

CAROLINGIAN AND COMITAL BARCELONA

PHILIP BANKS

Escola d'Idiomes Moderns, Universitat de Barcelona

With the exception of a few exceptional cases, especially Venice and Amalfi in the earlier part of the period and subsequently Genoa and Pisa, the subject of western Mediterranean cities in the period between the Age of Charlemagne and the 12th century is not one that has attracted great interest on the part of scholars. The vast majority of cities failed to attain the commercial precociousness of the first two cities or the far-reaching impact of the latter two. At the same time, the cities of the lands bordering the Mediterranean lay outside what has long been perceived as the heartland of urban revival in the Christian west, in other words the Rhineland, Flanders and northern France. Studies of the western Mediterranean coastlands in this period are further complicated by the fact that the area was divided between the Christian and the Moslem spheres, which led to cities developing in fundamentally different ways and the cities of al-Andalus and the Maghreb enjoying far greater prosperity and dynamism than those of the more northerly parts of the Iberian Peninsula, the south of France and northern Italy. Finally, the restricted amount of historical evidence before the 12th century in the case of the majority of cities and the limited synthesis of information derived from archaeological excavation has led to scholars being attracted to the far better documented later medieval centuries.

This brief summary aims to reflect on the cities of these regions by taking the example of Barcelona in the Carolingian and Comital periods (A.D. 800-1150) and to consider the city's political, cultural and religious functions, economic role and physical development especially in the light of recent publications referring to the Mediterranean as a whole, and of two key works referring to the early medieval period, which have had a far-reaching impact on the way in which these centuries are interpreted.¹ In fact, these pages will undoubtedly raise questions rather than provide answers, but this is not an inappropriate approach for a seminar that aimed to deal with a broad sweep of Mediterranean studies.

1. I here refer to HORDEN, Peregrine and PURCELL, Nicholas. *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; ABULAFIA, David. *The Great Sea. A Human History of the Mediterranean*. London: Allen Lane, 2011; and more especially, WICKHAM, Chris. *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and McCORMICK, Michael. *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, A.D.300-900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

The classical inheritance

Although urban centres on totally new sites emerged both in what was to become Catalonia and elsewhere, these were rarely of great dimensions, and the vast majority of early medieval cities could trace their origins back to the Roman period if not before. In the case of Barcelona, the imprint of the Roman past was still clearly noticeable in the 11th century; the city itself was characterised by its strong late Roman defences, while other remains of Antiquity could be found: the church of Sant Miquel in what had once been the Roman baths building; the Roman temple still standing at the heart of the city and dubbed the *Miracle* by the inhabitants. Outside the walls stood the no longer functioning Roman aqueducts, which later came to form the backbone of one of the main medieval suburbs. These structures reflect some of the many common factors that need to be analysed when studying the cities of this period, aspects such as the de-monumentalization of the forum area, the fragmentation of the urban area leading to what has been called the *città ad isole*, the subdivision of urban residences, the end of public services, the phenomenon of intra-mural burial, and finally the abandonment of some, often large, parts of the urban area and their use for agricultural or horticultural purposes.

The early medieval city's military, judicial, administrative and religious functions

Some sixty years ago, Edith Ennen proposed a *Kriterien-bündel* of twelve characteristics for an early medieval city, which can probably be reduced to five main features, namely: permanent occupation; a larger population; an economic basis not only founded on subsistence; the provision of higher-level services (whether social, economic, religious, administrative, judicial or military); and greater social differentiation in comparison with other sites. Barcelona fulfilled all these characteristics.

The military role found in the closing decades of the Visigothic Kingdom was predominant in Barcelona in the period between the Carolingian conquest and the early 10th century. It is not fortuitous that the stages of conquest were marked by the capture of cities and episcopal centres. Nevertheless, Ramon d'Abadal stated that only Girona, after Barcelona, could really be considered of any significance in an urban context

in the Catalan counties, and there is much to recommend this opinion. In both cities their key role was a result of the strength of their Roman defences.

These defences were incorporated into urban houses, particularly of the local aristocracy; and there are other indications, in the form of charter evidence and some tenth-century inscriptions, that suggest the aristocracy were more present in the city in the 10th and 11th centuries than subsequent ones. However, we do need to ask ourselves to what extent the aristocracy played an active role in the local economy in these early stages. Professor Wickham has emphasised the role of the urban aristocracy in earlier periods, pointing out that a large élite provided more opportunities for both artisans and merchants.

Although a palace of the Counts of Barcelona is recorded, political responsibility for urban affairs lay in the hands of the viscounts and bishops. Hence, when a group of Frankish monks arrived in Barcelona in c.858 on their way to Córdoba they were welcomed by the viscount and the bishop. However, there are also signs of a fledgling urban community through the involvement of a poorly defined group of *boni homines* or 'good men' in legal decisions alongside professional judges.

The bishops' role in urban life was also significant. Reinterpretation of the excavated remains in the north-eastern quadrant of the Roman city suggests that much of this quarter was in the bishops' hands by the 7th century. Much of the city's cultural life, especially the schools, was also centred upon the cathedral and the community of canons. It should not be forgotten that Archdeacon Sunifred Llobet was known well beyond the region for his translations of mathematical treatises. Neither should we forget the charitable role of the city, marked by the existence of a hospital adjoining the cathedral. The bishops also controlled two of Barcelona's gates and enjoyed market, trade and minting rights. In the 11th century the church still dominated this sector of the old walled area. However, subsequently, the role of the church seems to have declined, as the role of the larger cities changed. Generally speaking, in this period, the smaller the city, the more extensive the space dedicated to religious functions seems to have been. The role of monasteries should also be mentioned; a number held large estates in and around the city in these centuries; we need to analyse in greater depth whether they and the episcopal estates played a significant role in urban change through their agricultural activity, as they seem to have done elsewhere in the 9th and 10th centuries.

The urban economy

Michael McCormick has presented a wealth of evidence for long distance connections in the Mediterra-

nean world prior to the 10th century. However, the north-western Mediterranean seems to have been largely isolated from such phenomena; with the exception of a number of naval campaigns by the Counts of Empúries, maritime activity is barely mentioned before the mid-10th century. In addition, there are two factors we must always bear in mind: the majority of objects transported are likely to have been luxury items, and thus few in number, and there are many ways in which goods might move without commerce being involved, such as diplomacy, pilgrimages or matrimonial agreements. So in spite of the long acclaimed role of Catalonia as a crossroads between two worlds, the Islamic and the Christian ones, there is little direct evidence for commercial activity in this period. Even if the proposed commercial emporium or *portus* to the south of the city adjoining the mountain of Montjuïc and the mouth of the River Llobregat, a classic location for such a feature, almost at the interface between the Moslem and Christian worlds and at the beginning of a route running far inland, is accepted (and not all scholars would do so), it can only have functioned on a seasonal basis and had fallen out of use by the year 1000. Even in the 11th century evidence for long distance trade in Barcelona is meagre: some bolts of silk; references to fur and skins; pepper, spices and slaves being sold at the market, and any merchants remain almost hidden until the 12th century, which is when there was a fundamental change in the city's economy, and when it became more diversified. Nevertheless, one suspects that the slave trade between the Christian and Moslem worlds, partly in the hands of Jews, was a not insignificant factor, as has been demonstrated elsewhere in the Mediterranean in these centuries. Moreover, other evidence for long distance ties can be seen in the form of personal names such as *Maurus* or the seven individuals described as 'the Greek' in the documentation for the city around the year 1000.

Neither is there much evidence for manufacturing activity in Barcelona; with the exception of a handful of personal names indicating artisan trades - a moneyer, a smith and a weaver - there would be no evidence at all before the year 1000. Neither are specific workshops referred to in the documentation until the late 11th century. What is clear is that the economy had a largely agricultural basis with a large number of free peasant owners of plots in and around the city, producing both to maintain themselves, to satisfy fiscal demands and for the urban market. Local markets started developing in Catalonia in the later 10th century and are one of the signs of a growing agricultural economy; in the 11th century there are indications of a significant wine trade in the city: the increase in the number of vineyards and the number of houses with wine cellars as well as references to large volumes of wine. It was this sort of activity, coupled with the in-

come from *paries*, the protection money, the gold derived from the Muslim kingdoms to the south, which fuelled the city's growth in the 11th century.

However, were we to analyse other cities in the north-western Mediterranean in this period, they would undoubtedly display somewhat different characteristics. While the military, judicial, administrative and religious functions of most cities in the Christian areas of the Mediterranean world must have been broadly similar, the economic ones would have varied considerably from region to region, thus emphasising the regionalisation that was such an important feature of these centuries.

The townscape of Barcelona

In the 10th century, the vital centre of the city had long shifted away from the forum area northwards to the religious centre. The majority of the houses documented in the city were clustered in this zone, while not very far away, even in the old Roman core, there were open spaces with few buildings of any type, where horticultural plots, vineyards and even fields were predominant, even within the city walls. Further south, separated from the main centre, there may have been a second settlement nucleus, around the Regomir gate. Once again, the fragmentation of the urban area into discrete communities is evident.

However, one aspect of the economic growth of the region in the mid-10th century was the reappearance of suburban settlement, a movement with parallels in other cities in northern Spain and southern France. The centre of this development was the market, strategically located outside the main gate, at the foot of the Castell Vell, where, as from the 960s, the *burgus* of the city is mentioned. Subsequently, new *burgi* appeared elsewhere. Why these suburbs developed is another unanswered question; as we have seen it was clearly not a consequence of a lack of space within the city walls. The tenth-century city was thus largely an agricultural, administrative and religious centre, with only a limited commercial and manufacturing role. It was still very small, with a population of probably no more than 1500 people, comparable in size with the other 'large' city in the Christian part of the Iberian Peninsula, León, and slightly larger than cities such as Girona; however, these were hardly villages alongside the splendours of contemporary Córdoba.

By the end of the 11th century, a number of fundamental transformations, which were to herald the transition to the medieval city proper, had taken place. In the old walled city a new Romanesque cathedral had been consecrated in 1058 and there had been substantial reorganisation in its adjoining dependencies (hospitals, the episcopal palace, houses for other ecclesiastical officers, the cloister, cemeteries). A Jewish quarter had also been defined for a community of perhaps some 300 individuals. The previously open spaces had been largely filled in, with few horticultural plots remaining inside the walls. At the same time, the first workshops are recorded in an area adjoining the Counts of Barcelona's palace, specifically supplying the aristocracy with military metalwork. Outside the defences the market, hitherto a largely open space, had acquired permanent buildings and was beginning to display signs of trade specialisation. Other services necessary for a higher order urban centre had also made their appearance: mills on the channel or mill-stream known as the Rec and specialist ovens, with a monopoly over baking in a defined urban area. At the same time, the extent of the inhabited suburban area had increased substantially, particularly in the area around the market and along the main roads leading into the city, with the first signs of planned development in an area called the *villanova* in 1080s, where urbanisation was encouraged by means of a system of perpetual leases known as *emphyteusis*. At this stage, around the year 1100, we might suppose a population of 4000 or 5000 in this city of 30 hectares.

The final changes towards the full medieval city took place after the financial crisis of the late 11th and early 12th with the advent of new families, increased immigration and a more varied economy, including international commerce after about 1130.

To conclude one might reflect whether our study of the cities of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries has been excessively affected by cities such as Venice and Amalfi, Genoa and Pisa. Important though they undoubtedly were, perhaps we need to adopt a more comparative approach and try to find common factors in this time of considerable fragmentation in the Christian world and the clear diversity in types of towns. The role of the western Mediterranean islands, so important in subsequent centuries, has also been neglected and needs to be included within any such study.