

Archaeology and History of Peasantries 1

From the Late Prehistory to the Middle Ages

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (ed.)

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INDEX

Resumen, Abstract, Riassunto, Resumé	9
Listado de autores	11
Listado de figuras	13
Listado de tablas	19
Preface	
<i>Juan Antonio Quirós</i> (UPV/EHU)	21
1. Do we need an archaeology of peasantries? A new look at rural history (at the light of the Iberian experience) <i>Juan Antonio Quirós</i> (UPV/EHU)	23
2. What the Iberian Copper Age can tell us about peasant societies, and <i>vice versa</i> <i>Pedro Díaz-del-Río</i> (CSIC, Madrid)	41
3. The social dynamics of peasants in northern Iberia (1200-20 BC) <i>Antonio Blanco González</i> (Universidad de Salamanca)	55
4. The Economic Anthropology of the Roman Peasantry: Old Problems and Current Trends <i>Jesús Bermejo Tirado</i> (Universidad Carlos III)	79
5. Peripheral Landscapes and Mountain Areas (5th-9th Centuries): The Case Study of Revenga (Burgos, Spain) <i>Karen Álvaro Rueda</i> (Universitat de Barcelona), <i>Esther Travé Allepuz</i> (Universitat de Barcelona)	95
6. Standing on the shoulders of peasants: agency and risk in Anglo-Saxon farming <i>Mark McKerracher</i> (University of Oxford)	113
7. Vecinos y diferentes: identidad e iniciativa campesina a través de algunos contextos funerarios altomedievales <i>Alfonso Vigil-Escalera</i> (Universidad de Salamanca)	125
8. Collective action in local contexts in the Kingdom of León (9th-11th centuries): an exploration of the charter evidence <i>Álvaro Carvajal Castro</i> (CSIC, Madrid), <i>Julio Escalona</i> (CSIC, Madrid), <i>Iñaki Martín Viso</i> (Universidad de Salamanca), <i>Igor Santos Salazar</i> (UPV/EHU)	149

9. Archaeobotanical contribution to the history of farming practices in Medieval Northern Catalonia (8th-14th c.) <i>Jérôme Ros</i> (AASPE UMR7209, CNRS, MNHN, Paris, France), <i>Carole Puig</i> (ACTER archéologie sarl, FRAMESPA UMR 5136, Toulouse, France), <i>Olivier Passarrius</i> (Service Archéologique Départemental des Pyrénées-Orientales, CRESEM EA 7397, Perpignan, France), <i>Julien Maintenant</i> (ACTER archéologie sarl, TRACES UMR 5608, UT2J-CNRS, Toulouse, France), <i>Jérôme Kotarba</i> (Inrap, UMR5140, Montpellier, France), <i>Nicolas Guinaudeau</i> (ACTER archéologie sarl, Perpignan, France)	163
10. Paisajes y prácticas campesinas en la Vall de Perputxent (Alicante): Canèssia, de alquería islámica a despoblado morisco <i>Julia Sarabia-Bautista</i> , <i>Ignasi Grau Mira</i> (Universidad de Alicante).	183
11. Conclusiones <i>Margarita Fernández Mier</i> (Universidad de Oviedo)	203
Bibliografía	209
Criterios de evaluación y normas de publicación de la serie «Documentos de Arqueología Medieval»	211
Títulos publicados	215

Resumen

Este libro es el primero de una serie de volúmenes colectivos dedicados al estudio de los campesinados preindustriales en la Península Ibérica y otros espacios europeos desde la Historia y la Arqueología Social. Esta temática conoció un importante auge a lo largo del siglo xx, pero ha decaído progresivamente en los últimos decenios en el marco de las renovaciones teóricas que caracterizan el giro posmoderno y la caída del telón de acero. No obstante, la emergencia de una nueva arqueología rural y del campesinado, la creciente atención a los paisajes culturales, la renovación de la historia social europea y las profundas consecuencias que ha tenido la crisis financiera de los años 2007-2008 han creado las condiciones para interrogarse acerca de la vigencia de esta temática, así como analizar los nuevos enfoques teóricos y metodológicos que se están utilizando. Adoptando una innovadora perspectiva diacrónica, estos volúmenes recogen algunas de las principales aportaciones que se están realizando en torno al estudio del campesinado preindustrial desde una perspectiva interdisciplinar. Este primer libro de la serie se ocupa del campesinado desde la prehistoria hasta la edad media desde una perspectiva preferentemente arqueológica.

Laburpena

Liburu hau iberiar penintsulako eta beste hainbat esparru europarretako industriaurreko nekazalgora Historia eta Arkeologia sozialaren ikuspuntutik ikertzen duten liburuki kolektiboz osatutako bildumaren lehenengo alea da. Gai honek une gorena bizi izan zuen xx. mendean zehar, baina azken hamarkadatan etengabe garrantzia galdu du bira postmoderno eta altzairuzko oihalaren erorialdia bereizten duten berrikuntza teorikoen testuinguruan. Hala ere, landa- eta nekazalgoaren arkeologia berriaren sorrerak, paisaia kulturei emandako gero eta arreta handiagoak, historia sozial europarraren berrikuntzak eta 2007-2008 urtetako finantza-krisiaren ondorio latzek, egoera prestatu dute gai honen indarra berriz jorratzeko, eta baita bere ikuspuntu teoriko eta metodologiko berriak ere. Ikuspegi diakroniko berritzailea hartuz, liburuki hauek nekazalgora buruzko ikerketak bereizten dituzten ikuspuntu teoriko eta metodologiko berriak lantzen dituzte diziplinarteko ikusmolde batean oinarrituta. Lehenengo liburuki honen gaia aurrehistoria eta erdi aroaren arteko nekazalgora da, batez ere ikuspegi arkeologikotik.

Abstract

This book is the first in a series of collective volumes devoted to studying pre-industrial peasantries in the Iberian Peninsula and other European spaces from History and Social Archaeology. This theme experienced a major boom throughout the twentieth century but has progressively declined in recent decades within the theoretical renewal that characterized the postmodern turn and the fall of the Iron Curtain. However, the emergence of a new rural and peasant archaeology, increasing attention to cultural landscapes, the renewal of European social history and the profound consequences of the 2007-2008 financial crisis have created the conditions to question the validity of this topic, as well as to analyze the new theoretical and methodological approaches being used. Following an innovative diachronic perspective, these volumes explore the renewed theoretical and methodological perspectives that characterize pre-industrial peasantry studies from an interdisciplinary perspective. This first book in the series deals with peasantry from prehistory to the Middle Ages from a preferably archaeological perspective.

Riassunto

Questo libro è il primo di una serie di volumi collettivi dedicati allo studio del mondo contadino in epoca preindustriale nella Penisola Iberica ed in altri spazi europei a partire dalla prospettiva della Storia e della Archeologia Sociale. Questa tematica ha conosciuto un certo interesse nel corso del secolo xx, decadendo progressivamente al finire del secolo stesso, nell'ambito dei rinnovamenti teorici che hanno caratterizzato la svolta postmoderna e la caduta della cortina di ferro. Ciononostante, l'emergere di una nuova archeologia rurale e del mondo contadino, la crescente attenzione ai paesaggi dal punto di vista culturale, il rinnovamento della storia sociale europea e le profonde conseguenze che ha avuto la crisi finanziaria degli anni 2007-2008 hanno creato le condizioni per interrogarsi sulla validità di questo problema, nonché sulle prospettive utilizzate. Adottando una prospettiva diacronica innovativa, questi volumi esplorano i rinnovati approcci teorici e metodologici che caratterizzano gli studi del mondo contadino preindustriale da una prospettiva interdisciplinare. Questo primo libro della serie si occupa del mondo contadino dalla preistoria al medioevo a partire da un punto di vista principalmente archeologico.

Resumé

Ce livre est le premier d'une série de volumes collectifs consacrés à l'étude de la paysannerie préindustrielle dans la Péninsule Ibérique et dans d'autres espaces européens du point de vue de l'Histoire et de l'Archéologie Sociales. Cette thématique a connu un important développement au cours du xx^e siècle, mais elle est ensuite déclinée progressivement dans les dernières décennies, dans le cadre des renouvellements théoriques qui caractérisent le virage postmoderne et la chute du Rideau de Fer. Cependant, l'émergence d'une nouvelle archéologie rurale et de la paysannerie, la croissante attention aux paysages culturels, le renouvellement de l'histoire sociale européenne et les profondes conséquences de la crise financière des années 2007-2008, ont créé les conditions appropriées pour se demander autour de la validité de cette thématique, ainsi que sur les nouvelles approches théoriques et méthodologiques employées. Tout en adoptant une innovatrice perspective diachronique, ces volumes ont le but d'explorer ces nouvelles approches qui caractérisent les études de la paysannerie préindustrielle depuis une perspective interdisciplinaire. Ce premier livre de la série s'occupe de la paysannerie depuis la Préhistoire jusqu'au Moyen Âge, adoptant de préférence une perspective archéologique.

Listado de autores

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado (Universidad de Salamanca)

Álvaro Carvajal Castro (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid)

Antonio Blanco-González (Universidad de Salamanca)

Carole Puig (ACTER archéologie sarl, FRAMESPA UMR 5136, Toulouse, France)

Esther Travé (Universitat de Barcelona)

Ignasi Grau Mira (Universidad de Alicante)

Igor Santos Salazar (Università degli Studi di Padova)

Iñaki Martín Viso (Universidad de Salamanca)

Jérôme Kotarba (Inrap, UMR5140, Montpellier, France)

Jérôme Ros (AASPE UMR7209, CNRS, MNHN, Paris, France),

Jesús Bermejo Tirado (Universidad Carlos III, Madrid)

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea)

Julia Sarabia-Bautista (Universidad de Alicante)

Julien Mantenat (ACTER archéologie sarl, TRACES UMR 5608, UT2J-CNRS, Toulouse, France)

Julio Escalona (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid)

Karen Álvaro (Universitat de Barcelona)

Margarita Fernández Mier (Universidad de Oviedo)

Mark McKerracher (University of Oxford)

Nicolas Guinaudeau (ACTER archéologie sarl, Perpignan, France)

Olivier Passarrius (Service Archéologique Départemental des Pyrénées-Orientales, CRESEM EA 7397, Perpignan, France)

Pedro Díaz del Río (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid)

Listado de figuras

Figure 1.1.	Frequency of the words ‘peasants’ and ‘farmers’ in bibliographic production in English and Spanish between 1920 and 2008 according to Google Books Ngram	24
Figure 1.2.	Word cloud of the keywords used in the papers of the book	26
Figure 2.1.	Summed calibrated date probability distributions for the later prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula (from Balsera <i>et alii</i> , 2015: 203 figure 3)	45
Figure 2.2.	Cartography and cartogram showing the comparative costs of transiting Iberia based on friction of terrain, courtesy of Antonio Uriarte, Instituto de Historia, CSIC. Cartogram produced with Cartogram geoprocessing tool for ArcGIS, based on the methodology developed by Gastner and Newman (2004). The used variable is the friction of terrain following Díaz (quoted in Parceró 2002) and altitude data from CGIAR-CSI SRTM 90m Digital Elevation Data (http://srtm.csi.cgiar.org/) (Jarvis <i>et al.</i> , 2008).	46
Figure 3.1.	Study area, divided into geo-cultural regions (dotted line). Sites mentioned in text: 1. Borneiro; 2. Neixón Pequeno; 3. Pena Redonda; 4. Torroso; 5. Santa Trega; 6. São Julião; 7. Sanfins; 8. Chao Samartín; 9. El Castrelín; 10. El Castru; 11. Campa Torres; 12. La Corona/El Pesadero; 13. Cerro de San Vicente; 14. El Raso; 15. Ulaca; 16. Soto de Medinilla; 17. Pintia; 18. Llano de la Horca; 19. La Hoya; 20. Alto de la Cruz; 21. El Ceremeño; 22. Segeda I; 23. Los Castellares; 24. Cabezo de la Cruz; 25. El Taratrato; 26. San Cristóbal and Tossal Montañés; 27. Moleta del Remei, Sant Jaume and La Ferradura; 28. Castellet de Banyoles; 29. Cabezo de Monleón; 30. Carratella y Genó; 31. Estinçells; 32. Ullastret.	56
Figure 3.2.	The ‘central-lane’ village, archetype of peasant and agnatic (patrilineal) organisation in the eastern sector of the study area. A) Genó (LBA) (SANMARTÍ and SANTACANA, 2005: 42); B) Cabezo de Monleón (LBA) (ROYO and ROMEO, 2015: 363); C) El Taratrato (early Iberian) (ROYO and ROMEO, 2015: 377); D) Estinçells (late Iberian) (BELARTE, 2018: 127).	61
Figure 3.3.	The Early Iron Age village of Torroso (Pontevedra), showing cognatic patterns. A) Mixed-plan dwelling. B) Artistic recreation of the village. C) Entrances to houses (arrows) and refuse middens (grey zones) (GONZÁLEZ RUIBAL, 2006-7)	63
Figure 3.4.	The Early Iron Age village of La Corona/El Pesadero (Zamora): A) Aerial view of excavations. B) Mudbrick roundhouses. C) Collapsed adobe rampart under thick stratification. D) Recreation of the enclosed village with low-density occupation (MISIEGO <i>et alii</i> , 2013).	64
Figure 3.5.	The Early Iron Age in the Ebro basin. Alto de la Cruz (Navarra): plan of the village (A), recreation of a dwelling (B) (RUIZ ZAPATERO, 2014) and several quarters by A. García y Bellido (C) (ROYO and ROMEO, 2015). Segmented village at Cabezo de la Cruz (Zaragoza): plan (D) and mud architecture (E) (PICAZO and RODANÉS, 2009). F) ‘Tower-house’ of Tossal Montañés (Teruel) (MORET <i>et alii</i> , 2008). G) Multi-room complex of Sant Jaume (Tarragona) (GARCIA i RUBERT <i>et alii</i> , 2015).	66

Figure 3.6.	The Late Iron Age peasant village of El Castrelín (León). A) and B) densely packed spatial arrangement with no overlapping viewsheds and independent entrances. C) Domestic compound. D) Metallurgical workshop (FERNÁNDEZ-POSSE and SÁNCHEZ PALENCIA, 1998; PARCERO, 2003; SASTRE, 2008).....	68
Figure 3.7.	Late Iron Age hierarchical forms. Plan (A) and aerial view (B) of the small hillfort of Borneiro (A Coruña) (GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL 2006-7; AYÁN, 2006). Plan (C) and on-site spatial arrangement (D) of the large <i>oppidum</i> of Ulaca (Ávila) (ÁLVAREZ-SANCHÍS, 2005; RUIZ ZAPATERO, 2018).	70
Figure 3.8.	Late Iron Age heterarchies. A) Plan of Ullastret (Gerona) indicating Zone 14. (B) Two plans of a large multi-room building from Zone 14 (open courtyards in grey) and a common house (BELARTE, 2018). C) The <i>oppidum</i> of Sanfins (Portugal) divided into sections, quarters and houses. D) Grand houses and commoner's dwelling compounds (GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL, 2006)	73
Figure 4.1.	The Mactar harvester inscription (photograph and transcription) CIL VIII 11824. . .	82
Figure 4.2.	Connectivity in ancient Roman world. Network map of the Roman Empire with a representation of the price costs for travelling to Rome (summer), after SCHEIDEL 2014: Car. 3	84
Figure 4.3.	Communications, urban cores and development in the western provinces after LEVEAU 2007: Fig. 3. Areas compared in this paper are remarked: 1. North of Roman Carpetania 2. <i>Ager Tarraconensis</i> survey project area 3. Nîmes territory 4. <i>Dianium</i> territory 5. Central belt region (Roman Britain)	86
Figure 4.4.	Table with comparison of the chronological evolution of the Roman rural sites sampled in the north of Roman Carpetania (data from BERMEJO TIRADO 2017), the territory of Nîmes (data from BERMOND <i>et alii</i> , 2013 and BUFFAT 2011), the <i>Ager Tarraconensis</i> (data from PREVOSTI and GUITART 2011), the territory of <i>Dianium</i> (data from FRÍAS 2010), and the British Midlands (data from SMITH <i>et alii</i> , 2016). To respect local specificities, we opted to retain the original denominations used in their respective publications.	87
Figure 5.1.	Location map of the Upper Arlanza Basin. Archaeological sites are classified according to their main features and/or size.....	97
Figure 5.2.	General and detail views of habitat remains in the Upper Arlanza Basin. General view of the esplanade annexe to the necropolis before the fieldwork was carried out in Revenga (a), general view of the non-excavated field at the south-east of the necropolis in Revenga as well (b), view of the potential habitat location in Cuyacabras (Quintanar de la Sierra, Burgos) (c), and potential location of habitat in San Martín (Quintanar de la Sierra, Burgos) (d)	97
Figure 5.3.	General layout of the archaeological site of Revenga with habitat structures identified around the necropolis	99
Figure 5.4.	Simplified matrix of activities at the site of Revenga (2014-2018).....	101
Figure 5.5.	Habitat structures superposition. Squared structures R9 and R13 affecting the circular structures C6, C7, C8 and C9 —some of these were probably reinforced with external underpinning supports— (a); and view of R9 structure superposition onto circular buildings C8 and C7	101
Figure 5.6.	Detailed analysis of the rocky hill under the necropolis and identification of circular sunken featured buildings earlier than the church and the cemetery.	102
Figure 5.7.	Potential identification of a singular building. Detailed plan of post-holes non-directly linked to the church building phases (a), detailed photograph of the rock surface carving on the top of the hill (b), and aerial view of the church footprint (c) . . .	103

Figure 5.8.	Production areas at the site of Revenga and stratigraphic sequence of occupation and use	104
Figure 5.9.	Micrographs of the main ceramic fabrics identified at Revenga, all of them taken at 20x in plane polarized light. Pottery fabrics show clay mixing (a), organic temper (b), fine quartz and rare calcite natural inclusions (c), naturally-occurring sandstone (d), coarse muscovite (e), opaque mineral inclusions with quartz and sandstone (f), textural veins and swirls (g) sandstone temper (h), and quartz temper (i)	105
Figure 6.1.	Map of sites mentioned in the text (contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2017)	114
Figure 6.2.	Plan of grain oven at Higham Ferrers (after HARDY <i>et alii</i> , 2007:52, Fig. 3.33)	115
Figure 6.3.	An ontology of risk aversion	118
Figura 7.1.	Mapa de situación de los principales sitios citados en el texto.	126
Figura 7.2.	Materiales más representativos de las sepulturas de El Jardín-Pelicano P10 (Arroyo-molinos)	128
Figura 7.3.	Fíbula y hebillas de cinturón de Gózquez (a partir de CONTRERAS y FERNÁNDEZ 2006: Figs. 12 y 14)	129
Figura 7.4.	Sarcófago de San Miguele de Molinilla del Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro	132
Figura 7.5.	Sarcófago antropomorfo medieval del Museo da Cidade «Quiñones de León», Vigo (http://www.museodevigo.org/ca_edad_media_gal.php)	134
Figura 7.6.	Sepulcro antropomorfo de Casar del Asno (Toledo). A cota superior tiene planta rectangular, aunque en su base se aprecian unos ligeros resaltes en reserva que marcan la posición de la cabeza (foto del autor)	134
Figura 7.7.	Sarcófago con molduras esquineras internas (cabecera y pies) de Lagunillas 2, Ciudad Real (a partir de MORENO y YÁÑEZ 2008)	136
Figura 7.8.	Sarcófago de Los Hitos (Arisgotas, Toledo), con molduras esquineras apenas indicadas en cabecera y pies (foto del autor)	136
Figura 7.9.	Sepultura de fábrica de tipo antropomorfo del presbítero Auderisio, iglesia de San Salvatore, Benevento (Italia), con inscripción y decoración pintada (modificado a partir de TOMAY 2009: Fig. 11)	138
Figura 7.10.	Inhumación altomedieval con orejeras (<i>earmuffs</i>) de Parknahow (Irlanda) (tomado de O'NEILL 2007: Fig. 5)	140
Figura 7.11.	Conjunto de sepulturas de La Cabeza (La Cabrera, Madrid): nueve cistas y un sepulcro antropomorfo tallado en roca (modificado a partir de YÁÑEZ <i>et alii</i> , 1994)	144
Figure 8.1.	Map showing principal locations mentioned in the text	150
Figure 9.1.	Plant foods exploited and traded in medieval northern Catalonia, based on textual sources (acts of practice, royal ordinances, commercial archives, terrier censuses) and carpological remains (10 th -15 th centuries): data as of 2014 (ROS <i>et al.</i> , 2016). Conception: J. Ros.	165
Figure 9.2.	Corpus of rural archaeological sites that have been the subject of a carpological study in Roussillon (Pyrénées-Orientales, France) for the period under consideration (8 th -14 th centuries)	165
Figure 9.3.	Studied area and location of the sites of the corpus (circle = archaeological sites). The site numbers correspond to those shown in Figure 2. Conception: J. Ros.	166

Figure 9.4.	Identification and enumeration of carpological remains of cereals of the corpus (sem. = seeds; fg. = fragment; X = present taxa)	167
Figure 9.5.	Identification and enumeration of the carpological remains of pulses and vegetables in the corpus (sem. = seeds; fg. = fragment; X = present taxa)	169
Figure 9.6.	Identification and enumeration of carpological remains of fruit plants, technical/oilseed plants and wild plants in the corpus (sem. = seeds; fg. = fragment; X = present taxa)	170
Figure 9.7.	Frequencies of cultivated/exploited plants within the corpus. In black, frequencies on the total number of sites (15 sites); in grey, frequencies on the total number of contexts (64 contexts). Taxa identified in a single context of a single site and that are not presented in the histogram: lentil (<i>Lens culinaris</i>), common vetch (<i>Vicia sativa</i>), hazelnut (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), stone pine (<i>Pinus pinea</i>), plum (<i>Prunus domestica</i>), oak (<i>Quercus</i> sp.), hawthorn (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>), hemp (<i>Cannabis sativa</i>)	171
Figure 9.8.	Apricot, orange and spinach in medieval northern Catalonia: compilation of carpological and textual references (market tariffs, acts of practice, royal ordinances, commercial archives, agronomy treaty) (AGUSTI 1617; PUIG 2003; TARAYRE 2006; CATAFAU 2018; ROS unpublished). (the asterisks indicate dates when textual references exist). Conception: J. Ros (logos issued from "the Noun Project", Conception: Vectors Market, Arif fajar yulianto, Atif Arshad, Maxim Kulikov)	175
Figure 9.9.	Corpus of rural archaeological sites that have been the subject of a carpological study in southern Catalonia (Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Spain) for the period under consideration (8 th -14 th centuries)	177
Figure 9.10.	Comparison of cultivated/exploited taxa documented by carpology in northern and southern Catalonia (data for southern Catalonia synthesized from PEÑA-CHOCARRO <i>et al.</i> , 2018) (in the table, the presence of a dash indicates that the taxon is attested)	178
Figura 10.1.	Mapa general del área de estudio con la ubicación del Valle de Perputxent (L'Orxa, Alicante) y detalle del paraje de Pla de Canèssia con la localización de los dos yacimientos detectados en la terraza superior	184
Figura 10.2.	Terraza superior del paraje de Pla de Canèssia donde hemos geolocalizado los materiales de superficie. Las mayores densidades nos han permitido detectar dos asentamientos pertenecientes a dos periodos de ocupación del sitio; uno íbero-romano (Canèssia Este) y otro de época medieval que perdura hasta época morisca (Canèssia Oeste)	186
Figura 10.3.	Propuesta de espacios residenciales y agrarios (secano y regadío) ocupados en los dos macroperiodos históricos estudiados según la dispersión de materiales de superficie. Como se aprecia en el MDT y en las secciones infrapuestas, las áreas residenciales estaban a una cota de entre 30-34 m por encima del espacio destinado al cultivo intensivo	187
Figura 10.4.	MDT-LiDAR sobre el que hemos podido detectar algunas anomalías topográficas en el interior del posible perímetro del asentamiento antiguo y que podrían corresponder a estructuras en el subsuelo.	189
Figura 10.5.	Superficie de los asentamientos medievales a partir de la dispersión de las producciones diagnósticas detectadas durante la prospección	191
Figura 10.6.	Conjuntos arquitectónicos conocidos como «casas o corrales de Canèssia» cuyo origen se remonta a la instalación de la alquería islámica de <i>Alquinencia</i>	192
Figura 10.7.	Planta de los dos conjuntos arquitectónicos conservados en el despoblado morisco de Canèssia. En detalle mostramos la planta y las técnicas constructivas documentadas en el conjunto 1 (planimetría de A. Soler)	195

Figura 10.8.	Propuesta de las diferentes fases constructivas del conjunto 1 en base a las técnicas constructivas y las dimensiones de las crujiás	195
Figura 10.9.	Evolución de la superficie agraria ocupada en Canèssia desde época íbero-romana hasta época medieval y moderna a partir de la dispersión del registro <i>off-site</i> . Hay parcelas donde hemos localizado materiales de cronología prerromana/romana y medieval/moderna (A/M) y parcelas donde sólo aparecen materiales medievales y modernos (M), lo que nos indica la explotación de estas parcelas (tanto de regadío como de secano) a partir de ese periodo.	199
Figura 10.10.	Parcelario agrario actual en el que se han identificado algunas unidades de paisaje (UP) que podrían tener un origen medieval.	199

Listado de tablas

Tabla 10.1.	Tabla con los datos paleodemográficos estimados para la Canèssia medieval y moderna a partir de las Cartas Puebla y los Censos históricos	197
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Preface

The series titled “Archaeology and History of the Peasantries. From the Late Prehistory to the European Common Agriculture policy” published in the collection “Documents of Medieval Archaeology” is one of the main results of the research project ‘Peasantry Agency and Sociopolitical Complexity in North-western Iberia in Medieval Ages’ funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness within the National Plan for R&D, as part of the Research Challenges in 2016. This project is part of a broader initiative consisting of four coordinated subprojects entitled ‘Local spaces and social complexity. The medieval roots of a 21st century problem’, which intends to understand the current rural communities in Southern Europe as heirs to a historical process of management and exploitation of local space dominated by the persistence of forms of collective organization in a permanent cooperative/conflict relationship with external actors of all kinds. One of the first axes in order to address this issue is, necessarily, to consider the genealogy of these historical subjects from a variety of approaches.

The main objective of this series is to explore the new theoretical and methodological approaches that characterize historical and archaeological studies of pre-industrial peasantries developed in recent years in the Iberian Peninsula and other European spaces. This theme experienced a major boom throughout the twentieth century, but has progressively declined in recent decades as a result of the theoretical renewal that characterized the postmodern turn, the fall of the Iron Curtain and, more generally, the progressive marginalization and disappearance of peasantry in favour of farmers embedded in a capitalist logic (RODRÍGUEZ BECERRA, MACÍAS SÁNCHEZ 2009). However, the emergence of a new archaeology of peasantries and rural areas, the recent renewal of social history in Europe and the profound consequences of the 2007-2008 financial crisis have created the conditions to question the validity and usefulness of this topic, and even this category of analysis. Increasing attention to cultural landscapes, processes of heritage of the rural environment, progressive erosion of collective identities through practices such as the registration of religious property or communal property appropriation and expropriation are some of the milestones that today characterize our capitalist society, culturally urban and generating forms of commodification, marginalization and subalternisation of societies and rural environment. Paradoxically, not only do peasants remain a majority on the planet, but their numerical entity has increased significantly in recent decades, particularly in Africa and Asia. But in addition, there are specialists who have not hesitated to underline the relevance that the processes of “re-peasantification” of rural areas are having in Europe and the West (PLOEG 2008) or the centrality that peasant cultures will have in the future in order to achieve forms of “sustainable development” in an era marked by the climate crisis (PÉREZ-VITORIA 2005), as highlighted at the recent COP25 World Climate Summit in Madrid. (<https://www.cop25.cl/#/>).

Being aware of the complexity of such intellectual challenge and aiming to avoid the more than common tendency to academic fragmentation with which Humanities address present societies challenges, on this occasion it has been decided that an innovative path in a triple direction is to be followed. First, a diachronic and long-lasting approach has been prioritized. Efforts to study peasants over different historical periods are not very frequent (ROSENER 1994; SCOTT 1998; TAUGER 2011), which makes it difficult to question the assumptions of each academic area or community. Secondly, there have been a diversity of researchers involved all of whom share an interest in new social history and are developing new theoretical and methodological proposals. Thirdly, although the focus of the project is located on the Iberian Peninsula, significant comparisons with other European territories under study have been made.

This first volume of the series deals with peasantries from prehistory to the Middle Ages from a preferably archaeological perspective. Some of the chapters that make up this volume were presented at a scientific meeting held at the Faculty of Arts of the University of the Basque Country in Vitoria-Gasteiz

in October 2018. However, the text does not include the final conclusions of the colloquium as such, since there are contributions which have been incorporated and, on the other hand, other texts have been published in other sites (PINAR 2017; DAVIES 2019). In conclusion, we must express our sincere thanks to all the people and institutions that have participated in the creation of this volume, starting with all the authors, the reviewers of the originals, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Geography, Prehistory and Archaeology of the University of the Basque Country / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea.

Juan Antonio QUIRÓS CASTILLO

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Do we need an archaeology of peasantries? A new look at rural history (in the light of the Iberian experience)

JUAN ANTONIO QUIRÓS CASTILLO

ABSTRACT

In this volume it is argued that the new archaeological studies that are being carried out around pre-industrial peasantry represent a factor of profound renewal in rural history. This introduction first discusses the context in which an archaeology of peasantry in the Iberian Peninsula and other European spaces has emerged in recent decades. Secondly, it intends to transcend traditional academic fragmentation and prioritize the study of the historical evolution of the social landscape over the analysis of the usual research topics. Then, the main contents of the volume are presented, focusing on the different theoretical and methodological approaches used by the authors. The nine chapters in the volume analyze peasantry between protohistory and the Middle Ages from three main thematic axes: social complexity, peasantry agency, and economy and land use. Finally, in the light of these contributions a general characterization of peasantry archaeology in Iberia over the last decade is carried out, showing the main trends studied and their strengths and weaknesses. The introduction concludes by suggesting some proposals for the future.

KEYWORDS: Rural history, Peasant Studies, Political economy, Anthropology, Sociology, Iberia, *Longue durée*, Landscape Archaeology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the 'Journal of Peasant Studies' or the 'Journal of Agrarian Change' are ranked amongst the most cited academic journals in Anthropology, Cultural Studies or Arts and Humanities according to SJR (Scimago Journal and Country Rank)¹, it is not hard to say that

peasant studies are considered by most historians and archaeologists as an old-fashioned subject, and that peasant studies have faded away from academic research agendas over the last two decades (BORRAS 2009, p. 17). Indeed, many scholars avoid the term peasant or peasantry, calling them non-elite, commoners, farmers, lower classes, dwellers, etc. and an explicit refusal of peasantry as a historical or archaeological subject can sometimes be found in recent academic production (THEUWS 2010; BLAIR 2018; SABLOFF 2019).

Obviously, this is an oversimplification, and some historians and archaeologists have been recently working on the study of peasantry. In archaeological terms Chris Loveluck's work 'Northwest Europe in Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600-1150' pays attention to the elite as well as peasantry, middle groups, artisans and traders (LOVELUCK 2013). Another influential work is Chris Wickham's monumental study 'Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800', where he defines a peasant mode of production in order to analyze the dynamics of rural social landscapes (WICKHAM 2005). However, the main intellectual references of Wickham's model date back to the 1960s and 70s, in the works of Marshall Sahlins, Ester Boserup and Claude Meillassoux (BOSERUP 1965; SAHLINS 1972; MEILLASSOUX 1975). In sum, it seems that discontinuity may exist between the 'golden age' of historical and archaeological peasant studies in the 1960s to 80s and present research.

tural Studies (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=15670&tip=sid&clean=0>); Journal of Agrarian Change h 52, Q1 in Anthropology, Archaeology, Archaeology (arts and humanities), Global and Planetary Change topics (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=96592&tip=sid&clean=0>).

¹ Journal of Peasant Studies h 75, Q1 in Anthropology, Arts and Humanities (miscellaneous), Cul-

Indeed, the two graphs in Figure 1 illustrate this tendency. Both curves have been obtained using the Google Books Ngram tool. This is an online search engine that plots the frequencies of any term using a yearly count found in Google's text *corpora*. In the first curve, reflecting English-language production, references to 'peasants' become frequent from the 1930s onwards to suffer a dramatic and progressive numerical reduction from the 1970s. In contrast, the curve for Spanish-language production shows a progressive increase in the term 'campesinos'

from the 1960s, reaches its maximum frequency between the 70s and 90s and declines markedly after the end of the century.

Even though the limitations of this diagnostic tool have to be taken into account, both curves show clear trends in the vigor of this topic in scientific production in two directions: on the one hand, there is a difference between Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic academic cultures since the fall of the Berlin Wall; on the other hand, studies on peasantry have contracted significantly in recent decades.

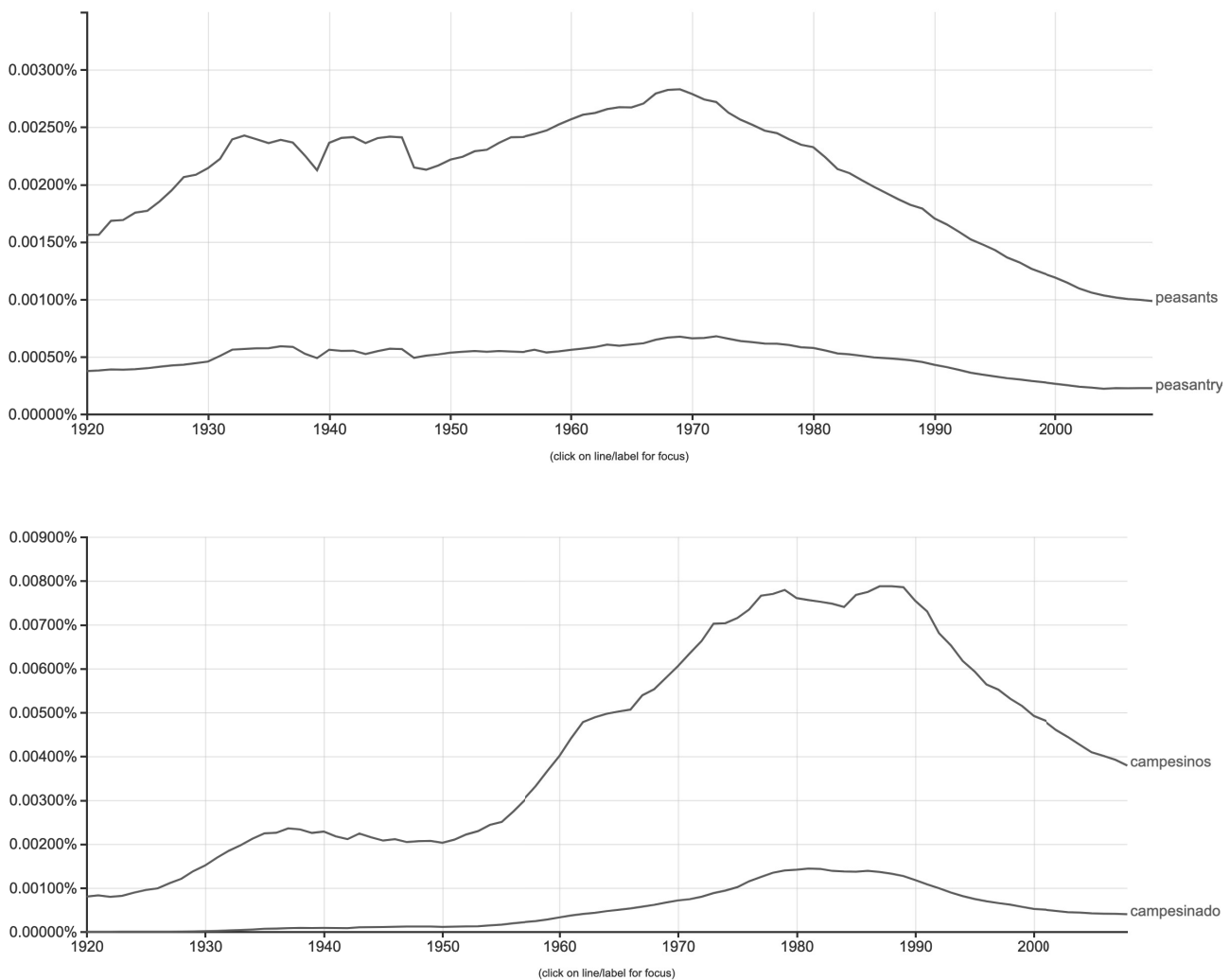


Figure 1.1. Frequency of the words 'peasants' and 'farmers' in bibliographic production in English and Spanish between 1920 and 2008 according to Google Books Ngram.