

Rafael Barroso Cabrera / Jorge Morín de Pablos / Isabel M. Sánchez Ramos: *Gallaecia Gothica*. From the Conspiracy of Dux Argimundus (AD 589/590) to Integration in the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo. Translated by Ricardo López Fernebrand. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing 2023 (Access Archaeology). III, 80 p., 14 ill., 9 maps. £ 26.00. ISBN: 978-1-80327-507-9.

Bishop Hydatius' description of the Roman province of Gallaecia as a region "at the edge of the entire world"¹ does not do justice to the profound importance that the territory had on the political landscape of late antique Hispania. For much of the twentieth century this view has been the status quo for scholars of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. However, only in the last twenty years has this view begun to be challenged by modern academics, as new evidence has been found through archaeological excavation and literary re-examination. As is now becoming rapidly obvious, for both the Suevic Kingdom and Visigothic Kingdom, the region subtly influenced the foreign affairs of the western barbarian kingdoms as the sixth century progressed. Nevertheless, the problems resulting from a lack of literary evidence are common for scholars of late antique Hispania, and for the rebellion of *Dux* Argimundus the situation is the same. In this regard, this work by Rafael Barroso Cabrera, Jorge Morín de Pablos and Isabel Sánchez Ramos has helped to highlight the machinations emerging from Gallaecia through careful study of archaeological, numismatic, and onomastic evidence, moving modern scholarship towards a redefined view of this region. The authors themselves have contributed greatly to academic discourse, particularly in the field of archaeology and the transformation of western urban societies. From their combined skillset is offered "Gallaecia Gothica": a new interpretation of the Argimundus rebellion, one of the most difficult challenges of Reccared's reign, as well as new insights on the region of Gallaecia both prior to and after its integration into the Visigothic Kingdom.

The first chapter of the book ("Conspirators and Conspiracies in the Reign of Reccared", pp. 2–6) begins with the testimony of the distinguished British academic Edward A. Thompson, whose landmark 1969 (1985 Spanish translation) work is oft-cited even still, with the quote "[...] there is no parallel in the reign of any other sixth-century king of Spain for so many revolts and

1 Hyd. chron. praef. 6.

conspiracies against the throne” (p. 2).² The discussion of the many conspiracies and rebellions in the reign of Reccared I (586–601) is at the forefront of commentary, with helpful explanation on the nuances between *coup d'état* and rebellions. The many rebellions dated during this period, to which a timeline or table of names would not have gone amiss, underline the serious problems encountered alongside Reccared's conversion to Catholicism in 587. The punishments for such crimes are then discussed, with reference to the academic discourse revolving around the nature behind the penalties of *decaluatio* and amputation.

The plot of Argimundus in 589/590 has little in the way of literary evidence to aid research into its interpretation (“Interpreting the Plot of Argimundus”, pp. 7–9). Nevertheless, the authors have made great strides into its understanding despite the poor availability of such data. In particular, their interpretation of the testimony of John of Biclaro and Pope Gregory is invaluable for such analysis. Arguments put forward by Thompson in 1969 that religious motivation cannot have been a factor for the instigation of the rebellion are still upheld by the authors.³ They contend that religious incentive does not seem to be supported by the existing literary evidence – as the usually vocal John of Biclaro is silent and Pope Gregory himself mentions that some of Mérida's conspirators had been named counts by Reccared (p. 7) – and they therefore dispute the theories of more recent scholarship, such as the works of Javier Arce and Roger Collins.⁴ With this, the authors instead lay the groundwork for the primary arguments put forward in this study.

The setting of the Argimundus rebellion is styled by John of Biclaro as a palace coup (*domesticae insidiae*) and has been tacitly accepted as also involving the widowed Queen Goiswinth. However, the authors offer a different interpretation, and suggest a more complex situation and an alternative understanding of the use of the word *domestica* (“The Scene of the Rebellion”, pp. 10–13). As such, several ideas relating to Germanic traditions such as adoption by arms (“*Waffensobnschaft*”, p. 10), patronage (“*Versippung*”, *ibid.*),

2 E. A. Thompson: *The Goths in Spain*. Oxford 1969, p. 104 (= 1985, p. 123).

3 *Id.*, p. 103 (= 1985, p. 123).

4 J. Arce: *Esperando a los árabes. Los visigodos en Hispania (507–711)*. Madrid 2011, p. 151, n. 19; R. Collins: *La España visigoda, 409–711. Traducción castellana de M. García Garmilla*. Barcelona 2005 (Serie Mayor), p. 66.

or oaths (*sacramentum*, *ibid.*) are considered as acts that would come under such a personal context to be described as *domestica* (*ibid.*). As a consequence of this, the reintroduction of arguments made some years ago by António M. de Faria – that Reccared’s issues with the triumphant legend should be related to the Argimundus rebellion and not to the Suevic kingdom’s conquest some years prior – seem pertinent to the understanding that the new Gothic province of Gallaecia was not so easily annexed as the sources would have us believe.⁵

Leading directly on from this, the authors begin to delve into the hypothesis of a “Possible Suevian Origin of Argimundus” (pp. 14–18). As is becoming a regular theme of this review, the information provided by John of Biclaro offers no details on the background or ancestry of the *Dux*. Nevertheless, by means of a detailed onomastic investigation the authors propose a convincing argument that the *Dux* was Germanic, and consequently not Hispano-Roman (p. 14), and in particular not Gothic. The extensive works of Luis A. García Moreno have underpinned this investigation heavily; however, this is no criticism, and his research into Visigothic prosopography has enabled the authors as a result to highlight the crucial details concerning Suevic onomastics.⁶ The arguments put forward are clear and logical, and alongside clinical and well-supported discussion of John of Biclaro’s Gothic bias (pp. 17–18), signpost a reader to the fact that not only was Argimundus likely of Suevic origin (p. 17), but that the rebellion itself was in Gallaecia.

As a way of giving credence to the arguments of a rebellion in Gallaecia against the reign of Reccared, the authors compare the event to a similar

- 5 A. Marques de Faria: On Finds of Suevic and Visigothic Coins in the Iberian Peninsula and their Interpretation. In: M. Gomes Marques/D. M. Metcalf (eds.): Problems of Medieval Coinage in the Iberian Area. Vol. 3: A Symposium Held by the Sociedade Numismática Scalabitana and the Instituto de Sintra on 4–8 October, 1988. Santarém 1988, pp. 71–88.
- 6 In particular see L. A. García Moreno: Prosopografía del reino visigodo de Toledo. Salamanca 1974 (*Acta Salmanticensia. Filosofía y Letras* 77); *id.*: El linaje witzano de Artaba(s)do. In: L. A. da Fonseca/L. C. Amaral/M. F. Ferreira Santos (eds.): Os reinos ibéricos na Idade Média. Livro de Homenagem ao Professor Doutor Humberto Carlos Baquero Moreno. Vol. 2. Porto 2003, pp. 779–788; *id.*: Prosopography and Onomastics: The Case of the Goths. In: K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (ed.): Prosopography Approaches and Applications. A Handbook. Oxford 2007 (*Prosopographica et Genealogica* 13), pp. 337–350; *id.*: Prosopography, Nomenclature, and Royal Succession in the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo. In: *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, 2008, pp. 142–156.

rebellion by the usurper Paulus during the reign of Wamba in 673 (“Argimundus and Paulus: Parallel Lives of Two Usurpers in Visigothic Spain”, pp. 19–22). The serious nature of this usurpation and the way the sources detail the punishment given out to the rebels lends support to the proposal that the Argimundus rebellion was a serious attempt to displace Reccared. Alongside this, the evaluation given to the stages of Gothic occupation of Gallaecia is well thought through and informative (p. 22). This item alone is something that scholars of late antique Spain would do well to consider more investigation into, as the seeds for later states in the northwest are seemingly planted throughout this period.

Having discussed the Argimundus rebellion in depth throughout the vast majority of this work, the discussion turns to the history of Gallaecia in the immediate years prior to Leovigild’s conquest of the Suevic Kingdom (“Gallaecia during the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo: From Submission to Conquest”, pp. 23–39). As part of this, the authors revisit scholarly debate regarding the identification of the *Runcones/Ruccones* mentioned by John of Biclaro to have come into conflict with the Suevic king Miro in 572 (p. 24).⁷ Considerable investigation of this subject leads to the identification of the *Ruccones* mentioned in Gothic literary sources with the pre-Roman *Luggones* mentioned by Ptolemy (p. 31).⁸ As such, this people seem to have resided in the mountain systems of the El Bierzo region, controlling access to modern Galicia from the Castilian-Leonese plateau. Following this line of inquiry, later arguments put forward in this chapter of a Suevic-Visigothic *limes* become more apparent with the idea that Miro would want to control such a strategic location (p. 32). Consequently, examination of Gothic military movements into Gallaecia are able to illuminate how the Argimundus rebellion was so quickly resolved by Reccared over a decade later (p. 38). Furthermore, the authors’ engagement with the works of Pablo de la Cruz Díaz Martínez and Céline Martin are essential to theories on the rise of local powers and some of the most important moments in post-Roman Hispania.⁹

7 Ioh. Bicl. chron. 21: *Miro Sueuorum rex bellum contra Runcones mouet.*

8 Ptol. geogr. 2.6.

9 P. C. Díaz Martínez: *La monarquía sueva en el s. V. Aspectos políticos y prosopográficos.* In: SHHA 4–5, 1986, pp. 205–226; C. Martin: *La géographie du pouvoir dans l’Espagne visigothique.* Villeneuve d’Ascq 2003 (*Histoire et civilisations* 861).

The final aspect of this text concerns the rise of the Duchy of Gallaecia and its importance seemingly as a state within a state as the demise of the Visigothic Kingdom was fast approaching (“The Rise of the Duchy of Gallaecia: Resurgence of Local Aristocracies and Struggling for Real Power”, pp. 40–68). This significance is demonstrated by the authors in their discussion of Gallaecia in its ecclesiastical and political role after its initial admittance as a Gothic province. This analysis, particularly that of the role played by the Suevic Church in the newly converted Visigothic ecclesiastical administration, is remarkably useful for scholarship investigating the kingdom’s disintegration during the Arab invasions (pp. 40–44). Earlier scholarship from García Moreno is once again examined on the topic of ducal administrative boundaries, with the credible suggestions that Lucus would have been the capital of the new duchy.¹⁰ However, the authors also make comment that more recent scholarship from the likes of Díaz Martínez (2008) and José Carlos Sánchez Pardo (2014) have convincingly suggested that Tude may have later become the ducal capital (pp. 47–48) in the final days of the kingdom.¹¹ Some of the last points to be made within this ultimate chapter are arguably the most interesting. The authors contend here that a Suevic-Gothic noble line was in fact the guiding force behind the Visigothic throne in the seventh century, and one powerful enough to place its members on the throne in both Toledo, and eventually Asturias after 711 (p. 63).

Scholars of Hispania in this period will be grateful for the contribution that Barroso Cabrera, Morín de Pablos, and Sánchez Ramos have made with this text. Their work highlights that sometimes what our scarce – and often unhelpful – literary sources do *not* say regarding a specific event can be just as informative as what they do. Much of their discussion and analysis concerns evidence not written down, but this by no means implies hypotheses clutching at straws. Instead, it shows that good use of alternative research methods can demonstrate the wider reality of a historical event. Throughout the text, the importance of individuals in a region that seemingly kept its identity after

10 García Moreno: Prosopografía del reino visigodo (note 6); id.: Estudios sobre la organización administrativa del reino visigodo de Toledo. In: AHDE 44, 1974, pp. 5–155.

11 P. C. Díaz Martínez: El reino suevo de *Hispania* y su sede en *Bracara*. In: G. Ripoll/J. M. Gurt (eds.): *Sedes regiae* (ann. 400–800). Barcelona 2000 (Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona 25), pp. 403–423; J. C. Sánchez Pardo: Organización eclesiástica y social en la Galicia tardoantigua. Una perspectiva geográfico-arqueológica del parroquial suevo. In: *Hispania Sacra* 66, 2014, pp. 439–480.

its sovereignty was extinguished is displayed here to an unparalleled degree. In this way, the authors clearly present the region of Gallaecia, and those originating from there, as an uncharacteristically dominant political force within the court of Toledo and beyond. This in itself is a research angle not extensively pioneered and one hopes that others might follow suit with similar investigations, thereby bringing a region at the edge of the world to centre stage where it rightly should be.

Alec Dawson, Swansea University
Department of History, Heritage, and Classics
PhD Ancient History
a.e.a.dawson@swansea.ac.uk

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Alec Dawson: Rezension zu: Rafael Barroso Cabrera / Jorge Morín de Pablos / Isabel M. Sánchez Ramos: *Gallaecia Gothica*. From the Conspiracy of Dux Argimundus (AD 589/590) to Integration in the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo. Translated by Ricardo López Fernández. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing 2023 (Access Archaeology). In: Plekos 26, 2024, S. 375–380 (URL: https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2024/r-gallaecia_gothica.pdf).

Lizenz: Creative Commons BY-NC-ND
