

Gift and Conflict

Forms of Social Domination in the Iberian Early Middle Ages

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GIFTS AND ARISTOCRACY

The concept of the gift was welcomed as a lost son by medievalists in recent decades and is now a highly popular one. Since the publication of the classic essay by Marcel Mauss in 1924, the concept was developed and approached in several different ways.¹ In the hands of medievalists Mauss' concept was transformed in inspiring and innovative ways, challenging old models and presuppositions and breathing new life into the medieval concept of gift-exchange. Because of the impact of Mauss' work, gift-exchange is now understood to be a manifold act, a plastic relation and, above all, a negotiation. In a recent and wide-ranging synthesis of how medievalists have used the concept(s) of gift-exchange, A. Bijsterveld states that:

Since the 1980s medievalists in the United States and Europe have been applying the [...] concept of gift-exchange to the study of gifts made by aristocrats to religious communities.

¹ M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 2002). The research for this article was funded by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (Capes) and *Pró-Reitoria de Assuntos Estudantis* (Universidade Federal Fluminense). The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their comments and suggestions for how to improve the text.

They have been doing this on such a scale, that it is hard to keep track of all their publications.²

Bijsterveld's main objective in the article was to review several classic works by medievalists in order 'to outline the current *status quaestionis* of medieval gift-analysis'.³ In his review, the idea of reciprocity lay at the core of gift-exchange.⁴ His conclusion was simple but clearly put: 'it is possible to observe a general social strategy of gift-giving throughout the Middle Ages, through which members of the aristocracy established enduring relations with religious institutions'.⁵ For him, there is a direct correlation between the current *status quaestionis* of the field and the gift-exchange from aristocrats to religious communities. However, this 'general social strategy' only applied to the aristocracy (lay and ecclesiastical). Even though the historiography reviewed by Bijsterveld dealt mostly with the central and later Middle Ages, his work is indicative of medieval gift-analysis in general.

Investigating the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, Florin Curta drew from a similar historiographical milieu, but his work focused specifically on the Early Middle Ages. By examining a series of gift-exchanges between Merovingian and Carolingian aristocrats, Curta's main objective was to deny that reciprocity was the core of gift-exchange.⁶ Instead, Curta argued that 'the unequal value of the goods exchanged (a priceless relic in exchange for silver and food) excludes any concept of reciprocity'.⁷ Moreover, by reutilizing the notion of *potlatch* in Mauss' essay, Curta demonstrated that 'gift giving "provided a language in which to express power relations".⁸ His conclusion was that when gifts were exchanged between aristocrats '[the gifts] were expressions of a desire to put the recipient lastingly in debt, to overwhelm and thus to dominate'.⁹

But from his conclusion that gift giving was 'a form of surrogate warfare in which assertive aristocrats engaged when competing with each other for power', it is not possible to derive his secondary statement: 'gift giving was not about social bonds or glue'.¹⁰ In the first place, because several societies show us that domination can be a very tight social bond. It is, therefore, not possible, given the evidence, to conclude that 'as a consequence, gifts circulated within a restricted

² A.-J. A. Bijsterveld, 'The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach', in E. Cohen and M. B. De Jong (eds.), *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power and Gifts in Context*, Cultures, beliefs and traditions 11 (Leiden, 2001), p. 123.

³ *Idem*.

⁴ 'Gift exchange is defined as a transaction to create, maintain, or restore relations between individuals or groups of people. The reciprocity of the gift is an essential element of this exchange'. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵ *Idem*.

⁶ F. Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), pp. 671–99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 697. Quoting Timothy Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Europe,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 35 (1985).

⁹ Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', p. 698.

¹⁰ *Idem*.

circle of individuals in Merovingian and Carolingian societies', or that 'gift giving was not part of a general production and distribution network', if only because the general presupposition of the article was an analysis of intra-aristocratic gift-exchange.¹¹ What we really have here is a conflation between the notions of *society* and *aristocracy*: as though Merovingian and Carolingian society were only a society of aristocrats. In this framework, gift giving could hardly appear as part of a general production and distribution network.

It is not possible to define the one-sided core of (medieval) gift-exchange as reciprocity (even if an ideal one) only by the complete identification of gifts as religious offers (*donatio pro anima*).¹² Likewise, it is not possible to displace reciprocity completely as the core of gift-exchange and substitute it for domination (intentional or unintentional) only based in the unequal value of a gift and its counter-gift.¹³ In order to understand the complex relationship between reciprocity and domination in gift-exchange it is necessary to start from a larger understanding of society, i.e. beyond aristocracies (lay or ecclesiastical).

As these two articles make clear most recent conceptual discussions about medieval gift-giving (or gift-exchange) have a tendency to share a general theoretical framework (even if that framework denies any model of the gift) for the whole Western Middle Ages or, at least, between the two great temporal blocks of Early and Late Middle Ages.¹⁴ By analysing the presuppositions and conclusions of both Bijsterveld's and Curta's articles we are able to see how these theoretical models are actually applied (or denied). Moreover, we are also able to find some general trends in medieval gift studies. After all, even though Bijsterveld dealt with Central and Late medieval historiography, and Curta with Merovingian and Carolingian representations of gift-giving, their findings and presuppositions are very similar. In summary, the theoretical models shared by these works, i.e. double (and dialectical) circumscription, documentary and conceptual, are complementary. Documentary because they search for gift-exchange primarily in sources that describe intra-aristocratic relations; conceptual because they both place reciprocity as the core of gift-exchange, even though their analyses are restricted to the social scope where reciprocity is the norm. In the end, the process is a circular one: the conceptual idea (gift-giving rooted in reciprocity) is grounded/grounds and strengthened/strengths by this specific documentary selection (intra-aristocratic relationships). This

¹¹ *Idem*.

¹² 'This [*donatio pro anima*] is the gift, mostly of landed property, to a church or monastery in order to receive a spiritual reward in the hereafter through the prayers of the clergy or monks for the benefactor's soul'. Bijsterveld, 'The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach', p. 128.

¹³ Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', p. 682.

¹⁴ Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (eds.), *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2010); Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernhard Jussen (eds.), *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003).

circular process is synthetized very briefly by Chris Wickham, noting that 'although our evidence for reciprocity (as for most things) focuses on elites, and excludes dependent peasant participation, we can safely assume that inside peasant society reciprocity (and politics, and honour) was as normal as inside elite society'.¹⁵ In this way, reciprocity is the norm projected to the 'peasant society', even though our evidence, supposedly, excludes this group from our consideration.

The idea that links gift-exchange and intra-aristocratic relations rises from an image of gift-exchange as equivalent to 'real reciprocity'. Both notions are strengthened by a specific documentary selection and, in a complementary manner, the documentary selection strengthens the idea of gift-exchange as an image of reciprocity. This double circumscription (documentary and conceptual) results in a thematic circumscription: intra-aristocratic gift-exchange.¹⁶

Even if the main objective of Curta's analysis was to displace reciprocity as the core of gift-exchange, he does it within this general circumscription. In this sense, the phenomenon is still seen as an aristocratic one and, if gift-giving is not reciprocal, it cannot be anything else. Instead of relying on this double circumscription, this paper argues that gift-exchange is neither restricted to aristocratic relations nor its reciprocal aspect.

If aristocrats indeed can engage in negotiation using, as Gadi Algazi said, 'a repertoire of existing cultural forms in order to define and redefine the nature of transactions, identities, and relationships', we should be directing our attention also to the matters of differentiation of access and usage of this repertoire.¹⁷ That is to say, if gift-exchange is more than an intra-aristocratic and reciprocal relationship, our analyses are always partial because they cannot deal with multiple relationships built upon or strengthened by the idea that all gifts *should* be reciprocated. However, not everyone is *capable* of doing so. In this way, reciprocity means more than just give something back, it requires the person to give the same or more.¹⁸ To define what is the same, more, and less is precisely the kind of negotiation that Algazi mentions, but one that is intrinsically unequal and ultimately conflictive. If

¹⁵ C. Wickham, 'Conclusion', in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 244.

¹⁶ This diagnostic is about a general trend in medieval gift-analysis. There are of course exceptions: in the field of anthropology Maurice Godelier highlighted the conflictive aspect of maussian theory in his *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago, 1999). In medieval history, Ana Rodríguez López e Reyna Pastor [‘Reciprocidades, Intercambio y Jerarquía en las Comunidades Medievales’, *Hispania: Revista Española de Historia*, 60 (2000), pp. 63–101] framed the gift-exchanges (in the twelfth and thirteenth century) of a Cistercian monastery with the local aristocracy and the peasants communities in its vicinity as a means of social hierarchization. Also, the Portuguese historian João Bernardo thoroughly investigate the gift as a form of domination and established it as the cornerstone of his ambitious synthesis [‘Poder e dinheiro: do poder pessoal ao estado impessoal no regime senhorial. Séculos V - XV. Parte I: Sincronia, estructura económica e social do século VI ao século IX’ (Porto, 1995)].

¹⁷ G. Algazi, 'Introduction – Doing Things with Gifts', in G. Algazi, V. Groebner, and B. Jussen, (eds.), *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 9–27, p. 12.

¹⁸ 'To give is to show one's superiority, to be more, to be higher in rank, *magister*. To accept without giving in return, or without giving more back, is to become client and servant, to become small, to fall lower (*minister*)'. Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 95.

we lose sight of the intrinsic conflictive dimension of gift-exchange (but one that is rooted in its reciprocal aspect), we transform the concept from a 'total social fact' to little more than an over-theorized synonym to the concept of (elite) patronage.¹⁹

HAGIOGRAPHIES

Hagiographies are a complex kind of historical source: they are forged amidst *topoi*, in several cases their narratives are an ongoing dialogue with other texts from the Christian canon, they have difficult manuscript traditions, explicit (and implicit) political objectives and, above all, there is a sort of general agreement that they are unreliable as historical sources.²⁰ These elements may explain why, twenty years ago, Ian Wood noted that despite the great progress in hagiographical studies during the previous years, 'the results of such studies are registered more often than not in the domain of the textual or literary historian or the theologian, rather than in that of the student of political or social history'.²¹ Almost a decade later, Isabel Velázquez challenged this claim, stating that most studies aimed for historical and social interpretation.²² In both claims, we can perceive the transformation of hagiographical studies in the last decades.²³

Social history is a field primarily concerned with the social structure and dynamics of a given past society. Therefore, hagiographies, when understood to contribute to a socio-historical understanding of the past have as much to reveal to us, and are as reliable, as any other (literary) source. As works produced by an author within a given society, in a given social structure, they *necessarily* are the products and represent the historical relations from where these social structures emerged. Social structures are here defined as relations and structures of thinking, language and culture, but also of domination, hierarchy, and production. Hagiographies, as social products (produced by social beings), are clearly influenced by the possibilities and limits of any given society.

¹⁹ Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 100.; see also R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1. A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Introduction', in *Idem* (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (Routledge, 1989), pp. 1–13, pp. 3–5.

²⁰ I. Velázquez Soriano, *La Literatura Hagiográfica: Presupuestos Básicos y Aproximación a sus Manifestaciones en La Hispania Visigoda*, Libros Singulares, 17 (Burgos, 2007), pp. 36–43.

²¹ I. N. Wood, 'The Use and Abuse of Latin Hagiography in the Early Medieval West', in E. K. Chrysos and I. N. Wood, (eds.), *East and West: Modes of Communication: Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Mérida* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 93–109, p. 100.

²² Velázquez Soriano, *La Literatura Hagiográfica*, p. 24 (n. 17).

²³ In 2004 Castellanos was already able to identify this new trend, even if still agreeing with Wood's diagnosis: S. Castellanos, *La Hagiografía Visigoda: Dominio Social y Proyección Cultural* (Logroño: 2004), p. 17.

Paul Fouracre offers an analysis of this process (even though its theoretical bases are not explicit) showing how a historically specific context determines the possibilities and limits of use and adaptation of the conventions in the hagiographical writings of the seventh century:

[T]he conditions in which they wrote limited the use of convention in their works and forced authors to deal with some of the awkward details of the real lives of their subjects. [...] hagiographers of the seventh century often had to deal with highly problematic subject material. This resulted in the necessary adaptation of traditional conventions to meet new conditions.²⁴

That is not equal to say that there is not room for subjectivity, innovation or imagination, but that all of them are *necessarily* subjected to social constraints. On the other hand, it is important to note that every limit marks a space of possibilities. It is within these wide limits (or spaces of possibilities) that subjectivity operates. Suffice it to say that although many hagiographies may be factually inaccurate (some of them are not), even in their inaccuracies they *may* be socially plausible. That is to say, even if the events narrated may be completely fictional, their fiction can only occur within the limits/possibilities mentioned above. The hagiographer may say that a bishop went to a specific place and we may know that this cannot be true. However, the description of the bishop's journey by the hagiographer and the kinds of relationships in which the bishop would enter with other people are socially plausible. In relating the actual and the plausible, hagiographies provide us with evidence that can help to explain primarily social relations and structures.²⁵

Given the narrative nature of, and the set of problems associated with, hagiography as a source for social history, a useful methodology, first sketched out by Ian Wood, in which the identification and location (chronological and geographical) of 'clusters of hagiographic texts' will be employed.²⁶ In doing so, I am less interested in the theological debates that may arise inside such a cluster than proposing that these 'hagiographic sets' must present a coherent image of the social world and of social practices and, consequently, reveals to us the possibility of investigating them.

In his classic work *The Cult of the Saints*, Peter Brown stressed that 'in the area of life covered by religious practice...differences of class and education play no significant role'.²⁷ This supposition is based on the acknowledgment of the saints' socially ambiguous character. The saints' everyday contact with several social *strata* would render him a 'the man without social class' even though it

²⁴ P. Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *Past & Present*, 127 (1990), pp. 3–38, p. 37.

²⁵ This kind of proposition can be grounded in a strong philosophical base such as the one provided by Critical Realism. Cf. R. Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (London, 2000).

²⁶ Wood, 'The Use and Abuse of Latin Hagiography in the Early Medieval West', p. 105.

²⁷ P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), p. 19.

was a commonplace *topoi* to relate specific saints with an aristocratic origin.²⁸ Analysing the rise of the holy man in the Syrian villages Brown characterized the saint, above all, as a patron and, in this role, he was a 'necessary figure of village life', a mediator between the village and the outside world.²⁹ The saint also mediated the community itself. 'It was', writes Brown, 'by the intervention of such men that the villagers sought a sense of communal identity. He placed some check on the strong centripetal tendencies of Late Roman agricultural life'.³⁰

I would argue that this view of the role of saint within a community is upside down. The saint, when understood this way, 'is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell'.³¹ This rational kernel is best found in the saint's position between aristocracy and peasantry. Although there may not be enough information about his character (through his *Lives*) to write a history of early medieval peasantry, there is enough to frame a history of the relationships between early medieval aristocracy and peasantry. When understood this way, the saint is far from being the mystical concept of a human being, rather the saint is the mystical image of the imperative bond between aristocracy and peasantry.

The hagiographic *corpus* analysed here is composed of three texts written in the Iberian Peninsula during the course of the seventh century: *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* (*VSE*), *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium* (*VSPE*) and *Vita Sancti Fructuosi* (*VSF*).³² These three documents compose a set that provides geographical and chronological breadth within the main limits of our investigation – i.e. the Iberian Peninsula during the seventh century. This is important as a means to construct a panoramic view of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo at this time: we are not dealing here with specificities or exceptions, but with a wide process of development.

It is important to bear in mind that the hagiographies in question contain two different chronological aspects: the period of composition and the period depicted in the narratives.³³ This is not always as straightforward as we would like and the variation between these two moments can be quite extensive: more than a hundred years in one case and twenty-five in another. Nevertheless, in doing

²⁸ A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), p. 383.

²⁹ P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), pp. 80–101, p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York, 1977), p. 103.

³² When not indicated otherwise, the English translations are all from A. T. Fear, *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (Liverpool, 1997); J. Oroz, ed., 'Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Aemiliani.', *Perficit*, IX, Segunda Serie (1978), pp. 165–215; A. Maya Sánchez, ed., *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*, Corpus christianorum. Series latina 116 (Turnhout, 1992); M. C. Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga: Estudio Y Edición Crítica* (Braga, 1974).

³³ Even if the author may be very well informed about its objects, we are always dealing here with two distinct chronologies.

so I hope to be able to underline that the hagiographical evidence is, by its very nature, a source that encapsulates the historical process. Hagiographies may be seen as narratives about the period in question or scrutinized to reveal elements of its composition but, above all, they should be analysed as evidence of the historical process that occurs between these two chronological boundaries.

CASE STUDIES

VITA SANCTI AEMILIANI (VSE)

Braulio, Bishop of Zaragoza, wrote the *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* sometime between 635-640 and dedicated it to his brother, the presbyter Fronimian.³⁴ Written amidst the available narrative templates, the *vita* recounts Aemilian's (a shepherd) answer to the divine call and his several miracles. The initial geographical setting of the *vita* is in the north of the peninsula, more precisely in the region of Berceo and the nearby mountains (where he performs his first miracles and attracts some crowds).³⁵ According to Espinosa Ruiz, Aemilian must have lived in the years between 473 and 574, a period near enough the creation of the *vita* that Braulio could point out some disciples from Aemilian as his sources.³⁶

Under the heading 'he casts out a demon from a senator's house' the hagiographer narrates that in the house of a great aristocrat named Honorius lived 'a most wicked and rebellious demon' who 'everyday perpetrated some disgusting and vile deed'.³⁷ As soon as the 'master of the house had sat down to feast, the impure spirit would put the bones of dead animals and frequently manure in his dishes' and 'at night when the inhabitants were asleep, it stole the clothes of men and women and hung them from the roofs'.³⁸ Anguished by this terrible situation, Honorius sent his messengers to bring Aemilian to the house, 'dispatching carriages to aid him on his way'. The saint, 'worn down by

³⁴ L. Vañzquez de Parga, *Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani episcopi Vita S. Emiliani* (Madrid, 1943), p. X. 'Dei uiro Dominoque meo et germano Fronimiano presbytero Braulio in merito episcopus salutem'. Oroz, 'Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Aemiliani.', p. 178. Fear (*Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, p. 15.) thinks that 'brother' here only indicates a spiritual bond.

³⁵ Oroz, 'Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Aemiliani.', pp. 186-190. Espinosa Ruiz identifies the mentioned 'villa Vergegio' in the *vita* within the contemporary territory of Berceo. U. E. Ruiz, 'El enclave "Parpalines" de la "Vita Sancti Aemiliani": espacio rural y aristocracia en época visigoda', *Iberia. Revista de la Antigüedad*, 6 (2013), pp. 79-109, p. 82.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81. Oroz, 'Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Aemiliani.', p. 178.

³⁷ 'De daemone expulso a domo Honoris senatoris Parpalinensi'. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁸ 'Sceleratissimum seditionariumque, domus Honorii senatoris daemonem sustinebat, qui eousque monstruosissime domini illius incubabat ut foedissima quaedam turpissimaque quotidie inferebat, nec daemonicolam quispiam sustinere poterat; denique saepe dominus domus quam causa coniuii fuisse accubitus, ferculis eius, animalium ossa mortuorum et plerumque stercora, inferebat spiritus in purus; saepe uero, nocturno tempore, datis omnibus in quiete, uestimenta uirorum ac mulierum subtrahens, ueluti quaedam uclamine foeditatis suspendebat e tectis'. *Idem*.

their entreaties', agrees to go to the house 'but did so on foot not in a carriage'.³⁹ In Parpalines, Aemilian orders a fast and on the third day put to flight the belligerent demon.

A few sections later, the hagiographer narrates that along with the expansion of his fame, Aemilian 'didn't lack crowds that came to see him daily' and 'as was his right, he compelled the visitors of his oratory to stay more and refresh themselves from his charity'.⁴⁰ When his servant told Aemilian 'there was nothing left for them to eat', he reproached the man and 'prayed to Christ to provide the necessary food'.⁴¹ Before he could finish his prayer, 'carts generously loaded down with food sent from the *senator* Honorius came through the gate'.⁴² Aemilian gave thanks then not to Honorius, but to 'the Creator of the World for having heard his prayer', 'set a sufficient amount of food before his invited guests and saw that the rest be saved for those who might come later'.⁴³

The framework of gift-exchange that these two narratives offer us provide a textbook-case of the Maussian synthesis of the three themes of the gift: 'the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and reciprocate'.⁴⁴ That is to say, a gift always requires a counter-gift. The relationship between Aemilian and Honorius sees examples of each moment of gift-exchange: giving (the exorcism of the *domus*), receiving (here even stronger, as it is Honorius who asks for the saint's help) and reciprocating (Honorius sends to Aemilian the carts loaded with food). This intra-aristocratic relationship is unequal for a brief period (as are most gift-exchanges), but its final outcome sees an equalization. The power play displayed between the two aristocrats is expressed, on the one hand, by the plea from Honorius and the (initial) refusal of Aemilian; on the other hand, by the *senator* dispatching the carriage to bring the saint to Parpalines and he refusing, choosing instead to walk.

Because giving is one of the three reciprocal obligations, it is not really an option for the saint to refuse to answer the plea of Honorius. The initial refusals and entreaties that came along have the role of highlight the newly established relation. We should also note here that, even though it is Honorius that is requesting the saint's assistance, he does so through his messengers. In this same way, the initial refusal of the saint is directed at Honorius plea, but it is performed towards his messengers. Hence, the entreaties that 'wore down' Aemilian are from Honorius messengers, not from the *senator*. It is this subtle mechanism – the mediation of messengers – that makes it possible

³⁹ '...dirigens subsidia uehicularum. Veniunt nuntii, implorant ut accedat et qua ope posset daemonem pellat; tandem, fatigatus precibus, ad ostendendam dei nostri uirtutem, pedibus suis, non uehiculo, est profectus'. *Idem*.

⁴⁰ 'Ut apud hominem dei, fama sanctitatis illius diuulgante, non deerant cotidie aduentantium cateruae, iure suo conpulit oppido hospites moras innectere et caritatis intuitu semetipso reficere' (translation amended). *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴¹ '...nuntiat nihil superesse quod possint prandere'. *Idem*.

⁴² 'Necdum intentionem finierat et ecce subito uehicula copiose onusta, ab Honorio senatore directa, ianuam intrant'. *Idem*.

⁴³ 'Dilectus dei directa suscipit, et, gratias rerum creatori, exauditus, persoluit: inuitatis sufficientes cibos adponit; reliquum conseruari superuenientibus praecepit'. *Idem*.

⁴⁴ Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 50.

for both sides to demonstrate their harsh positions. Their relationship becomes unequal when Aemilian 'put to flight' the demon that haunted Honorius' *domus*. However, the unequal status is quickly remedied when, only a few sections later, Honorius sends the carriages loaded with food to Aemilian, who in turn accepts the counter-gift.

Here we have two parties negotiating the gift, its limits, and means with which it will be reciprocated.⁴⁵ Aemilian is able to refuse first and accept later (but recognizes God as the true giver); Honorius tries to reduce the inequality of the relation sending the carriages to help Aemilian and so on. These initiatives of anticipation (asking and trying to disguise a plea as an offer, giving thanks to a third party etc.) occur out of necessity because gift-exchange is something to be treated with caution. The theme of domination is always present, even if most of the time it resides in the background: for Aemilian and Honorius, to ask each other for this kind of gift is something of a last resort. This relationship, framed by gift-exchange, is only established and developed in two moments of great need for both of them.

The structure of the second miracle then is very clear: this was a perilous moment for Aemilian, who should be able to feed this multitude that surrounds him. We should remember here that the maintenance of the saint's status was directly sustained by his everyday capacity to intervene in the sphere of sacred, i.e., his capacity to perform miracles. Without this, his powers of attraction and control would be diminished. After Honorius' counter-gift, the relationship between him and Aemilian was equalized, thus undermining the superior position of the saint in relation to the *senator*. Both actors are capable of fulfilling their reciprocal obligations. But it is through this very same action that the *unequal* relationship between Aemilian and the multitude can be sustained.

This multitude is a third (collective) subject that exists in parallel to the relationship between Aemilian and Honorius. A collective subject which is defined by a variety of words, like multitude (*caterua, multitudo*), people (*populi*) and the poor (*pauperes*). Here we have two clues about the social status of these people: on the one hand, the region of the High Ebro valley where Parpalines was located is characterized as a rural environment.⁴⁶ While on the other hand, the indication that Santiago Castellanos, through a process of social polarization, 'almost all of the population that are mentioned in the sources and that are not identified with the powerful [potentes] is in a position of actual dependence with them'.⁴⁷ In this way, it is no excess to characterize this multitude as impoverished peasants, noting that as a collective subject, they can have several juridical statuses (*servi, ingenui, liberti, fugitivi* etc.). As impoverished peasants, it is by living around the saint that these people were able to access some of their conditions of material and social reproduction. In another

⁴⁵ Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, (eds.), *Negotiating the Gift*.

⁴⁶ Urbano Espinosa Ruiz, 'El enclave "Parpalines" de la...', p. 96. Santiago Castellanos, *Poder Social, Aristocracias Y Hombre Santo En La Hispania Visigoda: La Vita Aemiliani de Braulio de Zaragoza*, Biblioteca de Investigación, 20 (Logroño, 1998), p. 51.

⁴⁷ Castellanos, p. 83.

scene in the same story, a crowd (*turbae, pauperes*) went to the saint ‘asking for their normal subvention’.⁴⁸ Without anything to give at the moment, the saint cut the sleeves from his tunic and gave them along with his cloak.⁴⁹ One of these *pauperes*, ‘who was more importunate than the rest, as is the way with beggars [*mendicantium*]’ went ahead of the other and clothed himself with the saint’s gift. Because of this act, he was then beaten by the others.⁵⁰ The most important element of this story is the recurrent nature of the saint’s gifts to these beggars, as they are asking for their normal, and rightly expected, subvention. It is exactly because of this that the saint has to give them something, even if only the sleeves of his tunic and his cloak. According to Martín Cerezo and Julio Escalona, *mendicantium* indicates here a loosely relation of personal dependence, but nonetheless, a real one⁵¹

We have the exact same logic in play when, in another instance, a multitude went to the saint and he did not have any wine.⁵² Through the saint’s relationship with God, he was able to perform a miracle and ‘a huge multitude drank to its fill from scarcely, as it is reported, a *sextarius* of wine’.⁵³ Taken together, these cases show us that these relationships between the saint and the multitude are perennial ones, always reproduced by both parties and revolving around elements of their material and ideal reproduction. The relations of personal dependence, as characterized by Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, were based in the ideas of *fides/fidelis* and *obsequium/servitium*. In the relationship between a presbyter from a rural church that was transferred to a cathedral by the bishop and the new cleric, now responsible for that rural church, the Council of Mérida (666) determined that the first should provide the food and clothes to the latter.⁵⁴ To these authors, the terms *fides/fidelis* and *obsequium/servitium* are applied as equivalents both in the religious canons as in the civil legislation.⁵⁵

Both cases above (in the *VSE*) are relationships structured by gift-exchange. The first one, between Aemilian and Honorius, is an intra-aristocratic relation. As in every gift-exchange, this relationship is established, in the same movement, by an act of giving and the debt that follows it. In this way, it is always an unequal relationship. But the main question here is the temporal dilation and the second act of giving: if, on the one hand, this second act is performed by the same party that has given first, debt may become dependence for the one who receives once again. If, on the other hand, the roles are

⁴⁸ ‘... poscentes consuetam subsidii stipem...’. Oroz, p. 202.

⁴⁹ ‘... ipse seu deficiente seu non occurrente quod prorogari deberet, ab ingenita non deficiens pietate, praecidens manicas suae tunicae, cum pallio quo utebatur, obtulit benignus’. *Idem*.

⁵⁰ ‘Tunc unus ex cunctis importunior, ut mos est mendicantium, caeteris aliis praeueniens, accepit; accepta induit’. *Idem*.

⁵¹ T. M. Cerezo and J. E. Monge, ‘El Léxico Sobre Relaciones de Dependencia En Un Texto de Época Visigoda: Un Ensayo Metodológico’, *Studia historica. Historia antigua*, 1988, 201–10 (p. 209).

⁵² ‘Contigit conuenire frequentiam populi, quando parum beato uiro esset uini’. Oroz, p. 204.

⁵³ ‘... ut atunt e sextario affatim satiata est ingens multitudo’. *Idem*.

⁵⁴ A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978), p. 102. J. Vives (ed.), *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963), pp. 333–ss.

⁵⁵ Barbero and Vigil, pp. 102–103.

reversed and the first receiver is now the giver (of a comparable gift), we have reciprocal – as both parties are givers and receivers – and balanced – as both gifts are comparable – gift-exchange. The main product of this exchange is a stronger relationship between the two parties, which both recognize the power of each other (to give) and maintains its own (by reciprocating). Hence, the relationship between Aemilian and Honorius in the *VSE* is reciprocal and balanced gift-exchange.

The second relationship, between Aemilian and the multitude has a different outcome. We have already shown how the relationships established between the saint and the multitude had a recurrent dynamic, but always with Aemilian maintaining his social role of a giver. The logic is the same here as in the relationship between Aemilian and Honorius, but the moment of equalization and balance does not exist. The relationship between Aemilian and the impoverished peasants does not have reciprocity as its core and equilibrium as its product. Instead we only have the first sequence (the saint as a giver) repeating itself. The peasants are never able to assume the role of givers in their relationship with the saint. Hence, this relationship is *non-reciprocal* and *unequal gift-exchange*: its outcome can only be one of personal dependence.

VITAS SANCTORUM PATRUM EMERETENSIVM

The anonymous *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium* (*VSPE*) is a collection of hagiography covering a long period of time. Their narratives extend from the mid-sixth century to the first half of the seventh century, were written between 633 and 638, and are divided in two parts.⁵⁶ The first part talks about the people who lived in Mérida (or its vicinity) – the geographical axis of the *vitae* – and features numerous miraculous reports. The second part narrates the lives of the five subsequent bishops of Mérida during the period focused in the *vitae*: Paul, Fidel, Masona, Innocent, and Renovatus.

The city of Mérida is not only the geographical axis of the *vitae*, but a major character itself. As one of the great cities of *Hispania* since its foundation in the reign of Augustus, the development of the city is particularly unusual.⁵⁷ Mérida was endowed with a set of civic buildings during the Roman period, and, according to Roger Collins, even in the middle of the sixth century it was possible to discern a period of construction and rebuilding.⁵⁸ For Collins writes:

⁵⁶ I. Velañquez (ed.), *Vida de los santos Padres de Mérida* (Madrid, 2008), pp. 11–15.

⁵⁷ R. Collins, 'Merida and Toledo: 550–585', in E. James (ed.), *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 189–219, p. 194.

⁵⁸ *Idem*.

The importance of this building programme lies not so much in the fact that it happened; rather it is in how it was able to happen. The crucial point is that it was the work of the bishops of the city, and moreover was part of a much more extensive system of patronage.⁵⁹

This specificity – a composition of wealth and dynamic civic life – would characterize Mérida as belonging ‘to a world of Mediterranean cities, with far flung contacts’.⁶⁰

On the one hand, the role of civic life, especially as performed by aristocratic families in Late Antiquity all along the Iberian Peninsula, is well known, while on the other hand, in the context of great ruralisation, the cities became poles of attraction for several reasons. According to Luis García Moreno, the articulation of these two elements made cities the privileged *locus* of the ‘clear tendency of land-owning aristocracies of urban character to occupy key positions in the administration of the State or in the ecclesiastical hierarchy’.⁶¹ When it was not possible to find a public power that functioned as a leadership of the city, the bishops emerged as the figures capable of organizing agreements and resistance.⁶² All through Western Europe at this time the episcopate inserted itself into key positions in the administration of the cities; a process which transformed it into a highly disputed position.

One of these figures of urban leadership in Mérida was the bishop Masona – for Isabel Velázquez he is even the main character in the *VSP*.⁶³ Characterized by the virtue of generosity, Masona was, above all, a prolific giver.⁶⁴ He was also a builder and founder of many richly endowed monasteries, and even ‘built an even larger number of basilicas of wondrous appearance.’ In addition to the monasteries and basilicas he constructed a *xenodochium* (a building destined to provide shelter and help to pilgrims and sick people), which was richly endowed by a large patrimony.⁶⁵ Masona also ordained that the *xenodochium* should receive ‘half of all the revenues (...) from the entire patrimony of the church’.⁶⁶ Through the *xenodochium*, Masona established relations not only with the local

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶⁰ I. N. Wood, ‘Social Relations in the Visigothic Kingdom from the Fifth to the Seventh Century: The Example of Merida’, in P. Heather (ed.), *The Visigoths: From the Migration Period to the Seventh Century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, Studies in historical archaeology 4 (San Marino, 1999), pp. 191–208, p. 194.

⁶¹ L. A. García Moreno, *Historia de España Visigoda* (Cátedra, 1998), p. 268.

⁶² P. Brown, ‘*Virtutes Sanctorum . . . Strages Gentium*’: “Deeds of Saints . . . Slaughter of Nations”, in *Idem, The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Chichester, 2013), pp. 93–122, pp. 106–111.

⁶³ Velaquez, *Vida de los santos Padres de Mérida*, p. 114 n. 1.

⁶⁴ Maya Sánchez, *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*, pp. 48–50.

⁶⁵ ‘...episcopatus sui monasteria multa fundauit, prediis magnis locupletauit, basilicas plures miro opere construxit et multas Ibide Deo animas consecrauit. Idem. ‘Deinde xenodochium fabricauit magnisque patrimonii ditauit...’. Idem.

⁶⁶ ‘Sed his omnibus beneficiis adiciens maiora precepit medicis ut sagaci sollicitudine gererent curam ut de omnibus exenii ab uniuersis actuariiis ex omni patrimonio eclesie in atrium inlatis medietatem acciperent, ut eisdem infirmis deferrent’. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

aristocracy, but with all the social strata in Mérida. He was said to have commanded the doctors that served in the *xenodochium* to seek and bring the sick people from Mérida to the building, 'be they slave or free, Christian or Jew'.⁶⁷ The *xenodochium* was also a place where the neighbouring peasants (*rusticis de ruralibus*) and citizens from Mérida could receive some goods that they required (such as wine, oil and honey).⁶⁸ His generosity, his hagiographer was eager to stress, was not restricted to his brothers and friends but was, above all, directed to the poor and 'even to the church slaves'.⁶⁹ Masona, it was said, 'excelled in the magnanimous virtue of giving rather than in receiving', and 'gave away much and took nothing away himself, but willingly granted everyone's request'.⁷⁰ Even the hagiographer acknowledged the bishop's privileged position in the circuits of exchange: '[Masona] gave many gifts, more endowments, enriched all through the munificence of his gifts and by that munificence was held to be a great man'.⁷¹ This privileged position is even more explicit in the following scene:

Indeed, in his day they were so wealthy that on the most holy day of Easter he set out for the church surrounded by many boys wearing silk cloaks as if they were in attendance on a king, and wearing this apparel, something that in those days no one had been able or presumed to do, they went before him and paid him due homage.⁷²

Emphasizing once again that the bishop's relationships were not restricted to the aristocratic circuits of gift-exchange, the hagiographer attempted to highlight both the bishop's generosity and the power it entailed by equating it to royal homage. The kind of power attained by bishops, such as Masona, should be viewed in a Late Antique context as the rise of a new kind of civil leadership in the cities. Moreover, scenes like this emphasise transformation of the role of the bishops from religious leaders to religious and civic leaders. The passages mentioned above firmly place Masona as not only as a great bishop, but also as a great aristocrat, even if an ecclesiastical one.

As Mérida's bishop, Masona was responsible for the administration of all the church's patrimony in the region.⁷³ In the same *VSPE* we are told that decades earlier, this same patrimony had grown immensely by a donation of an aristocratic couple to one of Masona's predecessors, the Bishop Paul.

⁶⁷ '...ut cuncte urbis ambitu medici indesinenter percurrentes quemquumque seruum seu liberum, Xpianum siue Iudeum'. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶⁸ 'Si quis uero de ciuibus urbis aut rusticis de ruralibus ad atrium ob necessitate accessisset, licorem uini, olei uel mellis...'. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶⁹ 'seruulis eclesie'. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷¹ 'Donabat multa, largiebat plurima, ditabat munificentia uniuersos beneficiis et munificentia magnus habebatur'. *Idem*.

⁷² 'Ita nimirum temporibus eius ditati sunt, ut in diem sacratissimum Pasche, quum ad eclesiam procederet, plurimi pueri clamides olisericas induentes quoram eo quasi quoram rege incederent et, quod his temporibus nullus poterat, nullus presummebat, huius indumentis amicti ante eum deuitum deferentes obsequium pergerent'. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷³ Barbero and Vigil identified this process of establishment of the bishop as the sole administrator of the church patrimony since the Council of Agde (506) and being restated in the latter councils (II of Braga, 572; III of Toledo, 589; IX of Toledo, 655). Barbero and Vigil, pp. 58–69.

The donation was repayment to Bishop Paul for healing and saving the life of a *senator's* wife. This patrimony, which is never detailed, but was probably composed of several rural properties, was held as personal property of Paul and inherited by his nephew Fidel, also as his personal property.⁷⁴ The acceptance of Fidel as Paul's successor is clearly attributed to his legal possession of this patrimony and the promise that, after his death, it would become church's property.⁷⁵ This aristocratic patrimony was larger than other senatorial patrimonies *Lusitania*.⁷⁶ After the donation, Paul is said to be more powerful than all the city aristocrats and even the church patrimony was incomparably smaller than his own.⁷⁷ In the *VSPE*, the history of Mérida's bishops is closely intertwined with the several transfers and uses of this patrimony. Masona, the direct successor of Fidel, is by all means then a very powerful aristocrat. Even if the above mentioned properties are not his private possessions, he is the legal administrator of all the Church's property in the region.⁷⁸

According to Abilio Barbero e Marcelo Vigil, the post-Roman kingdoms saw the result of the multi-secular process of unification of the figures of *dominus* and *patronus* in the same person. This process (traceable to the general transformations of the Roman economy in the second century) 'united the economic or material dependence to the personal or extra-economic'.⁷⁹ The *dominus* as the proprietor of the land and the *patronus* as the personal protector would have, in their origin, two distinguished types of relationships with their dependent peasantry. As the process developed, these two roles would be united in the person of a single aristocrat, now a *dominus* and *patronus*. For Barbero and Vigil, already in the First Council of Braga (400), we have evidence of this unification of roles in the prohibition to ordain as clerics those who were dependents of somebody if that relationship was not terminated beforehand. These relationships would be with lords and patrons – *domini vel patroni*.⁸⁰ As a great aristocrat, that is to say, as a great landowner, Masona would be one of the figures that embodied this union of *dominus* and *patronus*. The relationships between Masona and his personal dependents in the city of Mérida and in the nearby rural properties was, therefore, based both in his role as a major *patronus* and as a powerful *dominus*.

⁷⁴ P. C. Díaz Martínez, 'El Testamento de Vicente: propietarios y dependientes en la Hispania del s. VI', in M. J. Hidalgo, D. Pérez Sánchez, and M. J. R. Gervás (eds.), 'Romanización' y 'Reconquista' en la Península Ibérica, *nuevas perspectivas* (Salamanca, 1998), pp. 257–70, pp. 260–261.

⁷⁵ Maya Sánchez, p. 36.

⁷⁶ 'Tanta namque illis inerat copia rerum, ut nullus senatorum in prouincia Lusitanie illis repperiretur locupletior'. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ 'Et qui peregrinus nicilque habens aduenerat factus est cunctis potentibus potentior in tantum ut omnis facultas eclesie ad conparationem bonorum illius pro nicilum putarentur'. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁸ Cf. n. 81 above.

⁷⁹ Barbero and Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 22.

For Barbero and Vigil, the same terminology was used in Visigothic legislation to describe the relations of dependence in all the levels of the social organization.⁸¹ When understood in this way, the related concepts of *obsequium/servitium* and *fidelis/infidelis* were absolutely central, as they represented 'the relations of dependence and the rupture of these relations between serfs, freedmen, dependent freemen, clerics and nobles, both with the private aristocrats as with the Church and the king'.⁸² One of the obligations of the aristocrats (lay or ecclesiastical) in exchange of the *obsequium/servitium* would be to dress and feed their dependents, which can be seen both in the ecclesiastical and in civil documentation.⁸³ It is exactly this kind of relationship that we can see in the *VSPE* between Masona and the peasants, freedmen and slaves that seek his help at the *xenodochium* or when they honoured him as his entourage. This kind of relationship is even more explicit when the hagiographer notes that these same actors went to the *xenodochium* asking for 'a measure of wine or oil or honey', gifts that could be given by Masona himself.⁸⁴ What we find in all these passages are evidence of a relationship of personal dependence in which Masona was fulfilling his role as *dominus* and *patronus*. In the Visigothic worldview, it was pretty clear that the only act that we can expect of these dependents was that they behaved as *fideles* and provided Masona with their *obsequium/servitium*.

In this way, the relationships in which Masona enters, through the *xenodochium* (with both the city inhabitants and peasants) or as a great lord preceded by his richly clothed entourage, appears as the relationship between a powerful aristocratic and his personal dependents. Even if we cannot forget the ideals of Christian piety and charity, it is necessary to recognize that these ideals are historical ones, and can only have a proper existence in the general framework of the historical specificity.

The aforementioned passages give us images of gift-exchanges between saints and a heterogeneous group. This group is visible in the multitude of poor people that gathers around Aemilian and has their material reproduction made possible through the actions of the holy man (including his relationship with the senator Honorius). They are the crowd that bothers Aemilian in Berceo and again in his retreat at the Mount Dircetius; the beggars that came to him 'asking for their normal subvention' and the crowd that came when he did not have enough wine.⁸⁵ The Latin words used to describe them are diverse: *caterua, multitudo, mendicantes, populi* and *pauperes*.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Barbero and Vigil, p. 169.

⁸² Barbero and Vigil, pp. 169–170.

⁸³ Barbero and Vigil, pp. 102–103.

⁸⁴ 'Si quis uero de ciuibus urbis aut rusticis de ruralibus ad atrium ob necessitate accessisset, licorem uini, olei uel mellis a dispensantibus poposcisset et uasem parvulum in quo lebaret exhibuisset et eum uir sanctus uidisser, ut erat semper obtutu gratus, iucundi uultu, mox ipsud uasculum confringi et ut maiorem deferret precipiebat'. Maya Sánchez, p. 51.

⁸⁵ 'uidet impedimento sibi fore hominum ad se concurrentium multitudinem'; 'eousque fama sanctitatis eius percrebuit ut in notitia paene omnium perueniret'; 'poscentes consuetam subsidii stipem'. Oroz, pp. 188, 190, 202, 204.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 190, 202, 204.

Like Aemilian, Masona was a holy man who entered into relationships with the entire social spectrum; with other aristocrats and with this heterogeneous group mentioned above. Through the *xenodochium* he was able even to surpass the immediate urban context of Mérida and create (or reproduce) these relationships with the neighbouring peasants. In Masona's *vita*, this heterogeneous group is described by words as *rustici*, *seruus*, *liberum*, *seruulis eclesie*.⁸⁷ In both stories, the main element of this heterogeneous group was its lack of an aristocratic status. In each of these cases, they are never individualized, but rather are always described as a collective social agent. As mentioned above, Martín Cerezo and Julio Escalona analysed each of these terms in the *VSE* and classified them as varied forms of personal dependence, some more tightly bound, some more loosely bound.⁸⁸ To build a typology of the forms of dependence is a fundamental step, but the main question remains; how does one uncover the mechanisms that ground these relations of personal dependence?

Our hypothesis, as argued above, is that in these relations between the saint and this collective subject the core of gift-exchange is not reciprocity but domination. This does not mean (as Curta argued) that reciprocity does not have a fundamental role in the gift-exchange. Rather, reciprocity exists as the complement of domination. Reciprocity is not the one-sided core of gift-exchange exactly because it is meaningless without its complement, domination. The form of both reciprocity and domination varies in each society, but their intersection in gift-exchange is a constant.

These relationships of personal dependence are enduring ones. The specific meaning of reciprocity in these relationships was because the *obsequium* or *servitium* from these individuals was not enough to make the gift-exchange complete: reciprocity here does not mean to give something back, but to give the same or more.⁸⁹ The main element here is not that the peasants (or the multitude) cannot give anything back, but that they necessarily always give less than what they received. This occurs not only because they do not have access to prestige goods and so on, but because they have an inferior (social) position in relation to the saint. That is to say, the inequality was embedded in the gift-exchange and these inferior agents cannot 'complete' the exchange circuit. Gift-exchange was a mechanism to create, to express, and to strengthen the relations of personal dependence.

With both Aemilian and Masona we have to ask what the results of gift-exchange are when one needs to receive but cannot reciprocate. After all, the only thing the multitude can give back to Aemilian or Masona as a counter-gift for the food (or clothes, religious protection, miracles, healings and so on) was their fidelity and obedience (*fides*), that is to say, to perform services (*obsequium/ servitium*) for them. But these services do not make the circuit of gift-exchange complete,

⁸⁷ Maya Sánchez, pp. 50–54.

⁸⁸ Cerezo and Monge, 'El Léxico Sobre Relaciones de Dependencia...'.

⁸⁹ Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 95.

they only reproduce the same relationship of an everlasting debt that can never be repaid (in the given conditions).

These services could be performed in several ways: whether with the direct assistance to the holy man (something that is explicit in these hagiographies, even when the saint is in his 'eremitic period') to the settlement in a monastic community or the deliverance of goods to the saint and his followers.⁹⁰ As we saw, the relationship between Aemilian and his followers or between Masona and his clients in Mérida was no different than the one between a great aristocrat and their personal dependents. Amidst all these possibilities, the main element here is that through a relation framed by gift-exchange, these individuals enter in a relation of personal dependence with the saint. 'Gifts between equals', as Ian Wood succinctly stated, 'certainly played a role in the creation and maintenance of bonds of friendship, *amicitia*, which lay at the heart of aristocratic society'.⁹¹ As we saw above, between unequals, as aristocrats (even the ecclesiastical ones) and *pauperes* or peasants, gifts played a role in the creation and maintenance of *inequality* and *dependence*. The Iberian Early Middle Ages were no different. Gift-exchange was a central mechanism in the process of expansion and generalization of the relations of personal dependence.⁹²

VITA SANCTI FRUCTUOSI

The *Vita Sancti Fructuosi* (*VSF*) was written some decades later by another unknown author.⁹³ The text was composed in two independent sections, which were later merged. The earlier text related to the north of the peninsula and the latter text related to south. Díaz y Díaz argues that the *vita* must have been written in the region of Braga between 670 and 680; Codoñer Merino makes this argument a little more precise by observing that the merge of the two sections most likely occurred by at least 690.⁹⁴ The *vita*, therefore, must have been written shortly after the saint's death (665).⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Oroz, 'Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Aemiliani.', p. 206-208. Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 114-116. See also Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 84. As we argue below.

⁹¹ I. N. Wood, 'The Exchange of Gifts among the Late Antique Aristocracy', M. A. Gorbea, ed, *El Disco de Teodosio*, Publicaciones del Gabinete de Antigüedades de la Real Academia de la Historia 5 (Madrid, 2000), pp. 301-14, p. 303.

⁹² Barbero and Vigil, pp. 155-200.

⁹³ For the debates about the attribution of Valerio as the author of the VF, see Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, pp. 13-23.

⁹⁴ Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, pp. 14-15. See also Carmen Codoñer Merino, 'Sobre La "Vita Fructuosi"', in *Athlon: saturum grammatica in honorem Francisci R. Adrados*, L. A. de Cuenca *et al* (eds.), 2 vols. (Madrid, 1984), II, 183-90, p. 190.

⁹⁵ Díaz y Díaz (p. 15) dates the foundation of Compludo in 640.

Fructuosus is described by his hagiographer as 'sprung from most glorious royal stock', being firmly circumscribed in the *topos* that relates the saint to an aristocratic origin.⁹⁶ His 'moment of revelation' occurred early in his childhood, but it is only after the death of his parents that Fructuosus undertook his religious life. He was described as both a hermit and as an unstoppable founder of monasteries; it is in this second trait that we find some answers to our previous questions.

After a formative period under the authority of Bishop Conantius, Fructuosus returned to the 'place of solitude' (the mountain valleys of Bierzo, in the northwest of the Peninsula), where he was 'inspired by the Lord' and promised to build a monastery while still in his childhood.⁹⁷ In the hagiographical account it is said that:

he built the monastery of Compludo according to divine precepts, and keeping nothing for himself, but spending all his wealth on it, he richly endowed it and filled it to overflowing with an army of monks who came both from his own household and from the converts who eagerly hurried here from all over Spain.⁹⁸

The endowment of the monastery (but not its foundation) was contested by his sister's husband, who successfully sought the king's justice, claiming that he should receive half of the inheritance 'on the pretext of leading a campaign'.⁹⁹ After receiving this news, Fructuosus takes a series of measures. First, he removes the trappings of the church, laid bare the altars and writes to his brother-in-law 'to confound him, rebuke him, and threaten him in the Lord's name'. Then Fructuosus resorted to prayer. The result, in the hagiographer words, was that Fructuosus' brother-in-law, 'this envier of holy men and enemy of good deeds, was at once struck down by divine vengeance and swiftly ended his life'.¹⁰⁰

We should pay close attention to two aspects of this narrative. Firstly, the monastery was richly endowed by his patrimony – the disputed inheritance – and filled with monks. But these monks are not only the 'converts who eagerly hurried here from all over Spain', but also the ones 'from his own household'. Given Fructuosus' aristocratic origin and the high status of Fructuosus' father in the kingdom's hierarchy (he is said to have been '*ducis exercitus Spaniae*'), it is reasonable to assume that the family patrimony must have been quite considerable, and was probably composed of several

⁹⁶ Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 82.

⁹⁷ *Idem*.

⁹⁸ 'Nam construens cenobium Conplutensem iuxta diuina paecepta nichil sibi reseruans, omnem ase facultatis suae IbIdem conferens, eum locupletissime ditaruit et tam ex familia sua quam ex conuersis ex diuersis Spaniae partibus sedule concurrentibus eum agmine monachorum affluentissime compleuit'. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁹ Fear *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, p. 125. states that it is probably King Chindasvinth. The Latin states: '*pro exercenda publica expeditione conferretur*'. See also, Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ *Idem*.

properties, dependent peasants, and expressing a great local power.¹⁰¹ This hypothesis is reinforced by his brother-in-law's reaction, both in his objective (to receive half of the inheritance) and the means employed (the king's intercession and the characterization of the patrimony as a reward or as the means to lead a military campaign). In another point, the hagiographer tells us that Fructuosus went to Cadiz and built two monasteries (one of them called Nono). The expansion of his fame in the region was so intense that, according to his hagiographer, 'the columns of converts coming in hordes from all over the land formed a vast chorus'.¹⁰² It was said that his ability to attract followers was limited only because:

the dukes of the army of that province and the surrounding regions cried out to the king that there should be some restraints imposed - for if no bounds to permission to become a monk had been set, there would have been no one to fight in the army – a countless army of monks would have gathered together.¹⁰³

What social groups were attracted by Fructuosus' fame and bounded in the monasteries he built? This question is directly related to what kind of authority Fructuosus would have over these newly appointed monks.¹⁰⁴ The hagiographer mentioned that amidst all who were attracted by the saint, some were even nobles, and most of these nobles came to be bishops. The individualization in the hagiographers discourse is explicit.¹⁰⁵ This individualization had to be opposed to the generalization that occurred when the hagiographer was writing about Fructuosus' non-noble followers. That is to say, even if we knew the names of the nobles that joined Fructuosus, we would still not know who the others were. The connection made by the hagiographer in both cases between the men who bound themselves to Fructuosus' authority and the military capacity of the kingdom is very meaningful. In the first narrative we have the primary characterization of Fructuosus' father as a duke of the army and his brother-in-law's plea to the king as a mean of receiving some portion of the inheritance. This plea connects the inheritance with the objective of leading a military campaign; in the second narrative, it is Fructuosus' attractive power that appears as a great obstacle to the reproduction of the military dynamic of the kingdom. In both cases, Fructuosus' monastic foundations and the men it gathered are opposed both to the military dynamics of the kingdom and with the local aristocracy.

¹⁰¹ Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 82. See also, Díaz Martínez, 'El Testamento de Vicente...', pp. 260-261.

¹⁰² 'Tanti gloriosissimi et incomparabilis uiri rutilo fulgore radians exempla meritorum ita ardore fidei accedit animos populorum ut cateruatum undique concurrens agmina conuersorum inmensus fieret chorus'. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-106.

¹⁰³ 'Nisi et duces exercitus prouinciae illius uel circumseptus undique confinibus regi clamassent ut aliquantum proiberetur, - quia si fas fuerit permissionis non esset qui in expeditione publica proficiseretur - innumerabilis se debuit congregare exercitus monacorum'. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Fructuosus is the attributed author of a monastic rule: J. Campos Ruiz and I. Roca Meliá, eds., *Reglas Monásticas de La España Visigoda: Los Tres Libros de Las 'Sentencias'*, Biblioteca de autores cristianos 321 (Madrid, 1971), pp. 129-162.

¹⁰⁵ 'multas idoneas ac nobiles personas'. Díaz y Díaz, *La Vida de San Fructuoso de Braga*, p. 90.

The traditional interpretation of the second episode would point to the consequences of the ‘military laws’ by Wamba and Erwig in the *Lex Visigothorum* (LV 9.2.8 and 9.2.9).¹⁰⁶ These two laws, even though they were produced with different objectives in mind, would be responsible for exempting the monasteries from military service.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, to frame this narrative in the wider context of Visigothic society, we need to consider two other related processes: the transformation of the Visigothic army and the growing hierarchization of the whole society.

Since the sixth century, Visigothic society was a stage for great expansion of the personal relations of dependence. The army as an institution was greatly affected by this large-scale process. According to Dionisio Pérez Sánchez, in the sixth century a permanent army still existed in the Visigothic society, but it was mostly restricted to the frontiers and strategic areas. During this period private armies were already firmly established, but in the seventh century they were the fundamental form of military organization.¹⁰⁸ In the military laws of Wamba (672-680) and Erwig (680-687), the public army was then the sum of several private armies – groups of peasants bounded by personal relations of dependence to aristocratic proprietors.¹⁰⁹ The social hierarchization – one of the expressions of the generalization of the relations of personal dependence – was expressed by a series of processes (such as the transformation in the composition of the army), but here we are more interested in the one analysed by Amancio Isla Frez through the legislation concerning the fugitives in the Visigothic kingdom.¹¹⁰ According to Frez, this set of twenty-one laws in the *Lex Visigothorum* concerning ‘fugitives’ should be viewed as laws concerning a heterogeneous group of dependents who broke the ties that bound them to a specific *dominus/patronus*.¹¹¹ That group would contain a wider variety of people than actual slaves, consisting of ‘monks who abandoned their abbots, clerics that fled their bishop or, surely, peasants of different conditions bound to a lord’.¹¹² The development of these laws was a transformation of the old relationships into a situation where ‘everybody, including the supposed royal delegates, acted as lords ready to expand the number of his own dependents’.¹¹³ However, it is important to note that this situation, far from the traditional narrative, does not

¹⁰⁶ K. Zeumer (ed.), *Leges Visigothorum. Monumenta Germaniae Histórica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum, 1* (Hannover, 1902), pp. 370-379.

¹⁰⁷ D. P. Sánchez, *El Ejército en la sociedad visigoda* (Salamanca, 1989), p. 145. I. Wood, ‘Entrusting Western Europe to the Church, 400-750’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Sixth Series)*, 23 (2013), pp. 37-73, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ Sánchez, *El Ejército en la sociedad visigoda*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁰⁹ LV 9.2.8. K. Zeumer, ed., *Leges Visigothorum*, pp. 370-373; LV 9.2.9. pp. 374-379. See also Barbero and Vigil, p. 150.

¹¹⁰ A. Isla Frez, ‘Los fugitivos y el título sobre ellos del “Liber Iudicum”’, *Arqueología y territorio medieval*, 2001, 113-24.

¹¹¹ Frez, p. 113. See also, LV 9.1: ‘*de fugitivis et occultatoribus fugamque preventibus*’. K. Zeumer, *Leges Visigothorum*, pp. 351-365.

¹¹² A. I. Frez, ‘Los Fugitivos y el Título sobre ellos del “Liber Iudicum”’, p. 123.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

indicate the breakdown of the Visigothic State or society, only its transformation.¹¹⁴ In this framework both passages in the *VSF* should be understood as evidence for the expansion of personal relationships of dependence and the transformation of these relationships of production as expressed by the general movement of aristocratic (and personal) domination over the peasantry.

These statements not only provide a new light on our second narrative – the foundation of Nono – but our first narrative – the foundation of the monastery of Compludo and the opposition between Fructuoso and his brother-in-law – too. When the hagiographer emphasized that Fructuoso's power of attraction was so immense that people 'from all over Spain' hurried to his monasteries – be they in the Bierzo or in Cádiz –, it is clear that such a movement could not be restricted only to freemen.¹¹⁵

Both passages of the *VSF* are presented as episodes of the same structural process that we saw in the broad legislation about fugitives. That is, as a process of aristocratic dispute for personal dependents. Nevertheless, the essential unity between (control of) land and labour as the fundamental means of aristocratic reproduction cannot be forgotten. In the first case what we had was an aristocratic conflict provoked by a power vacuum (the death of Fructuoso's father). The main question here is not – as the hagiographer would like us to think – the conversion of Fructuoso and the foundation of Compludo. It seems reasonable to think that Fructuoso's brother-in-law's plea would occur even in the absence of these events. After all, he was not asking that the king cancel the foundation and endowment of Compludo, or that Fructuoso should not be allowed to enter the monastic life, but he that he might receive half of the inheritance as a means to render services to the king. Moreover, he maintained that this patrimony was given to Fructuoso's family precisely with that objective in mind. The hagiographer frames this conflict as a religious one, but what is truly in question is who gets to be the successor of a major aristocratic local power. Here we see some of the overlap between lay and ecclesiastical aristocratic powers, as the control of land and dependents are the fundamental basis of both.

The *VSF* is our latest hagiography, both in its period of composition (the last decades of the seventh century) and the period represented in its narrative. From our previous analysis, what arises from the *VSF* is the image of a society structured not only by a rigid hierarchy, but also by the generalization of the relationships of personal dependence. We can see the general character of these processes both in the inheritance dispute between Fructuoso and his brother-in-law (in the northwest of the Peninsula) and in the conflicts between Fructuoso and a group of aristocrats regarding the composition of the army and his monastic foundations (in the extreme south of the Peninsula). In both instances what was in question was not whether to reduce freemen or freedmen to the dependence of a great lord, but the affirmation of aristocratic power through the control of people

¹¹⁴ *Idem*.

¹¹⁵ It is worth noting here that even freedmen couldn't afford such freedom of movement. For a classical analysis, D. Claude, 'Freedmen in the Visigothic Kingdom', E. James, ed, *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 159–88.

that already had a dependent status. In a context of the generalization of relationships of personal dependence – where people already existed within these relationships – the growing power of one aristocrat could only occur through the conflict with other aristocrats over the dependent peasantry. This is precisely the process that we saw in the cases of the *VSF*. The conflict between Fructuosus and his brother-in-law over the inheritance (dependents and land) of Fructuosus' father is the process of affirmation of two 'new' aristocratic powers over the spoils of a fading one; the conflict between the 'dukes of the army' and Fructuosus in Cádiz is the opposition between local aristocrats and an intruder one.

CONCLUSION

The three hagiographies analysed above were chosen to reveal two elements in Visigothic society: structure and dynamics. In this way, each work of hagiography represents a 'frame' or 'image' of Visigothic society. When we put them together we have an overall image that is diverse both geographically and chronologically: encompassing almost all of the seventh century – the *vitae* analysed were redacted between 633 and 690 – and staged in several regions of the peninsula – from the north (Berceo, in the *VSE*) to the southwest (Mérida/*VSPE*); from the northwest (Bierzo/*VSF*) to the south (Cádiz/*VSF*).

Individually each of the hagiographies provides evidence of Visigothic social structure. The *VSE* and the *VSPE* are evidence for that structure in the first half of the seventh century: one grounded in a process that relates (ecclesiastical) aristocrats and a heterogeneous group whose main condition is its non-aristocratic status (*pauperes* and peasants) through a specific type of gift-exchange (incomplete or unequal). The products of these exchanges are dependence and domination. The *VSF* is also evidence of this same social structure, but in the second half of seventh century. What it depicts then is a social landscape in which the process above is almost complete: the relations of personal dependence between aristocrats (not only ecclesiastical ones, but also lay) and that heterogeneous group are the presupposition of the two cases in the *VSF* that we analysed above. When we consider these three hagiographies together as the process that connects the two historical moments they represent (one by the *VSE/VSPE* and the other by *VSF*), we have the social *dynamics*. It shows us the transformation of the relationships of personal dependence from an historical process in development (*VSA/VSPE*) to the established social logic of Visigothic society (*VSF*). What these dynamics reveal is the changing structures of Visigothic society, not as a progressive decadence, but as the transformation of the society as a coherent totality.

The *VSE* and *VSPE* are both evidence of the process of aristocratic domination over the peasantry, but a specific type of domination, one that is rooted in gift-exchange and where it is possible to analyse the role of the ecclesiastical aristocracy. *VSF*, in turn, is the testimony to an intra-aristocratic

(lay and ecclesiastic) conflict for the control of this dependent peasantry, but one that seems to be fundamental, that is capable of both opposing and uniting local powers and relating them to the expression of central authority – the king. This general process of aristocratic domination over the peasantry and its central mechanism – gift-exchange – should be distinguished from the concept of patronage. This is not only a question of which concept is more adequate to describe these relationships, but of the kind of analysis that one is conducting. Patronage is a classical concept in the analysis of ancient society and the work of Richard Saller is probably one of the most systematic interpretations of this element in the Early Roman Empire.¹¹⁶ His definition of patronage is mostly an elaboration of a sociological concept, and he distinguished it from other relations through three main elements:

First, it involves the reciprocal exchange of goods and services. Secondly, to distinguish it from a commercial transaction in the marketplace, the relationship must be a personal one of some duration. Thirdly, it must be asymmetrical, in the sense that the two parties are of unequal status and offer different kinds of goods and services in the exchange — a quality which sets patronage off from friendship between equals.¹¹⁷

Patronage then is a personal relationship of exchange that is both reciprocal (the exchange of goods and services) and asymmetrical (as the two parties have unequal status). This kind of definition not only puts patronage into the realm of gift-exchange, but also shows that the latter is the inner mechanism of the former. The saints mentioned above indeed act like patrons and it is possible to describe some of their actions as elements of a ‘system of patronage’.¹¹⁸ The building programme of Mérida mentioned by Roger Collins or the relation of care between the bishops and their congregations, that is, their ‘good work’ as pointed out by Ian Wood are all good examples of the kind of relation that can be defined as patronage, even if they are not always completely covered by Saller’s definition.¹¹⁹

However, as pointed out by Barbero and Vigil, the type of historically specific relationships that we are analysing here cannot be reduced to the patronage that we find in Imperial Rome, as the unification of the figures of *dominus* and *patronus* in the same person is a process that occurs in the Late Empire. The disjunction between Saller’s concept of patronage and some of the relations we analysed above can be explained exactly by this historical transformation of the figure of the *patronus* (and, of course, of patronage).

¹¹⁶ Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ R. Collins, ‘Merida and Toledo: 550–585’, p. 195.

¹¹⁹ R. Collins, ‘Merida and Toledo: 550–585’, p. 195; Wood, ‘Social Relations in the Visigothic Kingdom...’ p. 204.

Our objective was not only to describe the relationships we analysed, but also to uncover their inner logic. To investigate these relations through the framework of gift-exchange is a fundamental step towards such an understanding because this is a mechanism that is capable of explaining the overall relationship (be it defined as patronage or not). In other words, it is necessary to explain why patrons and clients create and reproduce their relationships as patronage, and why patronage transforms itself from a political relation to one that is both political and economic (material).¹²⁰ To identify and name these relationships as patronage is not enough if one is not able to explain its inner logic, that is, gift-exchange and the relations of personal dependence.

In recent historiography the gift appears as 'contested constructions of social transactions' and the meanings of such transactions as if they 'are 'negotiated' between social actors'.¹²¹ But its social scope is most of the time extremely reduced. If the gift still aims to be a 'total social fact' it is not possible that it only pertains to aristocratic relationships. The analyses above tried to show that far from this equal, balanced and reciprocal relation, the gift in the Iberian Early Middle Ages is a mode of domination. As a core mode of domination, the gift is one link between aristocrats and peasants in their relationship as two opposed groups. This link functions then as double mechanism: on the one hand, the gift is able to balance intra-aristocratic relationships – as in the relationship between Aemilian and Honorius; on the other hand, the gift functions as a form of domination of the aristocracy over the peasantry – as in the relationships between the saints above analysed and the *multitude* or the *pauperes*. Gift-exchange as a form of domination is both the expression and the mechanism of reproduction of the personal relations of dependence.

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