la arqueología funeraria visigoda de Hispania', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. S. I. Prehistoria y Arqueología* **2**, 389–418.
- Ripoll, G and Molist Capella, N 2015, 'Cura mortuorum en el nordeste de la Península Ibérica, siglos IV al XII d.C.', *Territ Soc Poder* **9**, 5–66.
- Riu, M 1982, 'Alguns costums funeraris de l'Edat Mitjana a Catalunya', *Necropolis i sepultures medievals de Catalunya*, *Acta Historica et Archaeologica Mediaevalia Anexo* **1**, 29–57.
- Rodríguez Lovelle, M R and Quiroga, J L 2000, 'El poblamiento rural en torno a Lugo en la transición de la Antigüedad al Feudalismo (ss. V–X)', *Cuad Estud Gallegos* **47**:113, 53–76.
- Rodríguez Resino, A 2005, *Do Imperio Romano á Alta Idade Media. Arqueoloxía da Tardoantigüidade en Galicia (Séculos V–VIII)*, Noia: Editorial Toxosoutos.
- Roig Buxó, J 2019, 'Prácticas funerarias de época visigoda y altomedieval (siglos VI al X): el ejemplo arqueológico del noreste peninsular (Cataluña)', in A García Álvarez-Busto, C García de Castro and S Ríos González (eds), *Actas Del Congreso Internacional 1300 Aniversario Del Origen Del Reino de Asturias. Anejos de Naulos* **5**, 431–81.
- Ruiz de la Peña Solar, J I 2002, 'La realeza asturiana y la formulación del poder regio', *La Época de la Monarquía Asturiana*, Oviedo: Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, Principado de Asturias, 163–201.
- Sáenz de Urturu, F 1990, 'Memoria de los sondeos estratigráficos realizados en las inmediaciones de las "Cuevas de los Moros" (Corro, Álava)', *Estudios de Arqueología Alavesa* **17**, 179–220.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C 2012, 'Los contextos de fundación de las iglesias tardoantiguas en Galicia (ss. V–VIII): substratos arqueológicos, distribución y significados', *Antiquité Tardive* **20**, 255–73.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C 2013, 'Iglesias y dinámicas sociopolíticas en el paisaje gallego de los siglos V–VIII', *Hispania LXXIII* **243**, 11–50.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C 2014, 'Organización eclesiástica y social en la Galicia tardoantigua. Una perspectiva geográfico-arqueológica del Parroquial Suevo', *Hispania Sacra* **134**, 439–80.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C 2015, 'Power strategies in the early medieval churches of Galicia (711–910 AD)', in J C Sánchez-Pardo and M Shapland (eds), *Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe*, Turnhout: Brepols, 227–68.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C, Blanco Rotea, R and Sanjurjo Sánchez, J 2017, 'Tres arquitecturas altomedievales orensanas: Santa Eufemia de Ambía, San Xés de Francelos y San Martiño de Pazó', *Arqueol Arquitect* **14**, 1–37.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C, De la Torre Llorca, M J and Fernández Ferreiro, M 2018, 'Élites, arquitectura y fundación de Iglesias en



- Galicia entre los siglos IX y X', *Reti Medievali Rivista* **19**:2, 311–66.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C, Carrero-Pazos, M, Fernández-Ferreiro, M et al, 2020, 'Exploring the landscape dimension of the early medieval churches. A case study from A Mariña region (north-west Spain)', *Landscape Hist* **41**:1, 5–28.
- Sánchez-Pardo, J C and Shapland, M 2015, *Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe*, Turnhout: Brepols.
- Sánchez Ramos, I 2007, 'La cristianización de las necrópolis de Corduba. Fuentes escritas y testimonios arqueológicos', *Arch Esp Arqueol* **80** 191–206.
- Sánchez Ramos, I 2019, 'Elite burials on the Iberian Peninsula in the 4th to 7th centuries AD', *Med Archaeol* **63**:2, 233–70.
- Suárez Otero, J 1999, 'Constructing the medieval Compostela: the necropolis', in M Calvo (ed), *St. James. The Hope*, Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 306–19.
- Suárez Otero, 2003, 'Del Locus Sancti Iacobi al Burgo de Compostela', in E Portela Silva (ed), *Historia de la Ciudad de Santiago de Compostela*, Santiago de Compostela: Universidade Santiago de Compostela, 49–77.
- Treffort, C 1996, *L'Église Carolingienne et la Mort: Christianisme, Rite Funéraires et Pratiques Commemoratives*, Lyon: Centre Interuniversitaire D'Histoire et D'Archéologie Médiévales; Presses Universitaires de Lyon.
- Utrero Agudo, M A 2009, 'Sepulturas e iglesias en la Hispania tardoantigua. Una relación difícil', in J Pinar and T Juárez (eds), *Contextos Funeraris a la Mediterrània Nord-Occidental (Segles V–VIII)*, Sant Cugat Del Vallès: Aredat, 17–34.
- Vidal Álvarez, S 2007, 'Nuevos datos para el estudio de la producción de sarcófagos del noroeste de la Península Ibérica entre los siglos IV–VI: el sarcófago de Portosín (A Coruña) y los relieves de Gijón (Asturias)', in G Koch (ed), *Akten Symposium Des Sarkophag-Corpus 2001*, Mainz Am Rhein: P Von Zabern, 215–31.
- Vigil-Escalera Guirado, A 2009, *Escenarios de Emergencia de un Paisaje Social y Político Altomedieval en el Interior de la Península Ibérica Durante la Quinta Centuria: cerámica, Necrópolis Rurales y Asentamientos Encastillados*, Vitoria: Universidad Del País Vasco.
- Vigil-Escalera Guirado, A 2013, 'Prácticas y ritos funerarios', in Quirós Castillo, 259–88.
- Vives, J 1963, *Concilio Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez.
- Vizcaíno Sánchez, J 2009, 'Cementerios tardoantiguos de la costa sureste. Indicios de cristianización', *Scriptia Fulgentia. Revista de Teología y Humanidades* **38**, 129–68.
- Wickham, C 2008, *Una Historia Nueva de la Alta Edad Media: Europa y el Mundo Mediterráneo, 400–800*, Barcelona: Crítica.
- Williams, H 1997, 'Ancient landscapes and the dead: the reuse of prehistoric and Roman monuments as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites', *Med Archaeol* **41**:1, 1–32.
- Williams, H 2006, *Death and Memory in Early Med Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zadora-Rio, E 2003, 'The making of churchyards and parish territories in the early-medieval landscape of France and England in the 7th–12th centuries: a reconsideration', *Med Archaeol* **47**:1, 1–19.

### Résumé

#### **Cimetières et formation étatique dans le nord-ouest de la péninsule ibérique au Haut Moyen-Âge** par Alejandro Garcia Alvarez-Busto et Jose Carlos Sánchez-Pardo

Sur la base d'une revue documentaire approfondie des travaux concernant les sépultures du Haut Moyen-Âge dans le nord-ouest de la péninsule ibérique, ce papier entend offrir, pour la première fois, une interprétation complète des pratiques funéraires et de leur transformation du 8e au 10e siècle, et évoquer leur rôle en tant qu'indicateurs utiles des processus non-linéaires de la formation

étatique dans cette région. En dépit de différences régionales importantes, une tendance générale à l'uniformité et au contrôle centralisé des comportements funéraires peut se détecter à cette période. Cependant, derrière la tendance globale à l'uniformité, les cimetières nous renseignent également sur la complexité et la diversité de l'influence sociale sous-jacente au niveau local. Il est avancé ici que les élites locales et régionales du royaume des Asturies ont encouragé cet important changement dans les pratiques funéraires, comme elles l'ont fait pour le réseau d'églises, étant donné l'importance des cimetières en tant que lieux de pouvoir et les implications de la création et du contrôle d'un lieu

d'inhumation commun pour les communautés locales.

*Zusammenfassung*

**Friedhöfe und Staatsbildung auf der nordwestlichen Iberischen Halbinsel des frühen Mittelalters** von Alejandro Garcia Alvarez-Busto und Jose Carlos Sánchez-Pardo

Die vorliegende Arbeit beruht auf einer gründlichen Analyse der Literatur über frühmittelalterliche Bestattungen auf der nordwestlichen Iberischen Halbinsel und hat zum Ziel, erstmals eine umfassende Interpretation der Bestattungsrituale und deren Wandels zwischen dem 8. und 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. zu bieten, sowie deren Funktion als nützliche Anhaltspunkte für die nichtlinearen Staatsbildungsprozesse in dieser Region zu erörtern. Trotz bedeutender regionaler Unterschiede lässt sich in dieser Phase eine allgemeine Tendenz zur Vereinheitlichung und zentralen Kontrolle über Bestattungsrituale erkennen. Allerdings geben uns Friedhöfe auch Einblick in die Komplexität und Vielseitigkeit des lokalen gesellschaftlichen Handelns, vor dem sich jener generelle Trend zur Einheitlichkeit abzeichnete. Angesichts der bedeutenden Rolle der Friedhöfe als Stätten der Macht sowie der Implikationen, die der Schaffung und Steuerung gemeinsamer Begräbnisstätten für lokale Gemeinschaften zugrunde lagen, vertreten wir hier die These, dass sowohl lokale als auch regionale Eliten im

Königreich Asturien jene bedeutende Transformation der Bestattungsrituale förderten, wie sie das auch mit dem Netzwerk an Kirchen taten.

*Riassunto*

**Cimiteri e formazione dello stato nella penisola iberica nordoccidentale altomedievale** di Alejandro Garcia Alvarez-Busto e Jose Carlos Sánchez-Pardo

Questo studio, basato su un'importante revisione del materiale bibliografico riguardante le sepolture altomedievali nella penisola iberica nordoccidentale, si propone di offrire per la prima volta un'interpretazione esauriente delle pratiche funerarie e delle loro trasformazioni tra l'VIII e il X secolo d.C. e di discuterne il ruolo in quanto utili indicatori dei processi non lineari attinenti alla formazione dello stato in quest'area. Durante questo periodo, malgrado alcune differenze regionali importanti, si può notare una tendenza generale verso l'uniformità e il controllo centralizzato dei comportamenti funerari. Tuttavia i cimiteri sono anche fonte di informazione sulla complessità e sulla diversità dell'intervento sociale a livello locale, al di là della più ampia tendenza all'uniformità. Qui si sostiene che le élite del Regno delle Asturie, sia locali che regionali, promossero questo importante cambiamento nelle pratiche funerarie, così come avevano fatto per la rete delle chiese, data l'importanza dei cimiteri quali luoghi di potere e date le implicazioni relative alla creazione e al controllo di un luogo di inumazione comune per le comunità locali.