

Braga and its territory between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries. Raquel Martínez Peñín (ed.). Braga: University of Minho – Archeology Unit/Lleida: Universitat de Lleida, 2015, 98 pp. ISBN:978-84-8409-760-0/978-84-8409-750-1

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This collective work, edited by Raquel Martínez Peñín, focuses on the city of Braga, founded *ex novo*, in the first century AD, as *Bracara Augusta*. With the contribution of several authors, this work reflects the current state of knowledge about the city and the respective territory from the times of late antiquity to the late Middle Ages. This extended timeframe is crucial for better understanding not only the city's concrete reality, but also the transformation processes that were similarly found in other urban contexts.

The archeological data collected during almost four decades of “rescue” work undertaken by the Archeology Unit of the University of Minho have considerably increased the number of studies that have been conducted about the city in recent years, especially in the areas of urbanism, architecture, and the economy. This work is therefore an analysis and a systematization of the archeological evidence collected so far. At the same time, it also highlights the new research topics, methodologies, and directions that are made possible through the different sources, both documentary and cartographic, and which all serve the same purpose: understanding the evolution of the city's space, people, activities, and powers. This interdisciplinary work consists of five articles.

The first article, by Manuela Martins, Jorge Ribeiro, Fernanda Magalhães, and Raquel Martínez Peñín, is about Braga's Roman Theater and its surroundings. The theater was built, in the second century, close to the public baths, at a time of great prosperity and rapid economic development, corresponding to the apogee of urbanism in the city, and was subsequently abandoned in the fourth century. Dismantled and subjected to different uses in the fifth and sixth centuries, the theater is an essential building for better understanding the changes taking place in an area that, despite its occupation by both the Suevi and the Visigoths, remained untouched in the medieval era. The available archeological evidence also demonstrates that, far from this being a period of stagnation and decline, there was intense building activity (both within and outside the town walls) during the fifth and sixth

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centuries, just as there had been in the fourth century. Evidence also points to the substantial presence of imported materials, confirming the maintenance of the Atlantic trade networks. In practical terms, this meant that the occupation of the city by the Suevi did not lead to the economic and civil collapse of the capital; it simply redefined its centralities and the subsequent desertion (or transformation) of part of the existing Roman public monuments, such as the sites used for entertainment and leisure activities. In fact, facilities such as theaters and amphitheaters lost their significance with the rise of Christianity (the new legitimating force that also restricted the development of the city's urban topography) and were dismantled. At this point, the northwestern area of the once monumental *forum* became a peripheral territory, but it also began to house structures that served other purposes, essentially ones that were residential and productive in nature. There was a shift from the foundational orthogonal layout to an organic organization of the buildings, adapted to the land's morphology and its already existing constructions. This break had already been seen with the construction of the theater and public baths, which led to the destruction of the *cardines* and the *decumani*. Nonetheless, the abandonment of the primary function of these sites opened up other possibilities, such as their adaptation and use for new purposes; taking advantage of part of their walls or using pieces of the buildings as construction materials for other structures, often resorting to different techniques. It should be noted, however, that the tendency to renovate public and private buildings in fourth-century *Bracara* was not exclusive to this area and, above all, that archeological records show that such remodeling coincided with a period of considerable construction activity. What is enlightening, however, is the fact that the stone foundations of the new structures were smaller in height and weaker in consistency, thus, they could only support roofs and brickwork of a perishable nature.

It should also be emphasized that the different constructions found in the area previously occupied by the theater are associated with ceramic sets that can be linked to the period of late antiquity. This evidence made it possible to date the different phases of the theater's abandonment and occupancy. Regardless of its being located either within or outside the city, these ceramics are identical to materials that have already been retrieved from other contemporary archaeological contexts, in several sites. The archeological data thus suggest that the urban population was maintained in this area, although it was subsequently organized according to a new concept of *civitates*. In fact, as was the case in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, these *civitates* were gradually transformed into episcopal centers.

There are yet other realities that have been documented in Braga as dating from between late antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages. The approach adopted in the second text, by Maria do Carmo Ribeiro and Luís Fontes, results from the cross-linking of iconographic, cartographic, documentary, and archeological data. Although they are limited in nature, these data allow us to peer into the city and conclude that Braga's urban morphology was characterized by the significant changes taking place between the fifth and fifteenth centuries (which we have subdivided here into three main periods).

The first period, between the fifth and eighth centuries (coinciding with the region's domination by the Suevi and Visigoths), is characterized by the reuse of several structures for different purposes – mostly public structures – and by important topographic changes, following the final decline of the original Roman urban model. In fact, new constructions were built in areas previously occupied by main streets, leading to a reorganization of the layout of the residential areas, which gradually began to be composed of more and more small-sized housing units. Furthermore, at the end of the sixth century, the city lost its political significance following the breakdown of the region's control by the Suevi and the subsequent integration of *Bracara* into the Visigothic Kingdom. However, *Bracara* remained a primary ecclesiastical see, which preserved its urban character. *Bracara* could no longer be regarded as a Roman city, but rather as a Christian city, closely linked to the new political, administrative, and religious powers. Concurrently, a new center began to be developed in the northeastern part of the city, around the original Paleo-Christian basilica, pushing other areas of the Roman city towards the periphery, which gradually became ruralized. In the meantime, on the outskirts of the city – where the Roman necropolis had been erected by the side of the roads that linked the different parts of the territory of *Bracara* cemetery basilicas appeared, associated with martyrial cults (*martyria*). The monasteries of Dume and São Salvador de Montélios were built on the outskirts of the city during the sixth and seventh centuries; the first was commissioned by São Martinho, and the second by São Frutuoso, the bishops of Braga and Dume respectively. As far as the eighth century is concerned, archeology has yet to provide sufficient data for a complete assessment of the disorder caused by the Muslim incursions; existing information is based mostly on documentary sources.

The second period ranges from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. During the ninth and tenth centuries, the process of urban reorganization, which clearly had implications for the limits of the city and its territory, was implemented by the kings of the Asturias and Leon. There is evidence of measures being introduced for the city's

revitalization, such as the renovation works at the original basilica and the creation of a new walled area in the southern part of the city, albeit far more modest in its scope and design than the imperial area. In the second half of the eleventh century, following the restoration of the archdiocese, the bishop Dom Pedro began the building of a new and extensive church — the cathedral. Built in the Romanesque style, the cathedral played a vital role in the reorganization and greater dignification of the urban center, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, once again significantly enhancing the city's ecclesiastical and political importance. It should, however, be noted that there are only scanty data available about Braga's topography between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, partly because the current urban fabric overlaps with the medieval borough. It is generally assumed that Braga's urban layout might have been organized along the same lines as other contemporary urban centers: one-story houses, with a backyard, built by the side of the road.

The last period encompasses the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The demographic and economic growth experienced in the thirteenth century (closely linked to the newly revitalized trade), resulted in a more complex road system, as suggested by the construction of new buildings and a new walled area. These walls, completed in the fourteenth century, encompassed suburban zones, doubling the area of the urban nucleus (compared to the early Middle Ages) and being complemented with the construction of a castle, built near one of the old imperial roads. The growth of the city's perimeter, compared with the early medieval period, is suggested not only by archeological discoveries: documentary and cartographic references also give an account of this phenomenon. Without the cross-linking of data from different types of sources, it would not have been possible to understand such dynamics, nor the relationship between the intramural arteries, such as those connecting the city with the centers that were to emerge in its surrounding area, namely in the vicinity of the old necropolises or Paleo-Christian basilicas, which were converted into churches. By cross-linking data in this way, the authors were able to conclude that, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Braga had two core urban morphologies: a more regular one, which, despite the transformations and the renovation work, inherited the original Roman layout; and a more sinuous one, which resulted from the integration of predominantly agricultural suburban areas. This suggests that, until then, Braga had passed through a series of different stages, marked either by urban retraction or by growth “programs.”

Let us now focus on the article by Raquel Martínez Peñín about locally produced ceramics dating back to late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, with particular emphasis on the “cerâmica cinzenta” (grey ware). The study focuses on the technical, morphological, and decorative aspects of these manufactures and their evolution. At the same time, it also seeks to demonstrate the advances in our knowledge about this subject, reviewing some iconic sites that have provided stratigraphically located data and pointing out the most relevant publications on the subject.

The article tracks the work developed by Alexandra Gaspar and applies to material collected from archeological sites in Braga. The ceramic ware is divided into three main groups that have a common denominator—they were fired in reducing atmospheres. The first group comprises imitations of imported foreign shapes (late antiquity grey ware), with smooth surfaces and manufactured on a fast wheel, denoting the use of reasonably purified clays with small amounts of non-plastic inclusions. The second group comprises “typical late antiquity grey ware,” where the ceramic paste includes more and larger non-plastic elements. These productions indicate the use of a wheel with a manual finish (hence the slight irregularity of the shapes, with only a limited repertoire), with smooth surfaces and a soft feel. The third and last group (early medieval ware) comprises vessels designed mostly for cooking purposes, made of minimally polished pastes and using identical technical procedures to those of the second group. In the author’s view, some of the shapes identified from the early medieval period indicate continuity in the production of the late antiquity grey ware. In turn, they seem to have some of the defining characteristics of “red engobes.” In view of this information, the author maintains that there was no discontinuity (in spite of the stagnation) in the production of ceramics in Braga. She also suggests that there was a correlation between the visible technological changes and the need to adapt the materials to the socioeconomic changes experienced by the city, a vast arena of transformations where a multitude of functions took place.

Ana Sofia Cunha and Arnaldo Sousa Melo’s contribution highlights the clear interconnection between productive activities and Braga’s urban specificities. Such manufactures played a pivotal role in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, not only in the development of trade and the provision of consumer goods, but also with regard to social and spatial planning. How, therefore, was this space shaped to meet the productive dynamics of the city? Some of the handicraft and industrial structures were located within the fourteenth-century enclosure, excepting those that required a specific location. Examples of the latter included water mills, slaughterhouses, and tanneries, which required

abundant supplies of water and were thus located in the suburbs. Within the city walls, the distribution of manufacturing facilities appears to have been uneven, with some areas having a significant concentration of buildings and others being almost completely devoid of constructions.

To outline the location of such facilities, the authors resorted to toponymy, as some of the terms found in rental contracts and other types of documents may serve as indicators of their location. As it is not possible to cover all sites and infrastructures, the authors focused their attention on squares, stalls, stores (*boticas*), and the abovementioned slaughterhouses (*açougues*) and tanneries (*pelames*). As an example of the results that they presented, we highlight the “Cathedral Square,” which was the most important square in Braga, where many collective structures were found and where numerous activities took place, including both political and business activities. There were, however, other densely crowded sites, both inside the city walls and on the outskirts, revealing a definite vibrancy, which is highlighted in the authors’ study.

Let us now look at the last contribution, by Raquel de Oliveira Martins, which focuses on the power networks that existed in Braga during the fifteenth century. Reviewing the existing historiography about elites, medieval municipalities, and power networks, the author highlights the major progress that has been made in the study of this subject in recent decades, although there are still some gaps in our knowledge at the local and regional level.

In order to analyze the medieval power networks in Braga, we must look at the city’s political elite, as well as the relationships between the Borough, the Chapter, the Cathedral, and the Archbishopric. There was a well-defined oligarchy that exerted an influence over the main structures of the city; this system was controlled by the citizens and *homens bons* (“good men”), who were responsible for the government of the borough as well as the management and administration of its key institutions. Moreover, the citizens and good men of the city often maintained close links with the Archbishopric and the Cathedral Chapter, where important activities were frequently carried out. However, to better understand the links established in the fifteenth century, it is crucial to stress the fact that, over 70 years (from 1402 to 1472), the jurisdiction of Braga shifted from the Archbishopric and the Cathedral (which had exercised this jurisdiction since 1112) to the Crown, resulting from a deal that was negotiated during the more centralizing reign of Dom João I, the first king of the House of Aviz.

There were, therefore, different types of powers coming together in medieval cities, and the transformations that fostered urban growth and economic development gradually concentrated the exercise of power in the hands of a small number of people. The same phenomenon could be seen in Braga in the fifteenth century, whose political elite was strongly endemic. Although it might be premature to identify power lineages within Braga's oligarchy, it nonetheless appears that certain families, linked to both spheres, maintained their members in the top positions of government over many generations.

Conversely, the study demonstrates that the Archbishopric and the Cathedral Chapter did not exercise power on an equal basis, nor did the powers that they enjoyed resemble those that have been observed in other contemporary boroughs. It is also suggested that the relationship between the ecclesiastical and the civil powers was pivotal in Braga, despite the normal conflict that existed between the two parties. Nevertheless, the author considers that the men of eminently urban origin who controlled the municipal government during the second half of the fifteenth century maintained links with welfare organizations, as well as with the Archbishopric and the Cathedral Chapter. In short, the author seeks to demonstrate that institutions were embodied by individuals, united by an important network of relations, and that the members of the oligarchy enjoyed a dominant position in society.

We thus conclude that the contents of this collective work are not only an interesting synthesis of the research carried out into an iconic city over several years (by several researchers), but they also identify the inspiring progress that has been made in relation to topics that previously were insufficiently explored. We therefore hope that the data presented about the evolution of *Bracara Augusta* will facilitate comparisons and the cross-checking of information with other contexts and case studies. We also consider that the transformation processes that occurred between the period of late antiquity and the medieval era represent an unquestionably important object of study, which will require yet further investigation.