

The Archaeology of Medieval Villages Currently Inhabited in Europe

edited by

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ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-300-3

ISBN 978-1-78969-301-0 (e-Pdf)

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Cover images: Village of Villanueva de Santu Adrianu, mentioned in IXct. documents. View from the north. Drawing and reconstruction of the buildings in the nucleated tun at the farm Seim, situated close to the fjord in Vik in the Sognefjord, as it appeared around 1870. Uncertain buildings drawn in dotted lines. (Drawing: A. Berg 1952).

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Printed in England by Holywell Press, Oxford

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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Preface

This book was developed in the context of research looking at the network of Early Medieval settlements in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula. This has been one of the priorities of medieval archaeology in Spain over the past decade and has mainly focused on the study of abandoned villages. However, research into inhabited villages on the Iberian Peninsula has only taken place over the past five years or so, compared with the longer tradition of historical research in other European countries where this topic has been considered in greater depth. These countries have also addressed the theoretical challenges of such work, as well as those relating to archaeological practice. The resulting ability to compare the different experiences and issues arising from the geographical and cultural diversity across Europe is of particular interest when carrying out research in this field. Our experience over the past few years of research in Spain has led us to try to deepen our understanding of three fundamental aspects of the work. The first looks at the origins of inhabited villages with the aim of establishing a chronology for their occupation while analysing their relationship with rural Roman settlements. This type of settlement is fairly elusive in some of the areas covered by the research. A second aspect — in which little progress has been made to date — is to understand the reasons why some settlements, which are still in existence today, have survived, while others were abandoned. Thirdly, given the need to work with the populations who still live in these spaces, this type of archaeology has become an appropriate setting in which to engage more deeply with a true social archaeology which actively involves the local communities living in the areas being researched.

To begin addressing these issues, we organised an event entitled ‘International colloquium on the archaeology of medieval villages currently inhabited in Europe’, held on 7 May 2016 at the University of Oxford and attended by several European researchers, with the aim of reflecting on the archaeological issues represented by medieval villages that are still inhabited today. As Chris Wickham argues, a comparative analysis may help us transcend the limits imposed by national archaeological traditions, which limit our ability to interpret phenomena produced, at least on a European level. Our aim was therefore to discuss different research agendas and their results and, ultimately, to gain a better understanding of the ways in which medieval rural communities — which have been resilient and have survived while also being transformed over the *longue durée* — were organised. All of the above took place within a general discussion framework, leading to a greater understanding of the situation in Europe. In the course of this colloquium, the diversity of situations and issues faced across the continent became apparent, as did the many obvious commonalities, and this is reflected in this collection of papers. The book is a compilation of some of the papers given at that event and other contributions that have broadened the context of the discussion at a European level.

The colloquium could not have taken place without the participation of a number of people and institutions to whom we would like to extend special thanks. Firstly, we wish to thank Chris Wickham for his logistical support, and the Faculty of History and the University of Oxford for providing us with financial support and a space in the Radcliffe Humanities Building in which to hold the 2016 event. Secondly, thanks are due to the Instituto Humanismo y Tradición Clásica at the University of León, which contributed logistical and financial support. Andrew Reynolds (UCL Institute of Archaeology), Stephen Miles (University of Oxford) and Wim De Clercq (University of Ghent) made some interesting contributions to the colloquium. Although they were not, in the end, involved in this publication, we are very grateful for their participation. Special thanks are due to Wendy Davies, who chaired the discussion at the end of the event. We would also like to extend our gratitude to all those who came to the Oxford colloquium and participated actively in the final discussion with their ideas and suggestions, all of which we have taken into account while gathering material and writing this summary. We are also grateful to the external reviewers, whose suggestions and comments greatly helped in improving the contributors’ texts. Finally, thanks are due to Archaeopress, and in particular to David Davison, for his confidence in our project from the very beginning.

This book grew out of the ELCOS research project, Espacios locales y complejidad social. Las raíces medievales de un problema del siglo XXI [Local spaces and social complexity: the medieval roots of a 21st century issue], HAR2016-76094-C4-1-R, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Introduction

Rural areas in present-day Europe have experienced an uneven process of abandonment, affecting a wide range of places across the continent to varying degrees. Rural communities have been transformed in different ways over the past few centuries, especially from the first industrial revolution onwards. From the 18th and 19th centuries onward, traditional communities in northern and central Europe were broken up, leading to the current pattern of small and medium-sized private farming enterprises and the growth of the service economy in rural areas. However, in southern European countries, some rural communities have continued to exist, having undergone varying degrees of transformation and using different methods for managing the land with resilient collective practices. These communities have adapted and redefined themselves over the centuries, and are still active today. Before the beginning of this process, traditional communities – despite the differences between them – followed a standard model, whose roots originated in the Early Middle Ages. However, in the process they also witnessed different turning points which led to the survival of some settlements, while acting to the detriment of others. Thus, over the last millennium, a large number of villages were abandoned, in a wide range of circumstances and over a long period of time. Over the past few decades, these villages have been the main focus of archaeological interventions.

Historical research into the socioeconomic processes and the organisation of land in the Middle Ages has concentrated on these abandoned medieval villages. This has encouraged a significant renewal of studies, mainly from the 1960s, into rural medieval settlements and landscapes all over Europe, which have placed great importance on the inhabited areas of villages (for example, Hamerow 2002; 2012; Francovich & Hodges 2003; Peytremann 2003; Valenti 2004; Quirós Castillo, 2009, Valais, 2012). This important leap – which is both qualitative and quantitative – has been encouraged by a number of different, converging factors, in which the role played by so-called preventive archaeology is of particular importance. It has had a key role in the excavation of medieval sites (see, for example, the papers by Vespay et al and Peytremann in this publication). In some regions, such as Île-de-France, a large number of early medieval villages have been excavated in the course of the construction of large public works, which have had a significant impact on studies of French medieval history (Peytremann, 2003). These interventions have sometimes formed part of larger research projects around monuments or heritage sites which, in some cases, have provided critical information on the first early medieval settlements (e.g. Azkarate Garai-Olaun and Quirós Castillo, 2001). Together, they have contributed to a marked increase in the number of records available on the medieval period across the whole of Europe, while at the same time facilitating a methodological renewal as a result of area excavations and the reflection on the different factors and processes of village abandonment.

In the same way, they have contributed to analysis of how each archaeological site has been generated, what its subsequent evolution has been, and what tools allow us to understand the meaning of the material culture associated with them (Schiffer, 1987, Lamotta, Schiffer, 1999).

In parallel with this positive development, an imbalance in the type of deposit studied was strengthened, related to the evolution of European rural history itself. The progressive development of the early medieval archaeology was focused on studies of sites that allowed progress in the characterization of settlements and questioned the origins of the feudalisation processes. On the contrary, less attention was paid to settlements from other periods better documented by written sources, which slowed the development of an archaeology focused on the problems related to rural communities after the twelfth century, always with great asymmetry between different historiographies.

The large volume of information generated about the early medieval settlements has stimulated the debates over the existing historical paradigms, resulting in the categories and concepts used in the studies of early medieval settlements being called into question and opening up new perspectives and changes in focus. The volume of archaeological data has undoubtedly stimulated the discussion on

the types of settlement, given the variety of situations that have been documented, as well as on the internal organisation of those communities and their relationships with centres of power operating at a supralocal level. Thus, the gradual incorporation of archaeological information on the Early Middle Ages has facilitated the discussion on the historiographical categories that were widespread during the 1990s, through studies of the land based on written sources. Concepts such as ‘proto-villages’, *pré-villageois* (Guadagnin, 1988) or non-villages (Lewis, Mitchell-Fox & Dier, 1997) are used to define early medieval settlements, with the concept of a ‘village’ being reserved for inhabited areas linked to feudal structures (Zadora-Rio, 1995; Peytremann, 2003; Francovich and Hodges, 2003; Valenti, 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Wickham, 2005). Gradually, archaeological practice has marked out a landscape dotted with farms, hamlets and villages, with the differences between the categories being defined according to different parameters on which researchers have not always agreed. Of course, these forms of settlement differ greatly across Europe, meaning that there is a need to define the terminology used in the categories analysed, as exemplified in some of the works contained in this book (see Oye and Vesya et al) and which is further complicated by linguistic differences.

More recently, also with different rhythms according to respective European historiographic traditions, working areas surrounding the villages have been incorporated into the investigation integrating the study of territoriality and agricultural practices through the analysis of different landscape elements like the forms of the plots, their excavation and the bio- and geoarchaeological studies. This has deeper knowledge of peasant work practices, their knowledge of territorial management, governance forms, and local communities’ indicators of identity. The excavation of cultivation fields, the investigation of mountain areas and pastures, and the archaeological study of forests has opened a new lines of work that have advanced a holistic approach to the deserted villages and their complementary surrounding productive spaces, especially in the Anglo-Saxon sphere (Ripon, 2008, Williamson, 2012, Quirós Castillo, 2014).

In summary, the complexity of this historical record has led to a need for a renewal of methodological approaches. This has taken place through the setting up of interdisciplinary teams, as well as the systematic incorporation of archaeobiological and micromorphological samples, converging with the interests of environmental studies that have led the way in recent decades.

Given this increase, and the fact that abandoned areas have been studied in a greater level of detail, interventions in small and medium-sized settlements, which have continued to be occupied until the present day, are more exceptional. It is true that spaces relating to centres of power (churches and castles) have been subject to archaeological surveys, but this has not happened in the rest of the inhabited areas and even less so in the production areas of villages. The result is a bias in the research agenda. Only those settlements which, for some reason, have been abandoned or, conversely, those which have been successful, ceasing to be villages and becoming towns, have been studied. It should not be forgotten that in recent decades, urban archaeology has seen a spectacular level of growth, linked to the activity of preventive archaeology. Today’s villages, which are largely medieval in origin, if not older, have remained on the margins of these programmes, although their situations vary depending on the historiographic traditions in different European countries.

Cartographic records of early medieval settlements, which have served as the basis for hypotheses about territorial networks, are partial and will not become meaningful until the information from villages still inhabited today is incorporated. The deserted villages were only one part of the medieval rural network of settlements along with the villages that still survive today: they operate in unison and are part of a complex network integrated into different territorial frameworks that cannot be understood as separate phenomena. Due to all of these reasons we need to complement the information from deserted villages with the chronology of the villages still inhabited today. We should ask why some settlements survive while others disappear, and also question the role played by the different social groups that have taken part in these processes. The promotion of one settlement at the expense of the other has broad notable repercussions: there are processes of re-territorialization in which all local communities are involved, which imply relevant changes to local identities and also new conflicts. To understand these processes

it is necessary to incorporate social complexity into the research agenda of medieval rural societies in the coming decades, analysing factors both external and internal to the community, and the role played by different social actors, both the peasantry, fleeing from a homogeneous reading as a group, and the lordships, with special attention to the church and the monarchy.

The five papers in this book reflect the different trajectories of this type of work in Europe. In the UK (Lewis) and the Netherlands (Vespay et al), complex projects have been undertaken which have already generated a large volume of information, and which have shown the partial nature of the conclusions reached when based only on data from abandoned villages. England has the longest history of this type of intervention (Lewis, 2007; 2017). In her paper, Carezza Lewis outlines a methodological approach which focuses on the use of small surveys (test pits) to document currently occupied rural settlements (CORS). Eighty percent of medieval habitats are likely to have survived to the present day; however, we scarcely have any data on their historic development over the *longue durée* or on the distinctive features that these villages had at different times throughout their history. Work is pending in Britain to combine the data of these projects mainly focused in social aspects with a complementary and more complex reading of the abundant data provided by deserted villages. Equally relevant, due to the volume of data it has provided, is the project undertaken in the Netherlands (Malta-archaeology). One of the main objectives of Dutch archaeological research is to examine the formation and development of medieval and early modern villages. The project makes use of data from the study of abandoned villages, as well as that obtained from occupied villages. This has led to the collaboration of various different administrative entities in the management of this information.

The experience of these projects impacts on a theme that is also addressed in these papers: information over the *longue durée* that can be gleaned through interventions on inhabited villages. On the one hand, the pre-existence of prehistoric settlements has been documented, in some cases dating back to the Neolithic era. This creates the possibility of identifying archaeological sites in territories with scarce documentation of open prehistoric settlements. On the other hand, on many occasions it is possible to verify the origin of these settlements in Roman times, with different characteristics and typologies; the coincidence of prehistoric and Roman sites with the medieval villages implies that we might question not only their origins, but also their continuity of use, breaks and ways in which they have been reused. The study of changes, permanent features, adaptations and modifications that have been features of these settlements from the Middle Ages to the present day it is also necessary, open up a variety of themes that will help us to gain a more complex understanding of these communities. The lack of attention given to the archaeology of inhabited villages could lead to a situation that is paradoxical, to say the least. For example, it could give us a better understanding of the features of early medieval settlements - particularly deserted villages. However, we do not have information about the internal processes of transformation which survival villages have undergone, and of their responses to the different historical conditions throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern era. This brings us directly to the concept of resilience, which we view as a robust conceptual tool with which to consider the complex development of these communities.

The concept of a 'resilient settlement' has been used recently to analyse the evolution of pre-industrial settlements, evaluating the ability of these communities to overcome crises caused by external agents. This has involved an analysis of their ability to recover from demographic crises, the decline of the areas that they used for economic purposes and the destruction of their dwelling areas (Curtis 2014). It is our view that some of the papers in this publication pave the way for a more complex understanding of the concept. We should not only be studying these communities' capacity for survival and recovery up to the time of industrial revolution, but also the ways in which they were able to adapt and redefine themselves, what factors provided stability in contrast to deserted villages, and the forms of governance that guided their actions. We should also seek to understand the active role played by farming communities in these processes. At the same time, archaeological practice must allow for the study of the reuse and redefinitions of the elements comprising the agrarian landscape. Many of these elements are medieval in origin and continued to exist across the whole of Europe until the agrarian reforms of the 18th and 19th centuries, and in southern Europe until the present day. This can be seen in the research carried out

in northern Spain (see Fernández Mier, Fernández Fernández) and in some of the examples from France (see Peytremann). The resilience of an inhabited space in the face of external processes and the resilience of the forms of the landscape, take on new functions and new meanings with the introduction of new crops, technological developments and new forms of land management and ownership.

Another element that stands out in all the papers is the need for methodological reflection. The contributors are unanimous in their view that interdisciplinary studies should be a priority, with data from intensive archaeological interventions being considered alongside data from written, cartographic and linguistic sources. This is an indispensable first step in planning intensive archaeology, as argued in the paper on archaeological sites in Norway. Such information is essential for interpreting archaeological data, which tends to be fragmentary. The impossibility of carrying out area excavations yields different types of data which are difficult to interpret, making it necessary to create corpora of information. These should take into account the data gleaned from both inhabited and abandoned villages, as suggested in the project carried out in the Netherlands. Furthermore, there is a need for a general research framework as the basis for historical questions and reflections in a more general sense, leading to better coordination of the research agenda (Vespary et al.). The need to explore new approaches to archaeological intervention is also noted, such as archaeological and geotechnical surveys that may yield data and facilitate the planning of archaeological interventions, as has happened in some projects in France and Spain (see Peytremann and Fernández Mier, Fernández Fernández).

A final important aspect is the involvement of local communities in the entire archaeological process; this is argued in the papers looking at the UK and Spain. The concept of Public Archaeology has been developed in the English-speaking world since the 1970s (McGimsey, 1972). It calls for a greater level of participation by local communities in the management of archaeology. This practice has been given a significant boost by post-processual theories, which demand the integration of the whole of society into the archaeological debate. The papers in this publication all touch on this aspect, from two different points of view. Firstly, the involvement of the educational community in the entire excavation process, which in England has led to the development of a broad programme led by Carenza Lewis' projects. Secondly, the creation of different types of tool for the involvement of local communities in the generation of knowledge which, at the same time, is of use to them in the processes of change and transformation in which they are currently immersed. This is particularly the case in southern Europe, as seen in the work carried out on northern Spain.

Taken as a whole, the range of papers in this publication allow us to take a closer look at an archaeology with enormous interpretive potential, which requires its own research agendas. These need to take place on at least three different levels: local, regional and European. At a local level, there are areas where not even preventive archaeology is undertaken in medieval settlements of this type (for example, in Spain archaeological surveys are not carried out in rural settlements at the same rate as they are in historic centres of towns and cities, meaning that there is a marked bias in the research). The raising of awareness and involvement of local government is key here, as Vespary et al have argued. On the other hand, where regular and systematic interventions are carried out, an appropriate degree of contextualisation of the results is required in regional interpretive frameworks, which is complemented by historical research. The papers by Peytremann and Lewis show the potential of this type of research, through which it is possible to question established historical paradigms. Finally, it is important to integrate the variety of experiences at a European level, as an initial step towards a better understanding of the informative significance and the interpretive potential of these inhabited places, which tend to be small and rural. This provides us with a better understanding of our diversity on a continental level, as well as those elements that we share and have in common. Our aim with this publication is to take an initial, modest look at this level, as a necessary step towards a future summary in which more European countries are represented. This collection of papers proposes methodologies, reflections and ways of approaching all these issues and scales of work. We hope that it will be of interest to readers who are researchers, those who are technicians or who work on an area of cultural heritage that is essentially rural, and as yet not well-known.

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