

The funerary topography of the Via XVII necropolis in Late Antiquity (Braga)¹

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Keywords: Funerary topography; necropolis; Late Antiquity; Braga

Abstract:

The present paper aims to analyse the archaeological evidence associated with the Via XVII necropolis in Braga with a particular emphasis towards its late antiquity period and related with data emerging from the excavations conducted across two main different areas. We intend to reflect over the specific features of the fourth-seventh centuries funerary space of one of the most important Roman necropolis existing in the city dated back from *Bracara Augusta* foundational period. We will analyse the latest active stages of the necropolis in order to understand the main changes related with burial rituals, intimately associated with the adoption of Christianity and reflected in the adoption of new construction areas, burial practices and distinctive solutions of space appropriation, with a reflection over the internal organization of funerary areas and the suburban landscape.

1 Introduction

The present paper aims to analyse archaeological evidence associated with the Roman necropolis of Via XVII, in Braga, with a particular emphasis towards its late antiquity occupation and related with data emerging from the excavations conducted across two main different areas. We intend to reflect over the specific features of the fourth-seventh century's funerary space of one of the most important necropolis of *Bracara Augusta*.

The Roman city of *Bracara Augusta* was an *ex novo* foundation dating back to 16-15 BC, located at the heart of a region dominated by the *Bracari*, an indigenous community that occupied several hill forts, some of which with wide dimensions and included in the *oppida* category. Since its early occupation the city maintained a strong political and administrative role associated with its function as convent capital of the *Tarraconensis* province. In Diocletian times it was chosen as the province capital of the

¹ Projects PTDC/HIS-ARQ/121136/2010 and SFRH/BPD/79511/2011, funded by FCT and PAB2013-16 (Projeto Arqueológico de Braga. Topografia, Urbanismo e Arquitetura) ruled by UAUM (Unit of Archaeology of Minho University).

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Callaecia province and during the fifth and sixth centuries it was the capital of the Suebi Kingdom.⁴ Its importance is equally well attested by the city economic dynamism and in the public building works that monumentalized the urban space, including the construction of several thermal complexes,⁵ a theatre⁶ and an amphitheatre.⁷ The Roman city had an orthogonal layout with square quarters including built areas of 1 *actus* occupied by elegant *domus* surrounded by porticos that witnessed several remodelling works between the High and Low-Empire periods.⁸

Despite the political changes emerging from the Suebi occupation in the beginning of the fifth century the city kept its economical and constructive role, corroborated by the continuity and persistence of some aspects of classic tradition, such as the conservation of the its original orthogonal layout and the continuous use of the necropolis,⁹ in particular the one related with Via XVII. The present paper will approach the latest active stages of this necropolis in order to understand the transformations related with burial rituals, intimately associated with the adoption of Christianity and reflected in the use of new construction areas, burial practices and distinctive solutions in terms of space appropriation and organization with impact in the suburban landscape.

2 The archaeological context of the Via XVII necropolis

The two sepulchral areas under analysis in the present paper were integrated in the necropolis of Via XVII, which connected *Bracara Augusta* with *Asturica Augusta* and exited the city on its eastern side. On the southern part of the necropolis is settled a sanctuary/fountain of indigenous origin dedicated to the *Nabia* deity, which was

⁴ Luís Fontes 'A Igreja sueva de São Martinho de Dume - Arquitectura cristã antiga de Braga e na Antiguidade Tardia do Noroeste de Portugal, *Revista de História da Arte*, nº 6, Lisboa, (2008), 163-181, (p. 167).

⁵ Manuela Martins, *As termas romanas do Alto da Cividade, Bracara Augusta Escavações Arqueológicas*, 1 (Braga: UAUM, 2005); Manuela Martins, José Meireles, Maria Carmo Ribeiro, Fernanda Magalhães and Cristina Braga, 'A água e o património cultural da região de Braga' *Forum*, 46, (2011), 5-36.

⁶ Manuela Martins, Ricardo Mar, Jorge Ribeiro and Fernanda Magalhães, 'A construção do teatro romano de *Bracara Augusta*', in *História da Construção – Arquiteturas e Técnicas Construtivas*, coord. by M. C. Ribeiro and A. Melo (Braga: CITCEM/LAMOP, 2013), pp.41-73.

⁷ Rui Morais, 'Breve ensaio sobre o anfiteatro de *Bracara Augusta*', *Forum*, 30, Braga, (2001), 55-76.

⁸ Manuela Martins, Jorge Ribeiro, Fernanda Magalhães and Cristina Braga, 'Urbanismo e arquitetura de *Bracara Augusta*: Sociedade, economia e lazer', in *Evolução da paisagem urbana: sociedade e economia*, coord. by M. Ribeiro and A. Melo, (Braga: CITCEM, 2012), pp.34-67.

⁹ Luís Fontes, Manuela Martins, Maria do Carmo Ribeiro and Helena Carvalho, 'A cidade de Braga e o seu território nos séculos V-VII', in *Toletum Visigodo, Actas del Congreso Espacios Urbanos en el Occidente Mediterráneo (s. VI-VIII)* (Toledo: Toletum Visigodo, 2010), pp.255 – 262.

monumentalized during the early Roman occupation. Presently it is known as 'Fonte do Ídolo' (Ídolo Fountain).¹⁰

The oldest information related with this necropolis dates back to 1940/1950s, when a group of funerary remains, largely out-of-context, was exhumed. It included funerary stelae, several Roman lamps alongside graves referred as 'rectangular graves made of brick'.¹¹ Subsequently, the Unit of Archaeology of the University of Minho conducted extensive excavations across different areas of the necropolis in 1988 and between 2007 and 2009.¹² In 1988, an intervention was made in an area of 6700m² known as 'Cangosta da Palha' (Figure 1). This area is located around 200 meters east of the site where a second area of the same necropolis was identified in 2007 and 2009. In this period a wide surface area (5300m²) was excavated including the quarter of the old post office in Braga, alongside the area with an underground tunnel (CTT/TAVL). It was possible to verify the existence of a wide burial area active between the late first century BC and the sixth/seventh centuries (Figure 1), which integrated 129 incineration graves, 94 *ustrinae*, 65 burials, 4 *mausoleums*, 6 funerary enclosures and remains from the Via XVII.¹³

Figure 1. Location of the two areas of Via XVII necropolis in the Roman urban layout.

3 The internal organization of the necropolis in Late Antiquity

The Via XVII necropolis has a wide chronology of use during which there were periods of wider and lesser use due to reasons certainly related with the different ways burial sites were organized and administered throughout the centuries.

Although the necropolis area witnessed sepulchral practices in the Middle Bronze period it was only in Augustan times that the site resumed its burial functions. Throughout

¹⁰ Elena Garrido, Ricardo Mar and Manuela Martins, *A Fonte do Ídolo – Análise, interpretação e reconstituição do santuário*, Bracara Augusta Escavações Arqueológicas, 4 (Braga: UAUM, 2008).

¹¹ A. Cunha, 'Novíssimas inscrições romanas de Braga', *Bracara Augusta*, IV, Braga, (1953), pp.249-252; J.J. Rigaud Sousa, 'Subsídios para a carta arqueológica de Braga', *Studia Archeologica*, vol. XX, 43-44 (55-56), Seminário de Arqueologia da Facultad de Filosofia y Letras da Universidad de Santiago de Compostela e Departamento de Prehistoria y Arqueologia da Facultad de Filosofia y Letras da Universidad de Valladolid, 1973, 7-28 (p.13).

¹² Manuela Martins and Manuela Delgado, 'As necrópoles de Bracara Augusta - A. Dados arqueológicos', *Cadernos de Arqueologia*, série II, 6/7, (1989/90), 41-187; Luís Fontes, Manuela Martins, Cristina Vilas Boas, José Braga, José Sendas and Fernanda Magalhães, 'Escavações Arqueológicas no Quarteirão dos Antigos CTT (Braga), Resultados Preliminares', *Al-madan*, 16 (Adenda On-line, IV, IIª série), (2008), 1-9.

¹³ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII* (unpublished master thesis, Braga: University of Minho, 2010).

the first century and up to the second century the necropolis endured an increase in burials and funerary constructions followed by a prominent decrease in its use in the third century with a new increase in burials being verified in the mid fourth century (Phase IX), (Figure 2).

As available data enabling the characterization of the necropolis in Late Antiquity were identified within two discontinuous areas (CTT/TALV and ‘Cangosta da Palha’) we will approach them separately in order to establish some common organizational patterns within the funerary spaces.

3.1 The CTT/TALV area

On the far west side of this necropolis area at an altitude of around 182,30 meters, 12 inhumations with N/S and NE/SW orientation have been uncovered. These graves diverge around 35 meters from the Via XVII that maintains the altitude of 181,36 meters. This topographic difference seems to suggest a somehow levelled funerary space with good visibility. Remains related with preparation practices of the ground in order to facilitate the disposition of graves have also been identified.¹⁴

If the graves with older chronologies were located in areas immediately adjacent to the Roman road, so that the deceased would be remembered by the living, graves with later chronologies occupied new and different spaces, normally located further back and distant from the Roman axis road.

The vast majority of burial structures were constructed with brick materials, namely the walls and the bases, which coexisted with simple pits that lacked any type of cover or inner coating, where the deceased were placed over a wooden board, or directly on the ground. Only one simple pit burial grave was identified in the eastern part of the site and had a NW/SE orientation.¹⁵

From the Low-Empire period onwards a clear trend was adopted in terms of disposing graves in the northernmost areas of the necropolis, a circumstance likely related with the construction of an artisanal area probably active between the fourth and the fifth centuries. This area was built in the intermediate section of the southern platform of the Via XVII. It partially overlapped a former funerary building dated from the first century

¹⁴ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.74; Manuela Martins, Luís Fontes, Cristina Vilas Boas Braga, José Braga, Fernanda Magalhães, José Sendas, *Relatório final dos trabalhos arqueológicos realizados no Quarteirão dos CTT – Avenida da Liberdade*, p.175.

¹⁵ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.102.

and located on a space corresponding to a previous corridor providing access to the 'Ídolo' Fountain. The reasons behind the construction of this artisanal area associated with the production of glass in a necropolis space are probably related with concerns regarding the safety of urban space by moving away potential dangerous activities to the periphery.

In an outlying area of the Via XVII, it also emerged a funerary building of squared plant and with a function still difficult to precise, around which graves with later chronologies have emerged.

Although inhumation practices became a predominant ritual from the fourth century onwards there are still remains of cremation activities at the necropolis, as well as incineration structures to support this ritual. Between the fifth and sixth centuries (Phase X) the practice of inhumation persists with the emergence of graves exclusively concentrated on the northern part of the Roman road and predominately displaying a NE/SW orientation. Equally, we have identified a rise of 1 meter in the height, within the area of about 25 meters separating the Via XVII from the group of graves further away from the road, although the topographic regularity already identified in the previous phase and registered for the High-Empire period was kept (Figure 3).

The best-preserved graves belong to this period and that was the reason why we were able to identify two skeletons, despite their poor preservation state preventing their study.

Figure 2. Distribution of fourth century graves at the CTT/TAVL area

Figure 3. Distribution of fifth-sixth century graves at the CTT/TAVL area

3.2 The 'Cangosta da Palha' area

43 burial graves from the fifth-seventh centuries (Phase Xa) have been identified at this area. Their distribution across different heights witness the adjustment of the funerary space to the natural slope existing in the ground that is rather significant in the 35 meters that separate the two groups of graves located in areas closer to the Via XVII. The altimetry variation is of around 3 meters, which may suggest that this area was probably organized in small terraces as opposed to what occurred at the CTT/TAVL.

Equally, there is a trend to distance late antiquity graves towards more peripheral areas with the most distant examples being located around 77 meters northward from that road.

As the vast majority of graves did not overlap we assume that there was a fair control and management of the necropolis space, even if signalling devices for each grave did exist. These devices, other than identifying the deceased, could exhibit symbols associated with the differentiation of Pagan and Christian graves,¹⁶ a circumstance known to have existed in other peninsular regions.

Figure 4. Schematic topographic representation of the ‘Cangosta da Palha’ area between the fifth and seventh centuries.

4 Graves typology

4.1 Inhumation graves

Seven different types of graves with their respective variants have been identified across the two excavated areas of the necropolis. They offer several construction solutions that draw parallels with other coeval necropolis existing in the peninsula. All identified graves correspond to individual inhumations, without evidence of collective inhumation structures.

Type 1 refers to a simple pit, open on the ground, where the deceased would be directly placed on the base of the pit and subsequently covered by ground material.¹⁷

Type 2 corresponds to structures existing on simple pits of rectangular plant and section, with 2x0,60 meters and lacking any type of coating on the walls or on the base. The cover consisted of 4 *tegulae* placed horizontally with overlapping ends and placed on a base made of small stones. This type of grave has a fourth century chronology¹⁸ (Figure 5).

Type 3 performs one of the most recurrent types of graves existing in Late Antiquity contexts across several Roman necropolis. It included gabled roofs and dates back to the fourth and sixth centuries. This type presents several variants.¹⁹

¹⁶ Isabel Sánchez Ramos, ‘La cristianización de la topografía funeraria en las ciudades occidentales: Corduba en la Antigüedad Tardía’, p.88.

¹⁷ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.59.

¹⁸ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.60.

¹⁹ Ana Bejarano Osorio, Tipología de las sepulturas en las necrópolis tardorromanas cristianas de Mérida: Evolución de los espacios funerarios, *Mérida Excavaciones Arqueológicas*, (1996), 341-357 (p.346); J. M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London: The John’s Hopkins University); Manuela Martins and Manuela Delgado, ‘As necrópoles de Bracara Augusta - A. Dados arqueológicos’, *Cadernos de Arqueologia*, 6/7, (1989/90), 41-187 (p.144); Valerie M. Hope, *Roman death*, (London: Continuum, 2009).

Type 3a is represented by 16% of all identified inhumation structures and is associated with graves exhibiting gobbled roofs with their basis made of bricks or inverted *tegulae*. The walls forming the cover were made of juxtaposed *tegulae*. The cover presented a triangular section with the upper joints topped by *imbrices* (Figure 5). The identified examples revealed variable sizes, between 0,90m/1,25m length by 0,24m/0,34m height, an understandable fact given that the grave sizes were fully dependant on the deceased stature. These graves were located in simple soil depressions and had the aim of framing and slightly lowering the structures in relation to the circulation level. The fact that these were not placed inside deep pits suggests that they may have had some sort of ground protection that would entail the existence of a monticule made of ground or stone located over the graves as a way to simultaneously hide and signal the structure.²⁰

The 3b type, contrarily to the previously described typology, corresponds to a gabled grave located on a pit with the top of the structure having the same height level as the circulation platform, hence suggesting that the structure was fully covered. The only grave of this type identified displayed a rough alignment of medium and large size stones placed around *tegulae* formalizing the cover and functioning as the structure containment perimeter.²¹ (Figure 5)

In both type 3 grave variants remains of skeletons in supine positions were exhumed. Everything seems to suggest that they were directly placed over the base of the grave also due to the lack of ironware.

Type 4 graves register two variants. Type 4a correspond to boxed structures with inverted *tegulae* on the base. Due to the structures poor preservation state, plundered by modern trenches, we can only add that they were located inside simple pits of rectangular sections with widths of around 0,70 meters and still with undetermined lengths. This is a common type of grave existing in peninsular necropolis with similar examples identified in Cordoba and dating back to the third and sixth centuries.²² Given the fact that the structures were plundered it was impossible to analyse their coverage techniques being only possible to verify their location on shallow pits. (Figure 5) Type 4b is only represented by one grave that matches a variant of type 4a. It has the particularity of exhibiting the negative of a wooden coffin with around 1,10 meters length by 0,30 meters

²⁰ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.60.

²¹ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.61.

²² Desiderio Vaquerizo Gil, 'Espacios y usos funerarios en Corduba', p.157-165.

width. The grave base was coated by 6 bricks with 0,40x0,40x0,04 meters and the area destined to house the coffin was delimited by vertical *tegulae*. It presented a stone structure placed on the exterior side of the box and partially located over the ballast serving as a buttress of the walls. This is a fourth century grave.²³ (Figure 5)

Type 5 graves comprise two variants. Type 5a corresponds to a box inside a simple pit and revealing a rectangular section with around 0,90 meters deep by 2 meters length. *Lydion* type of bricks (0,31x0,43x0,04 meters) were used in the construction of the wall. The base was organized by two sections of bricks (0,43x0,31x0,04 meters) laid horizontally and lacking any type of mortar. They were placed over another section of bricks supported by the grit and forming a type of box or false base that was completely empty. The cover was made of *bipedales* bricks (0,60x0,60x0,06 meters) supported by the inner walls and overlapped by granite stones randomly placed, that seemed to have functioned as a counterweight. Successively over the same bricks, other elements with the same typology were placed forming a sort of ‘fake cupola’²⁴ (Figure 5). Type 5b is represented by one boxed grave (2,08x0,64 meters) of rectangular section. Its walls were made of *lydion* type of bricks placed over granite slabs with interstices sealed by *opus signinum*. The cover was not preserved, however the filling emerging from the plunders enabled the recovery of *tegulae* and *imbrices* adorned fragments suggesting the existence of a gabled roof. A simple granite wall demarking the structure was identified as a cover support and counterweight. As this alignment is visible at the necropolis ground level we assume that it was also a signalling marker of the overall funerary structure.²⁵

Type 6 is represented by the 6a variant that corresponds to a boxed grave with the walls made of granite stones slightly rough and alternating with sections of re-used laid horizontally bricks. The walls didn’t connect with the base made of bricks. Assessing from the identified granite slab still preserved on the profile the cover performed a type of solution that also included stone monoliths.²⁶ (Figure 5)

Type 7 graves present two variants. To type 7a are associated all the structures with walls made of wide granite stones and with the basis made of rectangular or trapezoid shaped bricks. Through the grave section it was identified what remained from a poorly

²³ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p. 61-62.

²⁴ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.62.

²⁵ Cristina Braga ‘*Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*’, p.62.

²⁶ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.63.

conserved skeleton placed directly over the grave base.²⁷ (Figure 5) The 7b variant is associated with a grave of rectangular shape with regular masonry walls made of granite stones laid in horizontal rows. Granite slabs sealed it and the joints presented an *opus signinum* coating. Inside, a lead coffin with a sub-rectangular shape was uncovered with sizes estimated to be 2,20x0,40x0,40 meters, as it has not been excavated. The structure is located on a deep pit fully covered by a filling made of gravel and construction remains fully contributing towards its perfect hiding and consequent integrity.²⁸ (Figure 5)

Given these circumstances the use of brick materials in the construction of graves is clear and not surprising as these materials were widely available across several Roman buildings existing in the city that had lost their functionality in Late Antiquity. Although granite is an abundant raw material in the region the use of stone blocks carefully worked in the edification of funerary structures is relatively small when compared to the use of bricks, a circumstance probably related with the high cost of the stone material transformation.

Figure 5. The typology of identified inhumation graves

4.2 Cremation graves

Despite burial practices performing the dominant funerary ritual from the end of the Low-Empire period onwards archaeological evidence also suggests the existence of structures associated with the ritual of cremation, a funerary practice still used between the fourth and sixth centuries, however only registered at the CTT/TAVL area.

The dominant structures refer to *ustrinae* (Type 1) corresponding to the sites where the deceased were cremated easily recognisable due to the presence of a reddish layer formed by the heat action. These refer to shallow pits that tend to be round and sub-rectangular, where the funerary pyres, or *rogii*, were placed maintaining a filling comprised by ashes, charcoals, scorched bones and several fragments of metallic items and memorial remains.²⁹

In terms of secondary sepulchral contexts and referring to the sites where the filling emerging from cremation was deposited there are no structures revealing large

²⁷ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.63.

²⁸ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.58.

²⁹ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.58.

formal variability. Only one type (Type 2) has been identified and it refers to a deep pit with a U section characterized by the absence of memory assets.

With a Late Antiquity chronology (fourth and sixth centuries) are two structures from where one ceramic piece has been recovered, probably used as a funerary urn. It refers to a small pot in 'red engobe' from the fifth/seventh centuries that had ashes and carbonized bones inside.

5 Memory boxes

Another type of structure identified in the excavations conducted at the CTT/TAVL area is represented by boxes or pits. Due to the lack of evidence to support the contrary we believe these were structures associated with ritual practices paying homage and commemorating the dead. In fact, these structures are characterized by the lack of ashes, scorched or buried bones. However, these structures could have played several functionalities serving as elements supporting funerary practices and equally performing shallow reference items of the graves. These are structures highlighted by their morphological variability and long chronological use, being the oldest one from the second half of the first century and the most recent from the sixth century.

Type 1 corresponds to simple pits of rectangular section opened on the ground, where boxes made of *tegulae* or bricks adorned the walls and the base. The existence of three variants is admitted, depending on the sizes and sections of the boxes and due to the existence of several squared and rectangular sections with sizes ranging between 0,40x0,40x0,52 meters and 0,57x0,45x0,44 meters. The three identified structures can be dated between the fourth and sixth centuries.³⁰ No closing elements were detected, which enables the assumption that they were plain and only simply covered by brick elements over the boxes.

Type 2 is represented by one single structure characterized by the presence of large ceramic containers tumbled on the base of a pit in U section. Inside, a group of atypical small size open canal Roman lamps was found dated from the end of the third / beginning of the fourth centuries.³¹

6 Funerary enclosures

³⁰ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p.69.

³¹ Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, p. 69.

Funerary enclosures were intimately related with the bounding of spaces reserved for the graves and could be kept by family groups or destined for the burial of individuals with particular professions (*collegia*).

The only identified funerary enclosure integrated within the chronological scope under study has a squared plant and an area of around 16m² (3,98x4,01 meters). Although no funerary contemporary structures in terms of construction or use have been identified the building seems to have been established on an area with two pre-existing graves (type 5). This means that it probably overlapped a previously existing burial site. In its vicinity two impressive graves from the fifth century were identified performing an important construction investment and clearly related with the wealthy city elites.

7 The artefacts

The exhumed artefacts from later sepulchral contexts, other than providing precise chronological elements, enable the analysis of the evolution of rituals. According to funerary beliefs associated with the High-Empire period once votive artefacts were used in the world of the dead they could not be reintroduced in the everyday of the living.³² In certain situations the practice of introducing items in graves was kept throughout the Low-Empire and Late Antiquity periods, although it was a fairly uncommon practice.

Given that death were believed to be surrounded by night and darkness Roman lamps emerged as the symbols of light needed to illuminate the dead in a different world,³³ being common items both in High-Imperial and later funerary contexts. In the necropolis under study several Roman lamps have been uncovered from graves alongside memory boxes.

In this context we should highlight the funerary furniture emerging from an individual inhumation in the CTT/TAVL area, where 6 pots with an S profile of coarse common ceramic with different sizes have been recollected together with 4 bowls in thin common ceramic and a group of 4 intact Roman lamps of local production, with an open canal and fairly atypical dated from the end of the third beginning of the fifth centuries. These items were found inside a grave, although associated with the filling of the structure

³² Laurence Tranoy, 'Organisation interne des espaces funéraires – Les sites de La Favorite et La Favorite II, in Christian Goudineau, dir., *Rites funéraires à Lugdunum* (Paris: Éditions Erance, 2009), pp.107- 112 (p. 112); Valerie Hope, *Roman death*, p. 83.

³³ Sébastien Letepz and W. Van Andringa 'La nécropole romaine de Porta Nocera à Pompei', in *Rome et ses Morts – L'archéologie Funéraire dans l'Occident Romain, Les Dossiers d'Archeologie*, 330, (2008), 58-65.

plundering. They were piled at the farther northern side of the box and may have integrated a wider group of richer assets, however removed, where the items of lower economic value were broken down and still dropped at the necropolis. This group of memory assets seems to highlight the inexistence of a clear rupture with previously existing ritual practices. There was other memory items associated with the transport of solid foods and with the containment of liquids probably related with funerary banquet practices (*silicernium*) or with funerary meals occurring at some point during the commemoration or the evocation of the deceased. Proving this theory is the existence of small bowls, pots and a complete profile of a plate in 'red engobe' imitating the Hayes 59B type, dating from 320 – 420 (second half of the fourth – fifth centuries).³⁴

From the group of objects associated with funerary contexts coins should also be highlighted as they are connected with the funerary practices of Greek-Roman origin.³⁵ However, the inhumation graves only provided one poorly preserved coin from the fourth century. The absence of coins was equally common in the High-Empire period of the necropolis suggesting a reduced acceptance of the ritual practice associated with depositing coins near the deceased on behalf of the *Bracara Augusta* community that was predominately of indigenous origin.

The lack of artefacts associated with inhumation structures seems to perform a recurrent phenomenon across several Roman necropolis registering later chronologies with a clear decrease in the existence of memory remains and personal adornment objects.³⁶

Wooden coffins and a lead coffin have been identified, although the construction, origin, shape, size and potential decorative composition features of the latter are not yet clear, as it has not been excavated. Nevertheless, we are aware that we are dealing with a container from a period after the fifth century as suggested by the stratigraphic correlation of the levelling landfills.

The identification of several metallic remains associated with the transport and the disposition of the deceased should also be highlighted as they enabled the

³⁴ Maria Manuela Martins, Luís Fontes, Cristina Vilas Boas Braga, José Braga, Fernanda Magalhães and José Sendas, *Relatório final dos trabalhos arqueológicos realizados no Quarteirão dos CTT – Avenida da Liberdade*, Apêndice III – Apêndice 24 – DSC2801.

³⁵ Jorge López Quiroga, *Arqueología del mundo funerario en la Península Ibérica (siglos V – X)*, (Madrid: Ediciones de La Ergástula, 2010), p. 19.

³⁶ Isabel Sánchez Ramos, 'Las necrópolis de Corduba durante la Antigüedad Tardía', *AnMurcia*, 21, (2005), 165-177 (p.175); Mélanie Cunha, *As necrópoles de Silveirona (Santo Estêvão, Estremoz) – Do mundo romano à Antiguidade Tardia*, O Arqueólogo Português, Suplemento 4, (Lisboa: Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, 2008), p.79.

reconstruction of some wooden coffins.³⁷ However, the absence of metallic items in the vast majority of graves suggests that the placement of the deceased directly on the base of the grave was a recurrent practice. Nevertheless, the transport of the deceased to the necropolis was probably made with a clapboard, being the deceased later transferred to the sepulchral container.³⁸

8 The abandonment

The abandonment of the two analysed areas at the Via XVII necropolis seems to have occurred in late sixth and the seventh centuries since no graves with later chronologies have been identified. The necropolis gradually transformed into an agricultural space that accompanied the Via XVII layout, which kept its important role as a road to the twentieth century and maintained the communication with the city of Chaves.

In parallel, during Late Antiquity the city of *Bracara* witnessed important topographic changes emerging from the construction of the early Christian basilica at the beginning of the fifth century³⁹, settled on the site where the city Cathedral is currently located and where the episcopal complex was also erected. This area started to aggregate the group of civic, administrative and political activities existing in the city assuming the role that previously belonged to the Roman buildings and spaces as the forum and the theatre.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, new necropolis emerged located near the basilicas that were constructed in the city outskirts and alongside the main roads of Roman origin. Graves existing on these new necropolis likely included symbols expressing an association with the new religion, such as the cross monogram (P), interpreted as a schematization of Christ. (Figure 6a)

Early Christian temples emerging in the city outskirts are linked with the existence of new settlement centres as is the case of S. Vicente site connected with Via XVIII and where a funerary gravestone from the seventh century and dedicated to Remismuera was found.⁴¹ (Figure 6b) Equally S. Vitor, on the Via XVII axis, revealed the existence of

³⁷ Martins and Manuela Delgado, 'As necrópoles de Bracara Augusta - A. Dados arqueológicos', p.135.

³⁸ Mélanie Cunha, 'As necrópoles de Silveirona (Santo Estêvão, Estremoz) – Do mundo romano à Antiguidade Tardia', p. 54.

³⁹ Luís Fontes, Francisco Sande Lemos and Mário da Cruz, 'Mais velho' que a Sé de Braga: intervenção arqueológica na catedral bracarense: notícia preliminar', *Cadernos de Arqueologia*, 14-15, (1997/98), 37-164.

⁴⁰ Manuela Martins, Luís Fontes, Cristina Vilas Boas Braga, José Braga, Fernanda Magalhães, José Sendas, *Relatório final dos trabalhos arqueológicos realizados no Quarteirão dos CTT – Avenida da Liberdade*, p.198.

⁴¹ Francisco Sande Lemos, 'Arredores de *Bracara Augusta* Escavações arqueológicas na necrópole de S. Vitor, no contexto da via romana para *Aquae Flaviae*', *Forum*, 29, 9-38; Luís Fontes, Manuela Martins,

inhumation graves exhumed in the year 2000. Other religious buildings seem to sacralise older areas of the Roman necropolis or monuments. This was the case of the S. Pedro de Maximinos church that was located in the Roman amphitheatre site and built nearby the Via XVI/XX necropolis.⁴² Further away from the city were two important monasteries. One was built in the sixth century in the Dume region under the initiative of S. Martinho, together with a basilica, while the S. Salvador de Montélios monastery was built in the seventh century. Another Late Antiquity settlement existed in the Falperra hill, where a palatial building was constructed with an adjacent basilica dating back to the fifth century and referring to the site where the Suebi kingdom court functioned.⁴³

Figure 6. Funerary remains dating back the fifth/sixth – seventh centuries.

9. Final considerations

Late Antiquity is a period generally characterized by the abandonment of old Roman necropolis areas that were considered pagan sites. The sepulchral spaces of Bracara Augusta were not an exception. This is a well-studied phenomenon across several peninsular necropolis, where the new burial areas started to be organized nearby sites revealing strong relationships with Christianity and with the new places of worship that were built on the periphery of cities.⁴⁴

In Braga, the new sepulchral spaces were now associated with the cult of relics of the saints being located in peripheral areas of the city and not inside the walled space. On the other hand the management of these funerary spaces was now at the hands of a new elite closely related to the religious power. These new places of liturgical and funerary cult, proliferating over the fifth-seventh centuries, change the topography of the surrounding rural areas of the city being associated with a new logic of territorial organization. They were at the base of the formation of the episcopal headquarters contributing to the formalization of a new rural landscape structure.⁴⁵

Maria do Carmo Ribeiro and Helena Carvalho, 'A cidade de Braga e o seu território nos séculos V-VII', p. 258-259.

⁴²Luís Fontes, 'O período suévico e visigótico e o papel da igreja na organização do território, *Minho. Traços de Identidade*, (Braga: UMinho, 2009), pp.272-295 (p. 275).

⁴³Luís Fontes, 'A Igreja sueva de São Martinho de Dume - Arquitectura cristã antiga de Braga e na Antiguidade Tardia do Noroeste de Portugal, p.170.

⁴⁴ Melánie Cunha, 'As necrópoles de Silveirona (Santo Estêvão, Estremoz) – Do mundo romano à Antiguidade Tardia, p.88-90.

⁴⁵ Luís Fontes, 'A Igreja sueva de São Martinho de Dume - Arquitectura cristã antiga de Braga e na Antiguidade Tardia do Noroeste de Portugal, p.175; Josep M. Gurt Esparraguera and Isabel Sánchez Ramos

‘Topografía cristiana en Hispania durante los siglos V y VI’, in *Tiempo de los “Bárbaros”. Pervivencia y Transformación en Galia e Hispania* (ss. V-VI d. C.), ed. by Jorge Morín de Pablos, Jorge López Quiroga and Artemio Martínez Tejera, *Zona Arqueológica*, 11, (Alcalá de Henares, 2010), pp.321-345 (p.342).