



# Assessing place-based identities in the early Middle Ages: a proposal for post-Roman Iberia

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*Sociological models of place-based identity can be used to better understand the social dynamics of local communities and how they interact with their surroundings. This paper explores how these theoretical models of belonging to a place, in tandem with communal cognitive maps, can be applied to post-Roman contexts, taking the Iberian Peninsula in the Visigothic period (sixth–eighth centuries) as a preliminary case study. We argue that this approach can give us not only a more complex understanding of community agencies but also allows us to reconsider the social context for past social interactions. Furthermore, it will open a new archaeological perspective for future work on the relations between groups and individuals with their built, social, and natural environments.*

For many years, discussions about identity in the early Middle Ages revolved around the importance of ethnicity, the ‘Roman–Barbarian’ spectrum, and how to identify each of these groups archaeologically,

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but current research on this topic is repeatedly underlining the complexities of identity construction.<sup>1</sup> These more complex understandings present identity as formed by the contextual intersection of multiple layers, which may include ethnicity but also gender, age, and status amongst others. One of these layers may have been place or local belonging, which has received a good deal of attention from early medieval historians.<sup>2</sup> As a complement, in this paper we want to introduce the use of anthropologically defined place-based forms of group identity to assess the relevance of local forms of group belonging.

Our basic premises are: a) that social interactions define the way in which identity is portrayed; b) that these interactions are framed by familiar environments and surroundings that provide common points of reference; and c) that all archaeological proxies for social interaction developed in a particular way in early medieval times and can be tackled through historical enquiry.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the familiarity with a place can become an important way to underline differences or define an identity.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, which is intended to be a stepping stone for future work, we will address these issues by first presenting the theoretical frame of the formation of place and attachment, glossing how this can form place-based identities through the use of cognitive maps. This will be illustrated with selected examples from sixth- and seventh-century Hispania, which exhaust neither the complexities of place-based identities as a working concept nor the adequacy of cognitive maps as analytic tools to reassess the understanding of communities in post-Roman Iberia.

We will first present the theoretical background of place-based identity theory and cognitive maps as analytical tools. In this regard, one of the key elements when considering place-based identities, especially in pre-industrial societies, is the contradistinction between urban and rural milieus.<sup>5</sup> We will then move on to assess the validity of place-based identities in their own right and contrast their saliency with ethnic and

<sup>1</sup> The bibliography on this issue is too extensive and we shall only refer to one of the most recent works which gathers the basic literature on the topic: J. Harland and M. Friedrich (eds), *Interrogating the 'Germanic': A Category and its Use in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Berlin, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Examples include: W. Davies, *Small Worlds. The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London, 1988); R. Mathisen, 'Natio, gens, provincialis, and civis: Geographical Terminology and Personal Identity in Late Antiquity', in G. Geatrex and H. Elton (eds), *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity* (London, 2015), pp. 277–86.

<sup>3</sup> R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd edn (Abingdon, 2008; orig. 1996), pp. 1–6, 91–2; M. Johnson, 'Self-made and the Staging of Agency', in M.-A. Dobres and J. Robb (eds), *Agency in Archaeology* (New York, 2000), pp. 213–31.

<sup>4</sup> T. Ingold, 'The Temporality of the Landscape', *World Archaeology* 25.5 (1993), pp. 152–74.

<sup>5</sup> G. Delanty, *Community*, 3rd edn (London, 2018; orig. 2010), ch. 3.

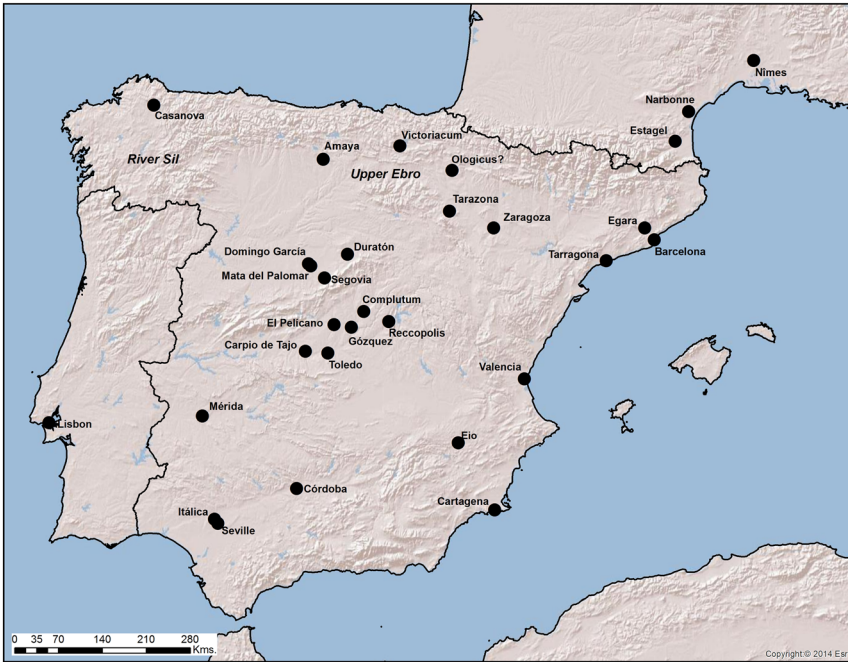


Fig. 1 Map of the Iberian Peninsula showing the location of the sites and areas mentioned in the text [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ome.12597)]

religious identities, as two layers of identity repeatedly used in historiography. Finally, while the case studies we have chosen are narrowed to sixth- and seventh-century Iberia (Fig. 1), the theoretical background can be seen and applied to other areas of the west in the early Middle Ages.

### Place-based identities

Place-based identity develops from the natural sense of attachment to a location whenever it fulfils an individual's or a community's needs. It is easy, perhaps, to understand what local attachment and local belonging are, in the same way that we can see ourselves identifying to a degree with our hometown,<sup>6</sup> but it is worth digging a bit deeper into the theoretical understanding that lies behind this.

<sup>6</sup> Delanty, *Community*.

*Identity, space, and place*

Identity, as we have already said, is framed by the intersection of multiple layers that define the self, being each layer a characteristic that can be used to understand the differences with and against the 'other'.<sup>7</sup> 'Place' may be a more familiar term, but social scientists make a clear difference between 'space' and 'place'. Space is the collection of physical surroundings that we use for reference. Place, however, is what we understand space to be; it is the accumulation of memories attached to certain spaces. Place is a cognitive construct, a subjective idealization based on experiences that requires active interaction, observation, and emotional understanding.<sup>8</sup>

At an individual level, attachment can develop naturally when a space can meet certain physical and psychological demands.<sup>9</sup> Different types of attachment will depend on the memories that are linked to a location, but elements like family connections, dwelling stability, and socializing play an essential role in the development of attachment. Since these are not mutually exclusive, and are usually interdependent, the constant associative overlap between physical surroundings and social interaction can prompt the organic development of more than attachment: a sense of belonging to a place that can become a defining layer of identity.<sup>10</sup>

Group memories can cluster at specific locations (sites of cult, economic hubs, watering points, areas devoted to political or communal assemblies), and the more these are shared and perpetuated, the more relevant and defining that place becomes for the community. Preserving *habitus* and ritualized practices add extra meaning to these locations.<sup>11</sup> The resulting mnemonic, social, historical, and emotional connections between the community and its lived space form a shared perception of place. Place becomes a dialectical node because it is a

<sup>7</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963), pp. 206–31; A. Hernando Gonzalo, *Arqueología de la identidad* (Barcelona, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> T. Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (London, 2014), pp. 7–14; G. Fine, 'The Sociology of the Local: Action and its Publics', *Sociological Theory* 28 (2010), pp. 355–77; C. Post, 'Making Place through Memorial Landscape', in J. Smith (ed.), *Explorations in Place Attachment* (London, 2017), pp. 83–96, at pp. 84–5.

<sup>9</sup> Although this is not necessarily the universal case across a community. Cresswell, *Place*, p. 14; I. Kaymaz, 'Urban Landscapes and Identity', in M. Ozyavuz (ed.), *Advances in Landscape Architecture* (Rijeka, 2013), pp. 739–60, at pp. 740–3; J. Ryckwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 188–9; J. Smith and R. Aranha, 'Cognitive Mapping as a Method to Assess Peoples' Attachment to Place', *Geographical Review* 112.1 (2022), pp. 6–26.

<sup>10</sup> M. Lalli, 'Urban-related Identity: Theory, Measurement, and Empirical Findings', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 12 (1992), pp. 285–303; Smith and Aranha, 'Cognitive Mapping'; S. Taylor, *Narratives of Identity and Place* (London, 2009), pp. 2–10.

<sup>11</sup> Cresswell, *Place*, pp. 119–22; M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1988); A. Haber, *La casa, las cosas, los dioses* (Córdoba, 2011); H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991); Post, 'Making Place'.

construct defined by the community but it, in turn, defines the community itself.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, once the community establishes this connection with its place it will actively commit to it; investing resources in preserving the fabric, building, adapting and improving it in order to ensure that the place continues to meet the community's needs, effectively modifying the space.<sup>13</sup> This investment and concern is one of the fundamental premises that prompts a local-based layer of identity: identification with a community that depends on its shared place will trigger a reaction (a definition) when the status is challenged or opposed by an outsider. The other side of this coin is that if a space cannot fulfil a community's needs or expectations, the commitment will dwindle, the location will be abandoned, and the place can become forgotten.<sup>14</sup> Many ancient sites exist only as uninhabited excavated remains; for very few do we know anything as defining as even a name.

Current approaches to place-based identities underline the importance of mobility and relocation in modern populations, but it is more likely that 'born and bred' narratives offer a more accurate perspective on pre-modern societies.<sup>15</sup> This understanding of place-based identities emphasizes family and historical connections, blurring class, age, and gender differences to underline local belonging as a divider with outsiders and to bring the community closer together, whilst still having tools to integrate newcomers by community participation. The understanding of the community in its place and of its past becomes, in this way, the key to mark otherness and insider-ness, while complementing rather than downplaying the influence of other layers of identity.<sup>16</sup> Social scientists working on place-based identities can work with interview material and other ethnographic data to measure connections between place, individual, and community belonging – a resource which is not available for the early Middle Ages. There is, however, a tool that highlights the relevance of certain key locations within a community's understanding of its environment, which may be useful: the cognitive map.

<sup>12</sup> Jenkins, *Social Identity*, ch. 9; A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, 'Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (1992), pp. 6–23, at p. 11; M. Richard, *Los dominios de la psicología*, trans. F. Peña et al. (Madrid, 1974), pp. 275–7.

<sup>13</sup> Cresswell, *Place*, p. 128; 'architecture creates place'. Lalli, 'Urban-related Identity'. Cf. L. Cuba and D. Hummon, 'A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region', *Sociological Quarterly* 34.1 (1993), pp. 111–31.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. P. McAnany and M. Lamoureux-St-Hilaire, 'An Archaeological Perspective on Recursive Place-making and Unmaking', in M. Lamoureux-St-Hilaire and S. Macrae (eds), *Detachment from Place. Beyond an Archaeology of Settlement Abandonment* (Louisville, 2020), pp. 11–23.

<sup>15</sup> T. Berger, 'Place, Imagery, Identity: Place Ethnography in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico', Ph.D. thesis, University of New Mexico (2016); Taylor, *Narratives*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> Berger, 'Place, Imagery, Identity', p. 325.

### *Cognitive maps*

Cognitive maps are psychological tools of analysis linked to phenomenology and the philosophy of experience.<sup>17</sup> Our minds understand our environment and surroundings (create place out of space) by clustering a) memories and emotions to certain locations that fulfil social and psychological needs and b) the ways in which we navigate to and from them. This works at individual and communal levels.<sup>18</sup> Cognitive maps are a way in which we can structure, represent, and rationalize these subjective interpretations of space for our own sociological analyses. These maps normally represent a series of nodes (locations of high significance) connected by links which represent the routes in between them. In the literature, the former are known as ‘landmarks’, the latter as ‘pathways’. A third common element to these maps are the edges, which mark the boundary between the known/familiar and the unknown/not-understood. Cognitive maps turn the abstract rationalization of space into a diagram with which we can connect physical spaces with mental landmarks, defining a community according to the way it structures itself within and around its environment.

Here is how we intend to apply these theoretical principles to historical interpretation. Cognitive maps have the potential to let us compare local understandings of space between different communities while giving a solid theoretical framework to understand place-based identities. Human geographers have been using cognitive maps to connect socializing hubs with landmarks and the hierarchy of streets and roads as pathways of varying importance.<sup>19</sup> We have to rely on information from written sources or anthropological comparanda to propose what sites could have been of local importance; from this we can try to find which throughways could have been key pathways and use different models to define territories to identify edges. With these three elements we can propose hypothetical and site-specific cognitive maps to help us understand how the local community understood itself and its place, and how belonging and identity could have developed. In the following sections we will assess the potential of these concepts to look into place-based identities in post-Roman Iberia.

<sup>17</sup> Lalli, ‘Urban-related Identity’; Smith and Aranha, ‘Cognitive Mapping’; A. Rapoport, *Human Aspects of Urban Form* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 109–42.

<sup>18</sup> J. Cepelewicz, ‘Goals and Rewards Redraw the Brain’s Map of the World’, *Quanta Magazine* 28 March 2019, [www.quantamagazine.org/goals-and-rewards-redraw-the-brains-map-of-the-world-20190328/](http://www.quantamagazine.org/goals-and-rewards-redraw-the-brains-map-of-the-world-20190328/), accessed 31 October 2022. P. Lersch, *La estructura de la personalidad*, trans. A. Serrate Torrente (Barcelona 1971; orig. 1938), pp. 220–4.

<sup>19</sup> Smith and Aranha, ‘Cognitive Mapping’.

## Landmarks

Landmarks are the ‘hot spots’ that carry the heaviest emotional and mnemonic associations, which tend to be spaces connected with socializing, ritualized community *habitus*, dwelling, or the workspace. These can be anything from individual sites and buildings to complex spaces, visual markers in the landscape, or locations of reiterative rituality.<sup>20</sup>

Places of worship are perfect examples of landmarks with easily connected material and cognitive elements. These were key to defining religious identities, and local saints and martyrs took the place of the heroic founders that had defined civic cults in Antiquity.<sup>21</sup> Third- and fourth-century saints with their shrines represented the origins of the Christian community (Leocadia in Toledo, Eulalia in Mérida, Fructuosus in Tarragona, or Justus and Pastor in Complutum), and became the patrons and protectors of town dwellers.<sup>22</sup> The urban church also promoted the development of a new sacred townscape through the construction of churches, cathedrals, and cemeteries, well known in the main cities, like Mérida, Tarragona, Barcelona, Córdoba, Nîmes, and Valencia.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes, as in Valencia or Tarragona, the location of cathedral complexes by or on the forum further underlined their centrality, because fora still played a central role in the idea of the city – despite the varying degrees of encroachment and dismantling.<sup>24</sup> In urban ideals fora were still conceived of as places for conducting public business for the (diminished) municipal administration, and King Sisebut (r. 612–21) certainly complains about lawyers and citizens moaning in the forum.<sup>25</sup>

Theatres or amphitheatres had been monuments to a city’s power and a celebration of its elites, and their grand scale matched their social centrality, so it is easy to see these as landmarks. In the Visigothic period

<sup>20</sup> F. Criado Boado and V. Villoch, ‘La monumentalización del paisaje: percepción y sentido original en el megalitismo de la sierra de Barbanza (Galicia)’, *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 55.1 (1998), pp. 63–8.

<sup>21</sup> J. Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 1–3; Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, pp. 28–35.

<sup>22</sup> C. Rapp, ‘City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts of Community in Late Antiquity’, in C. Rapp and H. Drake (eds), *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 153–62, at p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez, I. Sastre de Diego and C. Tejerizo García, *The Iberian Peninsula 300–850: An Archaeological Perspective*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia 6 (Amsterdam, 2018), pp. 161–8.

<sup>24</sup> P. Diarte Blasco, ‘The Evolution of the Forum Space in Late Antique Hispania: The Genesis of a New Urbanism?’, in C. Biemann and B. Thomas (eds), *Debating Religious Space and Place in the Early Medieval World* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 13–20.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Legicrepa tundunt, latrant fora’: Sisebut, *Astronomicon*, line 6, in *Anthologia Latina* 2, ed. A. Riese (Leipzig, 1906), p. 483. For municipal administration, see D. Fernández, ‘Transformaciones institucionales y liderazgo cívico en la Hispania post-imperial’, in A. Carneiro, N. Christie and P. Diarte (eds), *Urban Transformations in the Late Antique West* (Coimbra, 2020), pp. 259–79.



Fig. 2 Christian basilica built on top of the Roman amphitheatre in Tarragona. The standing structure is high medieval, but excavations have shown the foundations of an apsed basilica underneath, dated to the sixth century. Photograph by the authors [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

these buildings were no longer used for their original purpose, but they were too big, useful, and resilient to be completely relegated from the urban cognitive maps. In Córdoba the theatre might have been turned into a lime kiln,<sup>26</sup> but in Tarragona the amphitheatre was reused as a martyrial shrine (Fig. 2),<sup>27</sup> and in Cartagena the theatre became a new market square.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> R. Hidalgo Prieto, 'Algunas cuestiones sobre la Corduba de la antigüedad tardía', in J.M. Gurt and A. Ribera (eds), *VI Reunió d'arqueologia cristiana hispànica* (Barcelona, 2005), pp. 401–14.

<sup>27</sup> M. Pérez Martínez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad Tardía* (Tarragona, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> J. Vizcaíno Sánchez, 'Ad pristinum decus. La metamorfosis urbana de Carthago Spartaria durante el siglo V', in S. Panzram and L. Callegarin (eds), *Entre civitas y madina*, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 167 (Madrid, 2018), pp. 75–104.

Aqueducts also had a very strong symbolic nature, featuring as such in ancient literature from Strabo to Cassiodorus.<sup>29</sup> The structures would have not been socializing landmarks, but they would have been visual markers that immediately identified the city. Moreover, functioning aqueducts were a matter of civic pride, as they represented the power and capabilities of the local council while echoing connections to old Roman times. In Mérida we have attested failed attempts to reconstruct one of the fallen aqueducts, showing local commitment to this infrastructure even if it was unsuccessful.<sup>30</sup> In Reccopolis we find an aqueduct built alongside the new city because of the close relationship between the ideal of the city and monumental, long-distance water-supply systems.<sup>31</sup> But it was water fountains in particular that acted as main ‘hot spots’. Public water distribution points had always been socializing hubs, but in cities with denser populations and more rationalized water-supply systems, these places became paramount.<sup>32</sup> In Tarragona and Lisbon (Fig. 3), we have evidence for the construction of new public fountains in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>33</sup> In Valencia, Tarragona, and Barcelona episcopal complexes were built (perhaps not purely by chance) in the immediate vicinity of still-functioning fountains.<sup>34</sup> Water supply was an essential part of the understanding of the city, and preserving it was important at many different levels for urban communities.

If we turn now to village communities, landmarks are not as evident or monumental as in urban environments, but this is a result of the scale and the different mechanisms of socializing that characterize peasant communities. Post-Roman villages were formed by different, relatively autonomous domestic units, within a wide, unenclosed landscape, which determines their place-based characteristics of local identities in stark contrast with the urban milieu.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Strabo, *Geography* V.8, ed. H. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1924), p. 405; Frontinus, *De Aquis* I.16, ed. J. Henderson (Cambridge, MA, 1925), p. 356; Cassiodorus, *Variarum* VII.6.3, ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH AA* 12 (Berlin, 1894), pp. 205–6.

<sup>30</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez, *Aqueducts and Urbanism in Post-Roman Hispania* (Piscataway, 2019), pp. 51, 198.

<sup>31</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez, ‘A Preliminary Study of the Aqueduct of Reccopolis’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 34.3 (2015), pp. 301–20.

<sup>32</sup> J. Pickett, ‘Water and Social Relationships in Early Byzantine Neighbourhoods’, in F. Kondyli and B. Anderson (eds), *The Byzantine Neighbourhood. Urban Space and Political Action* (London, 2021), pp. 125–51.

<sup>33</sup> Martínez Jiménez, *Aqueducts and Urbanism*, pp. 68–71.

<sup>34</sup> Martínez Jiménez, *Aqueducts and Urbanism*, pp. 110–11.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J.A. Quirós Castillo and A. Vigil-Escalera, ‘Networks of Peasant Villages between Toledo and Velegja Alabense, Northwestern Spain (V–Xth Centuries)’, *Archeologia Medievale* 33 (2006), pp. 79–128.



Fig. 3 Photograph of the new, fifth/sixth-century public fountain of Lisbon. Photograph by the authors [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

Since social relationships in peasant societies are strongly based on direct personal contacts in a dialectic between the domestic unit and the community, there are fewer elements that can be singled out as landmarks: each house and each element played a central role.<sup>36</sup> The seventh-century *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* mentions a number of such examples of peasant solidarities in rural contexts in the Upper Ebro valley,<sup>37</sup> including the gathering of villagers for celebrations with wine and the collaboration in building activities.<sup>38</sup> However, except for some noteworthy examples (e.g. central rural sites such as Yeavinger in England) the early medieval rural world is not characterized by the presence of built landmarks as the ones described in the urban world, with one exception: funerary spaces.

<sup>36</sup> J. van der Ploeg, *The New Peasantries* (London, 2018); cf. T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (London, 1971).

<sup>37</sup> S. Castellanos García, 'Problemas metodológicos en la investigación de la ocupación del territorio durante la Antigüedad Tardía: el caso del Alto Ebro y la aportación de la Vita Sancti Aemiliani', *Brocar* 19 (1995), pp. 27–48.

<sup>38</sup> Braulius of Zaragoza, *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* [=VSA] XII.26 and XXI.28, in *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, trans. A. Fear (Liverpool, 1997), pp. 29 and 34. Cf. the celebrations mentioned by Martin of Braga, cc. 12–16, in *De correctione rusticorum*, in *Iberian Fathers*, trans. C.W. Barlow (Washington, 1969), pp. 71–85.

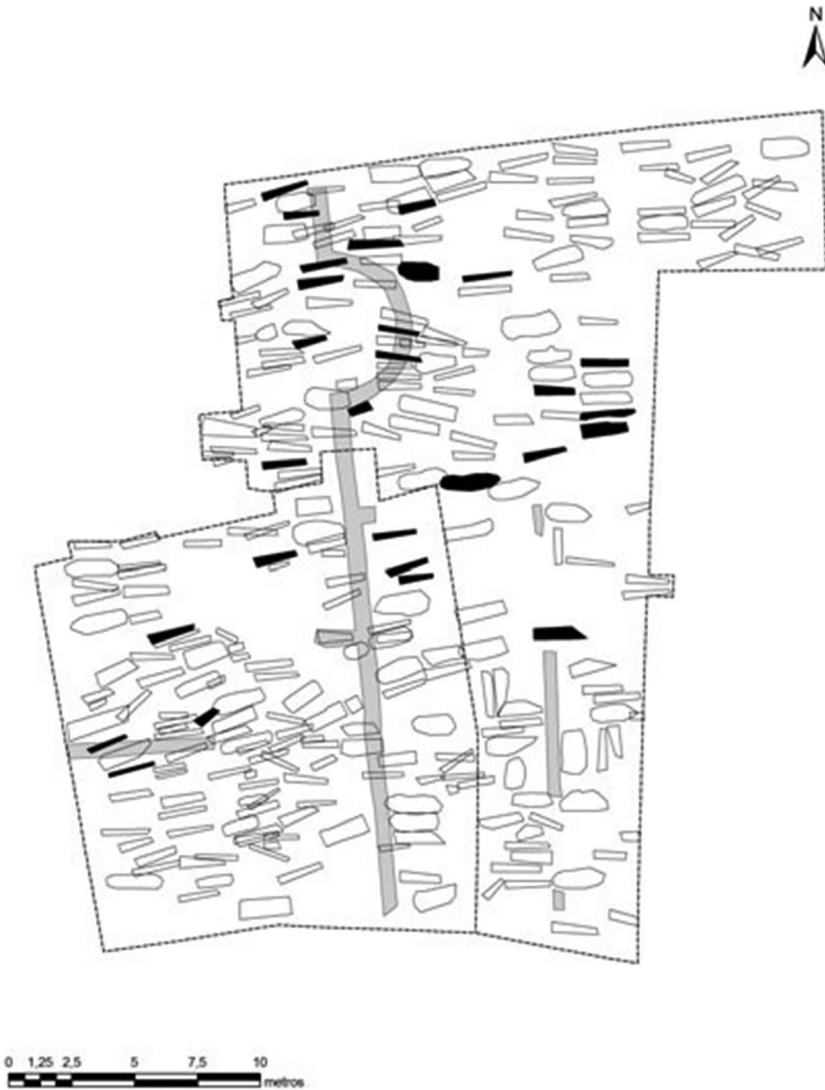


Fig. 4 Plan of the necropolis at the site of Duratón, indicating the location of the furnished burials

Although the analyses of the post-Roman funerary presence in the Iberian Peninsula have usually focused on row-grave cemeteries, archaeology has shown a complex world in which the necropoleis defined by the presence of cloisonné objects – traditionally related to Germanic peoples – are only one piece of the puzzle.<sup>39</sup> In fact, what is

<sup>39</sup> C. Tejerizo García, 'Ethnicity in Early Middle Age Cemeteries. The Case of the "Visigothic" Burials', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* 18 (2011), pp. 29–42.

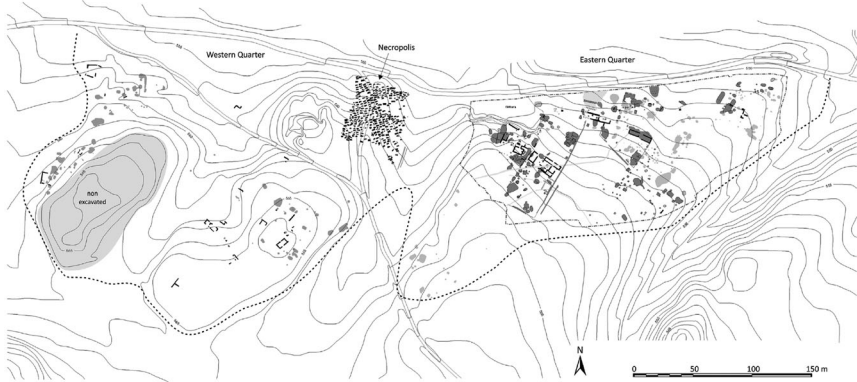


Fig. 5 Plan of the village of Gózquez, showing the location of the two dwelling clusters and the shared cemetery. Plan by Alfonso Vigil-Escalera, with permission [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/emed.12597)]

striking is not only the low number of such *inhumations habillées* within those cemeteries, but also that they do not cluster.<sup>40</sup> This pattern is better seen in extensively excavated cemeteries, such as Carpio de Tajo, Gózquez or Duratón (Fig. 4). In these cases we can interpret the use of grave-goods to differentiate some individuals from the rest of the burials in a local context based on the dialectic play between local relationships.<sup>41</sup> In contradistinction, lone, isolated burials reinforce the pre-eminence of the domestic unit over the community in rural contexts, as examples from La Mata del Palomar, Casanova, or Gózquez have shown. Something similar can be said for rock burials from central Iberia, which, documented as isolated instances or in clusters of small groups, acted as markers of local identities regarding the appropriation of lands through means of ancestry claim.<sup>42</sup>

The association between necropoleis and settlements would further underline that village communities used those spaces to reinforce local ties through place-based rituals like the exhibition of the deceased, funeral processions, or even banquets, all of which added layers to community memories.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the internal

<sup>40</sup> C. Tejerizo García, 'Etnicidad, identidad y poder en la meseta norte durante la Edad Media: reflexiones desde la Arqueología', in J.A. Quirós Castillo and S. Castellanos García (eds), *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania: propuestas teóricas y cultura material en los siglos V–VIII* (Bilbao, 2015), pp. 221–38.

<sup>41</sup> W. Pohl, 'Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West: An Introduction', in W. Pohl and G. Heydermann (eds), *Post-Roman Transitions* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 1–46.

<sup>42</sup> I. Martín Viso and A. González Blanco, 'Ancestral Memories and Early Medieval Landscapes: The Case of Sierra de Ávila (Spain)', *EME* 24.4 (2016), pp. 393–422.

<sup>43</sup> G. Halsall, *Early Medieval Cemeteries* (Glasgow, 1995); M. Parker Pearson, 'The Powerful Dead: Archaeological Relationships between the Living and the Dead', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 3.2 (1993), pp. 203–29.

characteristics of rural communal cemeteries, which include a voluntary organization of the burials (the so-called *Reihengräberfelder*), or the presence of burial markers – as recognized in cemeteries like Duratón or Estagel<sup>44</sup> – show the existence of established rituals, and therefore, *habitus*, arranged and contextualized by the community. One clear example of burial space as a fundamental node in a communal cognitive map is Gózquez. Located at the centre of the village, it acted as the landmark for two dwelling clusters, and served as the only recognizable common space for the village (Fig. 5).<sup>45</sup> Life (and death) in the village was understood in relation to the location of the necropolis, an association that would be uniquely shared by all the inhabitants.

### Pathways

Pathways are any linear elements that connect landmarks. These could be streets and roads, but could also include lines of sight. In the Roman period, the construction of gridded cities limited cognitive pathways to the main roads that linked the central focus of the forum with the different city gates,<sup>46</sup> but in Late Antiquity the emergence of new ‘hot spots’ away from the forum prompted the development of new axes.<sup>47</sup> These main roads with a pre-eminent role would have been key pathways, as perhaps seen in Isidore’s *plateae*, the ‘uninterrupted (*perpetuae*) and widest (*latiores*) streets of the city’.<sup>48</sup> These main streets, moreover, became performative arenas of their own. Many (famously in Reccopolis) became commercial axes,<sup>49</sup> but most were central in processions. Processions existed both in civil and religious contexts, including royal triumphal parades, but we know more about religious processions.<sup>50</sup> In some cases these were part of the liturgical calendar, as in Mérida (Fig. 6)<sup>51</sup>; in some others they were impromptu demonstrations of religious zeal, as happened during the Frankish siege of

<sup>44</sup> A. Molinero Pérez, *La necrópolis visigoda de Duratón (Segovia): excavaciones del plan nacional de 1942 y 1943*, Acta Arqueológica Hispánica 4 (Madrid, 1948); J. Martínez Santa-Olalla, ‘El cementerio hispano-visigodo de Estagel’, *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 41 (1948), pp. 128–31.

<sup>45</sup> A. Vigil-Escalera Guirado, ‘La identidad de la comunidad local y las afiliaciones individuales en necrópolis de la Alta Edad Media’, in Quirós Castillo and Castellanos García (eds), *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania*, pp. 249–74.

<sup>46</sup> F. Haverfield, *Ancient Town Planning* (Oxford, 1913), ch. 6.

<sup>47</sup> E. Rizos, ‘No Colonies and No Grids: New Cities in the Roman East and the Decline of the Colonial Urban Paradigm from Augustus to Justinian’, in A. Wallace-Hadrill and S. Greaves (eds), *Rome and the Colonial City* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 209–38.

<sup>48</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* XV.2.3, ed. W. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911). Our translation.

<sup>49</sup> L. Olmo Enciso, ‘Recópolis: una ciudad en época de transformaciones’, in L. Olmo Enciso (ed.), *Recópolis y la ciudad en la época visigoda*, Zona Arqueológica 9 (Alcalá de Henares, 2008), pp. 40–63.

<sup>50</sup> H. Dey, *The Afterlife of the Roman City* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 140–60.

<sup>51</sup> *Vitae sanctorum patrum Emeritensium* [=VPE] V.3.12, ed. and trans. A. Fear, *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (Liverpool, 1997), p. 76.

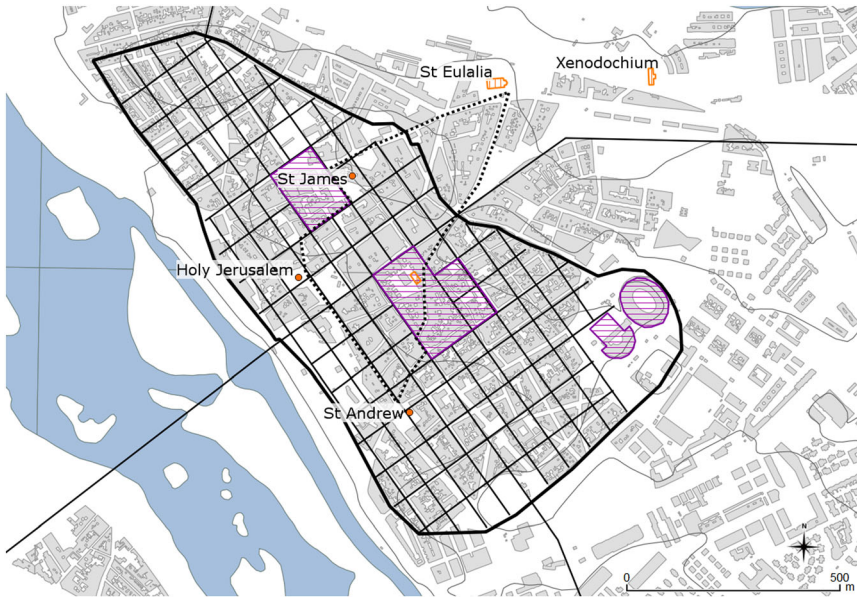


Fig. 6 Plan of the city of Mérida, indicating the location of the main Roman sites (purple, horizontal hashing), the main Christian sites (orange, vertical hashing), and how they relate to the current city and the ancient grid. Included also the possible processional routes (dotted). Drawn by the authors [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.com)]

Zaragoza.<sup>52</sup> These acts of communal worship had a strong role in shaping the communal cognitive map by adding memories to conceptual pathways.

Countryside pathways could be linked to processions, especially those connecting the scattered settlements with their local rural churches. These roads would have had an important role in village cognitive maps because they linked the settlement with their place of cult. But there were other routes that linked settlements with other liminal elements, like hillforts, cities, or distant seasonal pastures. In fact, ethnographic and spatial research into the transhumance routes in the Near East show that tradition and social understandings of the landscape were the determining factors in the herds' routes.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, old Roman roads, brooks, and rivers are linear elements that articulated

<sup>52</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum* III.29, ed. and trans. L. Thorpe (London, 1974), pp. 186–7.

<sup>53</sup> E. Hammer, 'Local Landscape Organization of Mobile Pastoralists in Southeastern Turkey', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 35 (2014), pp. 269–88. On Visigothic transhumance, P. Argüelles Álvarez, 'Vías de comunicación en la legislación visigoda', *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 38.1 (2020), pp. 143–66.

the layout and the connectivity of settlements. In sites like El Pelicano, the river became the element that linked all the clusters of dwellings that formed the village, giving it a cohesive linear understanding; a path that connected all the local landmarks.<sup>54</sup>

### Edges

Edges do not need to be specifically defined in cognitive maps, and could simply be the point beyond which the knowledge about space is neither accurate nor relevant, a badly defined liminal, grey area, rather than a sharp border. Walls come to mind when thinking about liminal elements, but they fit with difficulty as cognitive edges. By all means, walls mark a physical separation of space that sometimes had religious, legal, and even social implications, perhaps with those living in the suburbs having a perceived status different from those closer to the main landmarks of the city. City walls were also essential in the definition of the cityscape and, as a result, of the city as a community.<sup>55</sup> But walls were permeable, and suburbs played key social, religious and economic roles. Perhaps it is more useful to think of edges in terms of viewsheds and isochrone distances to reflect the limits of conceptualized space.

Liminal landmarks could have also marked the edge of a cognitive map; elements connected to the place but distant in (real and perceived) space.<sup>56</sup> For cities, these could be sites like rural monasteries (like the site of Casa Herrera, some seven kilometres from Mérida) or fortifications (the settlement of València la Vella, thirteen kilometres from Valencia).<sup>57</sup> In village contexts, the edges could have been defined by elements in the landscape and other settlements and singular sites. Rural churches that served different local communities in particular were fundamental nodes for the definition of rural place-based identities.<sup>58</sup> A perfect example is the ongoing fieldwork in the Sil River basin, which shows how these churches acted as nodes that articulated

<sup>54</sup> S. Kilby, *Peasant Perspectives on the Medieval Landscape. A Study of Three Communities* (Hatfield, 2020); C. Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas en la cuenca del Duero durante la Primera Alta Edad Media* (Bilbao, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> S. Stevens, 'Cadenia moenia. The Symbolism of Roman City Walls', in R. Frederiksen *et al.* (eds), *Focus on Fortifications: New Research on Fortifications in the Ancient Mediterranean and the Near East* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 288–99. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* XV.2.1: 'urbs ipsa moenia sunt', ed. Lindsay.

<sup>56</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez and C. Tejerizo García, 'Central Places in the post-Roman Mediterranean: Regional Models for the Iberian Peninsula', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 28.1 (2015), pp. 81–103.

<sup>57</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez and I. Sastre de Diego, 'A Late Antique Rural Community in Mérida: The Site of Casa Herrera', *Studies in Late Antiquity* 6.1 (2022), pp. 54–100; A. Ribera Lacomba *et al.*, 'Historia y arqueología de dos ciudades en los siglos VI–VIII d. C. Valentia y València la Vella.', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 37 (2020), pp. 63–106.

<sup>58</sup> A. Vigil-Escalera Guirado, 'Meeting Places, Markets, and Churches in the Countryside between Madrid and Toledo, Central Spain (c. AD 500–900)', in J. Escalona Monge *et al.* (eds), *Polity and Neighbourhood in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 173–202.

the settlement pattern (and its associated localized identities) around them. Many of these may be reflected in the *Parochiale Suevum*, a sixth-century document that describes the (desired?) administrative division of the territory.<sup>59</sup>

### *Urban and rural place-based communities in Visigothic Spain*

Cognitive maps are not needed to explain the social importance of monuments, communal spaces, or streets, but they are a useful tool to understand how local senses of belonging could develop. Communal cognitive maps allow us to reassess the social role played by landmarks as ‘hot spots’ of social interaction in the idealization and comprehension of place. They offer a way of thinking about the audience and the direct relationship between the community and its performative spaces, and underline the relevance of space and place in the formation of identities.<sup>60</sup>

Cities offer a perfect setting in which to study place-based identities, because of the socio-economic complexities that derive from such central places; their rites, performances, and *habitus* project strong local meanings.<sup>61</sup> There are plenty of sites within cities that were landmarks. Cities have a clearly defined municipal administration that shows a degree of community commitment, either by minting coins or maintaining aqueducts.<sup>62</sup> But whether for the spiritual or the physical preservation of its citizens, urban communities set up social and political mechanisms with local objectives in order to preserve their space. Moreover, the monuments and saints these communities interacted with linked them to a deep past, to those people who shared their same city generations before. In Mérida, for example, such was the power of the memory of St Eulalia that local factions fought over it

<sup>59</sup> M. Fernández *et al.*, ‘Asentamientos fortificados no interior da Gallaecia en época tardoimperial e sueva (séc. IV–VI): un achegamento a partir de varios casos de estudo’, *Gallaecia* 36 (2017), pp. 129–62; C. Tejerizo García, ‘El poblamiento en el interior de la Gallaecia entre el final del Imperio Romano y la Alta Edad Media: nuevos datos, nuevas propuestas’, *Studia historica. Historia Medieval* 38.2 (2020), pp. 155–87; more generally J.C. Sánchez Pardo, ‘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, 2015), pp. 227–68.

<sup>60</sup> Cresswell, *Place*, p. 119; Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 91–2; Post, ‘Making Place’; Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, p. 187.

<sup>61</sup> Lalli, ‘Urban-related Identity’, pp. 286–9; Rapoport, *Human Aspects*, pp. 282–4; also J. Martínez Jiménez, ‘Urban Identity and Citizenship between the Fifth and Seventh Centuries’, *Al-Masāq* 32.1 (2020), pp. 87–108.

<sup>62</sup> C. Ferguson, ‘A Comparative Approach to Ethnic Identity and Urban Settlement: Visigothic Spain, Lombard Italy and Merovingian Francia, c. 565–774 AD’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh (2012), p. 52.

when the king (an outsider) tried to take her relics away from her shrine: control of these relics and the spots linked to Eulalia's memory highlighted the connection between the townsfolk as citizens and the community's past.<sup>63</sup>

The formation of place-based rural identities poses a much more complex issue, because the elements that can conceivably be included within rural cognitive maps are either less monumental and durable or else go beyond the settlement to include areas of the surrounding landscape.<sup>64</sup> There is also a much wider variety of settlement types: from hillforts to monasteries, including individual farmsteads and aristocratic dwellings, all of which formed interconnected social networks.<sup>65</sup> However, we can state that place-based identities have a more nuanced salience in the rural world precisely because its inherent sociology, based on a more acute tension between the individual and the community, is dissimilar to urban sociology, where individuality has a more significant interference.<sup>66</sup>

Urban and rural forms of community belonging can be defined according to social understandings of a community's local place, and these forms of belonging can become a layer of identity at a local scale. However, we should note that, as any other expressions of identity, local belongings were always open to challenge and negotiation, especially when they intersected with other significant layers of identity in early medieval times, such as ethnicity or religion.<sup>67</sup>

### Validation of place-based communities

There are two main ways in which we can infer the usefulness of place-based communities in the study of the Visigothic kingdom, both of which involve the dialogue between local groups and an 'other', either a peer (e.g. a different place-defined community) or else a higher institution (like the monarchy). Validation by opposition (by 'othering' or alienation) is one of the basic concepts that explains the identities

<sup>63</sup> VPE V.6.11–12, ed. and trans. Fear, p. 84. This also extended to fights over the episcopal office: J. Wood, 'Conflicts over Episcopal Office in Southern Hispania. Comparative Perspectives from Visigothic and Byzantine Territories', in S. Panzram and P. Pachá (eds), *The Visigothic Kingdom: The Negotiation of Power in Post-Roman Iberia* (Amsterdam, 2020), pp. 353–72.

<sup>64</sup> J.A. Quirós Castillo, 'Introducción general', in *idem* (ed.), *Arqueología del campesinado medieval: la aldea de Zaballa* (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2012), pp. 41–70.

<sup>65</sup> Martínez Jiménez *et al.*, *The Iberian Peninsula*, ch. 6.

<sup>66</sup> L. Gracca, 'Peasant Mode of Production and the Evolution of Clientelar Relations', in L. Gracca and A. Zingarelli (eds), *Studies on Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Brill, 2015), pp. 158–203; K. Dobrowolski, 'Peasant Traditional Culture', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (London, 1971), pp. 277–98.

<sup>67</sup> A. González-Ruibal, *Archaeology of Resistance: Materiality and Time in an African Borderland* (Lanham, 2014).

introduced above. This form of peer-evaluation enhances the position of the community and corroborates the need of each sub-group to exist.<sup>68</sup>

Inter-city competitions are one of the clearest examples of place-defined communities trying to outdo each other for prestige, civic pride, and validation. Peer-polity interaction is a phenomenon hardly considered for the early medieval world, even if, by showing the community's agency, it represents an emic (insider) definition.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that the proliferation in Hispania of intra-mural episcopal complexes and cathedrals and the demand for newly carved marbles from the mid-sixth century onwards reflects a conspicuous consumption of architecture, in which neighbouring cities tried to outdo each other.<sup>70</sup> But this competition for the holy went beyond construction: we find clear examples of keen relic-hunting, and even the invention of saintly bishops to add pedigree to a city, as can be seen in Toledo.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the maintenance of certain municipal and increasingly scarce structures, like aqueducts, may have been a similar source of civic pride.<sup>72</sup> There is also room to consider here coin-minting as an example of urban self-presentation. Minting coins showed the economic vibrancy of a city. The minting of gold *tremisses* underlined the city's pre-eminent role in the royal administration. It also marked the difference between those cities that minted constantly (provincial capitals like Mérida, Tarragona, Toledo, or Córdoba) and those that only did so intermittently (other secondary centres like Valencia, Reccopolis, or Zaragoza).<sup>73</sup> The minting of small copper-alloy coins with CIVITAS inscriptions or bearing the king's name may reflect special privileges granted to specific civic communities.<sup>74</sup>

These interactions between civic communities and the central administration were essential, because this recognition legitimized

<sup>68</sup> Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 102–6.

<sup>69</sup> J. Ma, 'Peer Polity Interaction in the Hellenistic Age', *Past and Present* 180 (2003), pp. 9–39; C. Renfrew and J. Cherry, *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> Martínez Jiménez *et al.*, *The Iberian Peninsula*, pp. 161–8 (episcopal complexes) and 251–5 (marble workshops). Cf. M.Á. Utrero and F.J. Moreno, 'Evergetism among the Bishops of Hispania between the Sixth and Seventh Centuries', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23.1 (2015), pp. 97–131.

<sup>71</sup> S. Panzram, 'Mérida contra Toledo, Eulalia contra Leocadia. Listados "falsificados" de obispos como medio de autorepresentación municipal', in A. García (ed.), *Espacios urbanos en el occidente mediterráneo (S. VI–VIII)* (Toledo, 2010), pp. 123–30; cf. J.L. Ramírez Sádaba and P. Mateos Cruz, *Catálogo de las inscripciones cristianas de Mérida* (Mérida, 2000), no. 5, pp. 31–5, and *VPE* V.6.9–26, ed. and trans. Fear, pp. 83–6.

<sup>72</sup> Martínez Jiménez, *Aqueducts and Urbanism*, pp. 95–102.

<sup>73</sup> R. Pliego Vázquez and T. Ibrahim, 'La ciudad a través de las emisiones monetarias y sigilográficas de la Península Ibérica de la Antigüedad Tardía a la conquista Omeya', in Panzram and Callegarin (eds), *Entre civitas y madina*, pp. 135–52.

<sup>74</sup> R. Pliego Vázquez, 'Kings' Names on Visigothic Bronze Coins: A New Minimus from Ispali in the Name of Leovigild', *American Journal of Numismatics* 30 (2018) pp. 219–31.

the validity of place-based communities and their derived local identities.<sup>75</sup> This is especially the case with municipal enfranchisements and citizenships; local citizenship did not disappear with the third-century *Constitutio Antoniniana* and, in fact, it could be argued that local civic ties became ever more relevant in the post-Roman period.<sup>76</sup> The constant interactions between the monarchy and the cities of the Visigothic kingdom through bishops, counts, or *curiales* underlined the relevance of *civitates* not only as territorial units but as groups of citizens with political agency. The use of civic language in the written sources shows that the citizen body was increasingly identified with the townsfolk, which established clear categories between resident neighbours (a *civis*) and outsiders, regardless of other social points held in common.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the central administration had the power to promote a secondary settlement to city status by making it a bishopric (*Italica*, Segovia, Amaya), and could create newly founded cities (Reccopolis, Eio, Victoriacum). Similarly, cities fell out of grace with the crown and were demoted to secondary positions (as briefly happened with Mérida).<sup>78</sup>

In rural contexts, it is likely that the opposition happened between villages and other types of rural settlements like monasteries or hillforts, and this peer competition is visible in assemblies and other moot-like meetings; such are the cross-road gatherings (*conpita*) described by Isidore.<sup>79</sup> It is in this context that we must understand the sixth- and seventh-century *conventus publici vicinorum*. The purpose of these assemblies is unclear, but they seem to represent the concerns of rural communities in opposition to urban authorities, and they also had some degree of judicial authority.<sup>80</sup> The material expression of these spaces of social interaction are extremely evasive, but local churches acted as common places for these types of local meetings in later centuries.<sup>81</sup> But in Domingo García (Segovia) we know of a site were

<sup>75</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Paris, 2001); Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 19 and ch. 13; J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, 1998).

<sup>76</sup> R. Mathisen, 'Peregrini, barbari, and cives romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire', *American Historical Review* 111.4 (2006), pp. 1011–40, at pp. 1016 and 1019.

<sup>77</sup> Martínez Jiménez, 'Urban Identity'.

<sup>78</sup> Martínez Jiménez *et al.*, *The Iberian Peninsula*, pp. 173–8; for the demotion, see *VPE* V.6.29, ed. and trans. Fear, pp. 86–7.

<sup>79</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* XV.2.15: 'Conpita sunt ubi usus est conventus fieri rusticorum; et dicta conpita quod loca multa in agris eodem competant; et quo convenitur a rusticis', ed. Lindsay.

<sup>80</sup> E. Daffon, 'Tumultos e clamores: assembleias rurais e resistência camponesa na Hispânia Visigoda (séculos VI–VIII)', *Brathair* 15.2 (2015), pp. 132–67.

<sup>81</sup> Á. Carvajal Castro, 'Local Meetings and Meeting Places in Early Medieval León', *EME* 25.2 (2017), pp. 186–207.

assemblies were called, as evidenced by the repeated use of the place, including the carving of glyphs on rocks.<sup>82</sup>

These *conventūs* highlight both the political involvement of rural communities (comparable, at a different scale, with municipal administration) and the existence of performative spaces within a community's territory, in which place-based identities were constructed and opposed. Some of these rural communities may have been granted or delegated tax-collecting powers, as suggested by the Visigothic slate texts that reveal the existence of 'communities of tax payers' fixed to a particular place.<sup>83</sup> After all, in Visigothic law *vici* appear as specific locations with a separate legal standing.<sup>84</sup> The inhabitants of the kingdom as a whole were considered subjects under the same law (a universalizing ideal that was also followed by the Hispanic church),<sup>85</sup> but the practicalities of the rural countryside required it to be considered separately.

The monarchy may not have interacted with villages individually, and the evidence for peer validation at a village level may be invisible, but place-based identity would still have mattered in opposition to town dwellers.<sup>86</sup> Villages, because of their productive nature in a landowning economy, were at the base of the settlement hierarchy, and interactions with outsiders would have relied heavily on rank difference, but that does not undermine the value of the locally shared cognitive map to define the community itself.<sup>87</sup> Economically, the ties between cities and their rural territories meant that both spheres were closely connected; in fact, cities might have lived following agrarian cycles as much as rural communities.<sup>88</sup> But, from the point of view of the cognitive map analysis, the two communities were different by virtue of residence and their associated senses of place. Villagers might have had a first-hand knowledge of the landmarks of their nearest city, and it is likely that they participated

<sup>82</sup> Tejerizo García, *Arqueología de las sociedades campesinas*, pp. 106–7.

<sup>83</sup> I. Martín Viso, 'Tributación y escenarios locales en el centro de la Península Ibérica: algunas hipótesis a partir del análisis de las pizarras "visigodas"', *Antiquité Tardive* 14 (2006), pp. 263–90.

<sup>84</sup> E.g., *Lex Visigothorum* III.4.17, VIII.1.12 and IX.1.21, ed. K. Zeumer, *MGH Leg. Nat. Germ.* 1 (Hanover, 1902), pp. 157, 318, 363–5.

<sup>85</sup> Cf., *Lex Visigothorum* I.2.3: 'lex regit omnem civitatis ordinem . . . tam rusticis quam urbanis', ed. Zeumer, p. 41; *Toledo I*, in *La colección canónica hispana*, ed. G. Martínez Díez and F. Rodríguez (Madrid, 1966–2002), can. 5: 'si intra civitatem fuerit vel in loco in quo est ecclesia aut castellum aut vicus aut villa' (p. 330).

<sup>86</sup> And vice versa: cf. M. Bell, 'The Fruit of Difference: The Rural-Urban Continuum as a System of Identity', *Rural Sociology* 57.1 (1992), pp. 65–82.

<sup>87</sup> Bell, 'The Fruit of Difference'.

<sup>88</sup> L. Smith, 'In Search of Urban Identity', in H. Fulton (ed.), *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (Swansea, 2012), pp. 19–50, at p. 24.

in the same religious festivals,<sup>89</sup> but their experience of the urban space was significantly different, and they were not included in all urban *habitus*.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, city dwellers' experiences of life in villages would have been very limited. When the bishops of Mérida distributed the dole to townsfolk (*cives*) and villagers (*rustici*),<sup>91</sup> the distinction was more than a rhetorical device: it was a way of classifying the people in the diocese, acknowledging a separation based on residency.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, rural inhabitants had traditionally been linked with heresy and paganism – a distinction that the urban church wanted to underline in order to justify its expansion into rural areas.<sup>93</sup> In summary, as a consequence of the relationship between individuals, communities, and their cognitive maps, a place-based identity analysis can delve into the complexities of the development of rural and urban sociologies during post-Roman times. It can also help us to understand the validation of these sociologies, as a result of their interaction in specific contexts.

### *Ethnicity vs. locality*

The social structure of the Visigothic kingdom has often been portrayed as one of opposing ethnicities (Goths vs. Romans), but this division should be understood in terms of political and social differences and not two opposed parallel societies.<sup>94</sup> A 'Goth' was, up to the sixth century, a label used for Arians and those in the service of the king, and, therefore, part of the ruling elites or a soldier (something similar to what happens with the label 'Frank'); it might have had a kinship component, but this was not a hard divider.<sup>95</sup> By the seventh century, however, 'Goth' signified any inhabitant of the kingdom.<sup>96</sup> These category labels were not useless: one needed to be a Goth to become a king, and Roman was a default free status upon emancipation, but we

<sup>89</sup> *Toledo III*, can. 23: 'In religiosa consuetudo est quam vulgus per sanctorum sollemnitates agere consuevit', ed. Martínez Díez and Rodríguez, p. 131.

<sup>90</sup> For instance, different burial locations (row-grave cemeteries vs. church burials).

<sup>91</sup> *VPE V.3.7*, ed. and trans. Fear, p. 75.

<sup>92</sup> Ferguson, *Comparative Approach*, p. 64.

<sup>93</sup> V. Guimarães and M. Lemos, 'O II Concílio de Braga e da correção dos rústicos contra o paganismo: entre a cultura escrita e a oralidade', *Perspectivas e Diálogos* 2.6 (2020), pp. 174–205; J.A. Jiménez Sánchez, 'Aristocracias hispanas y pervivencias paganas durante la Antigüedad Tardía', in V. Revilla *et al.* (eds), *Ex Baetica Romam* (Barcelona, 2020), pp. 1257–78.

<sup>94</sup> Pohl, 'Christian and Barbarian Identities'.

<sup>95</sup> C. Broome, 'Approaches to Community and Otherness in the Late Merovingian and Early Carolingian Periods', Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds (2014).

<sup>96</sup> E. Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities in Spain and Gaul, 500–700*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia 4 (Amsterdam, 2017); M. Koch, 'Arianism and Ethnic Identity in Sixth-Century Spain', in G. Berndt and R. Steinacher (eds), *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed* (London, 2014), pp. 257–70; Pohl, 'Christian and Barbarian Identities'.

must understand that the terms had no necessary racial connotations, and there is no reason why these should have been the most salient forms of individual or group definition. As with all other layers of identity, ethnicity was only highlighted when necessary. The armies of the Goths were so because they fought against Franks or against Romans, and Ologicus is defined as a civic community of Goths, a *civitas Gothorum*, because the ‘other’ it was being defined against was the defeated and rustic Vascones.<sup>97</sup> In these examples, it is clear that the identity is clearly defined against outsiders. Similarly, in the context of internal power struggles in Mérida, Bishop Masona was *natione Gothus*, but he was, most importantly, a Catholic.<sup>98</sup> Meanwhile, his deeds as ‘helmsman’ (*gubernator*) reflected on the piety of the *emeritenses* as a whole, in the same way that the reconstruction of the walls of Italica by Liuvigild was a threat to the *Hispalensi populo*, and Agila’s war was against the *Cordubenses cives*.<sup>99</sup>

Ethnic and local identities can intersect. In Mérida we hear not only of Goths and Arians coming to blows, but also of Greeks and Jews living alongside them. These are four groups defined in religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic terms, but they would have all shared a similar emic understanding of their city.<sup>100</sup> The ethnic identifications of individuals as belonging to one group or another in urban contexts show that ethnic identities could be the more salient form of identification because they are subdivisions of an overall, local identity. Alterity was defined against internal social dynamics rather than against the common cognitive map, but this does not undermine the importance of local identity when opposition was shown to an outsider.

This cohesive understanding of the city community despite internal groupings (including ethnicity) can be seen in Isidore. His views on cities compile earlier traditions from Cicero through Augustine, but he was nevertheless a keen observer of his own time, and he defined the *cives* and the *populus* in traditional Roman terms as inhabitants brought together by bonds of solidarity.<sup>101</sup> This understanding of the urban community is broad and inclusive and defined solely in terms of

<sup>97</sup> Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, e.g. cc. 41, 42, 46, 48 (Goths as army); c. 63 (Ologicus), ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH AA II* (Berlin, 1894), pp. 283–4, 286; p. 293.

<sup>98</sup> *VPE* V.2.1, ed. and trans. Fear, p. 73.

<sup>99</sup> *VPE*, *passim* (Emeritenses), V.8.18 (helmsman), ed. and trans. Fear, pp. 90–1; John of Biclár, *Chronica, s.a.* 584 (Hispalenses), ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH AA II* (Berlin, 1894), p. 216; Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 45 (Cordubenses), ed. Mommsen, p. 285.

<sup>100</sup> *VPE* IV.1.1, ed. and trans. Fear, p. 58; R. González Salinero, ‘Fuentes arqueológicas y documentales para el estudio de los judíos en la Hispania Romana y Visigoda’, in Javier Castaño, *Una Sefarad inventada?* (Córdoba, 2014), pp. 133–60.

<sup>101</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.4.2–6, ed. Lindsay.

residence. Isidore did not specify ethnic divisions, but in his view the bonds of solidarity are central, and they describe the commitment to the community we have discussed above. Moreover, this conceptualization of urban communities as the entirety of the urban population mirrors the universalizing charity of Bishop Masona, who gave to all locals regardless of ethnicity.<sup>102</sup> The minting of coins to facilitate trade, the maintenance of aqueducts, or the repair of bridges would fall within this same category of commitment to the entire community.

In rural contexts, the intersection between ethnicity and locality is more difficult to see. Just as in cities, it cannot be denied that some village dwellers might have been of Visigothic descent, but this incoming population was not the result of a single settlement and was probably focused on cities rather than on a 'Gothic core land'.<sup>103</sup> For this reason it is nearly impossible to identify anything explicitly and uniquely Germanic in the rural world. Sunken-featured buildings, for example, have been repeatedly related to traditional barbarian architecture, even though they are a common element to rural societies.<sup>104</sup> Cloisonné jewellery and weapon burials may indicate an affinity for or connections with the militarized elite displays of the Visigoths, but they exist as objects in a local context whose relation to the Goths is questionable at the very least.<sup>105</sup> On the contrary, these materialities are much better explained from the point of view of place-based identities and the deep understanding of peasant anthropology. Focusing on the jewellery, for example, the *habitus* associated with its display (and burial) speaks about social performance and about the consolidation/challenging of status *within* the community, not for outsiders. Not even personal names can be seen as a specific indicator of Gothic elements in the countryside.<sup>106</sup> In village contexts, where each settlement was so reduced in size and population, the internal social dynamics would have highlighted social differences

<sup>102</sup> *VPE* V.3.5, ed. and trans. Fear, p. 75, where Jews and Arians are all part of the urban community of Mérida; cf. Martínez Jiménez, 'Urban Identities', p. 101.

<sup>103</sup> M. Koch, 'Gotthi intra Hispanias sedes acceperunt. Consideraciones sobre la supuesta inmigración visigoda en la Península Ibérica', *Pyrenae* 37 (2006), pp. 83–104.

<sup>104</sup> C. Tejerizo García, 'Estructuras de fondo rehundido altomedievales en la Península Ibérica', *Munibe* 65 (2014), pp. 215–37.

<sup>105</sup> G. Halsall, 'Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries', *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 18 (2011), pp. 15–28.

<sup>106</sup> H. Gallego Franco, 'Algunas reflexiones en torno al aspecto étnico-cultural en la onomástica femenina de las fuentes epigráficas de la "Hispania" tardoantigua', *Hispania Antiqua* 31 (2007), pp. 209–33.

whether or not these had an ethnic basis – in the same way that the peasant networks of collaboration and solidarity would have included the community as a whole.<sup>107</sup>

Overall, ethnicity may be useful to see differences within local groups, but even clearly differentiated ethnic communities that coexist in the same place still share *habitus*, behaviours, and ways of understanding that are deeply rooted in local interactions.<sup>108</sup> Since place-attachment is not dependent on group validation and it develops from continued interactions, local bonds of loyalty towards the place-community can be stronger than any expected links with a social peer if they are outsiders.<sup>109</sup> When othering happens with an outsider, someone who does not share the same understanding of place, place-based identities can be more salient, inclusive, and cohesive than ethnicity.

### *The Catholic paradox?*

While local belonging and ethnicity are different categorizations of identity and can intersect within groups, religious belonging is a more complex subject. This is because it is cultural, political, and closely linked to ethnicity, but the public nature of certain forms of worship also underline locality.<sup>110</sup> Civic cults were an essential part of ancient political identities, and many had an intrinsic local component. The extension of Roman rule extended a set of overarching public beliefs, but it was with Christianity that religious identity shifted to a really ecumenical and universal aspiration.

Augustine clearly established the difference between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei*, and the accepted doctrine was that Christians should aspire to the universal (the Catholic) community that was offered through Christ.<sup>111</sup> Iberian funerary inscriptions from the fourth century onwards share the same formulaic celebration of reaching the new life

<sup>107</sup> J.A. Quirós Castillo and C. Tejerizo García, 'Filling the Gap. Peasant Studies and the Archaeology of Medieval Peasantry in Light of the Northern Iberian Evidence', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 21.2 (2020), pp. 377–95.

<sup>108</sup> Fine, 'The Sociology of the Local'. Cf. S. Gooden and M. Eberhardt, 'Local Identity and Ethnicity in Pittsburgh AAVE', *UPenn Working Papers in Linguistics* 13.2 (2007), pp. 81–94.

<sup>109</sup> E. Badone, 'Ethnicity, Folklore, and Local Identity in Rural Brittany', *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1986), pp. 161–90; Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 106–10.

<sup>110</sup> P. Brown, 'Christianity and Local Culture in Late Roman Africa', *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968), pp. 85–95.

<sup>111</sup> A. Vanderjagt, 'Political Thought', in K. Pollmann and W. Otten (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 1561–9; N. Kamimura, 'Augustine's *Sermones ad Populum* and the Relationship between Identity/ies and Spirituality in North African Christianity', in G. Partoens et al. (eds), *Praedicatio Patrum. Studies on Preaching in Late Antique North Africa* (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 429–60.

and resting in the Peace of Christ, reflecting this idea of transitioning to a larger, universal community.<sup>112</sup> Naturally, while Christianity aimed to include a wider community in its fold, it could also be used to exclude, and it was a well-established Roman practice to use orthodoxy to alienate heretics and non-believers.<sup>113</sup> In Visigothic contexts, there was at first a tolerated opposition between Arians and Catholics (which nevertheless resulted in no small amount of conflict),<sup>114</sup> and during the seventh century this alienation was focused on the Jews, with much harsher policies.<sup>115</sup>

However, the overlap between the structure of the earthly church and the city-focused (post-)Roman administration meant that there was a local component in Christian identity that was never lost, as can be seen in the cult of local saints. Christian proselytism has always found a way of adapting to local circumstances,<sup>116</sup> and belonging to the City of God did not absolve Christians from mundane commitments. Already in the Council of Elvira (possibly early fourth century) the issue was raised about those Christians who continued to perform their public duties as *flamines*.<sup>117</sup> In the Visigothic period bishops played an increasingly important role in city and judicial affairs, and episcopal elections required a modicum of popular acceptance to justify episcopal involvement in municipal business.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, the cult of saints and protector martyrs, presented as guardians of communities and their representatives in heaven, were the object of local-focused competition, further underlining this paradoxical Christian civic ideal.<sup>119</sup> Even the architecture of cult buildings was designed with urban discourses of power in mind.<sup>120</sup> Funerary inscriptions might have celebrated the transition to the new life, but

<sup>112</sup> Martínez Jiménez *et al.*, *The Iberian Peninsula*, p. 129.

<sup>113</sup> E. Rose and R. Flierman, 'Banished from the Company of the Good. Christians and Aliens in Fifth-Century Rome', *Al-Masāq* 32.1 (2020), pp. 64–86.

<sup>114</sup> Koch, 'Arianism'.

<sup>115</sup> L. Chernin, 'Visigothic Jewish Converts: A Life in Between', *Visigothic Symposia* 3 (2018), pp. 1–18.

<sup>116</sup> J. Barker, 'Toward an Anthropology of Christianity', *American Anthropologist* 110.3 (2008), pp. 377–81.

<sup>117</sup> L. Diniz, 'Christianisation and Religious Identity from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages: A Comparative History of Gaul, Hispania and Britannia', Ph.D. thesis, University of Vienna (2017), pp. 96–8.

<sup>118</sup> S. Castellanos, 'The Significance of Social Unanimity in a Visigothic Hagiography: Keys to an Ideological Screen', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11.3 (2003), pp. 387–419.

<sup>119</sup> P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 2nd edn (Malden, 2013), p. 19.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. I. Jacobs, 'Holy Goals and Worldly Means. Urban Representation Elements in Church Complexes', in A. Busine (ed.), *Religious Practices and Christianization of the Late Antique City (4th–7th c.)* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 71–114.

the funerary rites associated with burial were eminently local. The importance of location in Christian burial practices partly relates to the role these funerary rites had in anchoring the deceased to their locality, bringing the community together.<sup>121</sup> Burials *ad sanctos* in martyrial shrines (like those at St Eulalia, in Mérida), episcopal tombs in cathedrals (the cemetery of the Almoina excavations of Valencia), and other suburban funerary basilicas (Casa Herrera in Mérida or Clos de la Lombarde in Narbonne) form points of paradoxical intersection as a local community celebrated a universal identity.

Despite this approach to community, the dichotomy between the local and universal purposes of Christian belief and identity was not problematic. Bishops and preachers seemed comfortable with this duality, which had precedents both in Ciceronian discourses of *duae patriae* and Christological debates on the nature of Christ.<sup>122</sup> The way Christian ideas of belonging appealed to the Catholic *ekklesia* and the City of God while also focusing on the mundane affairs of (and responsibilities to) the local community is perfectly exemplified in the use of citizenship and civic language in Christian discourse.<sup>123</sup> In sum, while Christianity was a universal cult that underlined the unity of its community in a true Church, it had the disposition to tolerate local, place-based communities. Christian identities could be understood both as universal and as a defining local element (especially through the emerging parishes),<sup>124</sup> which reinforced the way place-based communities of this period understood themselves.

## Conclusions

Our main aim with this paper was to delve into the possibilities, and also the pitfalls, for early medieval studies of using cognitive maps to analyse

<sup>121</sup> A.M. Yasin, 'Funerary Monuments and Collective Identity: From Roman Family to Christian Community', *The Art Bulletin* 87.3 (2005), pp. 433–57.

<sup>122</sup> Cicero mentions that town dwellers have two fatherlands (*municipibus duas esse censeo patrias*), 'one by nature (*naturae*) and one by citizenship (*civitatis*)' (Cicero, *De Legibus* II.5, ed. C. Keyes (Cambridge, MA, 1928), p. 374). This set a legal precedent to allow municipal (local) enfranchisements alongside Roman (universal) citizenship, which was preserved in civic thought into Late Antiquity and beyond (cf. Ausonius, *Ordo urbium nobilium* XXX, ed. H. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA, 1919), pp. 282–5).

<sup>123</sup> J. Martínez Jiménez and R. Flierman, 'The Uses of Citizenship in the post-Roman West', in J. Filonik *et al.* (eds), *Citizenship in Antiquity: Civic Communities in the Ancient Mediterranean* (London, in press); for the east, see T. Langley, 'Local and Universal Citizenship in Works of the Cappadocian Fathers', *Al-Masāq* 32.1 (2020), pp. 34–53.

<sup>124</sup> G. Ripoll and I. Velázquez, 'Origen y desarrollo de las parrochiae en la Hispania de la antigüedad tardía', in P. Pergola (ed.), *Alle origini della parrocchia rurale (IV–VII sec.). Atti della giornata tematica dei Seminari di Archeologia Cristiana (Ecole Française de Rome – 19 marzo 1998)* (Vatican, 1999), pp. 101–65.

local place-based identities. In this regard, we think the examples used throughout this work show that local belonging and place-based identities have much to offer to our understanding of the late antique and the early medieval past and its local communities. We would like to finish this contribution with some remarks on the possibilities that this line of thought opens for future enquiries.

Thinking about place as opposed to space is a first step to understand the needs and motivations of a community, which already prompts new ways of interpreting the archaeological record. Belonging to a place-defined community is an important layer in the formation of identities. This perspective adds to and expands on the identity and ethnicity debate that for decades has characterized our discipline. In this regard, local belonging is not meant to provide a solution, but rather a new perspective from which to further understand social interactions and group agency in this period. It forces us to think about the particular agencies and interests of local communities in relation to their lived and built environments, well represented both in the written and archaeological records.<sup>125</sup>

Local identities mattered, and a shared understanding of (and belonging to) a place was, when contrasted with outsiders, a basic form of othering. While this does not rule out the validity of other forms of self-presentation, on a daily basis the repeated and routine *habitus* reinforced the connection with the local, and this insider knowledge did make a difference when confronted by an outsider or when the interests of the community as a whole were challenged. Either through local citizenships or rural parochial divisions, local forms of identification mattered in the post-Roman period because these communities offered many advantages (legal, economic, social, emotional) to the individual and, in the same way, could be used to exclude outsiders from these networks.

Studying groups and communities from this local perspective, therefore, allows us to think more about the aims and objectives of communities as agents with vested interests in both the place they live and their neighbours. Moreover, we have shown the specificities of the emergence of place-based identities in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages through means of particular materialities (e.g. churches or burials), rituals (processions or house-building), and social relationships (rural *conventus* and assemblies). This has the potential to prompt more nuanced interpretations of the past. From this perspective, episcopal charity is not only a religious duty, it is part of a community's

<sup>125</sup> Cf. M. Pitts, 'The Emperor's New Clothes? The Utility of Identity in Roman Archaeology', *American Journal of Archaeology* III.4 (2007), pp. 693–713.

expectation, a social contract that ensures the survival of the group and the preservation of the structures that sustain it. Town and village assemblies, similarly, can be understood as instruments to regulate internal- and external-peer competition and are linked to community-focused decision-making, while landmarks create the nodes for the cognitive maps shared by the community in order to reinforce individual belonging to such groupings. In this regard, the contrast between place-based identities in the urban and the rural milieu is something quite visible both in the documentary and archaeological record, and is a promising avenue for future research.

Last, but not least, our examples have been taken from Visigothic Iberia for convenience, but the theoretical framework can be applied generally. This is a compelling perspective to delve into in the future, not only at a territorial level but also at the scale of the emerging polities of post-Roman Europe. In summary, cognitive maps and place-based identities offer a tool with which to think differently about past environments. Local experiences would have undoubtedly differed, but we can use the same theoretical principles to illuminate them.

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