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

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**ELEONORA DELL’ELICINE**
National University of General Sarmiento / University of Buenos Aires

**ABSTRACT**

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

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

² Filotas cannot compose this “pragmatic” definition with the title chosen for her text, *Pagan Survivals*. On the one hand, the scholar posits that superstition only exists if there is an authority validating it, while she affirms that the practice is a set of inherited behaviors from previous times. In my opinion, this addresses two different ways of considering the problem. The metaphor of pagan practices as traces/survival immediately places the issue in terms of an unyielding resistance to the central powers. A subject stemming from the populus – that by a slip already imposed by the documentation ends up being a peasant subject – sticks to their ancestral patterns of behavior and their inertia becomes entangled with the active policies of the dominant powers. From the other perspective, the problem does not lie in the content of the practice or in its ancestral origin, but in the strategic nature of the label. To typify it as “superstitious” or “pagan” is already a political action in itself, the unilateral movement of a force that seeks to impose its order on situations that show capacity (real or fictitious) to generate their own legal systems. In this matrix, the labelled subject is not necessarily plebeian or peasant but can acquire more transversal and complex dimensions. Neither does this perspective prejudge him in a passive position but rather supports the possibility of strategic assemblies and situational calculations: the fact that his practices were not an inert inheritance of a remote past but patterns that convey cyclical positions in relation to other forces. In short, Filotas’s title and definition point to two different ways of approaching the problem of superstitious practices in the earlier middle ages: one that focuses on the content of the practice and the other on its dimension as political action. For the first approach see: Stephen McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain Up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (DC: The Catholic University of America, 1938); Antonio Tovar and José Blázquez Martínez, *Historia de la Hispania Romana* (Madrid: Alianza, 1975); Rosa Sanz Serrano, “Sive pagani sive gentiles: El contexto sociocultural del paganismo hispano en la Tardoantigüedad,” *Gerion* 21, no. 7 (2003): 9-37. In a clever analysis, Isabel Velázquez and Gisela Ripoll consider that the new generations are not limited to inheriting old patterns of behavior but that they select knowledge and re-signify it according to criteria and requirements of their time. See Isabel Velázquez Soriano and Gisella Ripoll López, “Pervivencias del termalismo y el culto a las aguas en época visigoda hispánica,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie II, Historia Antigua*, no. 5(1992), 555-80.
Filotas’s definition also involves certain methodological precautions in relation to the sources. If the function of pastoral literature was to regulate a field, we should not consider its contents to be a faithful reflection of what was happening in society. Instead of describing pagan practices, the sources represent dynamic compositions in which information of different nature, origin and level can be identified. From this cannot necessarily be inferred – in the way of a linguistic-turn-type of argument – that the heterogeneity of beliefs and cults was a pure invention, a creation of clerical writing, but rather that those constructs were more persuasive and effective than a detailed account of what was really happening.³

In a recent article, written in 2015, Céline Martin disregards the problem of describing pagan practices and focuses, instead, on the political game of the central powers.⁴ Martin highlights two elements: on the one hand, the connection between critical moments of the monarchy and the proliferation of anti-pagan policies; and on the other, the employment of repressive measures against the Jews in these same circumstances.⁵

In her opinion, these topics are not autonomous, but rather constitute the arsenal of the dominant powers’ methods of intervention.

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


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

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

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

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

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

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⁶ “Praecepta haec Domini non in ultione sed in terrore delinquentium adponentes non mortis per hanc sententiam promulgamus, sed cultores idolorum, veneratores lapidum, accensores facularum et excolentes [sacra] fontium vel arborum admonemus, ut agnoscant quod ipsi se spontaneae morti subiciunt qui diabolo sacrificari videntur, mortis enim nomen diabolus appelatur sicut de eo scriptum est: ‘Et erat illi nomen mors’. ” XII Toledo XI (*Concilios Visigócticos e Hispano-Romanos*, ed. and trans. José Vives [Barcelona, 1963]).
overthrowing an anointed king, Wamba (r. 672-680), hence, the urgent need to strengthen his own role as a Christian prince. In this framework, Erwig relied on Deuteronomy 4: 1-20, introducing his government as a renewal of the alliance between Yahweh and the Chosen People. These seminal Bible verses connect two conditions regarding the renewal of the relationship: in the first place, the presence of a mediator, a Moses who is able to move from the Earthy to the Terrible because it is God’s will; in the second place, the definitive eradication of infidelity. Re-signifying his government through this agenda, Erwig presented himself as a new Moses and appropriated the anti-idolatry mission.

In the introductory speech to the council Erwig elicited another element of the anti-idolatry program: its strong apocalyptic tone, as shared with the main ecclesiastical mentor of the council, Julian (Bishop of Toledo, 680-690). In the Book of Revelations 7 Erwig introduces his ascent to power in this way: “Eu, reverentissimi patres et honorabiles ministeriorum coelestium sacerdotes, soliditatem sanctae fidei veraciter tenens et sincera cordis devotione amplectens testimonium paternitatis vestrae fortissimum in salutis nostrae advoco adiumentum, ut quia regnum fauctore Deo ad salvationem terrae et sublevationem plebium suscepisse nos credimus, sanctitudinis vestrae consiliis adiuvemur. Unde licet sublimationis nostrae primordia paternitati sanctae vestrae reminiscar relatio non lateant, quibus clara divinorum iudiciorum dispositione praeventus et regnandi conscenderim sedem ad sacrosanctum regni perceperim unctionem, ita et his orationum solamen impendat […].” XII Toledo Tomus regius.

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

“Non dubium, sanctissimi patres, quod obtima conciliorum adiutoria ruenti mundo subveniant, si officiosis quae corrigenda sunt studiis peragantur, et ideo quibus malis terra prematur quibusque plagis praeveni dierum succedentium feriatur, paternitati vestrae non reor esse incognitum. Obinde quia certum apud nos gerimus quod pro contentu divinorum praecipuum terrae permiciem sustineat pressurarum […].” XII Toledo introduction.
people surrender to the Beast and worship it. In Rev. 19: 20-21 – where the eschatological battle is prophesied – the Beast is captured and finally hurled into the sea by the Saint, together with the False Prophet and his worshipers. Unaware of when the end of time will arrive, the new princeps visigothorum has the certainty that the Earth will collapse if the necessary remedies are not applied, and if the alliance fails to be renewed. In this last scenario, his role may also come to be redefined: if, in fact, what is happening before his eyes is the announced end of times, the apocalyptic role of “Fidelis et verax” that “cum justitia judicat et pugnat” could well suit Erwig’s anti-idolatrous struggle and fight against the false prophet Wamba.

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

11 Rev. 19: 11.
12 The Bible of Jerusalem refers to the Vulgate’s Ex. 22:20 as Ex. 22:19.
13 To strengthen the measures taken by the Second Council of Braga, Martin developed his famous De correctione in which he writes: “Nam ad petras et ad arbores et ad fontes et per trivia cereolos incendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli?” Mart., De correctione rusticorum 16.2 (Martino di Braga: Contro le superstizioni: catechesi al popolo: de correctione rusticorum, ed. Mario Naldini [Firenze: Nardini, 1991]).
14 “Audivimus aliquos ex vobis ad arbores vota reddere, ad fontes orare, auguria diabolica observare: de qua re tantus dolor est in animis nostris, ut nullam possimus consolationem recipere.” Caes. Arel. Ser. LIII, 1. This same warning is repeated in the synod of Auxerre (561- 605): “Non licet consensum in
little about the reality of the practices listed by the council. However, they do indicate
that the Visigothic Fathers took part in the issue, selecting from ecclesiastical tradition
and other information available to them about practices associated with sacrifices and
offerings. These measures clearly focus on combating any action that might promote
an alternative to the efficacies offered by the Church and that might suspend any
mediation controlled by the clerical hierarchy. Canon XI also refers to punishments, yet
does not include the death penalty. For the moment, neither the prince nor the bishops
were ready to stage the eschatological battle. Death was not chosen because they neither
wanted to nor could hasten the end of time. Throwing idolaters and the Beast into the
sea could wait. Thus, what the sources reveal are complex constructs that are far
removed from popular culture and which seek only to centralize power. How do they
do this, and why?

Central Powers, Pagan Slaves and the Authority of the Lord

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

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

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domibus proprinis nec pervigilios in festivitates sanctorum facere nec inter sentius aut ad arbores sacros
vel ad fontes vota dissolvere nisi, qicumque votum habuerit, in ecclesia vigilet et matriculac ipsum votum
aut pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pedem aut hominem ligneum fieri penitus praesumat." Aux, III
(Les canons des conciles mérovingiens [VIe-VIIe siècles], ed. Jean Gaudemet and Brigitte Basdevant, 2
vols. [Paris: Sources chrétiennes, 1989]).
commit such wickedness. But if their owners do not want to receive those culprits under oath, then they will be presented to the king by the authorities in order to obtain the free ability to donate them. Also their owners, who having been warned about the errors of such slaves postpone their punishment, will suffer the penalty of excommunication and must know that they will have lost their rights on that slave who they did not want to punish. And if in these errors free people were involved, they will receive perpetual penalty of excommunication and will be punished with exile.\textsuperscript{15}

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

Exclusive servile origin for the idolaters, however, cannot be inferred directly from this canon XI. Twelve years later, at XVI Toledo (693), Erwig’s successor Egica (r. 687-
700) again recommended the suppression of idolatry, but on this occasion the *famuli*’s protagonism was ousted by a general interest in the rustic population and in the role of the bishops.\(^{17}\) Most likely, the reference to the servile world in XII Toledo XI did not describe a set of actors, rather it aimed to mobilize rural possessors. In this it emulates Reccared’s monumental III Toledo (589),\(^{18}\) whose canon XVI refers to the idolatry of the *famuli* as a crucial aspect of the problem, recognizing authority of the lord of the house to identify sacrilege, to ban it, and to provide consequent punishment. As bishops and judges in the rest of the diocesan territory, a lord also needed to follow anti-idolatry regulation. If not, he was punishable by excommunication. Almost a century later, XII Toledo provided a decisive breakthrough for the powers granted to public agents: in this context, the judge and the bishop were in charge of identifying, punishing and delivering the culprits to their lord, who was now, in fact, responsible for ensuring that the idolater would not relapse into sacrilege. The intervention of the lord was no longer primary but expected after the intervention of the delegates of the king. Remember, the canon posits that if the lord neglected his obligations he would be punished with

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

\(^{18}\) Article XVI of the council envisages the concerted action of bishops and judges: “Ut episcopi cum iudicibus idola dextruant, et ut domini idolatriam servis prohiberant: Quoniam pene per omnem Spaniam sive Galliam idolatriam sacrilegium inolevit, hoc quem consensu gloriosissimi principis sancta synodus ordinavit, ut omnis sacerdos in loco suo una cum iudice territorio sacrilegium memoratum studiose perquiraret, et exterminari inventa non differat; omnes vero, qui ad talem errorrem concurrunt, salvo discrimine animae, qua potuerit animadversione coercent. Quod si neglexerint, sciant se utrique excommunicationis pericum esse subituros. Si qui vero domini extirpare hoc malum a possessione sua neglexerint vel familias suae prohibere noluerint, ab episcopo et ipsi a comunione pellantur.” III Toledo XVI.
excommunication and the loss of his rights over the slave. The central power’s strategy was targeted at the family of the *possessor* to diminish his capacity of mediation.¹⁹

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

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

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

²¹ In fact, this renowned ethnographer founds that consecrated categories as “clan” and “lineage” – although useful to organizing experiences and making comparisons – are restricted when analyzing empirical social units and the strategies they develop to perpetuate themselves. In this context, he proposes the concept of “la maison”: “Est donc que la maison abord une personne morale détenant ensuite un domaine composé de biens matériels et immatériels et qui enfin se perpétue en transmettant son nom, sa fortune, et ses titres en ligne directe ou fictive tenue pour légitime, la seule condition que cette continuité puisse exprimer dans le langage de la parenté ou de alliance et le plus souvent des deux ensemble.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Histoire et ethnologie,” *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 38, no. 6 (1983): 1224. I should note that “la maison”, or ‘house’ or ‘estate’, involves in a single concept the resident group, their base of material support and the symbolic dimension (name, memory, etc.) that distinguishes one house from another. It mainly supposes a logic of duration. For an elaboration see Pierre Lамaison, “La notion de maison: entretien avec C. Lévi-Strauss,” *Terrain* 9 (1987): 34-39. See
largely appropriated the language of authority provided by Christianity. One of the devices available to them, for example, was the construction and support of patrimonial churches, sacred perimeters fostering the memory of their estates and terminals of offerings in their rural environment.\textsuperscript{22} Recceswth’s (r. 649/653-672) IX Toledo (655) granted such founding families the right to propose rectors, but they were not allowed to dispose freely of the patrimony with which they endowed the churches.\textsuperscript{23} Patrimonial


\textsuperscript{23} “Ut fundatores ecclesiarium quosque advixerint earum habeant cura ipsique illic ministros eligant servituros. Quum saepe sit solitum etiam illa vae non debentur prece supplicationis et vi quodammodo ex torqueri doloris, quanto iam sine obstaculo concedi debent exquisite simul et ordine iuris et dolore compassionis? Quia ergo fieri plerumque cognoscitur ut ecclesiae parrochiales vel sacra monasteria ita quorumdam episcoporum vel insolentia vel incuria horrendum decidant in ruinam, ut gravior ex hoc
churches were founded mainly on patrimonial land. Land in this case was a dimension of the estate, an essential component insofar as it enabled the lords to accumulate in order to distribute, to distribute with a view to creating relations, and to create relations to perpetuate the name of the estate. From the land, the lord was able to control access

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25 In this field, the bibliography is dispersed. Post-processualist funerary archaeology is perhaps the school that makes a more systematic effort to connect different research about exchange of goods, of gifts, of residential aristocratic patterns, etc. For the Visigothic Kingdom see: Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado, “La identidad de la comunidad local y las afinaciones individuales en necrópolis de la Alta Edad Media (400-900 AD),” in Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania. Propuestas teóricas y cultura material en los siglos V-VIII, ed. Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo and Santiago Castellanos (Victoria- Gasteiz: Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2015), 249-74; Iñaki Martín Viso and Santiago Castellanos, “The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000),” Early medieval Europe 13 (2005): 1-42; Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, Miguel Loza Uriarte and Javier Lorenzo Niso, “Identidades y ajuares en las necrópolis altomedievales. Estudios isotópicos del cementerio de San Martín de Dulantzi, Álava (siglos VI-X),” Archivo Español de Arqueología 86 (2013); Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, El poblamiento rural de época visigoda en España. Arqueología del
to goods, alliances, prestigious assets, and eventually public honors. These precarious balances rested on the lord’s ability to interpret changing variables in real time and to guide them toward the continuity of his domestic unit.

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


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

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

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

**Conclusion**

The latest historiography on idolatrous practices among the Visigoths shows that the difficulty of historical investigation does not lie in the shortage or the meagerness of the sources, but in their prescriptive nature as components of structures of power. The
extant documentary sources, mostly developed by the central authorities, do not show but definitely are strategies drawn by the king and the bishops to accumulate authority in the tone of an agenda based on the Bible. In the case study presented here, Erwig re-signified his role of ruler and sought to discipline territorial powers through the anti-idolatry measure set forth in canon XI of XII Toledo.

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


