The subject of this paper concerns the jewellery of the Visigoths after their settlement in the Iberian peninsula, the former Roman province of Hispania. It is intended as a review of the evidence, so follows a path well trodden already by archaeologists and art-historians of the Visigothic period, including N. Åberg, P. de Palol, G. Ripoll López, H. Schlunk and T. Hauschild.¹

To set the Visigoths briefly in their historical context, they derived from the groups of Gothic peoples who had migrated from Eastern Europe to the Pontic regions of the Ukraine and Romania in the 3rd century AD.² Linguistically and, to a large extent societally and culturally, they were Germanic. But they had adopted Arian Christianity in the late 4th century and, during the 42-year course of their further migration from the steppes to south-west France (where they were settled as Roman federates in 418–19), and eventually into Spain, where they had initially supplied military assistance to the Romans, at the end of the 5th century. Driven into exile by the Huns, once they had entered into the East Roman Empire – as the research of recent years has emphasised – they came to form more of an army on periodic marches than an ethnic group, amalgamating with other Gothic and Germanic elements as well as with non-Germanic groups, such as the Alans, Sarmatians and Galindi. They were joined by slaves on the run from their masters and by disaffected, or displaced, Roman inhabitants.³ In the late 5th century many Gallic aristocrats rejected the Emperor Anthemius (467–72) as a Greek emperor and preferred an alliance with the Visigoths, while the Visigoths themselves supported the imperial administration until the momentous events of the 470s.

The Visigoths thus had plenty of time to become closely familiar with Mediterranean culture and although curiously little archaeological testimony other than a handful of brooches, buckles and a few combs of eastern Germanic type testifies to their establishment of the Kingdom of Toulouse in the early 5th century, there is increasing evidence for their occupation of one or two villas, such as Séviac and La Turraque (Gers).³ Future discoveries may alter the picture, but it would appear so far that there was either rapid acculturation, or the general adoption of Christian burial practices that might have skewed the survival of material remains. At the same time, although new political institutions emerged, the old Roman legal and social order was retained to a greater or lesser extent.

Following their defeat at the battle of Vouillé by the Franks under Clovis in 507, the Visigoths were expelled from their extensive territories in Gaul south of the Loire, except for the region of Septimania around Narbonne, Nîmes and Carcassonne, and settled in Spain.³ There in contrast to the situation in south-west France, cemeteries traditionally regarded as Visigothic – where the dead were buried with grave goods and dressed in Germanic style with jewellery and costume fittings – are relatively numerous in the northern Meseta region particularly.⁴ But it is a question of current debate whether they are truly Visigothic, or whether they represent to some degree contingents of the other main Gothic grouping, of Ostrogothic soldiers and their womenfolk, who had joined with the Visigoths, or other generic eastern Germanic federates who had left northern Gaul after the brief sub-Roman ‘kingdom’ of Syagrius there had come to an end.⁷

The women were buried wearing a pair of bow brooches at the shoulders, indicating a ‘peplos’ type of sleeveless dress (Pl. 1), and buckles of a belt at the waist in a fashion typical of the elite of the Danubian region, of whatever ethnic affiliation, rather than Visigothic per se, although the males were generally buried without weapons, which is a Gothic trait.⁸

The Visigoths in the Iberian peninsula effectively constituted only a small, though powerful minority ruling over the native Hispano-Roman population and, to put this in some kind of perspective, estimates vary up to a maximum of around 200,000 Visigoths among perhaps 7–10 million native inhabitants.⁹ Many of the structures of Roman society lived on and some towns even continued to govern themselves into the 6th century, while the Roman senatorial aristocracy maintained much of their wealth and status alongside the new Gothic nobility, especially in Baetica, the most romanised part of southern Hispania, which roughly corresponded in area to modern-day Andalusia.¹⁰ The patricians of Córdoba even continued to maintain the fiction of the Roman Empire in the West in the 6th century. But this is not to say that the Roman

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Plate 1 Mid-5th-century Danubian female costume
way of life did not have to adapt and the appointment of *curiales* finally ceased in the late 7th century. The shrinking of towns indicates a decline in population over the period.

From early in the Visigothic period the jewellery reflects western Mediterranean influence, such as the adoption of disc-brooches, some with cruciform designs of possibly Christian inspiration (although still often worn in pairs in Germanic fashion) (Pl. 2), and *cloisonné* buckles with a wide variety of geometric designs inlaid in glass or garnet, which may have been produced in the Narbonne area during the 6th century (Pl. 3).  

These influences took on a more distinctively Byzantine intensity following the attempts by Justinian I to reconquer the former Roman provinces of the West Roman Empire and control trade in the western Mediterranean and through the Straits of Gibraltar. In 552 he sent military support to the rebel magnate Athanagild, who seized control of the kingdom, while, around 560, Byzantine forces took over the ports and towns of the southern and south-eastern coasts (Spaña) and the Balearic Islands, centred on the capital established at Cartagena. How far their rule extended inland, or into the Algarve region, is less clear, although Córdoba was held until 572. Byzantine forces also later came to the aid of Hermenegild, the son of King Leovigild, who had been sent as a co-ruler to Hispalis (Seville), but had instigated a rebellion in 579. They were bought off by Leovigild, however, although they carried off Hermenegild’s Catholic Austrasian wife, Ingundis, who died *en route* to Constantinople.

The sources also tell of Syrian traders in the south, especially in Hispalis, and of Greeks in Mérida and other towns of Baetica, such as Mertola, where inscriptions in Greek have also survived. Bishop Paul of Mérida (530–60) and his successor Fidelis (560–71) were of Greek origin, so presumably from the eastern Mediterranean region, and some Greek inscriptions from the region are preserved there in the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano. Major political and cultural changes took place during the reigns of Leovigild (568–86) and his son Reccared (586–601). But political contacts alone seem insufficient to explain the strongly Byzantinising cultural shift and a major stimulus must have been given by Mediterranean trade contacts through surviving ports such as Barcino (Barcelona) with North Africa, Egypt, Syria and Constantinople. The main archaeological evidence for this exchange is the importation of fine ceramic table-wares, particularly from North Africa, as well as Egypt, Asia Minor and Cyprus; silk from the East; and the discovery of late 6th-century Visigothic gold coins as far away as Israel and the Lebanon.

Leovigild succeeded in establishing Visigothic rule over virtually the whole of Hispania and, in a manifest example of *imitatio imperii*, deliberately sought to reshape the kingdom in the image of the Byzantine Empire, adopting imperial pomp and lavish ceremonial, both as a conscious echo of the majesty of Heaven on Earth, and as a symbol of his power. The witness to this is Isidore of Seville’s History of the Goths (ch. 51) and other 7th-century texts. The diadem, sceptre, throne, and rich vestments including the purple appear to have been based on Byzantine models, although the extent of the influence is a matter of debate, and both royal servants and altar boys wore silk cloaks. In 576, Leovigild issued gold *tremisses* in his own name without the names of the Eastern emperors, the first Visigothic and possibly the first ‘barbarian’ king to do so, although there seem to be conflicting claims. In so doing he was both setting himself up as the equal of the Eastern emperor and distancing himself from the Gothic nobility, among whom the king had been previously *primus inter pares*. It is notable that the victory imagery of his coins is an imperial borrowing.

King Reccared (586–601) converted from Arianism to Catholicism in 587, followed by the Visigoths themselves after the 3rd Council of Toledo in 589, which had established Catholicism as the religion of the entire kingdom. This momentous event marked the final rapprochement of the Gothic nobility and the upper classes of Roman origin, after the end of the prohibition of intermarriage six years previously (although how effective the prohibition had ever been in later years is questionable). To what extent Visigothic material culture had already been affected by commercial, political and social contact with Byzantine Hispania, or whether the council itself was the major catalyst for change is debatable, but it is quite clear that there was a radical change in female costume in the last third of the 6th century, which must reflect the adoption of the sleeved Mediterranean *tunica*. Paired shoulder brooches were abandoned and the showy buckles with rectangular plates were replaced by copper-alloy, fixed-plate forms of Italian derivation and frequently found in male graves, following the typology of Ripoll López (Pls 4–5). They
were decorated with griffins and lions drinking at the Fountain of Life and other scenes from Christian iconography, alongside simpler, plain forms (Pl. 6). The tongue-shaped plates of some examples are clearly based on Byzantine models, such as a late 7th/early 8th-century buckle, possibly from Jerusalem, which depicts a scene from the Physiologus (the Greek treatise on natural history) of a stag in combat with a dragon as an allegory of Christ’s triumph over the Devil according to Eger’s interpretation (Pl. 7).22

As a backdrop to this artistic development, in the 7th century, particularly during the Isidoran era, Hispania became an important focus of western Christendom. After the 670s it also provided a haven for Byzantine refugees from North Africa in the wake of the Islamic conquest, whose influence has been detected in church architecture and decoration.23

Numerous examples of buckles of Byzantine type from Hispania may reflect both these events and contacts with the Byzantine-occupied southern coastal region. They include late 6th to 7th-century buckles of most of the types originally defined by Werner, such as the Balgota, Bologna, Corinth, Hippo Regius, Sucidava and Syracuse types.24 It is also possible that moulds were imported for copying locally. Byzantine metalwork of the minor arts may also have reached Hispania by way of another type of import: by diplomatic gift as discussed by Daim.25 A Byzantine gold medallion bearing the scene of the Adoration of the Magi in the British Museum is evidently an example of the type that provided the model for the gold disc brooch with a Greek inscription from Medellín (Pls 8–9).26 The question arises whether the latter was an oriental import, or even perhaps a product of the Byzantine enclave. The lack of a secure provenance unfortunately makes...
it difficult to say if a disc brooch in the collection of the Ariadne Galleries also portraying the Adoration is from Hispania or Byzantium.  

In the 7th century, so-called ‘lyre-shaped’ and typologically related buckles copying Byzantine, or more generally Mediterranean, types (especially ‘Trebizond’) came into fashion in the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom, extending into Narbonensis and rarely into south-west France, although in cast copper-alloy rather than in precious metal *(Pls 10–11).*  

Hispalis (Seville) appears to have been an important centre of production. Local versions decorated with silver and brass inlay, a Frankish or Burgundian technique, were developed in the late 7th century.  

The end date for the ‘lyre-shaped’ type in Hispania is uncertain, but they most likely continued in use for some while after the beginning of the Islamic conquest in 711. Apart from their personal names, the Visigoths had become more or less completely assimilated by the late 6th century and spoke Latin as exemplified by the inscription on the buckle-plate from Hinojar del Rey *(Pl. 12).* So it becomes proper now to speak of Hispano-Visigothic art, which was probably developed in the workshops of the urban centres of Baetica and Lusitania, such as Seville, spreading from there throughout the kingdom.  

A Byzantine buckle depicting a crocodile enclosed by a double-headed serpent is based on a chapter in the *Physiologus* *(Pl. 13).* A group of buckles is recorded from Spain, e.g. from León, portraying what appear to be related scenes of quadrupeds, possibly lions, fighting snakes.  

Because of the scarcity of coins from burials and the long periods of their circulation, close dating of the lyre-shaped buckles is difficult, but the fine gold buckle from the high-status, coin-dated burial, or hoard, at Mala Pereščepina in the mid-Dnieper Valley, of the mid- or second third of the 7th century helps to establish the approximate period *(Pl. 14:11).*  

The extent of the copying of both form and detail that went on in Hispania is quite remarkable. For example, a monogram in Roman letters that may be read as the personal name Fidelis on a fragmentary Hispano-Visigothic buckle-plate *(Pl. 15)* imitates the style of inscribed Byzantine buckles, such as a piece in gold in the British Museum *(Pl. 16),* or a bronze buckle from Athens *(Pl. 17),* but filigree interlace was not used *(Pl. 18).* Ripoll López notes a Spanish buckle with a laurel wreath and cross derived from Byzantine coins in a similar position on the terminal.  

Hispano-Visigothic buckles of the 7th/early 8th century with cruciform plates, which are fairly rare, also derive from Byzantine forms, such as a further buckle from Athens *(Pl. 19).* One is inscribed with a Gothic name. The Hispanic buckles, however, are mainly in the form of a Latin cross *(Pl. 20),* while eastern types are in the form of a Greek one. Belt clasps of Byzantine type were also adopted.  

In contrast with the art of other Germanic kingdoms of western and northern Europe, early Visigothic art had only a very limited tradition of stylised animal representation. But now the lyre-shaped buckles, such as the fine plate from Hinojar del Rey *(Pl. 12)* are decorated with animal motifs, or simply their heads. They most likely represent griffins with beaks and ears from a comparison with designs on contemporary ecclesiastical metalwork and sculpture.
Ager

Áberg has demonstrated the stylistic connections between the Byzantine style in Italy and its Visigothic analogues, drawing attention particularly to the animal and vegetal motifs (Pl. 23). But they extend also to a Visigothic imitation of ‘dot and comma’ decoration, a stylised vegetal ornament derived from sculpture, although not generally as crisply defined as Byzantine and Italo-Byzantine work (Pl. 24).

The Byzantine influence on Visigothic sculpture is discussed by Cruz Villalón and Perea. It was not just the buckles that were so widely imitated, but items of personal jewellery, too, such as a pair of 7th-century earrings from Puente Genil, that appear to be decorated with amethysts and Mediterranean-style interlace combined with...
Byzantine Influences on Visigothic Jewellery

Plate 20: Hispano-Visigothic buckles of cruciform and other types

Plate 21: Hispano-Visigothic paten

Plate 22: Sculpture from a chancel screen of the church of San Miguel de Liño, Oviedo
zoomorphic elements reminiscent of Salin’s Germanic Animal Style II (Pl. 25); earrings of ‘basket’ type of Byzantine derivation (Pl. 26); or finger-rings with high bezels in Byzantine style (Pl. 27). A Byzantine earring from Spain in the Walters Art Museum shows that Byzantine artefacts could have served as direct models. Hisp UNSP Visigothic craftsmen, including jewellers, were based in the towns, and it is probable that the workshop of the palace goldsmith was established at the capital of Toledo by Leovigild and the post of præpositus argentariorum, in charge of the court argentarii, is referred to in one of the laws of Chindaswinth (642–53). These close cultural contacts notwithstanding, King Sisebut (612–21) led two campaigns against the Byzantines in Spain, who were finally expelled from the peninsula in 628 by his eventual successor Swinthila (621–31).

It is unknown how much of Alaric’s booty from the sack of Rome in 410 still formed part of the royal treasury. But the Visigothic Church was very rich and the great wealth of the nobility, too, is demonstrated by the fine of 27,000 solidi that the son of Theodemir had to pay to the Arabs; the equivalent of 123 kg of gold.
A mid- to late 7th-century renaissance stemming from the court is attested by the production of the gem-encrusted, gold votive crowns from the famous hoards of Guarrazar, discovered near Toledo in 1858 (Pl. 28), and Torredonjimeno, found near Jaén. These crowns are too large to have been made for wear, but they were given to churches and cathedrals by royalty and wealthy ecclesiastics for suspension above the altar, following Byzantine practice and symbolising the dedication of the kingdom to Christ. The form of the crowns is based on Late Antique models, such as the pendent crown from Monte Barro, Italy, or the lost gold crown with a pendent cross of the Lombardic King Agilulf, dating from around 600.

In the early 7th century the Eastern Roman emperors introduced the custom of wearing crowns adorned with pearls and gems, and the style, techniques, and use of imported gems on the crowns from Guarrazar — sapphires, amethysts, emeralds, moonstone, crystal, glass, pearls and mother-of-pearl, as demonstrated in the paper by Drauschke — have been compared with Byzantine jewellery by Schlunk, Perea and others. It is hard to imagine that metalwork of such a high standard could have been produced without the presence of Byzantine craftsmen in the Visigothic court workshops, as proposed by Schlunk and Ripoll López.

The richest of the Guarrazar crowns is the one dedicated by King Recceswinth (d. 672) and whose name is spelled out by the garnet-inlaid letters hanging from the lower edge (Pl. 29). The leaf-shaped links of the crown’s chains (Pl. 30) may be compared with Byzantine jewellery, such as the 7th-century openwork, leaf-shaped pendant in the British Museum (Pl. 31; see also Entwistle, this volume, no. 47), although their quality is not as high. Furthermore, examination of the central pendent cross at the Museo Arqueológico has shown that it is, in fact, a re-used brooch that is most likely of Byzantine origin (Pl. 32). With reference to the paper by Daim in this volume, it is perhaps, therefore, a further example of a diplomatic gift, which had been taken from the king’s personal treasury.

The elaborate pendent cross of the earlier crown of Swinthila (621–31) was perhaps of similar origin (Pl. 33), although, since the crown was stolen in 1921 and never recovered, it is difficult now to be certain. But the scrolls of its arms bear comparison with, for example, the late 6th/early 7th-century gold saddle mounts from the Lombardic cemetery of Nocera Umbra, grave 5, Italy (Pl. 34), or the Byzantine earrings from Assiût, Egypt, in the British Museum (Pl. 35). The two surviving, gem-encrusted plaques in the hoard from the arm, or arms, of a processional cross were probably originally mounted on a wooden base and a few minute garnets remain in some of the openings (Pl. 36). The plaques are thought to date from an earlier period than the crowns and...
the cross itself may have been a papal gift. In the recent publication of the hoard by Perea, both the form and openwork technique of the decoration have been compared with a 4th-century trapezoidal gold mount with a Christian monogram in the British Museum from Silivri, Turkey (Pl. 37). The ornamentation of the cross possibly served as a model for the crown of Recceswinth.

The Byzantinising style clearly apparent in Hispano-Visigothic jewellery, metalwork and sculpture appears to have served to legitimise the Visigothic successorship to the West Roman Empire in opposition to the Franks north of the Pyrenees, the other major contenders for the title, whose Merovingian dynasty continued in Germanic tradition and whose art still displayed animal symbolism of Germanic origin. The ubiquitous Hispano-Visigothic style may be fairly regarded as visual propaganda underpinning the extension of the idea of the gens gothorum (as mentioned in the acts of the Councils of Toledo and royal legislation) to the whole population of the Iberian Peninsula, both Roman and Gothic, in the course of the 7th century.

Notes


Plate 36  Plaques with garnets from processional cross

Plate 37  Gold plaque with garnets, London, British Museum (PE 1980,5–1,1)


17 F. Retamero, ‘Panes et silique. Las condiciones de la producción de moneda en el Regnum Gothorum’, in Arce and Delogu, ibid., 117–32; Carr (n. 12), 105–6, 137.

