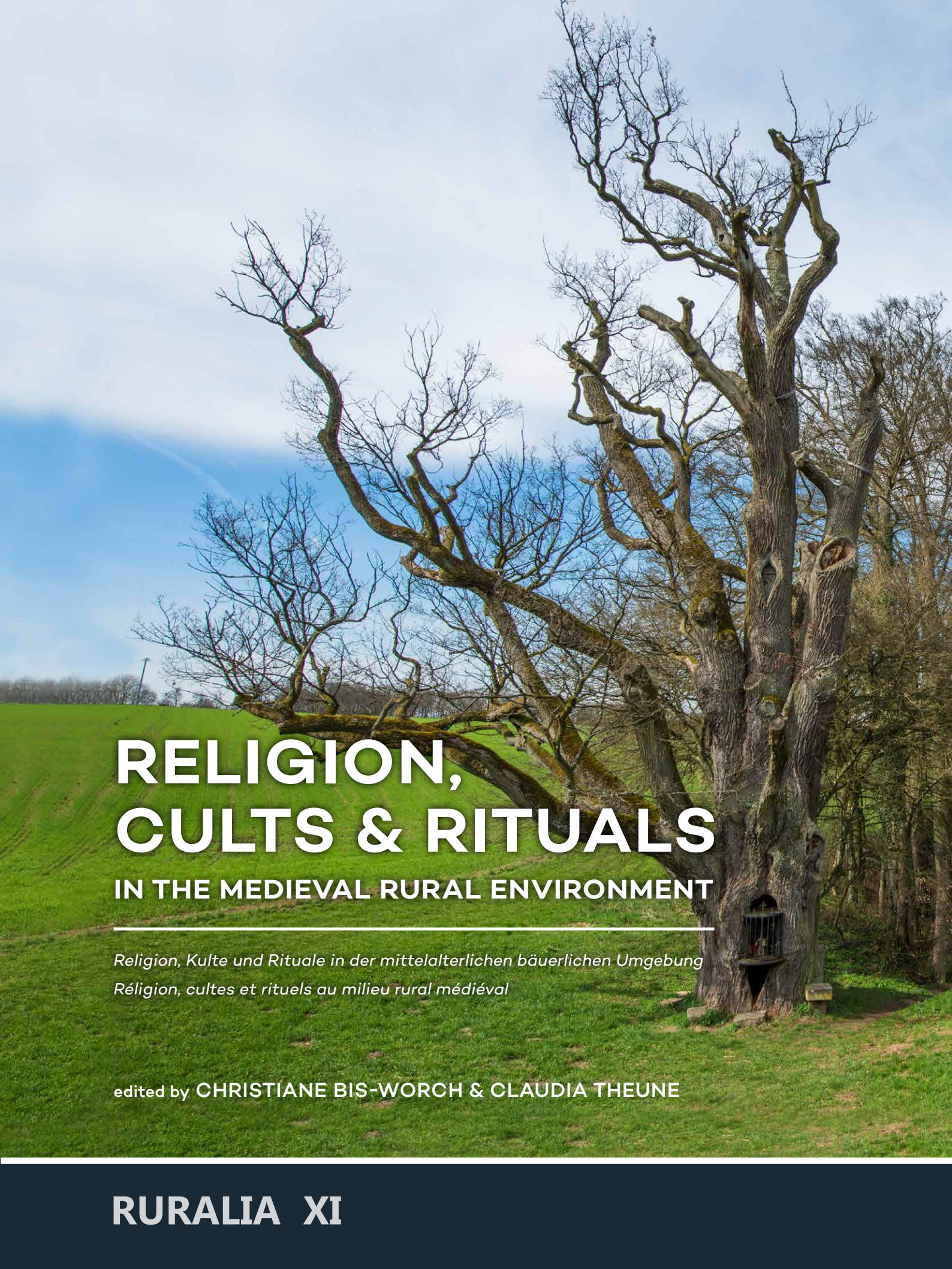




RELIGION, CULTS & RITUALS

IN THE MEDIEVAL RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Religion, Kulte und Rituale in der mittelalterlichen bäuerlichen Umgebung
Réligion, cultes et rituels au milieu rural médiéval

edited by CHRISTIANE BIS-WORCH & CLAUDIA THEUNE

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Rock-cut graves and cemeteries in the medieval rural landscape of the Viseu region (Central Portugal)

Catarina Tente *

ABSTRACT

Viseu and its territory are located in central-northern Portugal, between the Douro and the Mondego rivers. This was a frontier territory between Christians and Muslims from the 8th to the 11th centuries. A large number of rock-cut tombs are known in the area. These sites, which are devoid of grave goods, are generally organized in small scattered groups (one to ten tombs) and are seldom clustered in large cemeteries. As far as the available evidence shows, the majority lack any close relationship with religious buildings, whereas some are known to be located in proximity to habitation places. Available data on these religious and socio-economic phenomena indicate we are dealing with segmentary societies in which family and kinship relations played a structuring role in the funerary landscape of the region.

Keywords: *Early medieval territories, local communities, rural churches, Christian Conquest Period.*

RÉSUMÉ

Tombes taillées dans la roche et les cimetières dans le paysage rural médiéval de la région de Viseu (centre du Portugal)

Viseu et son territoire se situent au Portugal centre-nord, entre les rivières Douro et Mondego. Cette région fut une terre de frontière entre chrétiens et musulmans du VIII^e au XII^e siècle. Un grand nombre de tombes rupestres sont connues dans la région. Ces sites, dépourvus de mobilier funéraire, sont organisés en petits groupes dispersés (1 à 10 tombes). Plus rarement, les tombes sont regroupées dans de grands cimetières. L'information disponible montre que la majorité de celles-ci ne présente pas de relation étroite avec les édifices religieux, dont certains se sont implantés à proximité des lieux d'habitation. Les données actuelles sur ces phénomènes religieux

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et socio-économiques indiquent que nous sommes face à des sociétés segmentaires, dans lesquelles les relations familiales et les liens de parenté prirent un rôle structurant dans le paysage funéraire de la région.

Mots-clés : *territoires médiévaux, communautés locales, églises rurales, période de la conquête chrétienne.*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In Fels gehauene Gräber und Friedhöfe in der mittelalterlichen ländlichen Landschaft der Region Viseu (Zentral Portugal)

Viseu und sein Umland zwischen dem Douro und den Mondego Fluss liegen im zentral-nördlichen Portugal. Die hier behandelte Region stellte im 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert ein Grenzgebiet zwischen Christen

und Muslimen dar. In dem Gebiet sind zahlreiche Felsengräbern bekannt, die keine Grabbeigaben enthalten. Sie sind oft in kleinen verstreuten Gruppen von 1 bis 10 Gräbern organisiert, seltener in Form großer Friedhöfe. Bisher konnten keine engeren räumlichen Beziehungen zu religiösen Gebäuden belegt werden, jedoch liegen einige in der Nähe von Wohnplätzen. Die bisher verfügbaren Daten zu diesem religiösen und sozioökonomischen Phänomen weisen in Richtung segmentärer Gesellschaften, in denen die Familien- und Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen die strukturierende Rolle in der Grab-Landschaft der Region spielen.

Schlagwörter: *Frühmittelalterliche Territorien, Landgemeinden, Landkirchen, Periode der Christlichen Landnahme.*

Introduction

Rock-cut graves are known in several western European countries, but they are a particularly common phenomenon in the Iberian Peninsula, where this type of funerary structure and its associated practices were a long-lasting tradition, in use from the 6th to the 12th centuries AD. In many parts of Iberia rock-cut graves are the most abundant funerary remains left by early medieval communities. They are particularly common in central Portugal, where they are the most outstanding medieval testimony in the region's rural landscape. This is clearly related to the fact that they were carved in a durable material and therefore remain highly visible in the archaeological record. However, they are far from being evenly distributed in the territory (see below).

At the same time, rock-cut graves are enigmatic archaeological monuments that present a number of difficulties for interpretation. This is due to the lack of their original contents: grave goods, human remains or even their infill. Despite being extremely difficult to analyse and study, their distribution and spatial relationship with habitation sites allows us to approach the creation of the rural landscape in the region. These necropolises are also testimonies to a deliberate intention of marking the landscape in various ways, from long-lasting places for the dead to the economic, social and symbolic appropriation of a rural territory in Early Medieval times. The durability and location of graves was clearly intentional. Rock-cut graves were in many ways the most permanent human-made monuments in this landscape, and it seems likely that they were a focus for remembrance, expressing a connection to ancestors, and perhaps a way of legitimizing control over land by

specific kin groups (*Martín-Viso 2012a; 2014, see also Martín-Viso in this volume*).

The present study focusses on the Viseu territory in central Portugal between the 6th and the 12th centuries, the time when rock-cut tombs are thought to have been used. A total of 522 sites have been recorded in 26 modern municipalities, covering a total of 6150 km². This inventory is, however, only a first approach within a wider analysis. It is far from being exhaustive or finished. The database is founded mainly on three sources with variable degrees of reliability. First, data was obtained in field surveys carried out by the author and her team mainly in the western and south-eastern sectors of the region. Other data derives from the Portuguese archaeological database (available online at www.portaldoarqueologo.pt), where all archaeological work taking place in the country is recorded. And thirdly, some other data was retrieved from the available literature, either more general in scope or more specialized. Overall, it forms a dataset dependent on the more or less intensive nature of the research and its diffusion. There are municipalities whose archaeology is well known but others with a complete absence of information on their heritage sites. A clear example of the latter is the Penacova municipality, which contrasts with cases such as Celorico da Beira, Guarda, Viseu or Gouveia. Information is sometimes rather incomplete regarding the number of rock-cut tombs per cemetery, their typologies or sizes. There are also cases, albeit scarce (3.4% of total sites), for which we do not possess precise cartographic information; these cases are not represented in Figure 1. Despite this limitation, the retrieved data allows a regional-scale analysis. The results obtained will be briefly presented and discussed in this paper.

1. The Viseu region

Viseu and its territory are located in the highlands of central-northern Portugal, between the Douro and the Mondego river basins (Fig. 1). These highlands are bordered by a series of mountains, of which Estrela Mountain to the east is the highest summit, at 1,993 m asl. To the north, the territory is delimited by the left banks of the Douro River and its surrounding hills. It is also separated from the coastal plain to the west by a chain of mountains. Within these vast plateaux, the city of Viseu is remarkable for its centrality and two important river basins—the Mondego, the Vouga and their tributaries—that drain to the Atlantic, by the south-west and the west respectively.

In Roman times, Viseu was capital of a *civitas*, centralizing the road system that connected the northern, southern and inland sectors of Iberia with the nearest Atlantic coast. After the fall of Rome, Viseu became an episcopal centre, as documented at least from the 6th century. Its limits are not well known; however, we can tentatively propose this map as a reliable proposal, based on the available written records. By the middle of the 7th century, Viseu lost part of its territory in favour of a then newly-founded diocese, Calíabria, located between the

Côa and Douro rivers, in the region's north-east sector. From the 8th to the 11th centuries, these territories were a frontier land between Christians and Muslims.

In geological terms, the region is characterized mainly by granites and schist, covered by relatively thin and acidic soils that compromise the preservation of organic remains. Due to human-induced deforestation since Neolithic times and to subsequent erosion, the most fertile soils can be found today mostly in lower lands and river valleys.

2. Rock-cut graves and cemeteries

In the Viseu region, 522 sites are currently known with rock-cut tombs, which constitute the basis for this study. The minimum number of graves has been calculated as 1,726. These sites display variable patterns of geomorphologic location and grave typology. Moreover, the intra-site arrangement of the graves differs greatly from site to site. What these structures have in common is their apparently deliberate purpose of being a long-lasting funerary monument, marking this medieval rural space.

Most cemeteries consist of fewer than 10 graves, normally dispersed. Few sites have a larger number of

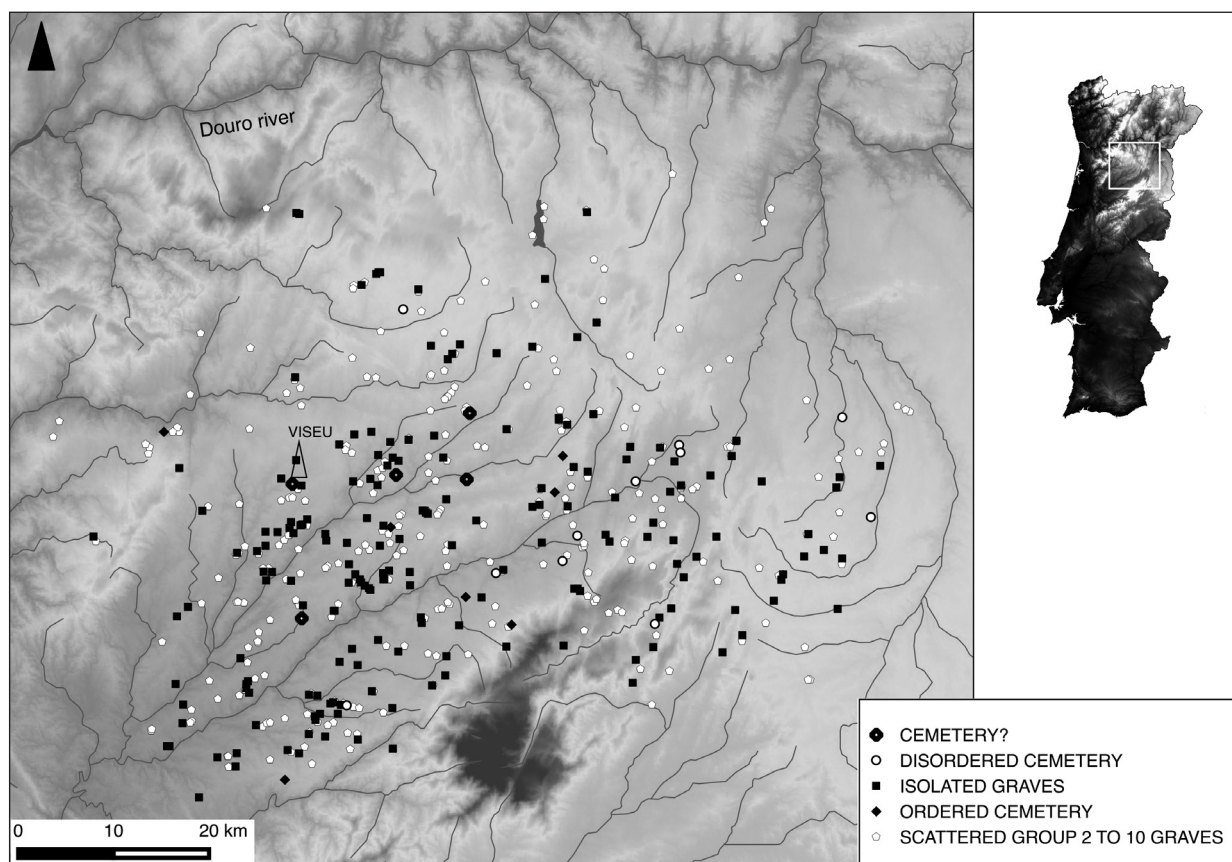


Fig. 1. Distribution map of sites with rock-cut graves. There is a classification in the different categories: isolated graves; scattered groups of 1 to 10 graves, ordered cemeteries and disordered cemeteries (© Catarina Tente and Tomas Cordero).

graves. Since A. del Castillo's seminal works (*Castillo 1970; 1972*), rock-cut graves have been analysed in terms of typology and sites classed according to their number of graves (isolated or in small groups). For this author, rock-cut graves were a funerary phenomenon spread by Christians who came from the south to the centre and north of Iberia to populate these areas. This model—and especially its chrono-typological features—was criticized by several authors who considered its proposed evolution from simple to complex types was unsupported, and that both coexisted at some point in time and space, namely when pairs were found placed side-by-side as indicating kinship relations (e.g. *Reys – Menéndez 1985; Barroca 1987; Tente – Lourenço 1998; Tente 2007*). They also contested the idea of a close relationship between this kind of funerary manifestation and the repopulation of the area (*Bolós – Pagés 1982; Barroca 1987; Vieira 2004; Lourenço 2007; Martín-Viso 2007; 2009; 2011; Tente 2009; 2010; Padilla – Álvaro 2010, 2012*). Recently Martín-Viso (2012a) has put forward a new classification of these sites in three main categories: isolated graves, ordered cemeteries, and disordered cemeteries. The advantage of this model is that it attempts a correlation between the arrangement of the graves and the social organization of their builders. It also predicts that the graves' location may reveal their role as landmarks (*Martín-Viso 2012b; 2014; Tente 2015*).

This paper applies an adapted version of Martín-Viso's classificatory model (Martín-Viso, 2012a; see also Martín-Viso in this volume, whose paper is framed under the same theoretical perspective), because it is considered important to separate isolated graves from the scattered groups, which are in the same category in his model. There are some sites with a single grave that are interpreted differently regarding the social organization and memory of the peasant communities, such as the example of Penedo dos Mouros (municipality of Gouveia), which will be discussed below. Consequently, for this paper the sites have been classified in four different types: isolated graves (a single grave); scattered groups of 2 to 10 graves (small necropolises consisting of scattered graves); disordered cemeteries (with more than 10 graves apparently disposed in a non-patterned way); ordered cemeteries (with more than 10 graves where there is apparently an intentional spatial arrangement).

In the Viseu territory, this kind of funerary manifestation is dominated by isolated graves and scattered groups of 2 to 10 graves. Around 93% of the known sites are organized this way. Larger cemeteries are more scarce. The few clustered graves are not confined to a well-delimited area and are randomly scattered, at least apparently, or follow a norm or logic we find today difficult to understand (Fig. 1). Each of the categories will be described in more detail.

Isolated graves represent 37.7 % of the total inventory of sites. This category includes 197 graves of various types (Tab. 1). Most are of adult size but in three cases these seem to have been intended for children. In terms of geographic location, isolated graves are found either in valley bottoms, mid-slopes, near water bodies, swamps or even on mountain plateaux, above 1,000m asl. Thus, it is not possible to recognize a dominant pattern (Fig. 1). Similarly, no recognizable pattern can be identified in their orientations. Many would have been in the vicinity of workplaces or near habitation sites of small family-groups.

There is, however, one case that suggests other interpretations. The site of Penedo dos Mouros was excavated archaeologically in 1998, 2008 and 2009. This work revealed a fortified settlement located on a platform overlooking the fertile Boco stream valley (Fig. 2). A few huge granite boulders on its eastern side supported a complex wooden superstructure. The valley must have been exploited by the human group established in the site, since hundreds of burnt broad beans, among other botanic remains, were recovered during the excavations. The site was abandoned after a fire that took place sometime in the second half of the 10th century, leading to its destruction and the collapse of the wooden structures (*Tente 2010; 2015; Tente – Carvalho 2011*). Penedo dos Mouros possess only one rock-cut grave, on top of the highest granite boulder. It is not possible to claim that the 10th-century habitation structures were coeval with the tomb, but its location and direct access by rock-cut steps is very suggestive of some kind of relationship between the two. The most likely explanation is that the grave was cut after the destruction and abandonment of the fortified site, which occurred in the second half of 10th century. If so, we are forced to consider that whoever built and used the tomb lived in a time when the memory of the site, and possibly of the event that caused its destruction, was still in the oral tradition. In this hypothesis, this tomb would have been, above all, a place of remembrance.

Scattered groups of two to ten graves are the most common type of cemetery, representing 55.2% of the inventory of sites (Tab. 1). Altogether, this category includes a minimum number of 987 tombs of diverse types. These cemeteries are dispersed across the whole territory (Fig. 1). Scattered groups are clusters of graves rather than necropolises, if these are understood as community cemeteries. These sites are not organized; quite the contrary, they are found scattered across the landscape in no apparent pattern. At their intra-scale of analysis, the graves also display what seems to be a chaotic dispersal.

It is common, in these scattered groups, to find direct spatial associations between graves. In these cases, graves show similar orientations but there are cases in which side-by-side graves were orientated towards opposite

Municipality	N. of sites	N. of graves	Isolated Graves		Scattered Group		Disordered Cemetery		Ordered Cemetery		Cemetery undetermined	
			Sites	%	Sites	%	Sites	%	Sites	%	Sites	%
Oliveira de Frades	3	7	1	33.3	2	66.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vouzela	8	11	1	12.5	6	75	0	0	1	12.5	0	0
São Pedro do Sul	3	10	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castro Daire	3	4	2	66.7	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vila Nova de Paiva	12	34	5	41.7	6	50	1	8.3	0	0	0	0
Sátão	25	71	8	32	16	64	0	0	0	0	1	4
Aguiar da Beira	18	57	8	44	9	50	1	6	0	0	0	0
Penalva do Castelo	11	31	3	27.3	6	54.5	0	0	2	18.2	0	0
Gouveia	28	88	11	39.3	14	50	1	3.6	2	7.1	0	0
Fornos Algodres	22	87	7	32	11	50	2	9	2	9	0	0
Celorico da Beira	40	199	13	32.5	22	55	5	12.5	0	0	0	0
Trancoso	13	174	0	0	9	69.2	1	7.7	3	23.1	0	0
Guarda	48	107	24	50	23	47.9	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Pinhel	23	138	3	13	17	73.9	3	13	0	0	0	0
Meda	7	28		0	7	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sernancelhe	22	73	7	31.8	12	54.5	1	4.55	0	0	2	9.09
Seia	16	28	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oliveira Hospital	32	111	15	46.9	15	47	1	3.13	1	3.1	0	0
Mangualde	43	134	21	49	21	49	0	0	1	2	0	0
Viseu	63	145	27	43	35	55	0	0	1	2	0	0
Nelas	25	45	12	48	12	48	0	0	0	0	1	4
Carregal do Sal	17	40	5	29.4	10	58.8	2	11.8	0	0	0	0
Tábua	16	33	7	43.8	9	56.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Santa Comba Dão	10	29	5	50	4	40	0	0	0	0	1	10
Tondela	14	33	3	21.4	11	78.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Penacova	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	522	1726	197	37.7	288	55.2	18	3.4	13	2.5	6	1.1

Tab. 1. General inventory and cemetery types (© Catarina Tente).

quadrants; here, the deceased were buried facing each other, as in the case of the Tapada da Serra graves, located on Estrela Mountain (Tente 2007, 73). It is also common to find two adult graves in association or one adult and one juvenile or infant. The available data indicate a minimum number of 35 child graves within this category. Everything seems to point to a kinship relation in these cases. Although normally one child grave is found per site, there are a large number of sites without any, and in one case the three graves recognized seem to have been for children (Três Rios, in Tondela municipality).

The disordered necropolises aggregate more than 10 graves. These represent only 3.4% of the analysed sites,

representing a total of 280 graves (Tab. 1). However, the majority of these necropolises revealed a small number of graves—indeed, nine of them have fewer than 20 graves and a further three cases do not exceed 31 graves. The outstanding exception is São Gens, in the municipality of Celorico da Beira, where there are more than 54 graves.

The highest density of cemeteries is found around the foothills of Estrela Mountain or, in other words, away from the urban and diocesan centre of Viseu and lordships.

These cemeteries are arranged in a dispersed pattern very similar to that of the scattered groups. Direct associations between graves are also very common. As



Fig. 2. Penedo dos Mouros (municipality of Gouveia). The 10th – century site has a single grave cut in the major boulder that supported a complex wooden superstructure. The rock-cut grave is signed by the arrow (© Catarina Tente).



Fig. 3. Casal das Pias (Estrela Mountain). An example of side-by-side rock-cut graves that reveals an eventual kinship relation (© Catarina Tente).

in scattered groups, it is possible that we are dealing in these cases with kinship relations.

One site stands out from the others. São Gens (Fig. 3) covers all these characteristics, but also displays a further notable aspect: this is the largest of all rural necropolises known in the region. São Gens is an archaeological complex with a disordered cemetery. Overall, these graves are scattered across a large area and no internal organization is evident. This necropolis, with 56 graves, was built around a Roman farm that was abandoned by the end of the 4th century. The number of graves may originally have been slightly higher, since we know from oral traditions that some graves were destroyed. São Gens is almost imperceptible in the landscape, revealing a very limited visual control over the horizon.

The medieval settlement had a walled perimeter, oval in shape, enclosing an area of around 0.5 ha. This site was under excavation between 2008 and 2012. From the datable material culture and radiocarbon dates, it is clear that occupation of the settlement was restricted largely to the 10th century. The enclosure contains within it a large number of granite boulders and evidence of hut structures. It is likely that the structures were constructed entirely in perishable organic materials, the remains of which only survive in cases of fire-induced preservation. Two radiocarbon determinations were obtained (short-lived samples such as cork and bushes) to date a great fire that occurred around the second half of the 10th century. This was responsible for the complete destruction and abandonment of the site (Tente – Carvalho 2011). The

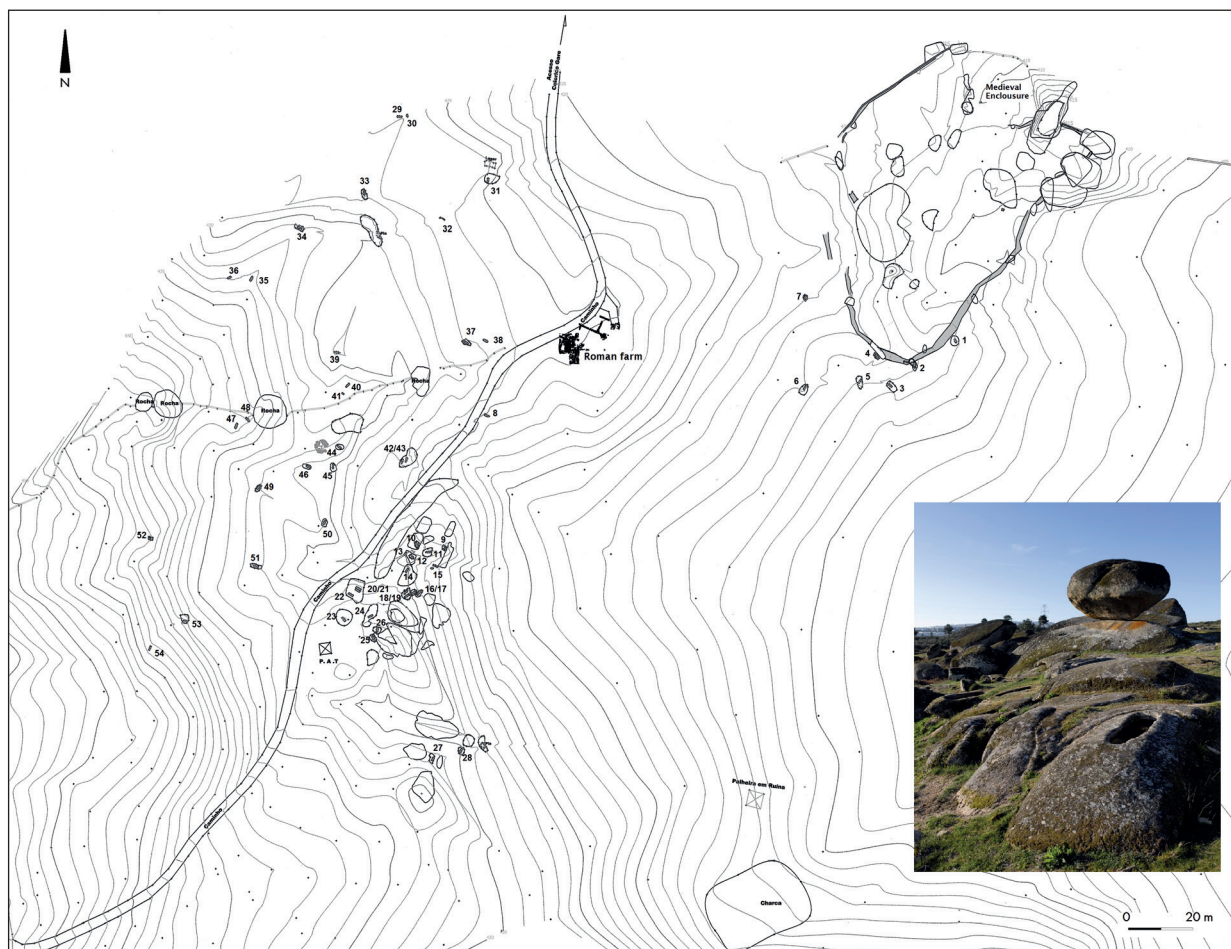


Fig. 4. Plan of São Gens (municipality of Celorico da Beira), with the Roman structures (1st to 4th centuries), the medieval enclosure and the disordered cemetery (10th century), with graves indicated by numbers (© Catarina Tente and José António Tomás).

archaeological excavation revealed that occupation was concentrated within the enclosure.

Although the occupied area was concentrated, the cemetery was not: the graves are scattered across an area of 6 ha. Some graves are relatively isolated; others are grouped into small clusters, just as in the category of scattered groups. Within the small groups, graves show some sign of patterning, however the level of dispersion and the general layout of the graves suggest that there was no formal organisation of the funerary space. Great diversity is seen in terms of both grave types and orientations, in spite of a slight tendency of them to point to the east, north-east and south-east. Based on their dimensions, six of the 54 graves (11%) would appear to belong to children; ranging from 64 cm to 125 cm in length. In addition, there are six unfinished graves, two of which are child sized (*Brookes et al. forthcoming*).

Both the spatial analysis of the cemetery layout and the archaeological data from the enclosure suggest that the site was used by a community comprising

three or four self-identifying groups, over a period of around four generations. The general lack of spatial differentiation within the cemetery may suggest these were the graves of relatively equally-ranked members of the community, albeit reflecting a household organization (*Brookes et al. forthcoming*).

Ordered cemeteries represent a very small percentage, totalling only 2.5% of all known sites. When located near modern churches, it is often difficult to determine the total number of rock-cut graves; indeed, only excavations would allow these to be counted (and individualized from other types of graves), but usually only part of the total cemetery area is studied.

Their main characteristic is the clustering of a very high number of graves in a reduced space, usually cut side-by-side and following a dominant orientation. In the majority of the cases, these necropolises were built in close association with churches, such as São Pedro da Lourosa, one of the few 10th – century churches known in the region (Fig. 5). Its construction has been

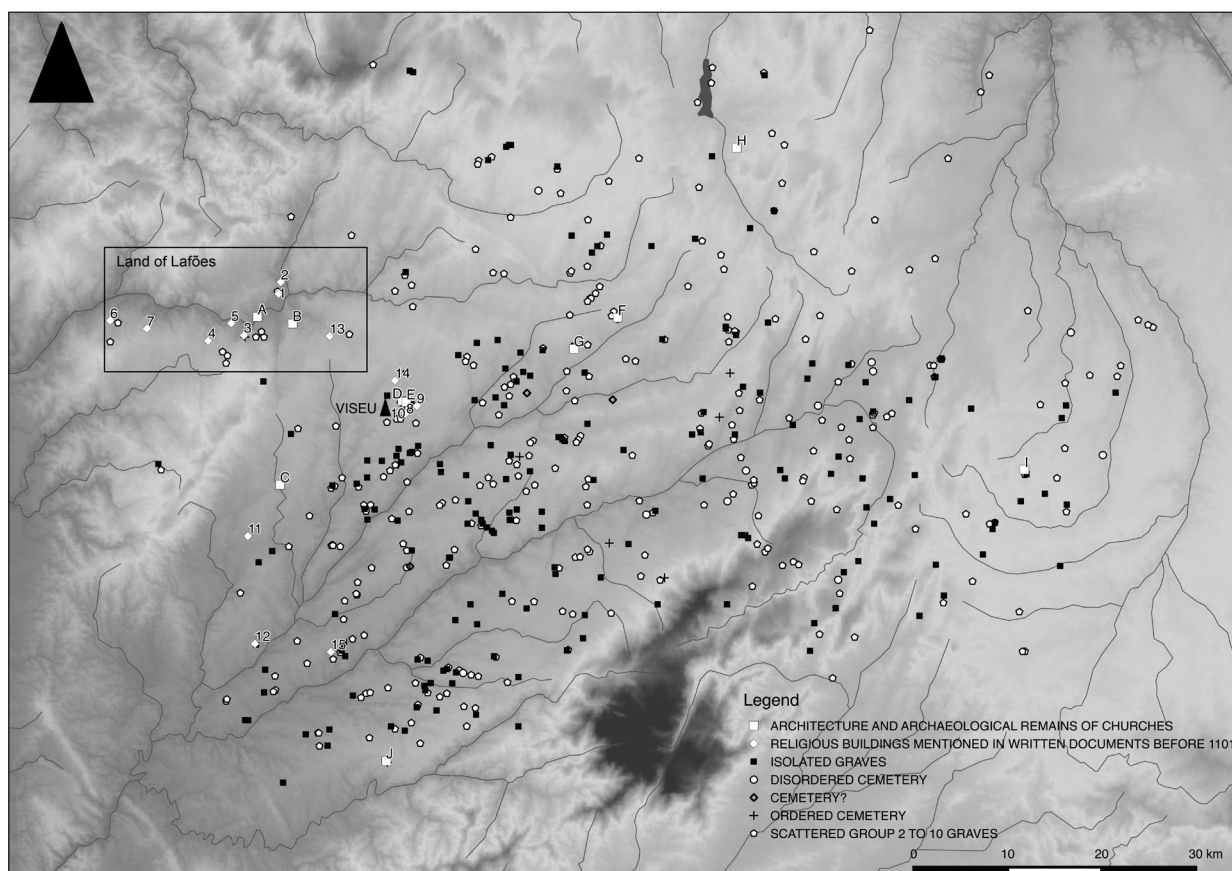


Fig. 5. Distribution map (© Catarina Tente and Tomas Cordero Ruiz) of sites with rock-cut graves, and location of churches that are mentioned for the first time before 1101, and architectonic and archaeological remains of churches before the 12th century (Rodrigues 1999).

Churches: São Pedro [do Sul] (1085), Santa Maria de Vouzela (1070), São Vicente de Lafões (1092), Santa Maria do Arcozelo (1083), São Tiago do Mato (1083), Monastery of Vouzela (1082), Santa Maria da Várzea (1070), São Gens de Nespereira (1078), São Miguel Fetal (880?), Santa Eugénia (1099), São Martinho (1066); Monastery of Seperandei (957), Monastery of Fráguas (1129), Monastery of Currelos (981), Molelos (1101), and Treixedo (981).

Architecture and archaeological remains of churches: São Martinho (c. 10th), Figueiredo das Donas (c. 10/11th), Monastery of Fráguas (c. 10/11th), Sé de Viseu (c. 6/7th), Nossa Senhora do Barrocal (971), Casal de Cima (c. 10/11th), Sernancelhe (c. 9/10th), Jarmelo (c. 10th), São Pedro da Lourosa (912).

attributed to an important elite established in Viseu (Fernandes 2005; Real 2014).

Ordered cemeteries increase in number in the second half of 12th century and mainly during the following. In Portugal, the parochial system emerged first in towns, and spread later and more slowly in rural areas. It must have been in the wake of the Gregorian reform, along with the later implementation of the tithe, that parish churches would start to be systematically built and have their jurisdiction legally defined (Mattoso 1985, 401-405). This was a time when the parishes were being established in the region. This phenomenon implied the building of churches that aggregated the parish interments. This changing funerary behaviour had as a consequence the progressive abandonment of the scattered-type groups of graves and disordered cemeteries. In these parishes, rock-cut graves

are found alongside other forms of inhumation. Graves are often found overlying each other, and several events of disturbance of the older ones are frequently identified. This may reflect depersonalization of at least some of the graves. Here, identity and ancestry do not seem to be as important as before. These notions are replaced by the feeling of belonging to a broader community that shares, above all, a common faith and church. This phenomenon irreversibly changed the inhumation practices but reflects, above all, the existence of an external and supra-local power that regulated and organized the religious and social lives of the communities.

From the few preserved bone remains so far exhumed from rock-cut graves (because of the acidity of granitic and schist substrata), only two radiocarbon determinations were obtained in this area (see also

Provenance	Lab Number	Date BP	cal BC/AD
Alto da Quintinha	Sac-2333	1080 ± 50	778-791 (1,4%), 805-842 (2,7%), 861-1032 (91,2%).
Algodres (grave nº23)	Sac-2207	710 ± 40	1356-1389 (17,7%), 1224-1315 (77,7%).

Tab. 2. Radiocarbon determinations of human bones exhumed in rock-cut graves from Viseu region (Tente – Carvalho 2015, 131).

Martín-Viso, this volume): one from an isolated grave (Alto da Quintinha), and the other from the first phase of occupation of one of the parish cemeteries (Algodres). The results are very interesting in spite of the skewed available radiocarbon evidence (Tab. 2). Indeed, they suggest that the necropolises scattered throughout the landscape are a much older phenomenon, whereas cemeteries aggregated to parish churches occur mostly after the end of 12th century.

In the older phase, the ‘architectonic’ option was to cut the graves in granitic outcrops, but through time and with the increasing number of burials in restricted spaces, an option for simpler and faster solutions becomes more common, such as inhumations in earth graves and the use of stone slabs.

3. Discussion

Despite the large number of sites in the territory of Viseu, only a few have been studied archaeologically. Available data show diversified realities, as is the case of the two sites discussed in this chapter: Penedo dos Mouros and São Gens. Given the state of research, a larger set of sites needs to be studied. However, it should be noted that this will not change a well-established scattered pattern across the region’s rural landscape during the 6th – 12th centuries. In the Viseu region, rock-cut graves cluster generally in small dispersed groups and often seem to be connected with living/working areas rather than with religious structures. Indeed, the distribution map of these sites shows an image of fragmented space, thus suggesting a segmented social reality in which the household is its main structuring feature. This is in perfect accord with the lack of written documents mentioning churches before the 12th century. Churches are also very scarce in the rural archaeological record (Fig. 5), and were probably correspondingly rare in the landscape.

Therefore, churches must have been very few in number and were, in most cases, away from the populations. The distribution of graves in the territory reflected the presence of household and local groups only, thus testifying a segmentary type of social organization. Ancestors served not only to mark the space but also to legitimate control over a certain terrain by their descendants (Martín-Viso 2014).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that more labour was applied in cutting the outcrops, where long-lasting graves could be dug, than at habitation sites, which were built with perishable materials. The durability and location of the graves was, therefore, intentional and can only be related, in the Early Middle Ages, with the exploitation of agricultural land and forests.

It should be mentioned that, according to what can be inferred from written sources, the location of churches and monasteries does not overlap with the distribution of rock-cut graves. The largest concentration of religious buildings before the 12th century was in the city of Viseu and its immediate surroundings, where they were probably founded by the Diocese. A similar trend can also be observed to the north-west of Viseu. In this part of the region (the Lafões area), a larger number of written documents (Rodrigues 1999) attests to the presence of counts and their courts from the 9th century onwards, who would have been responsible directly or indirectly for the foundation of several churches and monasteries.

In rural spaces located in more remote areas, or away from the areas of interest of the dominating powers, churches were scarce and populations had more liberty to choose where to create their scattered necropolises. Conversely, in Lafões, the presence of so many churches and monasteries in a rural area seems to have implied a more restrictive control over family or community funerary practices by the ruling social groups.

This phenomenon will eventually become common in the whole region after the end of 12th century, a moment in time when the Church definitively disrupts the household and community logic that was being expressed, until then, in the funerary manifestations of the Early Middle Ages.

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RELIGION, CULTS & RITUALS IN THE MEDIEVAL RURAL ENVIRONMENT

The study of belief, faith and religious practices can provide a deep insight into historical societies, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish or pagan. They form a constant of human behaviour. Through religion, cult and rituals, multi-layered and complex cultural norms are expressed, demonstrating group affiliation. However, popular devotion and belief in a rural environment can include practices that are out with those of the official religion.

Some of these practices discussed in this book can be investigated through archaeology. Important religious sites like churches, monasteries, mosques and synagogues as well as caves, holy wells and hermitages are discussed. Furthermore burials of children, revenants and the condemned are analysed, as they often deviate from normal practice and shed light on particular communities and their beliefs. Rituals concerning the protection of buildings and persons which focus on objects attributed with religious qualities are another area explored. Through archaeological research it is possible to gain an understanding of popular religion of medieval and early modern times and also to draw conclusions about religious ideas that are not written in documents. By bringing together these topics this book is of particular interest to scholars working in the field of archaeology, history and cultural anthropology.

The addressed subjects were the theme of an international conference of the RURALIA association held in Clervaux, Luxemburg, in September 2015. Ruralia promotes the archaeology of medieval settlement and rural life. Current research questions in rural archaeology are discussed in an European wide context. The aim is to strengthen the exchange of knowledge in, and the development of, archaeologically comparable studies, and to make archaeological results available to other disciplines.

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