

ARCHAEOLOGY OF PEASANTRY

From the Late Prehistory to the European Common Agriculture policy

OPENING KEYNOTE:

Gardens and gardening in early medieval Spain and Portugal

Wendy Davies (University College London)

Although we may have an image of flowers and perfumes adorning the palaces of Andalusian Spain, gardens do not come so quickly to mind when we think about Northern Iberia in the early middle ages. Yet northern charters often detail transactions in gardens – differentiated from arable land – and recent macro-botanical work throws some light on what may have been cultivated. Key questions include: when ninth- and tenth-century northern texts specify 'gardens', what do they mean and do they differentiate garden from orchard and from vineyard? When archaeologists designate areas of excavated settlements as 'gardens', is it reasonable to classify such spaces as gardens? Do we have physical evidence of intensive production at this period? Were gardens significant contributors to domestic food production? Was gardening a regular focus for peasant labour? This lecture offers an overview of the range of gardens, garden plants and garden work to be found in early medieval Spain and Portugal, north and south, as also of the kinds of source material available and of the principal problems that such a study poses. We should not bring our modern assumptions to the subject.

What the Iberian Copper Age can tell us about peasant societies.

Pedro Díaz-del-Río (Instituto de Historia, CSIC)

The early emergence of peasant communities out of previous kinship-based societies required the development of a permanent dependence bond in the form of landesque capital.

Under these conditions, vulnerability to extortion would have been possible as long as the costs of abandonment (or rebellion) outweighed those of subjection. These conditions would have made the earliest forms of rent socially possible, thus turning kinship-based groups into peasants. To use Eric Wolf's words, "it is the production of a fund of rent which critically distinguishes the peasant from the primitive cultivator".

During the Iberian Copper Age (3100-2200 BC) human groups had an absolute dependence on agriculture and animal husbandry, developing different forms of territorial appropriation with archaeologically recognizable effects on the landscape. These economic bases were able to feed exceptional mega-sites with population densities in the thousands, massive infrastructures and vast dimensions, with proportions unknown until the Roman conquest. The exponential increase in scale must have necessarily increased social tensions in the already complex balances of a kinship-based society, creating inevitable contradictions in the multiple spheres of social life. These were in some cases channeled through an increase in ritual paraphernalia, while in others through a reaffirmation of segmentary independence. Whatever the pathway taken, the increase in scale did not give way to a structural change, a transformation that would have laid the conditions for a society of lords and peasants, but to the ruin of the preexisting communal forms of sociability.

My presentation will explore these issues and the way they are reflected in the archaeological record, in the hope that the contrasts of diverging trajectories will favor a dialogue between prehistoric and medieval archaeologies.

An appraisal of later prehistoric peasantry in northern Iberia (second-first millennia BC) via moral and political economies

Antonio Blanco (University of Salamanca)

This overview addresses Bronze and Iron Age societies in inner and Atlantic Iberia. These communities are often envisaged as stagnant, underdeveloped and unenterprising compared to their Mediterranean counterparts. Their trajectories certainly do not fit conventional processes from egalitarian and tribal to tributary and class-based organizations, yet mainstream accounts are misguided. To offer a more fine-grained social reading, this contribution focuses on two disparate yet complementary sets of social strategies: a) moral economy that reinforces commoners' agency and buttresses risk-averse solidarity and altruistic ethics against social division (aka 'social glue'); and b) goal-oriented and ambitious political-economic practices aimed at producing and investing agrarian surplus in risky competitive endeavours (aka 'social dynamite'). An assessment drawing on both mechanisms provides with a better understanding of such 'primitive peasants', i.e. organizations lacking true state-like institutions and always compelled within kin- and community-based restrictions. In this vein, archaeological features such as scattered homesteads and wandering lifestyles, fortified villages and agglomerated sites, or conspicuous militarism and ranked cemeteries operated as efficient political means to either promote or curtail and hinder wealth and power. Such peasant-like communities exhibited failures and outbreaks, yet in the long run they proved resilient and successful in resisting against centralization and social stratification till the Late Iron Age.

The Economic Anthropology of Roman Peasantry: Old Problems and Current Trends

Jesús Bermejo (University Carlos III, Madrid)

The study of Roman peasantry, both smallholders and rural *proletari*, has been largely ignored by classical archaeologists and ancient historians. Several methodological and ideological reasons can be adduced to explain this gap. However, we can appreciate a certain turn in this issue, materialized in the development of diverse research projects explicitly oriented to the study of Roman peasantry. The results of these projects, that are coming to light in the recent years, are still having a limited impact in the mainstream scholarship on the Roman social and economic history.

Departing from the historiographic analysis of this topic, I will analyze how the introduction of new methodological procedures and theoretical perspectives (mostly coming from other forms of Anthropological Archaeology) are contributing to change our current perceptions on the economic structure and performance of Roman peasant communities. Finally, I will discuss the main reasons that lie behind this -for the moment- limited impact of this kind of research in our current conceptions of Roman rural world.

Archaeobotanical contribution to the history of farming practices in medieval northern Catalonia (8th-13th c.)

Jérôme Ros (UMR7209 AASPE) and Olivier Passarrius (Conseil départemental des Pyrénées-Orientales) with the collaboration of Carole Puig (ACTER archéologie, UMR5136 FRAMESPA-TERRAE), Jérôme Kotarba (Inrap, UMR5140 ASM), Julien Maintenant (ACTER archéologie, UMR 5608 TRACES), Nicolas Guinaudeau (ACTER archéologie)

The High Middle Ages is considered as a period of major changes for the agricultural world. These changes, which intervene as soon as the 9th c. in Catalonia and reached their full potential between the 12th and the 13th c., had an impact on farming practices and on the exploited landscapes: forest clearing, creation of new rural spaces, improvement of water management (irrigation, mills), exploitation of wetlands (marsh) for the creation of meadows, then for cereal cultivation, increase of specialized productions.

Although well-known through the study of textual sources, agrarian productions and practices were, so far, poorly documented by archaeology in northern Catalonia (Pyrénées-Orientales, France). The increase of archaeobotanical investigations in this region allow us to present a first review of medieval farming practices. Based on the study of fifteen rural sites, this paper aims to document, through archaeobotanical data, the characteristics of northern Catalan agriculture between the 8th and the 13th c. (cultivated crops, prevalence of certain species, farming practices associated, types of exploited landscapes), while attempting to detect possible specificities or evolutions over the long term (integration of new species to the staple crops, agrarian specialization).

Landscapes and rural practices of some peasant communities of the southeast of the Iberian peninsula from antiquity to modern times through the surface record

Julia Sarabia (University of Alicante)

We present the results of the recent analysis studies of the surface archaeological record developed in some regions of the southeast of the Iberian peninsula, where we have been able to recognize the vestiges of different rural landscapes, some resilient and others with more limited sequences. The realization of archaeological field work with the use of the same methodologies, especially the assistance of geospatial techniques such as GPS, GIS, LiDAR, etc., allows to compare the results obtained. In this way we can analyze the old land uses, the occupation sequence of the rural spaces and the recognized patterns of settlement in a comparative way, showing the different ways of organizing the habitat and the agrarian practices.

Within a countryside cemetery of the 5th-7th century: selected remarks on organization and economy

Joan Pinar Gil (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz)

Research throughout the last three decades has brought a number of new perspectives on the funerary world at the very beginning of the Middle Ages. Regarded as little more than mere collections of grave goods and anthropological remains by classical approaches, it is nowadays

usual to pay greater attention to the social and cultural implications of funerary spaces. Not only fresher theoretical approaches to the social use of cemeteries and to the rites performed there have been brought in: also the more or less sporadic accounts from the written sources and the increasingly accurate environmental and genetic datasets have contributed to a wider and deeper understanding of the cemeteries and their users.

Even in this renewed conceptual framework, a number of crucial aspects must be yet explored in depth. That is the case, for instance, of the boundaries between private and public, individual and social spheres and their materialization in the spatial organization of the cemetery. A number of economy and labour issues related to the production and caretaking of the funerary structures are also a noteworthy example. These are subjects which I'll try to address on the basis of selected evidence from rural cemeteries of the 5th-8th century.

Standing on the shoulders of peasants: who led innovation in early medieval English farming?

Mark McKerracher (University of Oxford)

The socio-political history of England between the late seventh and early ninth centuries AD is principally characterised by two related themes. This 'long eighth century' witnessed, on the one hand, the consolidation of the major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and land-owning élites; and, on the other hand, the arrival and spread of Roman Christianity – including a proliferation of monastic estates – as these kingdoms came within the ambit of western Christendom. Archaeology, meanwhile, provides strong evidence that, at the same time, agriculture was undergoing significant changes aimed at increasing productivity, especially in cereal farming. What remains unclear is the chief agency behind these agricultural innovations. According to some scholars, such developments presaged the process of 'manorialization', and ultimately the emergence of the feudal system. The coincidence of archaeological evidence for agricultural growth with high-status settlement sites could indeed imply that abbots and other landlords were the prime movers of these transformations in farming practices. Yet the long eighth century is not normally considered to be an age of strong, coercive lordship in England, in which élites could directly impose new agricultural regimes on peasant communities. This paper therefore explores an alternative model in which peasant strategies of risk-avoidance, coupled with growing political stability, sowed the seeds of transformation in Anglo-Saxon farming.

Peripheral landscapes and mountain areas (5 – 9th Centuries): The studycase of Revenga (Burgos, Spain)

Karen Álvaro Rueda and Esther Travé Allepuz (University of Barcelona)

The study of peopling processes is a complex issue to deal with, particularly with regard to border and marginal areas. The Iberian Peninsula exhibits a heterogeneous landscape and the processes of Romanization and Christianization had different degree of impact throughout the Peninsula, and it was particularly low in some mountain isolated areas.

Our contribution is focused on a clearly delimited territory, the Upper Arlanza Basin, and the interpretation problems arising from the study of the early medieval site of Revenga. The archaeological site of Revenga (Comunero de Revenga, Burgos) is a challenging settlement to get better knowledge about the period between 5 – 9th Centuries AD. Recent works at this archaeological site revealed a stratigraphic sequence featured by the uninterrupted occupation of space and intense reuse of structures. This correlates with the settlement transformation and the changes occurred within its internal structure between 5th – 9th Centuries. Results obtained

through fieldwork must be considered with regard to the landscape organization and the presence of autochthone communities inhabiting and exploiting natural resources in a marginal area not directly controlled by those existing political powers.

Unequal peasants in the Early Medieval setting of Hispania

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera (University of Salamanca)

El objetivo de la comunicación es indagar en torno a los indicadores arqueológicos utilizados habitualmente para evaluar la desigualdad social y económica del campesinado altomedieval, sus posibilidades y límites, tanto en los asentamientos como en las sepulturas. El análisis comparativo debe afrontar la constatación de marcadas diferencias de unas regiones a otras en lo que atañe a la cultura material disponible, la morfología de los asentamientos rurales e incluso lo que podrían ser las formas de estructuración social dominantes (grupos unifamiliares frente a comunidades establecidas). A estos fenómenos debe añadirse una muy distinta calidad y cantidad de la base empírica disponible.

La discusión irá acompañada de algunas reflexiones sobre la coherencia del proceso inferencial que conduce a las interpretaciones de índole histórica y cuestionará hasta qué punto son apropiadas las definiciones comúnmente aceptadas de la categoría 'campesinado' cuando nos situamos en los extremos de la misma

The collective action of the peasantry in the Kingdom of León (9th-11th centuries): some perspectives of analysis from the written sources

Álvaro Carvajal Castro (Universidad of the Basque Country), Julio Escalona (CSIC, Madrid), Iñaki Martín Viso (University of Salamanca) and Igor Santos Salazar (Universidad of the Basque Country)

This paper aims to reflect upon the feasibility of using the written sources (mainly charters) to study the collective action of the early medieval peasantry. It also offers a preliminary approach to this topic on the territory of the ninth- to eleventh-century kingdom of León. This was a rapidly-changing socio-political environment where peasant communities underwent an intense process of 'encapsulation' (*encellelument*). Peasant collective action is hardly visible in the surviving written records, most of which are dry transfers of property preserved in the archives of ecclesiastical institutions. Nevertheless, glimpses of it emerge here and there in the charters and they can be used to build an image that – even if necessarily impressionistic – is rich enough to reveal a complex, multi-faceted situation. Local communities, their internal functioning and their interactions with other neighboring communities and with higher status actors, such as lay and ecclesiastical elites, are the most visible in the records, but hardly the only channel. Peasants were also part of kin-groups, clienteles, and other forms of aggregation that worked in parallel, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes to the detriment of community links. The dialogue between collective cohesion and internal differentiation determined the scope and reach of peasant agency, well beyond the mere resistance to the growth of feudal lordship.