

Luis A. García Moreno: *Varia Gothica. Estudios de historia institucional de la España visigoda*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia 2025 (Clave Historial 52). 630 p. € 18.00. ISBN: 978-84-15789-31-4.

This substantial volume contains twenty-one of the numerous article-length contributions on institutional aspects of the history of Visigothic Spain (c. 409–711)<sup>1</sup> written by the justly distinguished Spanish scholar Luis Agustín García Moreno over the last fifty years. Article length can be almost as variable as that of a piece of string, with the longest and also the earliest of these, published in 1974, extending here to nearly one hundred and thirty pages, while the briefest, from 2023, is no more than nine.<sup>2</sup> They appear together as the latest volume of a series established by the Real Academia de la Historia in 1998 for the publication of such collected studies by members of the Academy, an honour conferred on Professor García Moreno in 2007. The very reasonable price for a book of this length, even allowing that it is a paperback, can be attributed to the substantial sponsorship from a number of Spanish banks and grant-making cultural institutions acknowledged on the first page. The patronage of such bodies was once the financial mainstay of Spanish academic publishing more widely, but it is now of necessity much reduced.

As a requirement for thematic unity and also the great extent of his overall corpus of publication dictated, Professor García Moreno has focussed this collection on the Visigothic period and on its institutional history in particular. The latter is in any case a distinguishing feature of the author's scholarship, though chronologically his interests are broader, embracing various periods in Hispanic ancient history and making occasional forays beyond the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711. These articles also need to be seen in the context of some of his larger scale publications, beginning in 1974 with his University of Salamanca thesis, which, despite the general na-

1 For a detailed table of contents, readers are referred to the end of this review (pp. 350–352).

2 L. A. García Moreno: *Estudios sobre la organización administrativa del Reino visigodo de Toledo*. First published in: *AHDE* 44, 1974, pp. 5–156 [here pp. 15–143], a journal founded in 1924 and still extant that was once noted for the extreme length or stupefying verbosity of its contributions, and: *Los gardingos. Un nuevo homenaje a don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz*. In: *IV Coloquio internacional sobre la nobleza*, Madrid, 22–23 abril 2022. *Actas*. Madrid 2023, pp. 271–277 [here pp. 311–319].

ture of its title,<sup>3</sup> was confined to the clerical and other personnel attending the numerous kingdom-wide and provincial councils of the Spanish church; this still remains a valuable resource today. It was followed by a short monograph on the fall of the Visigothic kingdom,<sup>4</sup> which reflected the then prevalence of the view that its internal decadence, moral, political and social, explained the rapidity of the kingdom's fall to the Arab and Berber armies. In 2013 this topic became the subject of one of the author's most recent books.<sup>5</sup>

The contents of the volume reviewed here are divided into two sections, each structured chronologically by their dates of publication, though these can only be discovered in a prefatory footnote to each individual article. The first section "Administración pública, Derecho y Fiscalidad", encompasses law, taxation and administration, while the second comprises "Religión, Iglesia y Poder político", which proves to be more heterogeneous mix. While the lengthy first article is very wide-ranging, several of the other seven in the administrative section deal with much narrower issues, including two on taxation or "fiscalidad", and there is one in English on the peasantry in the Visigothic period. Others cover such topics as the financial institutions of the kingdom, the *Gardingi* (a body of nobles selected to be in attendance on the king or acting in his service), and the *sortes* or division of estates between indigenous and incoming Gothic landowners. All of these have been the stuff of Visigothic institutional history for many decades, in some cases since the nineteenth century, not least under the inspiration of German scholarship of that period. This contributed in part to the rather 'otherworldly' nature of such studies in Spain for many decades thereafter, not in a sense of being whimsical, but being over theoretical and unwilling to recognise the limitations of the available evidence as a guide to social reality.

The sources for the history of the Visigothic period are overwhelmingly normative in character, in the form of copious legal codes, both civil and ecclesiastical. These can be supplemented by an important body of monastic regulation, though surprisingly this is yet to receive its first critical edition. On

3 L. A. García Moreno: *Prosopografía del Reino visigodo de Toledo*. Salamanca 1974 (Acta Salmanticensia. Filosofía y letras 77).

4 L. A. García Moreno: *El fin del Reino visigodo de Toledo. Decadencia y catástrofe. Una contribución a su crítica*. Madrid 1975 (Antiqua et mediaevalia 1).

5 L. A. García Moreno: *España 702–719. La conquista musulmana*. Seville: 2013 (Historia y geografía 244). 2nd edition 2014.

the other hand, narrative history, of the kind that is relatively plentiful in both Merovingian Francia and Anglo-Saxon England, is brief in character and confined to certain limited chronological periods. In consequence, the Spanish tradition of institutional history has tended to be robustly if misleadingly positive in its approach, combining evidence of all sorts, however ill-matched, and drawing confident conclusions about ‘what did happen’ from texts that merely state ‘what ought to happen’. As abstract expressions of *desiderata*, such sources have their role to play, but they are poor guides to the lived realities of an early medieval society such as that of the Gothic kingdom. They are in urgent need of more sympathetic reinterpretation, especially the seventh century civil codes, none of which exists in a manuscript of pre-711 date.

The second section of this volume contains thirteen articles, a number of which relate to Gothic Arianism. Chronologically, these cover topics ranging from the fourth century to the seventh and include consideration of the role of Arian theology as a vehicle for expressing Gothic ethnicity. While people in the past may have been more religious, however that be defined, this does not necessarily include a firmer grip on or interest in the intricacies of Trinitarian theology. However, the discussions here involving issues of Gothic identity (the words Visigoths and Visigothic are actually anachronistic in this period, even if convenient) testify to the influence on Professor García Moreno’s thinking over the last two decades of the interpretations of ethnic formation in the Late Roman period that were developed from the 1960s by Reinhard Wenskus (1916–2002) and then by Herwig Wolfram (b. 1934) and his disciples in what has been called ‘the Vienna School’.

In the case of the supposed Arian-Catholic confrontations that culminated in the recognition of the theological unification of the church in the Gothic kingdom at the Third Council of Toledo in 589, on which an enormous amount of scholarly activity has been lavished over a very long time, it perhaps needs to be asked if we have not been led at least a little way up the garden path by misleading evidence of a supposed theological conflict that in practice scarcely existed, was entirely one-sided and almost entirely post-humous in character. In other words, most of the evidence that supposedly relates to alleged conflict and even persecution of the Catholic elite by an Arian monarchy is either retrospective, and reflecting a post-facto interpretation of the events apparently being described, or alternatively is capable of

being understood quite differently if not seen in the light of that later distortion.

Another strand in the second section of articles concerns individual episodes or broader contexts in which ecclesiastical and secular authority and administrative structures interacted or came into conflict. These include a study of “la problemática de la Iglesia hispánica durante la supremacía ostrogoda (507–549)”, or why was there no Catholic-Arian conflict at that time when there would be later in the century? An alternative answer has just been suggested here. Another of the articles examines opposition, clerical and otherwise, to king Suinthila (621–631), and there are two broader studies of political aspects of religious dissent in the kingdom. Again it is important to note either the complete lack, or the limited nature, of narrative sources for most of the events concerned. Instead a political context has to be deduced, as in the case of the article presenting Bishop Julian of Toledo (680–690) as “el primer primado de España”, in the midst of “la sangrienta dialéctica Coronanobleza de las últimas décadas del reino goda” (p. 602). This “dialéctica” and its presumed consequences can be examined at greater length in the author’s book on the years 702–719, referred to above. It becomes a central interpretative feature of his replacement for the older decadence theory of the overthrow of the Visigothic kingdom, in a confident narrative that combines sources that need a very cautious or even sceptical handling.

The two main sections of articles are preceded by a six-page “Introducción” that provides an interesting if short account of the opening phase of Professor García Moreno’s academic career, including his relationship with his supervisor in the University of Salamanca, Professor Marcello Vigil Pascual (1930–1987), and the genesis of both his thesis and the lengthy article on administration of 1974. Regrettably, the other articles republished here together with the developments in the author’s views and interests that led to their being written lack an equivalent autobiographical treatment, but there is reference to some of the broader methodological influences that have helped shape the author’s work, including his debt to modern German historical scholarship, not least in the field of Ancient History (*Altertumswissenschaft*).

This and his particular interest in institutional history, encompassing legal as well as administrative topics, mark him as an adherent of the distinctively Hispanic tradition of historical scholarship that has its roots in the later nineteenth century, especially in the work of the legal and administrative histo-

rian Eduardo Hinojosa y Naveros (1852–1919). He, like several of his successors, was strongly influenced by contemporary German ideas on both Roman and ‘Germanic’ law, and also combined an academic career with serving as governor of a succession of civil provinces, from Alicante to Barcelona, in the 1890s.<sup>6</sup>

Hinojosa’s influence was the one most often acknowledged by the leading figure in earlier Hispanic medievalism in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (1893–1984), who despite an active political career in the 1930s and a consequential long exile in Argentina following the fall of the Spanish Second Republic in 1939, produced a prodigious quantity of often overly prolix work on not just the Gothic kingdom but also the ensuing Christian Kingdom of the Asturias (c. 718/722–910) in the north of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>7</sup>

Pursuing an intellectual agenda he had inherited and further developed that emphasised a succession from the Visigothic kingdom to the modern Spanish state via the successive kingdoms of the Asturias and of Castile and engaging in judgmental arguments over the true nature of the Spanish identity, Sánchez-Albornoz contributed strongly to the intellectual isolation of Spanish historiography during most of his lifetime.<sup>8</sup>

Although not himself a student of Sánchez-Albornoz or even of one of the latter’s numerous disciples, who collectively dominated the study of these periods in Spain itself during the Franco period (1939–1975), it is to this tradition that Professor García Moreno is perhaps most strongly indebted, as acknowledged not least in his article on the *Gardingi*, explicitly subtitled as “un nuevo homenaje a Don Claudio”. An alternative, more philological and

6 Among Hinojosa’s relevant publications are his “Documentos para la historia de las instituciones de León y de Castilla (Siglos X–XIII)” (Madrid 1919), histories of both Roman and Spanish law (Madrid 1885 and 1887 respectively), and “Elemento germánico en el Derecho español” (Madrid 1915).

7 It is both typical of Sánchez-Albornoz and testimony to his massive output that for the bibliography for his volume *La España Cristiana de los siglos VIII al XI: El reino astur-leonés (722–1037)*. Madrid 1980, he only included works that he himself had written.

8 Soon after commencing my own research in the early 1970s, when making an enquiry in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, I was told all I needed to do was to read my way through all the works of Sánchez-Albornoz to be found in the library’s card catalogue; the name was repeated syllable by syllable to make sure I understood!

text-based equivalent tradition of scholarship, whose most prominent representatives in recent decades have included Manuel Cecilio Díaz y Díaz (1924–2008) and Carmen Codoñer Merino (b. 1936) and their many distinguished disciples and students, is acknowledged in the introduction to this volume, though its influence on our author has not been as profound as that of the Sánchez-Albornozistas.

He also continues the work of legally and administratively inclined ecclesiastical historians, such as the lawyer and priest of Opus Dei José Orlandis Rovira (1918–2010).<sup>9</sup> The latter, through a series of textbook histories of the period, his more specialist work on its conciliar sources and a substantial body of other scholarly publications, became the dominant figure in the interpretive history of the Visigothic period and its legal and administrative institutions from the later 1960s to the early 1990s, a role which Professor García Moreno can be said then to have inherited.<sup>10</sup>

This ‘succession’, however, followed a period in the late 1970s and the early 1980s in which criticism of the introverted and, by comparison with other western European nations, backwards nature of medieval historical study in Spain became increasingly frequent. It was perhaps no coincidence that this was also the time when, as he mentions in his introductory essay, Professor García Moreno transferred his attention away from the Visigothic period, then seen as a key component of a view of Spanish national history favoured in the Franco period, to topics in the much less controversial history of the Iberian Peninsula in antiquity. As can be seen here, after the long article on administration of 1974, his next article on matters Visigothic was published in 1982.

The sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of Spanish medievalism was expressed not least in the popular press and among a rising generation of younger scholars, no longer so intellectually or politically obliged to accept predetermined lines of enquiry. With differing degrees of speed, university

9 His own *Años de juventud en Opus Dei*. Madrid 1995 should not be missed.

10 I first met both Luis García Moreno and José Orlandis in June 1985 on a Spanish television programme, consisting of three hours of uninterrupted discussion on the history of Visigothic Spain by six academics, three Spanish and one each from Germany (Jörg Jarnut), Italy (Lellia Cracco Ruggini) and the United Kingdom (me), plus a showing of the film “Attila the Hun”. A remarkable evening’s entertainment! The third Spanish participant was Luis Racionero, later Director of the Biblioteca Nacional.

history departments began to look outwards for methodological influences and also permit a less nationally focused curriculum. There was a degree of not always well-synchronised catching up to be done, which involved among other things a search for Hispanic feudalism, the previously proclaimed absence of which had been lauded as a mark of Spanish particularism and distinctiveness.

In the case of the Visigothic period the terms of the debate meant that a fully developed feudal system might not be expected at so early a date, and so a precursor under the name of ‘protofeudalismo’ had to be found instead. In Professor García Moreno’s capable hands its existence would turn out to be a blessing that Spain conferred on the rest of the continent, as argued in his article “El estado protofeudal Visigodo: precedente y modelo para la Europa carolingia” of 1992, which is reprinted here.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps unfortunately, interest in feudalism was waning elsewhere in Europe just as it was being discovered in Spain. The author’s career thus coincides with a period of considerable intellectual change in the study of early medieval Spanish history, many phases of which have made their mark on his work, as this collection amply demonstrates, and in which he has remained attached to a continuing distinctively Hispanic historiographical tradition, while being increasingly and fruitfully open to a range of intellectual influences coming from outside the Iberian Peninsula.

11 L. A. García Moreno: El estado protofeudal Visigodo: precedente y modelo para la Europa carolingia. In: J. Fontaine/C. Pellistrand (eds.): L’Europe héritière de l’Espagne wisigothique. Madrid 1992 (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 35), pp. 17–43.

## Table of Contents

Introducción	7
--------------	---

**Administración pública, derecho y fiscalidad**

Estudios sobre la organización administrativa del Reino visigodo de Toledo	15
First published in: AHDE 44, 1974, pp. 5–156	
Imposición y política fiscal en la España visigoda	145
First published in: Historia de la Hacienda española (épocas antigua y medieval). Madrid 1982 (Estudios de Hacienda Pública), pp. 261–300	
Una nota sobre la organización de las <i>sacrae largitiones: comes/comites thesaurorum</i>	183
First published in: CFC(L) 11, 1976, pp. 469–480	
El termino ‘sors’ y relacionados en el <i>Liber Iudicum</i> . De nuevo el problema de la división de las tierras entre godos y provinciales	195
First published in: AHDE 53, 1983, pp. 137–185	
El estado protofeudal visigodo: precedente y modelo para la Europa carolingia	229
First published in: J. Fontaine/C. Pellistrandí (eds.): L’Europe héritière de l’Espagne wisigothique. Madrid 1992 (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 35), pp. 17–43	
Dos capítulos sobre administración y fiscalidad del Reino de Toledo	261
First published in: De la Antigüedad al Medioevo. Siglos IV–VIII. III Congreso de Estudios Medievales. León 1993, pp. 291–314	
From <i>coloni</i> to <i>servi</i> . A history of the peasantry in visigothic Spain	289
First published in: Klio 83, 2001, pp. 198–212	
Los gardingos. Un nuevo homenaje a don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz	311
First published in: IV Coloquio internacional sobre la nobleza, Madrid, 22–23 abril 2022. Actas. Madrid 2023, pp. 271–277	

**Religión, iglesia y poder político**

Problemática de la iglesia hispana durante la supremacía ostrogoda (507–549)	323
First published in: J.-I. Saranyana/E. Tejero (eds.): Hispania Cristiana. Estudios en honor del Prof. Dr. José Orlandis Rovira en su	

septuagésimo aniversario. Pamplona 1988 (Colección Historia de la iglesia 14), pp. 147–160

- Élites e iglesia hispanas en la transición del imperio romano al Reino visigodo 337  
 First published in: J. M. Candau/F. Gasco/A. Ramírez de Verger (eds.): La conversión de Roma. Cristianismo y paganismo. Madrid 1991, pp. 223–258
- La oposición a Sjuintila: iglesia, monarquía y nobleza en el Reino visigodo 363  
 First published in: Revista de ideas y formas políticas de Antigüedad clásica 3, 1991, pp. 13–24
- La coyuntura política del III Concilio de Toledo. Una historia larga y tortuosa 383  
 First published in: Concilio III de Toledo. XIV Centenario 589–1989. Toledo 1991, pp. 271–296
- Disidencia religiosa y poder episcopal en la España tardoantigua (ss. V–VII) 419  
 First published in: F. J. Lomas/F. Devís (eds.): De Constantino a Carlomagno. Disidentes, heterodoxos, marginados. Cádiz 1992, pp. 135–158
- Disenso religioso y hegemonía política 447  
 First published in: Ílu. Revista de ciencias de las religiones 2, 1999, pp. 47–63
- ¿Por qué los godos fueron arrianos? 463  
 First published in: E. Reinhardt (ed.): Tempus implendi promissa. Homenaje al Prof. Dr. Domingo Ramos-Lissón. Pamplona 2000 (Colección Historia de la Iglesia 33), pp. 187–207
- Etnia goda e iglesia hispana 483  
 First published in: Hispania sacra 54 (110), 2002, pp. 415–442
- Las Españas entre Roma y Constantinopla en los siglos V y VI. El imperio y la iglesia 513  
 First published in: F. Elia (ed.): Política, retórica e simbolismo del primato. Roma e Costantinopoli (secoli IV–VII). Atti del Convegno internazionale (Catania, 4–7 ottobre 2001. Omaggio a Rosario Soraci. Catania 2002, pp. 197–238
- La monarquía visigoda y la iglesia en Levante. Las raíces de un país 545  
 First published in: Alebus. Cuadernos de estudios históricos del Valle de Elda 6, 1996, pp. 7–30

- Ulfilas y la etnogénesis goda 571  
 First published in: C. Hermida del Llano/J. A. Santos Arnaiz (eds.):  
 Una filosofía del derecho en acción. Homenaje al profesor Andrés  
 Ollero. Madrid 2015, pp. 761–772
- San Julián, el primer primado de España 587  
 First published in: Toletana. Cuestiones de teología e historia 30  
 2014, pp. 49–66
- La misión arriana como instrumento y símbolo de la  
 hegemonía de la monarquía goda Balta sobre otras  
 monarquías militares bárbaras en el siglo V 603  
 First published in: E. Piazza (ed.): Quis est qui ligno pugnat?  
 Missionari ed evangelizzazione nell' Europa tardoantica e medievale  
 (secc. IV–XIII). Verona 2016, pp. 141–162

---

Roger Collins, The University of Edinburgh  
 Honorary Fellow in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology  
 pechtelm@aol.com

**www.plekos.de**

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Roger Collins: Rezension zu: Luis A. García Moreno: *Varia Gothica. Estudios de historia institucional de la España visigoda*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia 2025 (Clave Historial 52). In: *Plekos* 28, 2026, S. 343–352 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2026/r-garcia-moreno.pdf>).

Lizenz: Creative Commons BY-NC-ND

---