

**PIG HUSBANDRY IN VISIGOTH IBERIA: FACT AND THEORY**

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**RESUMEN:** El trabajo valora someramente la evolución de las cabañas ibéricas de porcino durante época visigoda contrastando la información estrictamente documental con los datos aportados por los restos de fauna recuperados en yacimientos arqueológicos. Se aprecian discrepancias que son comentadas desde una perspectiva analítica global.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** CERDO, CABAÑA, EVOLUCION, IBERIA, ROMANO, VISIGODO, FUENTES HISTORICAS, ARQUEOZOOLOGIA

**SUMMARY:** The work briefly discusses the evolution of iberian pig flocks during visigoth (viz. early Middle Age) times by confronting strictly historiographical information with data from archaeozoological assemblages. The analysis reveals some striking differences which are commented from a more global perspective.

**KEYWORDS:** PIG, HUSBANDRY, EVOLUTION, IBERIA, ROMAN, VISIGOTH, HISTORICAL SOURCES, ARCHAEOZOOLOGY

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The importance of domestic stocks during the "invasion period" of spanish history, right after the fall of the Roman Empire, can be inferred from the study of written historical sources. Many laws, such the Lex Alemannorum, for example, give an account of protected species, protection which can also be found in other non-juridical sources such as monastic rules (FRUCTUOSUS, 1971; RIU et al., 1982).

This importance (given to domestic and to wild animals as well) might be related to socio-cultural changes brought about by the germanic tribes entering the peninsula, though it is not unlikely that environmental changes, or simply changes induced by a different use of the land, might not have had its share of responsibility.

One aspect in which several authors and sources agree is the relative importance of pig husbandry which occurred during this period (GARCIA, 1989). Perhaps a germanic preference for pig meat or perhaps other variables favored such a change. Perhaps no such change occurred at all.

This paper aims at reconciling some of the data from historical sources with the findings of archaeozoological analysis from this early stage of the Middle Ages. Our goal is not so much to reach definitive answers on the subject as it is to show the potential which the joint use of historical and archaeozoological data offers the historian.

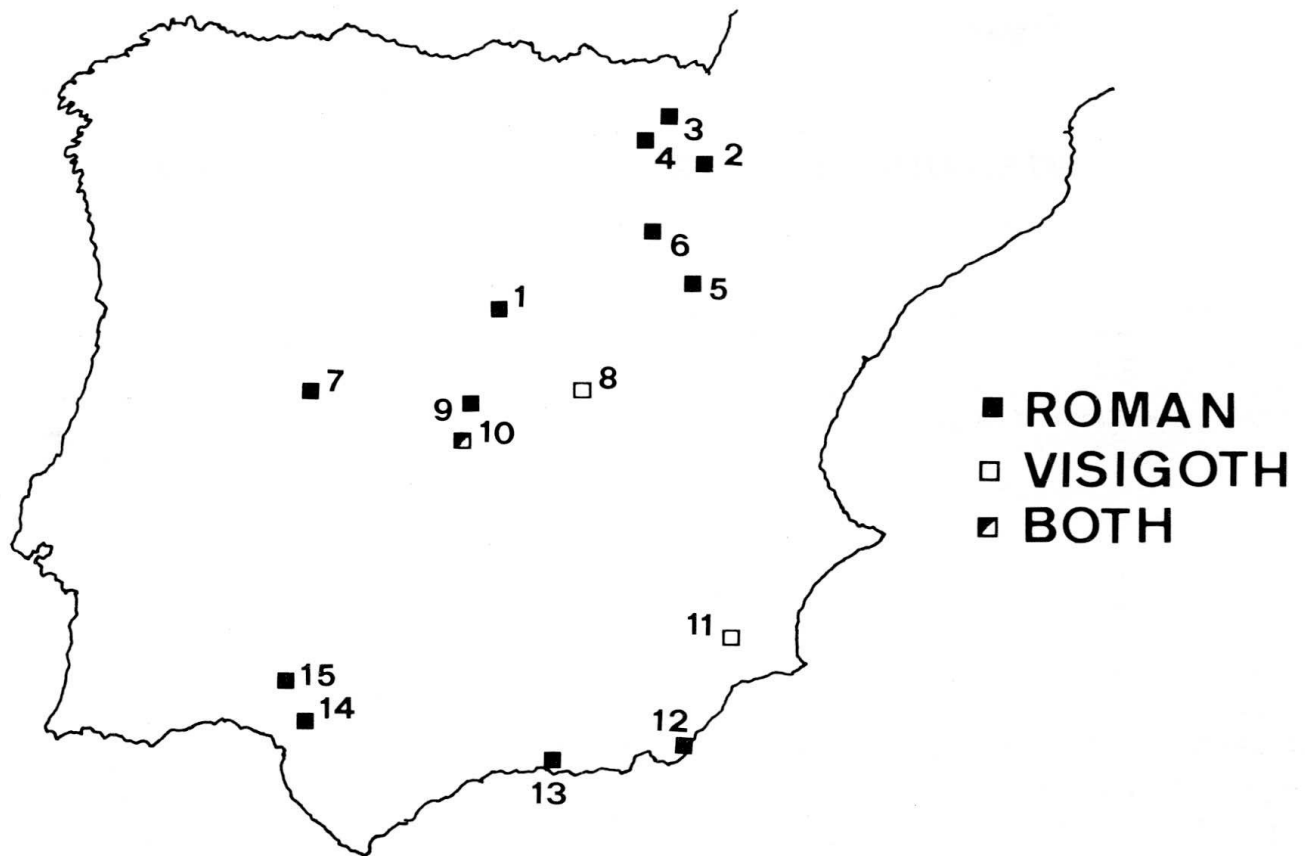
## **II. A CASE STUDY: THE IMPORTANCE PIG BREEDING IN VISIGOTH TIMES**

It has become somewhat of a routine for many historians to stress the importance of porcine stocks during visigoth times (ORLANDIS, 1988; GARCIA, Op. cit.). Partly due to the assumptions that, at that moment, the spread of woodlands was a more or less well established fact and these forests favored the spread of pig breeding in a semi-wild (i.e. extensive not intensive) way, and, partly due to the existence of legal documents specifying the interest of these flocks and the status given to their keepers, people concluded that this change in husbandry techniques brought about a change in human diets which shifted from the more vegetarian (i.e. cerealistic) during roman times to the more carnivorous (thanks, basically, to pork!) in the germanic periods which followed (LADERO, 1987). Other authors, however, maintain that it is not only pig stocks the ones that increase during visigoth times, but also ovicaprines (sheep and goat) (FERNANDEZ- GALIANO, 1975).

Why were pigs favored?, some historical sources openly specify that pigs take more advantage of woodland's pastures (open woodlands as in SW Spain today?) and that their maintenance is relatively cheap. Moreover, pigs could be more thoroughly "cropped" and their meat could be preserved for longer periods than was the case with other species (LADERO, Op. cit.; GARCIA, Op. cit.). Was it a cultural inertia to favour the breeding of pigs? germanic peoples did not have such a large amount of sheep and goats so, perhaps, meat consumption was mainly restricted to cattle and pigs. These speculations have nothing to do with the fact that the maintenance of pigs was carefully regulated as so many texts, such as book VIII of the Liber Iudiciorum, clearly specify.

Does this putative importance reflects itself in the faunal reports?. Iberian archaeozoological evidence from these periods is still sparse but we have tried to make a comparative analysis of domestic flocks retrieved in spanish sites (mostly published though still not too many cases) with flocks from early middle age sites, presently under study at our Laboratory.

Figure 1 shows the geographical location of the sites while Figures 2, 3 and 4 exhibit the importance of each one of the three stocks (estimated as percentages of the NR, or identified number of remains) in roman and "visigoth" (i.e. early Middle Ages) assemblages, respectively. Table 1 summarizes this information as abundance ranges.



**FIGURE 1** - Location of the sites analyzed. 1 = Tírmes (MIGUEL & MORALES, 1985); 2 = Castro de las Peñas de Oro (ALTUNA, 1972); 3 = Castro de Berbeia (ALTUNA, 1978); 4 = Los Husos (ALTUNA, 1980); 5 = San Esteban (CASTAÑOS, 1981); 6 = Bilbilis (CASTAÑOS, in press); 7 = San Julián (LAZ); 8 = Recópolis (LAZ); 9 = La Torrecilla de Iván Crispín (TORRE, unpub.); 10 = Burgalés (LAZ); 11 = Begastri (LAZ); 12 = Fuente Alamo (DRIESCH et al., 1985); 13 = Toscanos (UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 1973); 14 = Munigua (BOESSNECK & DRIESCH, 1980); 15 = Cerro Macareno (AMBERGER, 1985). Sites identified by (LAZ) are unpublished faunal reports of our laboratory.

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	<u>CATTLE</u>	<u>OVICAPRINES</u>	<u>PIG</u>
<b>ROMAN ...</b>	7 - 59'5	19 - 77	4-71
<b>VISIGOTH.</b>	11 - 22	61 - 77	8-15

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**TABLE 1** - Oscillations of NR (percentages of identified number of remains) of the main domestic flocks in roman and visigoth faunal assemblages.

The analysis of this data does not seem to correspond with what one might expect based on historical records. Thus, while abundance ranges for each one of the domestic species are always larger in roman sites, perhaps reflecting simply larger number of samples (13 roman vs 3 visigoth), the fact remains that pig stocks happen to be comparatively poor in the presumably middle age sites, while some roman sites have particularly high percentages of pig (i.e. Bilbilis, Figure 2F). More important than this, in the site of "El Burgalés", whose faunal analysis was recently finished by our researchers, pigs decrease from 23% in the roman levels (Figure 4C) to a mere 15% in the early middle age levels (Figure 4D) this being a significant difference (2.95). No apparent pattern emerges, except, perhaps, that in sites of mediterranean Iberia ovicaprines dominated (cattle are important in northern spanish sites but their highest abundances are reached in the andalusian site of Cerro Macareno) (Figure 3D).

Many other factors should be taken into consideration at this moment. Big mammals, such as cattle, might actually be overrepresented in most assemblages since manual retrieval has been the rule. From this perspective, the relative abundances of pigs and ovicaprines should be more reliable for direct comparison, though still not a faithful picture of the original taphocenosis. In particular, the characteristic morphology of pig bones render them more easily identifiable than the small ruminant's and there is but one species in Iberia exhibiting such morphology. On the other hand, there is always the possibility that pig bones can be clumped together with those of its agriotype, the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*, L.) in contrast with what is the case for sheep and goats (KRATOCHVIL, 1973; UERPMANN, 1987).

A detailed analysis of these abundances is, therefore, beyond our aims at the moment.

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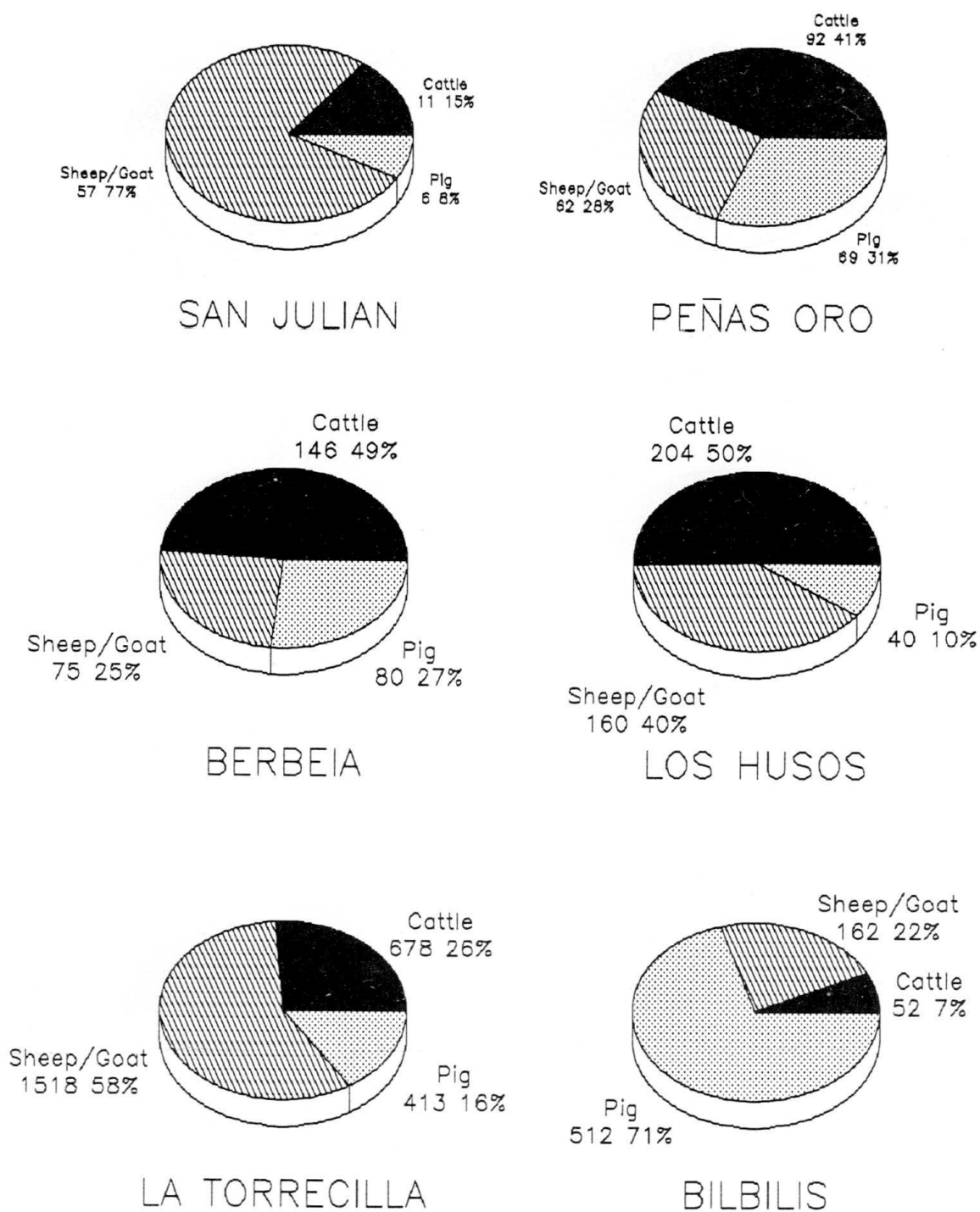
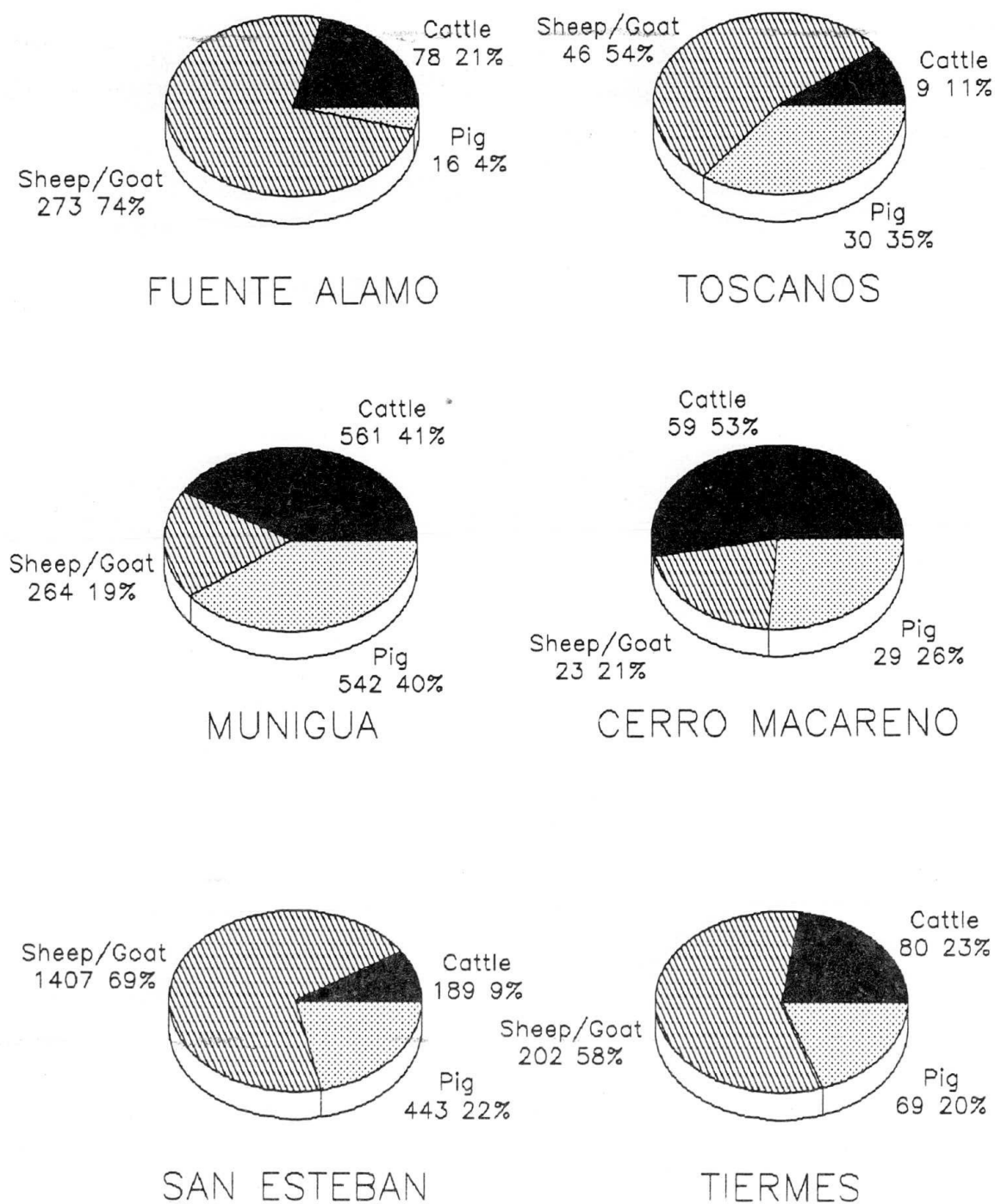
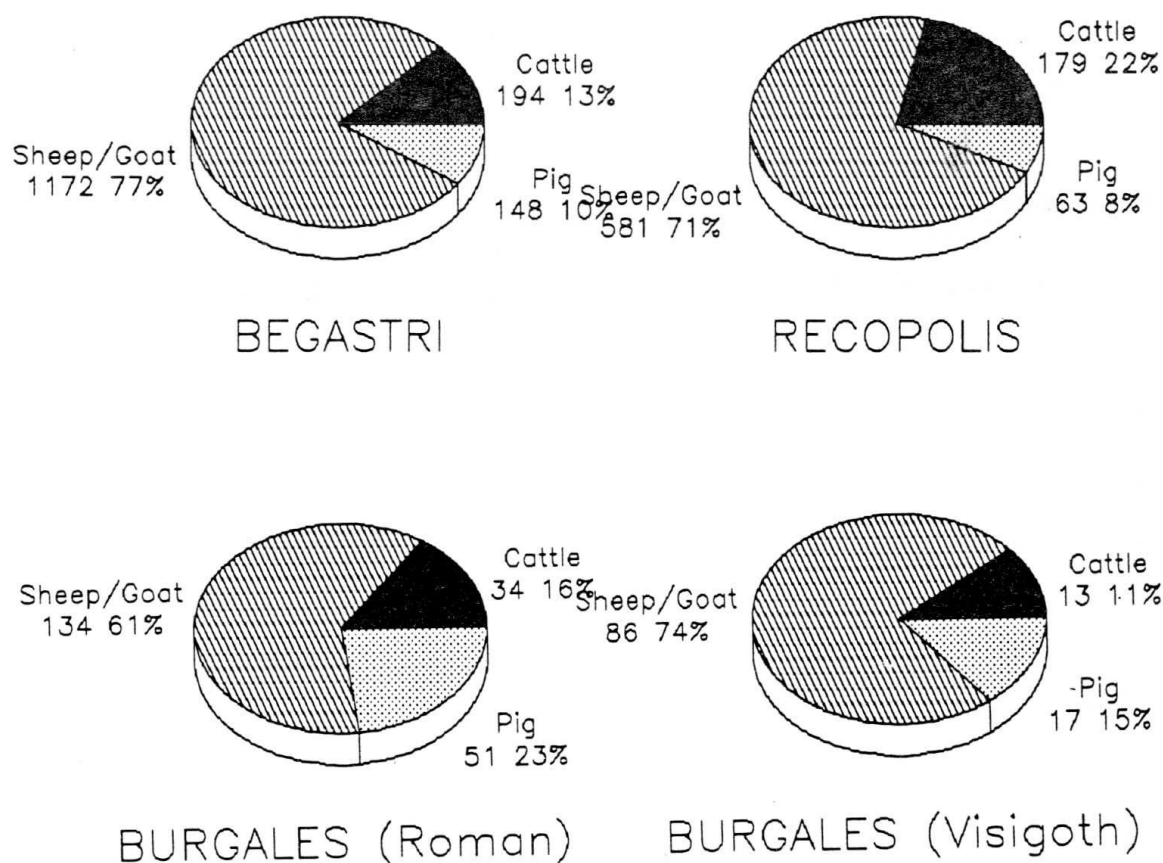


FIGURE 2 - Percentage of the main domestic species in roman sites of the Iberian Peninsula. Numbers refer to NR (identified number of remains).



**FIGURE 3** -Percentage of the main domestic species in roman sites of the Iberian Peninsula. Numbers refer to NR (identified number of remains).



**FIGURE 4** -Percentage of the main domestic species in visigoth sites of the Iberian Peninsula. Numbers refer to NR (identified number of remains).

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis evidences the need to contrast different and occasionally conflicting, sources of evidence. Though still tentative, it is clear that archaeozoological analysis do not seem to substantiate to any extent the expected abundance of pigs in post-roman Iberia. Whether or not this is caused by lack of reliable data, more thoroughly excavated samples, a systematic analysis of written records, etc..., remains to be seen. At this moment one is more tempted to think that pig stocks actually decreased in the transition to the Middle Ages and that stockbreeding remained, as it always has, dictated by large-scale agents such as weather and availability of adequate areas.



#### IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Arturo Morales without whose help this paper would have not been written. This work has benefited from a grant of the Spanish National Research Commission (D.G.I.C.Y.T.-PB87-0796-CO2-01).

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