



***Inreligiosa Consuetudo:***  
**Idolatry and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom**

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ABSTRACT

The following study is part of a broader project exploring the changing relationships between society and excessive or divergent social and religious practices in the Visigothic world during the seventh century. This is a traditional topic very seriously explored by Visigothicists, but which welcomes new approaches. Starting from the view that local religious practices, as they have been reported, were not a direct manifestation of the peasantry, it becomes relevant to identify the social mechanisms that did generate them, the conditions that allowed their activity, the circumstances that explain their sanction by the central powers and, finally, the shifting points that can be identified throughout the seventh century. This interpretive set allows the researcher to revert to an earlier scholarly tradition that combines textual information with data provided by archaeology (Cumont, 1906; Toutain, 1907). In a renowned article written during the 1980s, Jocelyn Hillgarth jointly analyzed the diverse textual artifacts that contributed to shaping 'popular religion' in Visigothic Iberia. In this essay, I return to this approach to identify critical junctures in which the issue appears with a greater or a lesser intensity, and to think further about its causes during the period AD 636-711.



## ESSAY

**Introduction**

In 2005, Bernadette Filotas proposed the following guidelines for defining pagan practices and early medieval superstitions: “I have accepted as pagan and superstitious any beliefs or practices condemned in pastoral literature which explicitly or implicitly entailed a reliance on powers not coming from God and not mediated by the Church.”<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, pastoral condemnation proves to be a decisive element in qualifying the practice. Its “pagan” or “superstitious” nature is not considered to be an intrinsic quality of belief or of ritual endeavor but emerges from a label imposed by an ecclesiastical authority. Although Filotas was unable to develop all the implications of her definition, in itself it constitutes an important step in deconstructing the image of idolatrous practice in the earlier middle ages as a trace or survival of previous cults.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Filotas cannot compose this “pragmatic” definition with the title chosen for her text, *Pagan Survivals*. On the one hand, the scholar posits that superstition only exists if there is an authority validating it, while she affirms that the practice is a set of inherited behaviors from previous times. In my opinion, this addresses two different ways of considering the problem. The metaphor of *pagan practices as traces/survival* immediately places the issue in terms of an unyielding resistance to the central powers. A subject stemming from the *populus* – that by a slip already imposed by the documentation ends up being a peasant subject – sticks to their ancestral patterns of behavior and their inertia becomes entangled with the active policies of the dominant powers. From the other perspective, the problem does not lie in the content of the practice or in its ancestral origin, but in the *strategic nature* of the label. To typify it as “superstitious” or “pagan” is already a political action in itself; the unilateral movement of a force that seeks to impose its order on situations that show capacity (real or fictitious) to generate their own legal systems. In this matrix, the labelled subject is not necessarily plebeian or peasant but can acquire more transversal and complex dimensions. Neither does this perspective prejudge him in a passive position but rather supports the possibility of strategic assemblies and situational calculations: the fact that his practices were not an inert inheritance of a remote past but patterns that convey cyclical positions in relation to other forces. In short, Filotas’s title and definition point to two different ways of approaching the problem of superstitious practices in the earlier middle ages: one that focuses on the content of the practice and the other on its dimension as *political action*. For the first approach see: Stephen McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain Up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (DC: The Catholic University of America, 1938); Antonio Tovar and José Blázquez Martínez, *Historia de la Hispania Romana* (Madrid: Alianza, 1975); Rosa Sanz Serrano, “*Sive pagani sive gentiles*: El contexto sociocultural del paganismo hispano en la Tardoantigüedad,” *Gerion* 21, no. 7 (2003): 9-37. In a clever analysis, Isabel Velázquez and Gisela Ripoll consider that the new generations are not limited to inheriting old patterns of behavior but that they select knowledge and re-signify it according to criteria and requirements of their time. See Isabel Velázquez Soriano and Gisela Ripoll López, “Pervivencias del termalismo y el culto a las aguas en época visigoda hispánica,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie II, Historia Antigua*, no. 5(1992), 555-80.

Filotas's definition also involves certain methodological precautions in relation to the sources. If the function of pastoral literature was to regulate a field, we should not consider its contents to be a faithful reflection of what was happening in society. Instead of describing pagan practices, the sources represent dynamic compositions in which information of different nature, origin and level can be identified. From this cannot necessarily be inferred – in the way of a linguistic-turn-type of argument – that the heterogeneity of beliefs and cults was a pure invention, a creation of clerical writing, but rather that those constructs were more persuasive and effective than a detailed account of what was really happening.<sup>3</sup>

In a recent article, written in 2015, Céline Martin disregards the problem of describing pagan practices and focuses, instead, on the political game of the central powers.<sup>4</sup> Martin highlights two elements: on the one hand, the connection between critical moments of the monarchy and the proliferation of anti-pagan policies; and on the other, the employment of repressive measures against the Jews in these same circumstances.<sup>5</sup> In her opinion, these topics are not autonomous, but rather constitute the arsenal of the dominant powers' methods of intervention.

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<sup>3</sup> To recover the rosy image of Jacques Fontaine, these constructs may be understood as *collages*, devices specifically oriented to convey meaning to readers learned in the Biblical. To show the variety of origins of the elements frequently inserted in these constructs, the following sources can be identified: a) items collected by the writer's direct observation or by his close informants, b) elements extracted from Patristic sources, c) elements taken from the Bible, and d) information provided by classic authors (Ovid, etc.). Evidently, the procedure to compose this kind of device is not description but exegetical comment.

<sup>4</sup> Céline Martin, "De sacrilegiis extirpandis. Interpretar la legislación contra el paganismo en la Hispania de los siglos VI- VII," in *La Iglesia como sistema de dominación en la Antigüedad Tardía*, ed. José Fernández Ubiña, Alberto Quiroga Puertas and Purificación Ubric Rabaneda (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2015). Moreover, in a classic article, J.N. Hillgarth shows that popular religion in Visigothic society owes much to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in their effort to register orthodox beliefs and practices in very different social ranks. The premise of a 'Christian common sense', according to this author, that led to many levels and aspects acting simultaneously: nothing further away from the romantic spontaneity of practices; nothing further away from a pagan popular culture separated from a Christian scholarly culture. Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, "Popular religion in Visigothic Spain," in *Visigothic Spain. New Approaches*, ed. Edward James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>5</sup> See also Wolfram Drews, "Jews as Pagans? Polemical Definitions of Identity in Visigothic Spain," *Early Medieval Europe* 11, Issue 3 (2002): 198.

Presuming that the mentioning of pagan practices in the sources was a gesture of power, a power at work, it is necessary to explore now which groups would be interested in organizing and sustaining particular representations that were possibly actualizing ancient beliefs. My purpose in this essay is not to reconstruct the reality of such practices but to try to identify those who supposedly embraced them and to figure out why.

### **A Case Study: Erwig's Anti-Idolatry Policy in the Twelfth Council of Toledo (681)**

To test the propriety of these questions and acquire instruments to approach the sources, it is fitting for the purposes of this paper to stick to a case study. I have chosen to work with canon XI of the Twelfth Council of Toledo (XII Toledo), held in 681, which states:

We enact these precepts of God, not for punishment but for terror of offenders we avoid imposing capital punishment; but we warn the worshippers of idols, those who worship stones, those who light torches and those who worship sources or trees, that the ones who show themselves sacrificing to the devil should admit that they themselves lead spontaneously to death, certainly the name of death is called devil as it is written: 'And his name was death'.<sup>6</sup>

Noticeably, the source is complex in meaning and multi-layered in associations and allusions. The canon and the council, as a set, are defined by the recent elevation of Erwig (r. 680-687) to the Visigothic throne in Toledo. Erwig gained the crown by

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<sup>6</sup> "Praecepta haec Domini non in ultione sed in terrore delinquentium adponentes non mortis per hanc sententiam promulgamus, sed cultores idolorum, veneratores lapidum, accensores facularum et excolentes [sacra] fontium vel arborum admonemus, ut agnoscant quod ipsi se spontanea morti subiciunt qui diabolo sacrificari videntur, mortis enim nomen diabolus appellatur sicut de eo scriptum est: 'Et erat illi nomen mors'." XII Toledo XI (*Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, ed. and trans. José Vives [Barcelona, 1963]).

overthrowing an anointed king, Wamba (r. 672-680), hence, the urgent need to strengthen his own role as a Christian prince.<sup>7</sup> In this framework, Erwig relied on Deuteronomy 4: 1-20, introducing his government as a renewal of the alliance between Yahweh and the Chosen People. These seminal Bible verses connect two conditions regarding the renewal of the relationship: in the first place, the presence of a mediator, a Moses who is able to move from the Earthy to the Terrible because it is God's will; in the second place, the definitive eradication of infidelity. Re-signifying his government through this agenda, Erwig presented himself as a new Moses and appropriated the anti-idolatry mission.<sup>8</sup>

In the introductory speech to the council Erwig elicited another element of the anti-idolatry program: its strong apocalyptic tone, as shared with the main ecclesiastical mentor of the council, Julian (Bishop of Toledo, 680-690).<sup>9</sup> In the Book of Revelations

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<sup>7</sup> Erwig introduces his ascent to power in this way: "Eu, reverentissimi patres et honorabiles ministeriorum coelestium sacerdotes, soliditatem sanctae fidei veraciter tenens et sincera cordis devotione amplectens testimonium paternitatis vestrae fortissimum in salutis nostrae advoco adiumentum, ut quia regnum fauctore Deo ad salvationem terrae et sublevationem plebium suscepisse nos credimus, sanctitudinis vestrae consiliis adiuvemur. Unde licet sublimationis nostrae primordia paternitati vestrae opinabili relatione non lateant, quibus clara divinorum iudiciorum dispositione praeventus et regnandi conscenderim sedem ad sacrosanctam regni perceperim unctionem, nunc tamen melius id poteritis et scribtorum relatione cognoscere et promulgationis vestrae sententiis publicare; ut sicut eadem regni nostri primordia conventus vestrae sanctitudinis conpererit divinitus ordinata, ita et his orationum solamen impendat [...]" XII Toledo *Tomus regius*.

<sup>8</sup> This relationship between Moses and the anti-idolatry initiative was previously exploited not by a king but by a bishop. In fact, in sermon XL Caesarius of Arles offers the example of Moses as a persecutor of idolaters: "Denique beatus ille Moyses, de quo legimus quod 'mitis' fuerit 'super omnes homines' descendens de monte, quia popuum idolis sacrificasse cognovisset, tria milia de populo iussit interfici, non ut iracundiae suae satisfaceret, sed ut Dei iniuriam vindicaret, et ut ceteri videntes nunquam talia peccata exercere praesumerent. Et ut intellegamus quo animo hoc fieri iusserit, regressus ad Dominum supplicavit, dicens: "Si non dimiseris populo tuo peccatum suum, dele me de libro tuo quem scripsisti". Ecce veram et integram caritatem: paucos interfici iussit, ut sexcenta milia exceptis mulieribus et parvulis liberaret [...]" Caes. Arel. *Ser. XL*, 1 (*Sermons au peuple* 2, ed. Marie-José Delage [Paris: Ed. Du Cerf, 1978]).

<sup>9</sup> "Non dubium, sanctissimi patres, quod optima conciliorum adiutoria ruenti mundo subveniunt, si officiosis quae corrigenda sunt studiis peragantur, et ideo quibus malis terra prematur quibusque plagis proventu dierum succedentium feriat, paternitati vestrae non reor esse incognitum. Obinde quia certum apud nos gerimus quod pro contemptu divinorum praeceptorum terra perniciem sustineat pressurarum [...]" XII Toledo introduction.

people surrender to the Beast and worship it.<sup>10</sup> In Rev. 19: 20-21 – where the eschatological battle is prophesied – the Beast is captured and finally hurled into the sea by the Saint, together with the False Prophet and his worshipers. Unaware of when the end of time will arrive, the new *princeps visigothorum* has the certainty that the Earth will collapse if the necessary remedies are not applied, and if the alliance fails to be renewed. In this last scenario, his role may also come to be redefined: if, in fact, what is happening before his eyes is the announced end of times, the apocalyptic role of “Fidelis et verax” that “cum iustitia iudicat et pugnat” could well suit Erwig’s anti-idolatrous struggle and fight against the false prophet Wamba.<sup>11</sup>

Whether or not the end of time was to arrive, the council’s anti-idolatry policy responded to the agenda of the central authorities. Canon XI begins with quotations extracted from Exodus 20:4 and 22:20 and Deuteronomy 17:2.<sup>12</sup> The latter is interesting because it imposes, on the Saint of Israel, the obligation of stoning the idolater. In a regime of truth revealed by the Bible, the thread of quotations demonstrates the necessity of the sort of decisions that the council was to make on this topic: there is no place for infidels in the New Israel. Without delay the article names a series of offenses: worshipping the idols, venerating stones, lighting torches, adoring fountains and trees. These practices had been surveyed by Martin, Bishop of Dumio and Braga (561-580)<sup>13</sup> and, less literally, by Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (502-542).<sup>14</sup> These precedents indicate

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<sup>10</sup> Rev. 13: 1-4.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. 19: 11.

<sup>12</sup> The Bible of Jerusalem refers to the Vulgate’s Ex. 22:20 as Ex. 22:19.

<sup>13</sup> To strengthen the measures taken by the Second Council of Braga, Martin developed his famous *De correctione* in which he writes: “Nam ad petras et ad arbores et ad fontes et per trivium cereolos incendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli?” Mart., *De correctione rusticorum* 16.2 (*Martino di Braga: Contro le superstizioni: catechesi al popolo: de correctione rusticorum*, ed. Mario Naldini [Firenze: Nardini, 1991]).

<sup>14</sup> “Audivimus aliquos ex vobis ad arbores vota reddere, ad fontes orare, auguria diabolica observare: de qua re tantus dolor est in animis nostris, ut nullam possimus consolationem recipere.” Caes. Arl. *Ser. LIII*, 1. This same warning is repeated in the synod of Auxerre (561- 605): “Non licet consensus in

little about the reality of the practices listed by the council. However, they do indicate that the Visigothic Fathers took part in the issue, selecting from ecclesiastical tradition and other information available to them about practices associated with sacrifices and offerings. These measures clearly focus on combating any action that might promote an alternative to the efficacies offered by the Church and that might suspend any mediation controlled by the clerical hierarchy. Canon XI also refers to punishments, yet does not include the death penalty. For the moment, neither the prince nor the bishops were ready to stage the eschatological battle. Death was not chosen because they neither wanted to nor could hasten the end of time. Throwing idolaters and the Beast into the sea could wait. Thus, what the sources reveal are complex constructs that are far removed from popular culture and which seek only to centralize power. How do they do this, and why?

### **Central Powers, Pagan Slaves and the Authority of the Lord**

Continuing the interrogation of canon XI of the council held in 681:

And therefore, any sacrilege of idolatry or anything against the holy faith that foolish men, captives of worshipping the devil, serve; discovered the fact by priests or judges, are these sacrileges to be removed, and already uprooted, these are to be truncated. Those who truly engage in such horror are to be punished with lashes and delivered to their owners loaded with shackles, provided that their owners promise through oath to watch them over so closely that it will be not possible for them to

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domibus propriis nec pervigiliis in festivitates sanctorum facere nec inter sentias aut ad arbores sacros vel ad fontes vota dissoluere nisi, quicumque votum habuerit, in ecclesia vigilet et matriculae ipsum votum aut pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pedem aut hominem ligneum fieri penitus praesumat.” Aux, III (*Les canons des conciles mérovingiens [VIe-VIIe siècles]*, ed. Jean Gaudemet and Brigitte Basdevant, 2 vols. [Paris: Sources chrétiennes, 1989]).

commit such wickedness. But if their owners do not want to receive those culprits under oath, then they will be presented to the king by the authorities in order to obtain the free ability to donate them. Also their owners, who having been warned about the errors of such slaves postpone their punishment, will suffer the penalty of excommunication and must know that they will have lost their rights on that slave who they did not want to punish. And if in these errors free people were involved, they will receive perpetual penalty of excommunication and will be punished with exile.<sup>15</sup>

The legislator of the canon directed the reader to the context of rural slavery through a carefully chosen vocabulary. Clearly, he strove to posit the problem of the exercise of idolatrous cults in the family of rural *possessores*: by avoiding naming the *famuli* he implied servile associations to idolatry and eventually extended its application to other rural statutes.<sup>16</sup> The canon also mentions the *ingenui* as possible idolaters, and, although the punishments to be applied are serious, they are less relevant.

Exclusive servile origin for the idolaters, however, cannot be inferred directly from this canon XI. Twelve years later, at XVI Toledo (693), Erwig's successor Egica (r. 687-

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<sup>15</sup> “[...] Ac proinde omne sacrilegium idolatriae vel quidquid illud est contra sanctam fidem in quo insipientes homines captivitati diabolicis culturis inserviant sacerdotis vel iudicis instantia inventa <haec> sacrilegia eradantur et exterminata truncentur; eos vero quid ad talem horrorem incurrunt et verberibus coerceant et onustos ferro suis dominis tradant, si tamen domini eorum per iusiurandi adtestationem promittant se eos tam sollicito custodire, ut ultra illis non liceat tale nefas committere. Quod si domini eorum nolint huiusmodi reos in fide sua suscipere, tunc ab eis / a quibus coerciti sunt regiiis conspectibus prasantentur, ut principalis auctoritas liberam de talibus donandi potestatem obtineat: domini tamen eorum qui nuntiatos sibi talium servorum errores ulcisci distulerint et excommunicationis sententia perferant et iura serviillius quem corecere nolint se amisisse cognoscat quod si ingenuorum personae his erroribus fuerint implicatae et perpetuae excommunicationis sententia ferientur et arctiori exilio ulciscuntur.” XII Toledo XI.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, the legislator refers to the *domini* as a power exercised on different social categories and not confined to *servi*, figuring that in the Visigoth law – given its Roman influence – it is more accurate and therefore restricted. However, as we have said, through the semantic field he uses he redirects the reader to that frame: the verbs *inservire*, *truncare*; the noun *ferrum*, etc.

700) again recommended the suppression of idolatry, but on this occasion the *famuli*'s protagonism was ousted by a general interest in the rustic population and in the role of the bishops.<sup>17</sup> Most likely, the reference to the servile world in XII Toledo XI did not describe a set of actors, rather it aimed to mobilize rural possessors. In this it emulates Reccared's monumental III Toledo (589),<sup>18</sup> whose canon XVI refers to the idolatry of the *famuli* as a crucial aspect of the problem, recognizing authority of the lord of the house to identify sacrilege, to ban it, and to provide consequent punishment. As bishops and judges in the rest of the diocesan territory, a lord also needed to follow anti-idolatry regulation. If not, he was punishable by excommunication. Almost a century later, XII Toledo provided a decisive breakthrough for the powers granted to public agents: in this context, the judge and the bishop were in charge of identifying, punishing and delivering the culprits to their lord, who was now, in fact, responsible for ensuring that the idolater would not relapse into sacrilege. The intervention of the lord was no longer primary but expected after the intervention of the delegates of the king. Remember, the canon posits that if the lord neglected his obligations he would be punished with

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<sup>17</sup> “Interea id praecipue a vobis procurandum est, ut ubicumque idolatria vel diversos diabolicae superstitionis errores reppereritis aut qualibet relatione cognoveritis, ad destruendum tale facinus ut vere Christi cultores cum iudicibus quantocius insurgatis, et quicque ad eandem idola a rusticis vel quibuscumque personis deferri perveneritis tota vicinis conferenda inibi ecclesiis conferatis. Pro quo etiam extirpando scelere edictum tale in regulis apponatis, ut quicumque antistes huiusmodi nefas agi permiserit vel peractum in sua diocesi protinus abolire distulerit a loci sui officio pulsus unius anni excursu sub poenitentiae maneat religatus lamento, alio tamen principali electione ibidem constituto, qui possit huius institutionis ordinem servare et populo christiano bonae conversationis tramitem pandere postmodum ad sedis suae ordinem reversurus [...]” XVI Toledo *Tomus regius*.

<sup>18</sup> Article XVI of the council envisages the concerted action of bishops and judges: “Ut episcopi cum iudicibus idola dextruant, et ut domini idolatriam servis prohiberant: Quoniam pene per omnem Spaniam sive Galliam idolatriam sacrilegium inolevit, hoc cum consensu gloriosissimi principis sancta synodus ordinavit, ut omnis sacerdos in loco suo una cum iudice territorio sacrilegium memoratum studiose perquirerat, et exterminari inventa non differat; omnes vero, qui ad talem errorem concurrunt, salvo discrimine animae, qua potuerit animadversione coerceant. Quod si neglexerint, sciant se utriusque excommunicationis periculum esse subituros. Si qui vero domini extirpare hoc malum a possessione sua neglexerint vel familiae suae prohibere noluerint, ab episcopo et ipsi a comunione pellantur.” III Toledo XVI.

excommunication and the loss of his rights over the slave. The central power's strategy was targeted at the family of the *possessor* to diminish his capacity of mediation.<sup>19</sup>

XII Toledo promotes a strictly vertical and hierarchical model in which God grants the monarch authority and the role of earthly mediator ensuring the continuity of the Christian community.<sup>20</sup> This structure locates the king on the summit of a scale of mediations that, descending through judges and bishops, finally assigns the *dominus* the role of implementing policies designed by the monarch. Accordingly, the authority of the king unfolds over a homogeneous space whose center is Toledo, from where the salutary effects are radiated. Idolatrous practices constituted an obstacle to this desired homogeneity, and to the king's ability to control the chain of mediations.

The *domini*, the lords settled in the territory, had their own strategies for reproducing authority and perpetuating their estates, which were – following the concept developed by Claude Lévi- Strauss – social frames constituted by residents, patrimony, and support networks controlled by a lord.<sup>21</sup> For these purposes, by 681, the *domini* had

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<sup>19</sup> Regarding this issue, Dumézil notes: “Placés à un niveau intermédiaire, entre le souverain et le peuple, et constituant donc des médiateurs obligés, les puissants avaient des intérêts évidents à jouer la politique de la bascule, entre tolérance motivée et coercition intéressée.” Bruno Dumézil, *Les racines chrétiennes de l'Europe. Conversion et liberté dans les royaumes barbares, Ve- VIIIe siècle* (Fayard, Paris, 2005), 427.

<sup>20</sup> “[...] nunc tamen melius id poteritis et scribtorum relatione cognoscere et promulgationis vestrae sententiis publicare; ut sicut eadem regni nostrae primordia conventus sanctitudinis conpererit divinitus ordinata, ita et his orationum solamen inpendat/ et salubrium consiliorum nutrimenta inpertiat [...]” XII Toledo, *Tomus regius*.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, this renowned ethnographer finds that consecrated categories as “clan” and “lineage” – although useful for classifying experiences and making comparisons – are restricted when analyzing empirical social units and the strategies they develop to perpetuate themselves. In this context, he proposes the concept of “la maison”: “Est-ce donc que la maison aborde une personne morale détentrice ensuite un domaine composé de biens matériels et immatériels et qui enfin se perpétue en transmettant son nom, sa fortune, et ses titres en ligne directe ou fictive tenue pour légitime, la seule condition que cette continuité puisse exprimer dans le langage de la parenté ou de alliance et le plus souvent des deux ensemble.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Histoire et ethnologie,” *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 38, no. 6 (1983): 1224. I should note that “la maison”, or ‘house’ or ‘estate’, involves in a single concept the resident group, their base of material support and the symbolic dimension (name, memory, etc.) that distinguishes one house from another. It mainly supposes a logic of duration. For an elaboration see Pierre Lamaison, “La notion de maison: entretien avec C. Lévi-Strauss,” *Terrain* 9 (1987): 34-39. See

largely appropriated the language of authority provided by Christianity. One of the devices available to them, for example, was the construction and support of patrimonial churches, sacred perimeters fostering the memory of their estates and terminals of offerings in their rural environment.<sup>22</sup> Recceswinth's (r. 649/653-672) IX Toledo (655) granted such founding families the right to propose rectors, but they were not allowed to dispose freely of the patrimony with which they endowed the churches.<sup>23</sup> Patrimonial

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also: Susan Gillespie, "Lévi Strauss et la société à maisons," in *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies*, ed. Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and, Susan Gillespie, "When is a House" in *The Durable House: House Society Models in Archaeology, Center for Archaeological Investigations* no. 35, ed. Robin Beck (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 2007). The concept of "home" must not be confused with its architectural expression. This aspect is interesting, but demands another field of bibliography. For basic information on the Visigoth realm, see Alfonso Vigil-Escalera, "Arquitectura de tierra, piedra y madera en Madrid (ss.V-IXd.C.). Variables materiales, consideraciones sociales," *Arqueología de la arquitectura*, 2 (2003): 287-91; *ibid.*, "Cabañas de época visigoda: evidencias arqueológicas del sur de Madrid. Tipología, elementos de datación y discusión," *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 73, no. 181-182 (2000): 223-52; *ibid.*, "El papel de las comunidades rurales (entre bárbaros y campesinos)," in *La trasformazione del mondo romano e le grandi migrazioni nuovi popoli dall'europa settentrionale e centro-orientale alle coste del Mediterraneo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Cimitile-Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 16-17 giugno 2011*, ed. Carlo Ebanista and Marcello Rotili (Cimitile: Tavolario edizioni, 2012), 75-88; Carlos Tejerizo, "Early medieval household archaeology in Northwest Iberia (6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries)," *Arqueología de la arquitectura* 9 (2012): 181-94; and, classical references related to European space in Helena Hamerow, *Early Medieval settlements. The archaeology of rural communities in North western Europe (400- 900)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> According to López Quiroga and Bango García, those foundations reach back to the end of the fourth century in *Gallaecia* and *Lusitania* (Jorge López Quiroga and Clara Bango García, "Los edificios de culto como elemento morfogenético de transformación y configuración del paisaje rural en la Gallaecia y en la Lusitania entre los siglos IV y IX," *CuPAUAM: Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología* 31-32 [2005-2006]: 30); but, for most archaeologists they are later foundations from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. For this issue, see Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, "Tumbas e iglesias en Hispania tardoantigua," in *Arqueologia medieval els espais sagrats*, ed. Flocel Sabatè i Curull and Jesús Brufal (Lleida: Pagés ed. 2015), 14; *ibid.*, "Churches and Aristocracies in Seventh-Century Spain: Some Thoughts in the Debate on Visigothic Churches," *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010): 4; Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, "Chiese e insediamenti rurali tra V e VIII secolo: prospettive della ricerca archeologica," in *La trasformazione del mondo romano e le grandi migrazioni nuovi popoli dall'europa settentrionale e centro-orientale alle coste del Mediterraneo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Cimitile-Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 16-17 giugno 2011*, ed. Carlo Ebanista and Marcello Rotili (Cimitile: Tavolario edizioni, 2012): 45-62; José Carlos Sánchez Pardo, "Iglesias y dinámicas sociopolíticas en el paisaje gallego de los siglos V-VIII," *Hispania* LXXIII, no. 243 (2013): 11-50; *ibid.*, "Las iglesias rurales y su papel en la articulación territorial de la Galicia medieval (ss. VI-XIII). Un caso de estudio," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 40-1 (2010): 149-70. See also the examples of churches founded by bishops in Sonia Gutierrez Lloret and Lorenzo Abad Casal, "La iglesia visigoda de el Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete)," *Antig. Crist.* XXI, (2004): 137-69; Jesus Rodríguez Morales, Alfonso Vigil-Escalera and Alejandro Villa Del Castillo, "La posible iglesia rural altomedieval de La Solana I (móstoles, madrid). El carácter central de su emplazamiento y sus vínculos con el poblamiento aldeano," *LVCENTVM XXXIV* (2015): 343-61.

<sup>23</sup> "Ut fundatores ecclesiarum quosque advixerint earum habeant cura ipsique illic ministros eligant servituros. Quum saepe sit solitum etiam illa vae non debentur prece supplicationis et vi quodammodo extorqueri doloris, quanto iam sine obstaculo concedi debent exquisite simul et ordine iuris et dolore compassionis? Quia ergo fieri plerumque cognoscitur ut ecclesiae parrochiales vel sacra monasteria ita quorumdam episcoporum vel insolentia vel incuria horrendum decidant in ruinam, ut gravior ex hoc

churches were founded mainly on patrimonial land.<sup>24</sup> Land in this case was a dimension of the estate, an essential component insofar as it enabled the lords to accumulate in order to distribute, to distribute with a view to creating relations, and to create relations to perpetuate the name of the estate.<sup>25</sup> From the land, the lord was able to control access

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oriatur aedificantibus moeror quam in construendo gaudii extiterat labor, adeo pia compassione decernimus, ut quamdiu earumdem fundatores ecclesiarum in hac vita supprestes extiterint pro eisdem locis curam permittantur habere sollicitam, et sollicitudinem ferre praecipuam atque rectores idoneos in eisdem locis curam permittantur habere sollicitam, atque rectores idoneos in eisdem basilicis idem ipsi offerant / episcopis ordinandos [...].” IX Toledo II.

<sup>24</sup> Traditionally known as ‘private churches’, I prefer to call them ‘patrimonial churches’ to avoid the opposition between ‘public’ and ‘private’. In order to examine the aristocracy’s residential patterns see: Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, “¿Castillos en el aire? Paradigmas interpretativos ‘de moda’ en la historiografía medieval española,” in *De Mahoma a Carlomagno. Los primeros tiempos (siglos VII- IX). XXXIX Actas de la Semana de Estudios Medievales de Estella, 17 al 20 de julio de 2012* (Navarra: Gobierno de Navarra, 2013): 131-66; Juan Quirós Castillo and Alfonso Vigil-Escalera, “Dove sono i visigoti? cimiteri e villaggi nella Spagna centrale nei secoli VI e VII,” in *Archeologia e storia delle migrazioni. Europa, Italia, Mediterraneo fra Tarda Età Romana e Alto Medioevo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi Cimitile-Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 17-18 giugno 2010*, ed. Carlo Ebanista and Marcello Rotili (Cimitile, 2011): 159-81; Jorge López Quiroga, *Arqueología del hábitat rural en la península Ibérica (siglos V- X)* (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2009); Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, “El fin de las villas y las transformaciones del mundo rural en occidente (siglos IV-VIII),” in *Las villae tardorromanas en el occidente del Imperio: arquitectura y función. IV Congreso internacional de arqueología en Guijón*, ed. Carmen Fernández Ochoa, Virginia García-Entero and Fernando Gil Sendino (Guijón: Trea, 2008): 193-214; Ángeles Utrero Agudo, “Sepulturas e iglesias en la Hispania tardoantigua. Una relación difícil,” *GAUSAC* 34-5 (2009): 17-34. For regional differences: on *Cartaginensis* see: Sonia Gutierrez Lloret and Ignasi Grau Mira, “El territorio tardoantiguo y altomedieval en el sureste de Hispania: Eio – Iyyuh como caso de estudio,” in *Visigodos y Omeyas en el territorio*, ed. Luis Caballero Zoreda, Pedro Mateos Cruz and Tomás Cordero Ruiz, *Anejos de Archivo Español de Arqueología LXI* (Mérida: Instituto de Arqueología, 2012): 171-99. For *Gallaecia* see: Paula Ballesteros and Rebeca Blanco, “Aldeas y espacios agrarios altomedievales en Galicia,” in *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Villages in Europe*, ed. Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2009): 121; Paula Ballesteros and Felipe Criado, “El paisaje agrario medieval en Galicia. Herramientas metodológicas,” in *Poblament, Territori i Historia Rural. Actas del VI Congrés sobre sistemes agraris, organització social i poder local*, ed. Jordi Bolós and Enric Vicedo (Lérida: Institut d’Estudis Ilerdencs, 2009): 599-612. For *Lusitania* see: Iñaki Martín Viso, “Propriété foncière et articulation sociopolitique au nord ouest de la Lusitanie (S° VI- VII),” in *Le Bréviaire d’Alaric. Aux origines du code civil*, ed. Michel Rouché and Bruno Dumézil (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008): 213-40. For the Basque country see Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, “Arqueología de los espacios agrarios medievales en el País Vasco,” *HISPANIA. Revista Española de Historia* LXIX, no. 233 (2009): 619-52; and, Agustín Azkarate Garai-Olaun and Iñaki García Camino, “Vasconia, tierra intermedia. Ritos funerarios de frontera,” in *Los cuadernos de Arkeologi* 5 (2013).

<sup>25</sup> In this field, the bibliography is dispersed. Post-processualist funerary archaeology is perhaps the school that makes a more systematic effort to connect different research about exchange of goods, of gifts, of residential aristocratic patterns, etc. For the Visigothic Kingdom see: Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado, “La identidad de la comunidad local y las afiliaciones individuales en necrópolis de la Alta Edad Media (400-900 AD),” in *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania. Propuestas teóricas y cultura material en los siglos V-VIII*, ed. Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo and Santiago Castellanos (Victoria- Gasteiz: Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2015), 249-74; Iñaki Martín Viso and Santiago Castellanos, “The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000),” *Early medieval Europe* 13 (2005): 1-42; Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, Miguel Loza Uriarte and Javier Lorenzo Niso, “Identidades y ajueres en las necrópolis altomedievales. Estudios isotópicos del cementerio de San Martín de Dulantzi, Álava (siglos VI-X),” *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 86 (2013); Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, *El poblamiento rural de época visigoda en Hispania. Arqueología del*

to goods, alliances, prestigious assets, and eventually public honors.<sup>26</sup> These precarious balances rested on the lord's ability to interpret changing variables in real time and to guide them toward the continuity of his domestic unit.

Unlike the homogeneous space proposed by the central powers, from these *possessores'* perspective, the territory constituted a discrete variable resulting from the whole set of strategies, a sort of control that arose from the deployment of powers of the lord. In this diagram, mediation was also the authorized way of exercising power; but, far from accepting the bottom rung of a chain of command, the lords offered themselves as natural intermediaries between the central authorities and the networks of groups

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*campesinado en el interior peninsular, Documentos de Arqueología Medieval* 6 (2013): 266; José Padilla and Karen Alvaro, "La organización del Espacio Funerario entre La Antigüedad Tardía y el Mundo Medieval: de la Necrópolis a los Cementerios Medievales Hispanos," in *Arqueología funeraria al nordest peninsular ss. VI – XII d.C. Problemas de cronología (Monografies d'Olerdola 3)*, ed. Nuria Molist and Gisella Ripoll (Barcelona: Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, 2012): 50. For another on European spaces: Alexandra Chavarría Arnau and Gian Pietro Brogiolo, *Aristocrazie e campagne nell'occidente. Da Costantino a Carlomagno* (Firenze: All' insegna del giglio, 2007), 155. From the post-procesualist point of view see Guy Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 230; Bonnie Effros, *Merovigian Funerary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2003): 211; and, Yvette Duval, *Aupres des saints. Corps et âme. L'inhumation ad sanctos dans la Chrétienté d'Orient et Occident du IIIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1988), 88.

<sup>26</sup> On topics about goods production and circuits, moods and exchange patterns, the bibliography is dispersed again. See Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado, "La cerámica del período visigodo en Madrid," *Zona arqueológica* 8, 3 (2006): 731; Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, "Dalla periferia: archeometallurgia del ferronella Spagna nord-occidentale nell'alto e pieno medioevo," in *L'Archeologia della produzione a Roma (secoli V-XV). Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Roma, 27-29 marzo 2014, Collection de L'École Française De Rome – 516*, ed. Alessandra Molinari, Riccardo Santangeli Valenzani and Lucrezia Spera, (École Française De Rome: Roma, 2016), 597-612. For theoretical perspectives for gift circuits and money exchanges see David Gerber, *Toward an Anthropological theory of value. The false coin of our own dream*, (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2001), 114. For a re-application of Maussian theory based not in reciprocity but in *imitatio* see Eliana Magnani, "Du don aux églises au don pour le salut de l'âme en Occident (ive-xie siècle): le paradigme eucharistique," *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 2 (2008); *ibid.*, "Les médiévistes et le don. Avant et après la théorie maussienne," *Revue du MAUSS* 1, no. 31 (2008). For exchange circuits, see Saulo Gelichi and Richard Hodges, *From One Sea to Another: Trading Places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages, Proceedings of the International Conference, Comacchio, 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March 2009* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 1; and, Paul Reynolds, *Hispania and the Mediterranean (AD 100- 700), Ceramics and Trade* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 130.

mastered by them. This model did not favor a vertical order, but rather promoted negotiations agreed with territorial powers.

In the frame of the domestic authorities, the transmission of an alternative knowledge to the one provided by the Church and so-called idolatrous worship constituted one of the variables of negotiation that lords had at their disposal in relation to their *famuli*, *clientes* and subordinates and in relation to the central authorities. According to the estates' internal balances and to the strategy planned by the *domini* for each occasion, these practices were permitted or not, sometimes fostered by the lords themselves as parallel modes of effective intervention on specific issues. As a set, these practices were functional to the domestic powers, to the authority of the local lords.

The option implemented by canon XI, to step with the full weight of public authority into the *famuli*, intended to intervene into one of the most well-established strategies of the *domini*, the negotiation with those who were directly under their power, concurrently straining those indirectly controlled by them: *amici*, *clientes*, or other sorts of bonds. The anti-idolatry measures addressed by article XI of XII Toledo did not necessarily respond to a resurgence of idolatry or to an invention of the centralist clergy, but rather constituted a calculated way of imposing conditions on powers based on territorial control.

## **Conclusion**

The latest historiography on idolatrous practices among the Visigoths shows that the difficulty of historical investigation does not lie in the shortage or the meagerness of the sources, but in their prescriptive nature as components of structures of power. The

extant documentary sources, mostly developed by the central authorities, do not *show* but definitely *are* strategies drawn by the king and the bishops to accumulate authority in the tone of an agenda based on the Bible. In the case study presented here, Erwig re-signified his role of ruler and sought to discipline territorial powers through the anti-idolatry measure set forth in canon XI of XII Toledo.

Although it cannot be argued that the *ingenui*, *famuli* and *possessores* were exclusively responsible for producing or allowing idolatrous practices, it is important to consider that, like the measures taken by the central authorities, social practices arose because there were powers that operated through them. Assuming a permissive or active role, lords manipulated their capacity to produce signs in order to mediate between central powers and their direct subordinates. It is very likely that *ingenui* and *famuli*, considering all the differences that separated them, also arranged signs to forge identity and protection networks. In order to overcome the paradigm that considers idolatrous practice as a survival of ancestral worship supposedly linked to an essence of the *populus*, it is necessary to consider to which rationality the deployment of alternative practices responded. In this regard, the category of *societe de maisons* proposed by Lévi-Strauss could help us to understand long-lasting strategies held by territorial lords in the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo.

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