

GALLAECIA GOTHICA

From the Conspiracy of Dux Argimundus (AD 589/590) to Integration in the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo

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Introduction

The history of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo is full of dark episodes difficult to elucidate, either because of the precariousness of the literary sources that report the events or because the stories they make are in contradiction with each other. All this has caused different and even conflicting interpretations of the same facts. In addition, on a few occasions our data refers to individuals or places that will never appear again mentioned in the historical documentation, which makes research difficult. On top of this, for the last decades of the life of the Visigothic kingdom – a time for which we have more extensive and proven information – the problem is accentuated due to gaps in the reliable data, since often what we do have comes from chronologically post-fact sources, which are also contaminated by the controversy surrounding the end of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo and the vexed question of the responsibility of ‘la pérdida de España’ (‘the loss of Spain’).

In truth, the main cause of our ignorance about the Visigothic past derives largely from the nature of the contemporary sources. Indeed, the fact that our main sources of information for the events that took place in Spain between the 6th and the first half of the 7th century – John of Biclaro and Isidore of Seville – are written in the form of an historical chronicle is a real misfortune for the historian, since, by the very nature of the chronological genre, each paragraph only provides a record of the news and the year in which the events it narrates happened. As is known, the chronicle is an historical-literary genre, whereby a series of historical events in the form of brief information and the year in which they took place are reviewed. Therefore, the main disadvantage of this genre is that virtually nothing is said about the context and circumstances in which the events took place and that they hardly provide information about the individuals involved in them.

Based on these premises, the reader is asked not to look in our study for irrefutable certainties, but only hypotheses and questions linked to what the texts often hint at, but at the same time remain silent about. Far from a banal exercise of erudition with few major pretensions, this is an attempt to open new lines of research on the territorial reality of the Visigothic kingdom, with special emphasis on the assimilation of the Suevic kingdom of Gallaecia and its subsequent influence on the development of power relations between the different elements in conflict that led to the fall of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo in 711. In this way, as a prosecutor might do in a trial – because we have to deal with a famous judicial process– we have tried to link here proven data and evidence with reliable but difficult (perhaps impossible) evidence to contrast against (at least in the current state of the investigation), and in this way, after joining the different pieces that make up this complex puzzle, reconstruct the historical context in which Argimundus’ rebellion took place and the problems presented by the incorporation of the Gallaecian province into the Visigothic kingdom. Undoubtedly these shortcomings pose a serious problem, but, after all, this is precisely an historian’s job. Does not the historical method consist, after all, in ordering within a coherent account the data provided by different historical sources in the light of archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic investigations? Following, then, this elementary premise, we will try along these lines to clarify a dark episode within the reign of Reccared, the significance of which, although repeatedly pointed out in almost all the studies dealing with this crucial period, we believe of great relevance for the knowledge of the end of the Suevic kingdom of Gallaecia and the consolidation of the political theory of the kingdom of Toledo.

Conspirators and Conspiracies in the Reign of Reccared

*Provincias autem, quas pater proelio conquisiuit, iste pace conseruavit, aequitate disposuit, moderamine rexit.*¹ With this succinct statement praising the conservation of peace in the provinces conquered by King Leovigild (568–586), Saint Isidore of Seville summarises the peaceful reign of Reccared I (586–601). But despite the atmosphere of apparent harmony with which the bishop of Seville wishes to depict this period, the truth is that Reccared’s reign can be considered anything but quiet, at least from the point of view of the kingdom’s internal politics. E.A. Thompson underscored this dramatically: ‘...there is no parallel in the reign of any other sixth-century king of Spain for so many revolts and conspiracies against the throne’.²

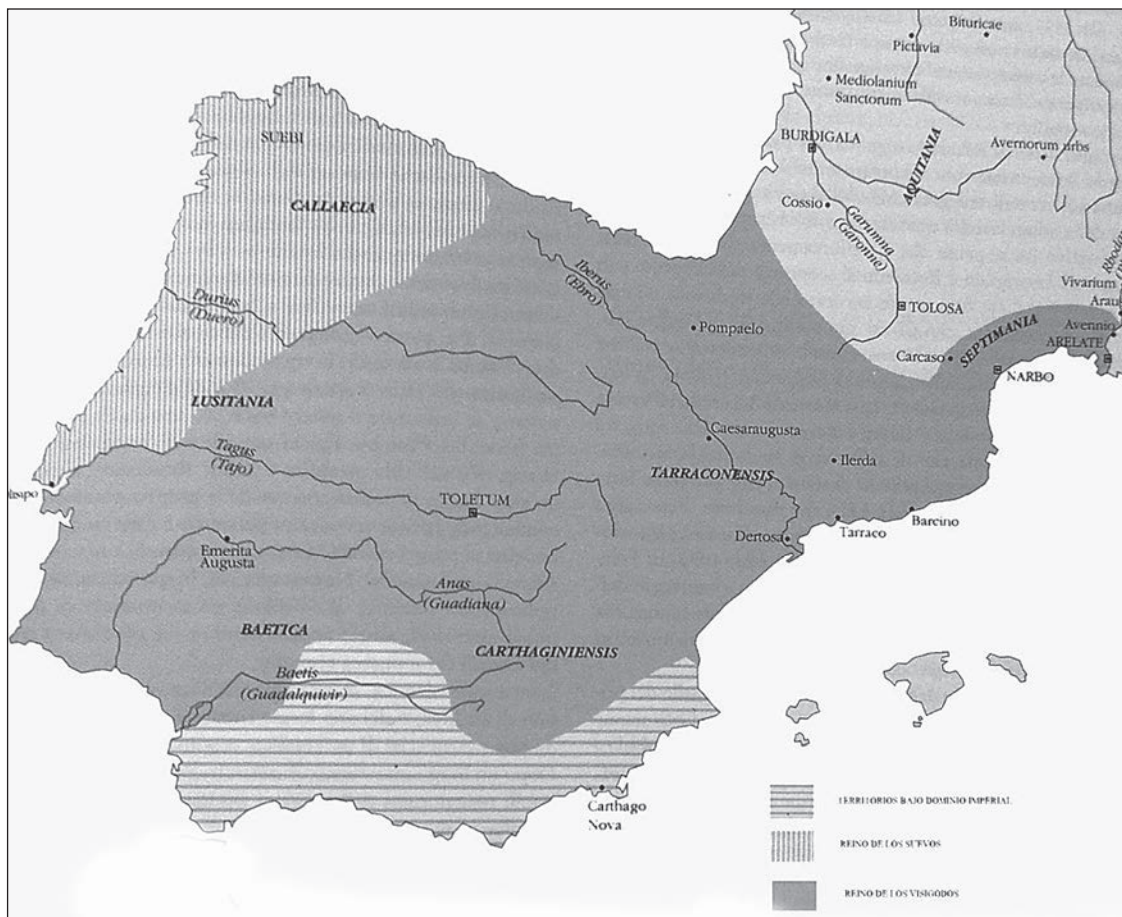


Figure 1. Hispania in the mid 6th century AD.

This has undoubtedly been a great boon to scholars, because it could be said that ‘quiet’ reigns produce no history. And, indeed, few Visigoth kings had to face so many enemies, and such formidable obstacles to remain on the throne, as the son of the great King Leovigild. And much of the instability during his

¹ HG 55. This is a new example of the contrast between the characters of Leovigild and Reccared, as can also be seen in HG 52, where Isidore compares the figures of father and son in complimentary terms for the latter. John of Biclaro also notes that Reccaredo had succeeded his father *cum tranquillitate*: Iohan. Biclaro Chron. a. 586.2.

² Thompson 1985: 123 (=1969: 104). On the rebellions of Reccared’s reign and the political context in which they developed, see Valverde 2000a: 260–263 and Petit 2009: 2–4. As this present study is a translation of the Spanish version, the original works in English will often appear cited from the corresponding Spanish edition.

reign was the result of an act that would profoundly mark the future of the Visigothic kingdom and the subsequent history of Spain: the conversion of the Goths to the Catholic faith (Figure 1).

We know that already in the same year, AD 587, therefore shortly after Reccared's accession to the throne of Toledo, a conspiracy led by the Arian bishop of Mérida Sunna and a nobleman named Segga occurred against the king. Among the plotters were also two other nobles, who, like the afore-mentioned Segga, were probably counts, elevated by Reccared himself: Witteric and Vagrila.³ The anonymous author of the *Vitas* notes that the conspirators were all Goths – a testimony that endorses the onomastic of them – and that they had risen against Bishop Masona, one of the most important personalities of the moment, and no doubt as well a reference to the new policy inaugurated by King Reccared based on the collaboration between the Gothic nobility and the Hispano-Roman element.⁴ However, John of Biclaro confirms that although the events took place in Mérida, far from the court, the conspirators' intentions were much greater: the real goal was to usurp the throne (*tyrannidem assumere*). Once the plot was discovered both leaders were exiled and had their properties confiscated. The recalcitrant Bishop Sunna was banished to Mauritania Tingitana and Count Segga was taken to Gallaecia, but not before having both his hands cut off.⁵ Witteric was forgiven after having confessed his crime to Bishop Masona.⁶ Some years later this nobleman was to succeed in another attempt that would overthrow Liuva II, son and successor of Reccared. As for Vagrila, who took shelter in the basilica of Santa Eulalia, King Reccared was content to deprive him of all his honours and riches and condemn him and his family to perpetual servitude in that church, this sentence being later revoked by Bishop Masona.⁷

To this first conspiracy we must add at least two more. The first took place in Narbonne, capital of the Gothic province of Gallia Narbonensis or Septimania, where, shortly after the conspiracy of Sunna in Mérida, the Counts Granista and Wildigern and the Arian bishop of Narbonne Athaloc rose in rebellion. John of Biclaro, the anonymous author of the *Vitas*, and Gregory of Tours give accounts of this conspiracy, providing insights into the importance of the rebellion, aggravated without doubt by foreign intervention. However, despite the fact that the rebels had the support of a Frankish army sent by Guntramn of Burgundy, under the command of *dux* Bosso, the rebellion was masterfully subdued by *dux* Claudius, achieving one of the most resounding successes in Gothic military history.⁸ The rebellion of Granista and Wildigern was an important challenge for the new king because of the obvious strategic nature of Septimania, located on the frontier with the Franks, traditional enemies of the Goths, and, on the other hand, the desire of King Guntramn of Burgundy to expand his domains to the Mediterranean coast, factors that turned Septimania into a settlement of an important part of the Visigothic army. For this reason it is not strange that, since Septimania was an area of constant friction between the two

³ This follows from VSPE V 10 1: *...quosdam Gothorum, nobiles genere opibusque perquam ditissimos, e quibus etiam nonnulli in quibusdam ciuitatibus comites a rege fuerant constituti.*

⁴ VSPE V 10–11.

⁵ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 588.1: *Quidam ex Arrianis, id est Siuma episcopus et Segga, cum quibusdam tyrannidem assumere cupientes deteguntur; conuicti Siuma exilio truditur et Segga manibus amputatis in Gallaeciam exul transmittitur.*

⁶ Actually there were two attempts to assassinate the Bishop: the first in the same palace and the second during the procession to the Basilica of Santa Eulalia that took place by Easter. The revelation of this second attempt is what saved Witteric: VSPE V 11 1–10.

⁷ VSPE V 11 17–21. Although the *Vitas* point to a supernatural explanation for Witteric's betrayal, Alonso (1986: 153) reasonably assumes that this was because the candidate to the throne was not the traitor himself. On the conjecture, see García Moreno 1974a: no. 664, 128, 172 and 157. For the date in which the events took place, see García Moreno 1974a: no. 35 n. 3. See also García Moreno 2008a: 61–63.

⁸ Iohan Bicl. Chron. a. 589.2; VSPE V 12 1– 5; Greg Tur. HF IX 15 (conversion) and 31 (rebellion). Apparently Reccared would have counted on this occasion with the express support of Brunhild and Childebert. See García Moreno, 1974a: no. 69, 165 and 663, who dated in the year AD 589, following the more precise chronology of Gregory of Tours. For *dux* Claudius, see García Moreno, 1974a: no. 35. This confrontation also seems to refer to Isid. Hisp. HG 54. Likewise, Faria (1988: 80) assumes that some deposits of Reccared's coins documented in eastern Tarraconensis could be related to the rebellion of Narbonne.

peoples, many of the main attempts at usurpation of the kingdom (Sisenand, Ilderic and Paulus, Achila II, etc.) arose from this province. In fact, during the entire Visigothic period the province of Narbonensis was considered one of the most important diplomatic issues, hence the interest of successive monarchs to control this territory through their clientele bases. We will return to this subject later.⁹

However, not all attempts at usurpation started from peripheral areas. The next conspiracy against King Reccared we must mention was not set in a distant province of the kingdom, but in the court of Toledo itself. Although chronicles on this point are very scarce, there is no doubt that it was a conspiracy of major import, doubtless a real *coup d'état*, as it had been plotted by individuals from the highest circle of Toledo's aristocracy. Among the conspirators were the widow Queen Goiswintha and the Arian Bishop Uldila (certainly from Toledo). According to John of Biclaro, the plot's objective would have been to restore Arianism, as a response to Reccared's decision to embrace the Catholic faith. This decision had been expressed by the king to the Arian bishops during an assembly held in the first year of his reign (AD 587). This Arian synod was, therefore, prior to the solemn abjuration of the 3rd Council of Toledo (AD 589) and may be considered as a preliminary and preparatory meeting aimed at eliminating any opposition amongst the ranks of the Gothic nobility.¹⁰



Figure 2. Madrid. El Escorial Library. Codex Vigilanus f. 145.
3rd Council of Toledo.

that the measure was not to the liking of all those affected, and it found some isolated resistance in recalcitrant sectors of the Gothic nobility, reluctant to change the political orientation undertaken by Reccared (Figure 2).¹¹

The last of the conspiracies that Reccared had to face, and the one that interests us here, was the attempted usurpation made by *dux* Argimundus. Regardless of the importance that this attempt should have had, the only mention of the plot of Argimundus is a paragraph in the chronicle of John of Biclaro,

⁹ The overall importance of this Gothic territory in Gaul can be seen in the fact that, to ensure a quiet succession to the throne after the death of Athanagild, Liuva decided to remain in charge of the province, leaving his brother Leovigild as co-regent in Toledo: Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 569.4 and 579.2; Isid. Hisp. HG 48 (see footnote 206 below).

¹⁰ If we consider AD 589 as probable date of the rebellion in Septimania, as García Moreno defends (see footnote 8 above), in this case the conspiracy involving Goiswinth would have taken place before the rebellion of Granista and Wildigern.

¹¹ Iohan Bicl. Chron. a. 589.1. See also: Chron. a. 587.5. For Uldila, see García Moreno, 1974a: no. 665.

in fact the news with which he closes his work.¹² Unlike the other conspiracies, curiously we hardly have here any details of the plot itself, while, on the contrary, the chronicler gives the minutiae of the punishment inflicted on the leader. As for the chronology, the plot must have happened around the year AD 590, shortly after the celebration of the 3rd Council of Toledo, which had seen the abjuration of King Reccared and all the Gothic nobility of the ‘perfidy of Arrius’, as John of Biclaro places his narration among the news concerning Hispania, just after the official conversion of the monarch.¹³

According to the narration, Argimundus, a prominent member of the *Aula Regia* (*ex cubiculo eius*) and also *dux* of one of the provinces of the kingdom (*etiam prouinciae dux*), which is not cited, would have led a conspiracy (*machinatione*) to seize the kingdom and assassinate the king (*tyrannidem assumere cupiens, ita ut, si posset, eum et regno priuaret uita*). Once the plot was discovered and neutralised, all the conspirators were sentenced to death, although before being executed Argimundus was subjected to a humiliating and tortuous process that would serve as a general lesson. The usurper was convicted of the crime of *maiestas*, and, after interrogation (and probably being whipped, following the usual procedure of the Roman *quaestio*), his head was shaved (*decaluatio*) and sentenced to have his right hand cut off. As a final punishment, and to serve as an example against any future attempts at rebellion, Argimundus was ignominiously paraded on the back of an ass through the streets of Toledo, exposed to the anger and mockery of the crowd in a triumphal parade of derision (*pompizando*).¹⁴ Although not expressly stated, and given the fate of the others involved in the conspiracy, it seems more than likely that Argimundus was ultimately executed, as Roman and Visigothic legislation provided for the crime of *lesa maiestas* with capital punishment.¹⁵ In any event, as has been seen, both the *decaluatio* (however it was carried out)¹⁶ and the amputation were considered infamous penalties in Visigothic legislation, consequently making it impossible for any suffering them to access the throne or exercise power.¹⁷

¹² The chronicle was written in around AD 604: Collins 2005: 79. On the date of the conspiracy, see Martin 2003: 189.

¹³ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 590.1: *Anno VIII Mauricii imperatoris, qui est Reccaredi regis IIII annis.*

¹⁴ Iohan. Bicl Chron. a. 590.3: *Reccaredo ergo orthodoxo quieta pace regnante domesticae insidiae praetendeuntur. nam quidam ex cubiculo eius, etiam prouinciae dux nomine Argimundus aduersus Reccaredum regem tyrannidem assumere cupiens, ita ut, si posset, eum et regno priuaret et uita. sed nefandi eius consilii detecta machinatione comprehensus et in uinculis ferreis redactus habita discussione socii eius impiam machinationem confessi condigna sunt ultione interfecti. ipse autem Argimundus, qui regnum assumere cupiebat primum verberibus interrogatus, deinde turpiter decaluatus, post haec dextra amputata exemplum omnibus in Toletana urbe asino sedens pompizando dedit et docuit famulos dominis non esse superbos.* The last sentence has a metric character, which has led some to think that the prisoner was preceded in his humiliating parade by *tituli* that exposed his crime, in the manner of Roman triumphs: McCormick 1986: 303, n. 30, and 326. This interpretation seems a correct one, especially since the term *pompizando* seems to refer to a staging and with a clear desire for show and ceremony (in terms of burlesque parody). However, see Arce (2011: 72) who considers this interpretation excessive.

¹⁵ On the condemnation of *dux* Argimundus, see Petit 2009: 3f.; Maple 2011: 151–153. For the punishment for treason against the king, see King, 1981: 59–70.

¹⁶ Historians are divided between those who hold that the punishment consisted of a simple shaving of the hair, a sign of nobility between the Goths, and those who believe that the scalp was torn off; Thompson 1985: 123 (=1969: 104); King 1981: 111 n. 33 (based on Mer. 15); Teillet 1984: 100f, 445 and 595; Maple 2011: 154–157. In either case, the penalty imposed made it impossible for the accused to occupy the throne. Note that the punishment of whipping, ignominious *decaluatio* (*turpiter decaluatus*), and permanent exile, will later be ruled, by the 16th Council of Toledo (c. 3), as punishments for sodomites: *...illius legis quae de talibus est edita nihilominus ferientur sententiae atque ab omni christianorum sint alieni caterva, insuper contentis uerberibus correpti ac turpiter decaluati exile perpetual mancipetur.* Note that Tejada y Ramiro, in the commentary on this canon, explained that the *decaluatio* did not consist of a simple shaving of hair to debase members of the nobility only, as it was applied equally to slaves. This seems to indicate that the scalp was torn off. At least this is what the author of the *Fuero Juzgo* also understood when he interpreted L.V. VIII 2.2 (=Fuero Juzgo IX), and translated the expression as ‘desfolar la frente laydamente’ (‘deflate the forehead flatly’); Ramiro y Tejada 1850: 568. Against this interpretation, however, Isidore’s testimony is raised regarding the case of Samson (*Allegor.* 81) and the LV XII 3.11 (*Erwig*) dedicated to the Jews who taught the children the books of their religion, a law that details that *decaluatio* could be ordered if their impious practices continued: Crouch 2010. In this case the head would be shaved in such a way that the guilty party would be stigmatised socially. We are inclined to think, however, that the punishment simply referred to shaving the head, as some of the rebel nobility seem to have been subsequently rehabilitated.

¹⁷ King 1981: 110f.; Arce 2011: 154–157.

Before continuing with the interpretations given to the Argimundus conspiracy, it seems appropriate to make a short digression on the symbolic meaning of these punishments inflicted on the conspirators in the Visigothic legislation.

From an ideological point of view, both measures are justified by the ritual custom recorded in many ancient societies (e.g. Iberians and Celts, but also among Latin, German, and Scythian tribes) of shaming the enemy by depriving him of the two members that govern the body: the head, considered the receptacle of the soul or vital essence of man, and the hands, whose main function in the warrior societies of the ancient world was to hold arms and exhibit the strength and courage of the warrior. These types of ritual practices were adopted by the Romans, who used them, stripped of all ritual character, in a purely punitive sense, applying them to enemies and deserters.¹⁸ Certainly, such ideological considerations should still influence, like other primitivisms and barbarisms, Late Roman and Visigothic legislation. In this regard, J. Arce emphasises that the *decaluare* action was ‘como quitarle a un noble el poder, la fuerza, el prestigio, e inhabilitarle para desempeñar funciones de poder correspondientes a su rango’ (‘like taking away a nobleman’s power, strength, prestige, and preventing him from exercising the powers corresponding to his rank’).¹⁹ In fact, the penalty of *decaluatio* – however the penalty was carried out, as a scalping or tonsure – can be taken as a symbolic substitute for decapitation, and obviously a less bloody one, as it meant the civil death of the victim, i.e. being reduced to servility, as happened to Segga and Argimundus, and probably also in the case of *dux* Paulus and his accomplices (HWR 27 and 30), or to a clerical state – e.g. Eboric and Audeca among the Suevi; Vagrila, Tulga, and, with nuances, Wamba. In mitigating the punishment in both cases it is not difficult to guess the beneficial influence of the Church.²⁰

On the other hand, E.A. Thompson drew attention to the fact that amputation was a foreign punishment to the Visigothic legal practice and was reserved almost exclusively for usurpers.²¹ The mutilation of the hand was intended, obviously, to incapacitate the subject in the exercise of arms, which, although not exclusively, as we have seen in the case of *dux* Claudius, was undoubtedly the main occupation of the Gothic nobility. This punishment, therefore, effectively ruled the victim out of commanding the army, which can be viewed among the Germans one of the key functions of royalty, if not the main one. Hence, as R. Collins rightly observes, when unable to exercise military authority, the amputation of hands also barred the accused from exercising sovereignty. In either case, the prisoner, reduced to a religious or servile state, and stripped of the power to command the militia, was unable to reign.²²

¹⁸ In the case of the ancient Indo-European peoples, a ritual sense can be envisioned in such practice as a pledge of guarantee of a judicial process: Dumézil 1990: 71–74. For Pre-Roman peoples, see Sopena 2009 and Torres-Martínez 2011: 400–404. If they were army deserters, the penalty of amputation was justified as the offence was considered equivalent to a crime against the state: Vallejo 1993.

¹⁹ Arce infers from this, additionally, that only certain sections of the Gothic communities wore their hair long: the nobility, the members of the *palatium* (*duces, comites*), and, probably, the *gardingi*, the personal guard of the king: Arce 2011: 157. Actually, in the Germanic world long hair was a sign of distinction for freemen: Hoyoux 1948; López Sánchez 2002. Thus it is very likely that most of the Goths wore long hair with a distinctive cut and a unique dress, at least until the first third of the 7th century AD, as the judges could distinguish them from the Hispano-Romans: Thompson 1985: 38 and 375f. (=1969: 25, 314); King 1981: 22, 36f.

²⁰ In general terms, and in spite of the opinion of Fredegar, the Visigothic kings seem to have been more civilised in these matters than their Frankish or Byzantine neighbours, see Besga 2007a.

²¹ Thompson 1985: 122 (=1969: 102), based on R.S. Lopez 1942–1943: 454f. In fact, the Visigothic law provided for the penalty of amputation of the hands in cases of royalty-related crimes, such as the falsification of royal documents or the royal seal (LV VII.5.1), or for monetary offenses in the case of slaves (LV VII.6.2): King 1981: 110. The latter scholar, in addition, opposes the idea of R.S. Lopez that such penalties were introduced in Spain under the influence of the Emperor Heraclius, as it is not demonstrated that LV VII.5.1 is not an *antiqua* and also that this was the usual punishment for traitors already in the 6th century, as evidenced by the penalties imposed on those who conspired against Reccared.

²² For that reason, Witteric, after the usurpation of the throne, was content to order the amputation of the right hand of King Liuva II, which presumably would have caused his death: Isid. Hisp. HG 57: [*Liuaa*] *quem in primo flore adolescentiae Wittericus sumpta tyrannide innocuum regno deiecit praecisaque dextra occidit...*

Interpreting the Plot of Argimundus

The first problem posed by the narrative of events reported by John of Biclaro is that the chronicler does not suggest possible motivations that would have led Argimundus and his collaborators to rise against the king. Our ignorance of what really happened has generated a whole series of likely causes that might have led one of the most distinguished members of the court to rebel against his king. Thus, and since the office of *cubicularius* implies, obviously, that Argimundus belonged to the highest stratum of aristocracy within the Gothic kingdom, R. Collins has speculated that the cause of the rebellion was the discomfort caused the *dux* by being excluded from the political benefits granted by Reccared, or perhaps for not sharing the ideological (i.e. religious) framework of the new king.²³ That is, Argimundus would have tried either to recover his local power or the restoration of Arianism. However, E.A. Thompson noted that, according to Pope Gregory's epistolary testimony, the Arians had been removed from power after the conversion, and there is also no evidence that the conspirators intended to restore Arianism.²⁴ J. Arce, based on precisely the same reference from Gregory that served as an argument to Thompson, believes the hypothesis of Collins has a certain credibility, and that the Arians, discontented as a result of their exclusion from public positions, could have been the cause of the rebellion.²⁵

It is evident that there must have been some cases of exclusion of public office in the new state among the Arians, but this must have happened specifically for those charges raised after AD 589, when conversion to the Nicene faith became official, and a point of no return was reached.²⁶ Certainly, the abandonment of the *gothica fides* had to have generated some discomfort among the most recalcitrant sectors of the Gothic nobility, as we have had occasion to verify in the rebellions of Mérida, Toledo, and Septimania. However, the power of this reaction should not be overrated; especially not after the erratic religious policy followed by Leovigild from AD 580, when the king tried to create a national church, even usurping the name of 'Catholic' in favour of heretics. In this sense, the concessions made by Leovigild over dogma in support of a fruitless approach to Catholics have dissolved the ultimate resistance of even the most fervent Arians.²⁷ A good example of this hesitant stance is the case of the nobleman Agila, who had so well defended Arian beliefs against Gregory of Tours, but who, according to him, would later convert to Catholicism.²⁸ In this context it is unlikely that there were significant numbers of Arians convinced at the time of conversion.

In addition, two other facts that seem relevant to this topic must be taken into account. The first is that, in the event that Argimundus and the rest of the conspirators had effectively decided to re-establish the old Gothic *fides*, it would certainly be unusual if John of Biclaro did not mention religious motivation as a trigger for the conspiracy, especially in a paragraph included in the same year in which the chronicler recounts the meeting of the 3rd Council and the solemn conversion of the Gothic people (*in qua synodo intererat memoratus christianissimus Reccaredus, ordinem conuersionis suae et omnium sacerdotum uel gentis Gothicae confessionem tomo scriptum manu sua*). And it would be as, or even more, disconcerting when the

²³ Collins 2005: 66f.

²⁴ Thompson 1985: 123f. (=1969: 103). Greg. Dial. III 31: *...Reccaredus rex non patrem perfidum, sed fratrem martyrem sequens, ab Arianæ haereseos pravitate conversus est, totamque Visigothorum gentem ita ad veram perduxit fidem, ut nullum in suo regno militare permetteret, qui regno Dei hostis existere per haereticam perfidiam non timeret.*

²⁵ Arce 2011: 151f., n. 19.

²⁶ Despite an opinion that is still widespread, there is no evidence that allows Witteric to continue being Arian, much less try to restore the old Gothic *fides* during his reign: Thompson 1985 (=1969: 157); García Moreno 1974a: no. 172.

²⁷ Thompson 1985: 53 (=1969: 40); King 1981: 33–35.

²⁸ Most likely it was Aila, one of the four Gothic magnates (*seniores Gothorum*) who signed the abjuration of the 3rd Council of Toledo. For this character, see Greg. Tur. HF V 43; Thompson 1985: 50 and 182 (=1969: 37 and 104); Isla 1990: 16–20; Orlandis 1992: 71–74.

author had previously related other attempts to restore Arianism, and when such a motivation would corroborate the fact that Reccared came to fulfil the central theme of his work, that is, the conversion of the Goths to Catholicism and the definitive unification of the kingdom.²⁹

Secondly, we must bear in mind that, notwithstanding the testimony of Pope Gregory – a foreigner who obviously writes based on hearsay, and whose intention is none other than comparing Reccared's reign with that of his perfidious father – the author of the *Vitas Patrum Emeritensium* explicitly states that some of Mérida's conspirators had been named counts by Reccared himself.³⁰ It is more than likely, then, that many of the Arian nobles had been confirmed in their positions by the sovereign, even after the conversion. This measure would echo the political logic of the moment, which went on to integrate the Gothic aristocratic element within the structures of the new state. And since, after the synod of AD 580, the majority of the Gothic nobility would only feel nominally Arian, there would be no drawbacks in maintaining it in the exercise of their duties and honours after what had happened at the 3rd Council of Toledo. After all, a similar measure had been followed with the Arian ecclesiastical population, which must be considered more obstinate in the doctrine and obviously much more involved in religious controversy, and whose representatives were confirmed in their dignity with the sole condition of fulfilling certain, not too burdensome, requirements.³¹

Therefore, regardless of some isolated attempts to overthrow Reccared by that section of the nobility still loyal to the *Gothica fides*, it does not seem that the Arian reaction had had enough support, even within the ranks of the Gothic nobility itself, where conversions had already been a habitual phenomenon for some time, as evidenced by such prominent examples as Masona, or John of Biclara himself. E.A. Thompson, in the reference cited above, agreed with this judgment when he stated that 'And yet the Arian protest against the conversion, though spearheaded by members of the nobility and supported by some of the rank and file of the population, appears surprisingly feeble and half-hearted'.³²

It does not seem that Arianism would have been an inconvenience when it came to keeping Argimundus in his offices after AD 589, although it is true that considering, on the one hand, that he was a *cubicularius* and *dux provinciae*, roles both of enormous importance within the political organisation of the kingdom and which indicate that the *dux* was a member of the *Officium Palatinum*, and, therefore, in tune with the king,³³ and on the other that John of Biclara does not specify that it was a religious motive, then the

²⁹ Iohan. Bicl. Chron. a. 588.1: *Quidam ex Arrianis, id est Siuma episcopus et Segga, cum quibusdam tyrannidem assumere cupientes deteguntur...*; Chron. a. 589.1: *Uldida episcopus cum Gosuintha regina insidiantes Reccaredo manifestur et fidei catholicae communionem, quam sub specie Christiana quasi sumentes proiciunt, publicantur...* Nor is this reason mentioned by the author of the *Vitas*, who nevertheless does narrate the rebellion of the Arian Bishop Athaloc and the nobles Granista and Vildigern in the Narbonensis (VSPE V 12), although here the omission can be justified because the author seems more interested in exalting the figure of *dux* Claudius, and everything that somehow surrounds the Emeritensis Church, than in narrating with any detail the conspiracies against Reccared.

³⁰ See footnote 3 above. Having said that, this does not completely deny the testimony of Pope Gregory, for surely the rebels of Mérida had been appointed before the conversion of the king. Of course, with the exception of the recalcitrant Bishop Sunna, it does not appear that the conspirators were bitter Arians: Vagrila was forgiven on the sole condition he stayed true to the Catholic faith (VSPE V 11 20–21).

³¹ A new ordination is simply prescribed for presbyters and deacons: II Conc. Caesar. C. 1 (Vives 1963: 154). As for the bishops, still in AD 599, ten years after the official conversion, the former Arian prelates Ugnus of Barcelona (*Ugnus Barcinonensis episcopus...*) and Fruisclus of Dertosa (*Fruisclus... ecclesiae Dertosane episcopus*) signed the acts of the 2nd Council of Barcelona next to the Catholic prelates of said sees Asiaticus and Iulianus: Vives 1963: 160f.; Thompson 1985: 117 (=1969: 113).

³² Thompson 1985: 123 (=1969: 104).

³³ It seems that there were at least two *cubiculorum comites*. This is stated in the VIII Conc. Tol., where they appear at the top of the list of signatory leaders of the conciliar acts, and in the XIII Conc. Tol., although only one in the IX Council: King 1981: 73, n. 5. Petit (2009: 3f.) assumes that Argimundus was part of the *Aula Regia*, which, according to Sánchez Albornoz (1946a: 22–27), would have been established already in the time of Leovigild in imitation of Constantinople. On the *Aula Regia*, see also: García de Valdeavellano 1975: 196–199; King 1981: 71–104; González, 1979: 528–532.

most reasonable and prudent conclusion is to think that Argimundus was a Catholic. The fact that in spite of holding such a prominent position in Reccared's court, Argimundus is not expressly mentioned among the *Gothorum seniores* who renounced Arianism in the 3rd Council, is thus a further indication that he was probably a Catholic.³⁴ This suspicion will have, as we will see below, some importance in determining the possible origin of the *dux*.

Thus, having discarded the religious option, we must turn our investigations elsewhere to look for possible motivations that explain the actions of Argimundus; and for this we must know the background to the events.

³⁴ Among the noblemen who renounced Arianism, only five (Gusinus, Fonsa, Afrila, Aila, Ella) are mentioned by their names, followed by the generic '*omnes seniores Gothorum subscripserunt*' (Ramiro y Tejada 1850: 227; Vives 1963: 136–138).