

Governance of Visigothic Iberia: The Shifting Role of the Bishops

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1 Introduction

One of the elements that defined the period of Visigothic domination in *Hispania* was the role granted to the Church and to bishops in the preservation of the political order conceived after the Visigothic defeat at Vouillé in 507. It would not be possible to understand the kingdom's survival until 711 without the contribution of the Church.¹ After all, both kings and bishops addressed the same social group, which they aimed to rule, and therefore could not ignore each other.² Bishops may have held a more dominant position over society, given that the Church regulated every aspect of their communities' daily lives.³ As stated by Lina Fernández, the episcopate would constitute “un elemento de poder con una base social mucho más amplia que cualquiera de los sectores sociales laicos del reino visigodo.”⁴ Social ascendancy had its territorial correspondence due to diocesan structures.⁵ Such episcopal cooperation was necessary for Visigoths to benefit and to successfully impose their power, particularly during the formative periods of the kingdom.⁶ Both the Church

1 Walter Pohl, “Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter: Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand,” in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie, Walter Pohl, and Helmut Reimitz (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11) (Vienna, 2006), 14.

2 Brigitte Basdevant-Gaudemet, “L'évêque, d'après la législation de quelques conciles mérovingiens,” in *Clovis, histoire & mémoire*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Rouche (Paris, 1997), 482.

3 Nancy Gauthier, “Le réseau de pouvoirs de l'évêque dans la Gaule du haut Moyen Âge,” in *Towns and their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Gian P. Brogiolo, Nancy Gauthier, and Neil Christie (Transformation of the Roman World 9) (Leiden, 2000), 173–207, here 173.

4 Lina Fernández Ortiz de Guinea, “Funciones sociales del cuerpo episcopal en el reino visigodo hispano: administración de justicia y protección de la comunidad cristiana,” *Hispania Antiqua* 20 (1996): 451–464, here 452.

5 Pablo Poveda Arias, “La diócesis episcopal en la *Hispania* visigoda: construcción, concepción y disputas por su territorio,” *Hispania Sacra* 71.143 (2019): 9–24.

6 Santiago Castellanos and Iñaki Martín Viso, “The Local Articulation of Central Power in the North of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000),” *Early Medieval Europe* 13.1 (2005): 1–42, here