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Pots, chicken and building deposits: the archaeology of folk and official religion during the High Middle Ages in the Basque Country

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Abstract

In this paper, a particular type of unusual archaeological deposits found at some high medieval (12th-13th centuries AD) sites located in the Basque Country (northern Iberian Peninsula) is examined. These structured deposits consist of inverted pottery vessels containing the remains of a chicken, placed in pits created on purpose for keeping them, and are generally found in archaeological contexts related to the foundation or reconstruction of public buildings, including churches and city walls. The implications of the occurrence of these rituals in Christian contexts are discussed in the framework of folk religion, suggesting that medieval religion was hybrid and dynamic, even after the Gregorian Reform (11th century AD) that, supposedly, unified the Christian administration and liturgy. It is suggested that the occurrence of such public ritual practices in the Basque Country during the High Middle Ages might be related to the formation and negotiation of new social and political communities.

Highlights

- The first known southern European medieval building foundation deposits are examined.
- These structured deposits appear in the Basque Country and are dated between the 12th and the 13th centuries AD.
- It is suggested that they are material manifestations of public ritual practices that served an important role in the construction of social and political identities.
- This evidence is discussed in the framework of a hybrid and dynamic medieval religiosity.

Keywords

Foundation ritual, structured deposition, official religion, vernacular religion, medieval, Spain, local communities, social display, identity, chicken, pottery

37 **1. Introduction**

38

39 The archaeology of religion has undergone recently an enormous theoretical and applied development,
40 once the criticisms of classical processualism and post-processualism to the analysis of religion as an
41 active agent of social construction and transformation were overcome (Insoll 2004). Some recent
42 syntheses and studies dealing with world religions (Insoll 2001), the archaeology of religion in the
43 Ancient world (Raja & Rüpke 2015), the study of religion in the Post-Medieval period (King & Sayer
44 2011), or the archaeology of ritual and religion (Insoll 2011), have proved the potential of these
45 analytical approaches, especially when they are developed from a holistic perspective that surpasses
46 the limitations of the mere analysis of liturgy, worship buildings and those places that commonly served
47 to the construction of social memory (Rowan 2012; Fennel & Manning 2014).

48 During the Middle Ages, the Iberian Peninsula was a cultural melting pot where three faiths
49 intermingled: Christianity, Islamism and Judaism. Studying how these complex cultures were
50 constructed and negotiated is of central interest, but it is also very challenging. The co-existence of these
51 different religious and political communities makes of medieval Iberia a valuable 'laboratory' where
52 intercultural interaction, religious syncretism and the construction of social identities can be analysed.
53 However, Iberian Medieval Archaeology in general has used until now an excluding approach to treat
54 the different religious and political communities. Thus, in the Iberian Peninsula, the archaeology of
55 medieval Christian and Islamic societies developed separately. Moreover, the study of Jewish
56 communities, of Christian communities living in Muslim kingdoms or of Muslim communities living in
57 Christian territories, has been relegated to the analysis of minorities (Valor & Miguel 2014). In the last
58 few years, however, new archaeological evidence, new theoretical frameworks, and the use of new
59 methodologies, have allowed viewing the role that religion played in the processes for constructing
60 social identities. For instance, recently, the existence of multi-faith cemeteries in early medieval Spain
61 has been recognised (Vigil-Escalera 2015). Also, religious identities played a key active role in the
62 construction of local identities, in the context of the aftermath of the Islamic conquest of the Iberian
63 Peninsula after year AD 711, and it has already been suggested that the early construction of an Islamic
64 identity might have been a native phenomenon, rather than imported (Inksip 2016: 263). In places and
65 periods of socio-political stress, such as the consolidation of ethnically based kingdoms after Roman
66 times (Goetz et al. 2003) or the Islamic conquest (Manzano 2006), the conditions were met in order for
67 religion (both doctrine and liturgy, theory and practice) to constitute a tool for the construction of socio-
68 political communities and identities at a local scale.

69 Institutionalised religions set aside, some recent works have explored the dynamic and hybrid
70 dimension of medieval religiosity, focusing on the material forms and expressions of people's beliefs.
71 This has led to the use of different names to describe this concept, such as folk, popular or vernacular
72 religion (Primiano 1995; Dever 2005; Gilchrist 2012; Hukantaival 2013; Kapaló 2013; Hukantaival
73 2016). Central to this paper, folk religion is here understood as "the totality of all those views and

74 practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and
75 liturgical forms of the official religion” (Yoder 1974: 14). This way, the contrast between
76 institutionalised religion and popular religion can be overcome, understanding that the existence of
77 forms of folk religion is consubstantial to the practices of official religion, and that the two spheres
78 coexist and interact in a dynamic way (García 2003; Pyysiäinen 2004; Hukantaival 2013; Kapaló 2013;
79 Johanson & Jonuks 2015). Nowadays, it seems clear that the multidimensional and changing character
80 of religious practices constitutes one of the main features of the religious experience, even in situations
81 where there is an ideological, political and social hegemony of well-established religions (Gilchrist
82 2012).

83 One of the main consequences of the development of such approaches has been the creation of new
84 conceptual frameworks that allow reinterpreting the so-called ritual deposits, special deposits, or
85 intentional/structured deposits in archaeology (Richard & Thomas 1984; Bradley 2005). The literature
86 on the ways these ritual activities can be identified in the archaeological record and interpreted
87 (generally thanks to ethnographic parallels) is absolutely enormous. Although in the past this topic was
88 mainly investigated by prehistorians (e.g. Brück 1999, Gerritsen 2003), in recent years, there is an
89 increasing interest on this subject among researchers dealing with world religions and historical
90 archaeologies (e.g. Hukantaival 2007; Gilchrist 2008 and 2014; Baron 2012; Fennel & Manning 2014).

91 In Spain, the study of medieval structured deposits that do not seem to correspond to official liturgical
92 practices has been neglected. They have normally been analysed from a perspective that is unaware of
93 religious practices, linking them to magic or pagan rituals that are difficult to disentangle. This marginal
94 character explains why they are rarely given further consideration. Many cases can only be found in
95 ‘grey literature’ or very local publications, and overviews of the evidence are still lacking. As an example,
96 some special archaeological deposits found in some funerary contexts have been reported in northern
97 Spain (e.g. at the Monastery of Corias -García 2011- and Santa María of Castro Urdiales –Marcos 2013),
98 but their interpretation was difficult due to the limited known cases. In general, for medieval Spain,
99 mainly funerary rituals have been studied to some extent, but other forms of material expressions of
100 beliefs, such as the performance of non-“official” rituals in non-funerary contexts, has not been
101 investigated so far. This has led to a very incomplete way of understanding religiosity in the Iberian
102 Peninsula during the Middle Ages, as well as its cultural dimension (Geertz 1993).

103 The present paper is the first analysis and discussion of a particular type of archaeological deposits that
104 constitutes direct evidence of non-official ritual practices, in Spain only known until now in the Basque
105 Country (northern Spain), during the High Middle Ages (12th-13th centuries AD). We argue here that
106 these deposits must be interpreted in the framework of folk religion practices that consubstantially
107 existed with the official religion. The coexistence of both types of communicational and social cohesion
108 systems played complementary roles in the construction processes of socio-political communities that
109 were active at various scales.

110 This work is structured in three main sections: first, the location and characteristics of the deposits are
111 explained; afterwards, the components of the ritual and possible precedents are examined; and last, this
112 paper discusses the social meaning of this ritual, and explores the relevance of this new archaeological
113 evidence for understanding religiosity in the Middle Ages. This paper is based on a set of Spanish
114 examples which, to date, constitute unique and rare archaeological evidence of folk religion in medieval
115 southern Europe.

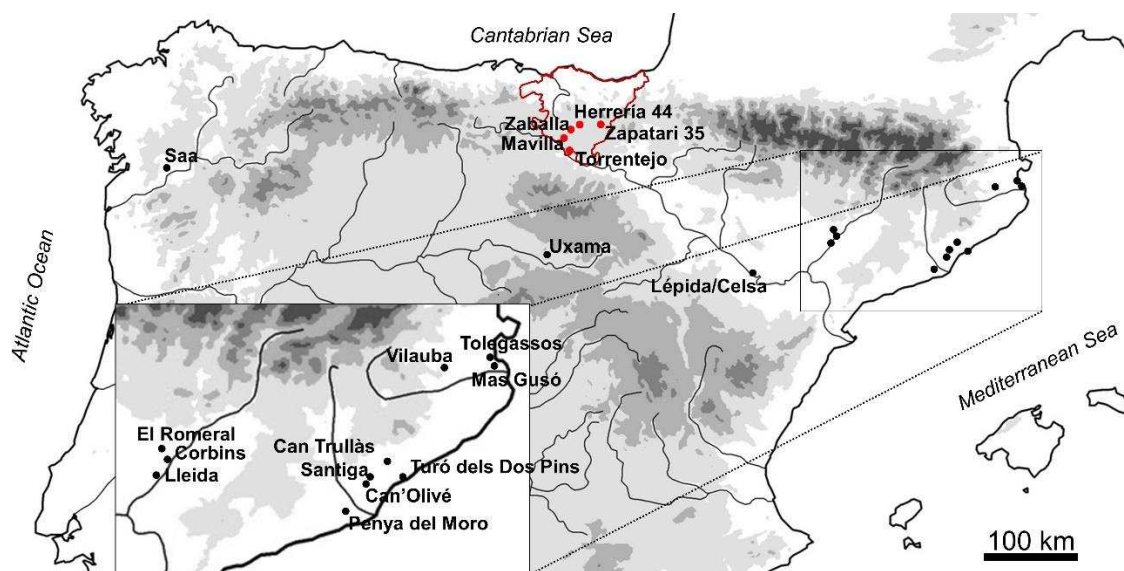
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117 **2. The sites**

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119 In this section, the archaeological evidence will be examined briefly, explaining the nature and the
120 location of the deposits, in each of the Basque archaeological sites that have been examined here, all
121 located in the Basque southern province of Álava, in the municipalities of Labastida, Vitoria-Gasteiz,
122 Salvatierra-Agurain, Iruña de Oca and Armiñón. A preliminary work on some of the zooarchaeological
123 remains (excluding Torrentejo) was already published (Grau 2015), and one of the deposits found in
124 Vitoria-Gasteiz was already described in a previous work (Sánchez 2012), but the evidence is here
125 examined further. In Figure 1, the location of the sites mentioned in this paper is shown (with our sites
126 marked in red). The contextual information of the deposits that is mentioned here, explaining the
127 position and relationship between the deposits and the buildings or structures, is based on the
128 information given by the archaeologists who excavated at the sites. Extensive information on the
129 stratigraphic context of the deposits can be found at the site-reports (Loza & Niso 2004 and 2009;
130 Fernández & Ajamil 2011; Quirós 2012, 2014 and 2015; Sánchez 2012). It has only been possible to
131 analyse five cases, but very recently a sixth case has been reported, found in Vitoria-Gasteiz: it is also an
132 inverted pot with a bird inside, and was found in relation to the renovation of the city walls in this area
133 at the end of the 12th century (Azkarate et al. 2016). Although the author of this paper has enquired
134 other colleagues for other similar cases, unsuccessfully, other deposits might not have been published
135 yet, or even appropriately recognised.

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Figure 1. Map showing the location of the sites mentioned in the text. In red, deposits examined in this work, in the Basque Country; in black, other sites (listed in Table 1).

2.1. Torrentejo, Labastida

The rural settlement of Torrentejo (Quirós 2014 and 2015) is located in Labastida and is currently undergoing intensive excavation. The medieval occupation, which started in the 7th century AD, is characterised by the foundation of a church in the 11th century that, according to the written sources, belonged to Sancho IV of Navarre. In the 12th century, this church was completely rebuilt, probably by the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, who owned the entire village. In 2015, while excavating a section just to the south of the church of Santa María, two pits (diameters 45 and 38 cm) were found in a context related to the rebuilding of the church. In the fillings of the pits (contexts 2125 and 2138), two pots were found, one of them (in context 2138) with remains of a complete juvenile galliform (most probably chicken, *Gallus gallus*). One coracoid, one scapula, two humeri, one ulna, one femur, two tibiotarsi and two tarsometatarsi were found, among other small fragments of the same skeleton, badly preserved. The two pots, typologically, can be dated between the 12th or the 13th centuries AD. Both are kitchenware, hand-wheel made. One of them was found inverted but empty, and is smaller than the other, with a flat base, and the rim is missing. It was decorated with incised lines in the shoulder. The second pot, where the chicken was found, is larger and it is almost complete. The pot has a flat base, short straight neck with incised lines, and its rim has a triangular lip, with oval punctures on the shoulder forming a shape similar to a shoe-sole, made during production (Figure 2). There are not known parallels to this mark; it is unknown at this point if the punctures constitute a production mark (by the potter, for instance), or if it was marking this particular pot for another reason. This second pot was not inverted, but appeared covered with a fragment of another pot.



Figure 2. Incision mark found in one of the pots of Torrentejo, Labastida, 12th century AD. Photo by L. Elorza.

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165 2.2. Herrería 44, Vitoria-Gasteiz

166 In 2004, the plot located in the number 44 of Herrería street, in the old part of the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz,
167 was excavated by the archaeological company Iterbide S.C. (Loza & Niso 2004). The site is located a few
168 meters away from the medieval church of San Pedro, built for the first time in the 13th century AD, when
169 the city expanded towards the west with the creation of a new quarter that was soon incorporated inside
170 the city walls.

171 In context number 3007, an inverted pot was found, with an almost complete juvenile galliform,
172 probably chicken (*Gallus gallus*), in it and a coin deposited on the top of the basis of the pot. The coin
173 was minted by king Alfonse VIII of Castile between AD 1195 and AD 1256 (Sánchez 2012). The pot, on
174 the other hand, can be dated to the 13th century AD. It is a complete pot of kitchenware, with a straight
175 neck and an everted lip, hand-wheel made with orange clay and mica inclusions. The deposit, surely
176 dated to the second half of the 13th century AD (according to the stratigraphy, the coin, and the type of
177 pot), is related to the foundations of the building that occupied this plot, contemporary to the
178 construction of the city walls in this area, according to the excavators (Loza & Niso 2004). The Hospital
179 and the Church of San Pedro were located next to this plot.

180

181 2.3. Zapatari 35, Salvatierra-Agurain

182 The plot located in number 35 of Zapatari street (also known as 'Antigua Biblioteca') in the old part of
183 the city of Salvatierra-Agurain, was excavated in 2009 by the archaeological company Iterbide S.C. (Loza
184 & Niso 2009). At the plot, the remains of some domestic buildings were found, apparently abandoned in
185 order to build the walls of the city, founded in 1256 by Alfonso X, king of Castile.

186 In context number 54, a pot with a complete skeleton of a chicken (*Gallus gallus*) was found. The bird is
187 very well preserved, and most of the anatomical elements were recovered. The proximal ends of the

188 tarsometatarsi show that the individual is not completely mature, and therefore no conclusive sexing
189 evidence was to be expected; in fact, there is no medullary bone¹ present (pointing towards male) but
190 the individual has no spurs (pointing towards female). The archaeologists interpreted this context as
191 related to the construction of the city wall, in the mid-13th century AD (Loza & Niso 2009). The pot is
192 kitchenware, almost complete. It has a flat base, short neck, and its rim has a triangular lip. The pot is
193 decorated with incised lines in the neck. It is hand-wheel made, without surface finishing, and traces of
194 fingers and many irregularities are visible. It was produced in an oxidizing atmosphere, with orange clay
195 and mica inclusions.

196

197 2.4. Zaballa, Iruña de Oca

198 The rural settlement of Zaballa, located in Iruña de Oca, was excavated in 2009 when a major public
199 construction needed to be carried out (Quirós 2012). In a context of area 6700, close to the church of
200 San Tirso, a fragmented pot with remains belonging to an adult chicken (*Gallus gallus*) was found. The
201 archaeological find is awfully preserved, and only a small number of the chicken's anatomical elements
202 were recovered (femora, tibiotarsi, and the shaft of a tarsometatarsus), and only the bottom of the
203 ceramic pot was preserved. The presence of medullary bone shows that the individual was a laying hen.
204 The deposit can be dated to the 12th-13th centuries AD, in relation to the construction of a new portico.
205 The pot is perhaps fineware, a pitcher or a jar with a flat base. It was hand-wheel made, without surface
206 finishing, and traces of fingers are visible. It was produced in a mixed atmosphere, with orange-brown
207 clay.

208

209 2.5. Mavilla, Estavillo, Armiñón

210 The rural settlement of Mavilla, located in Estavillo (Armiñón), was excavated by the archaeological
211 company Ondare Babesa S.L. in 1997. This is a rural settlement, probably located in the periphery of the
212 village of Armiñón, which is mentioned in the written documents since the 9th century AD.

213 In context number 17 (the filling of a silo or storage pit), an inverted pot was found with the complete
214 skeleton of a juvenile bird, identified as a galliform, probably a chicken (*Gallus gallus*). After this deposit,
215 the silo was filled with domestic residues. The excavators mentioned (Fernández & Ajamil 2011) that
216 this deposit might be evidence of a ritual for good harvests; however, I believe, as it is explained later,
217 that the meaning of this deposit was different. The pot is a small kitchenware, with a flat base, and a
218 short straight rim with a triangular lip. The handle has an oval section. In the upper body of the pot,
219 some "decoration" made with rows of punctuations was made before the fire. The archaeologists dated
220 the context to the 12th-13th centuries AD.

221

222

¹ Medullary bone forms in the marrow cavity in egg-laying bird bones in response to gonadal steroids, acting as a labile reservoir for the supply of eggshell calcium. When present, it is unequivocal evidence for sexing bird remains as female.

223 3. Defining the ritual

224

225 3.1. Components

226 In this section, all the components of these deposits (summarised in Table 1) will be examined together
227 (the material used for the deposit, their intentionality, their location, etc.), bearing in mind five of the
228 main reasons to suggest that they represent a manifestation of a ritual practice: similar material culture,
229 structuration of the deposits, geographical proximity, contemporaneity, and repetition. The relative
230 similarity of these examples, far from being isolated cases, constitute a consistent pattern. This set of
231 deposits seems to correspond to a distinct ritual practice, chronologically and geographically coherent,
232 based on the burial of objects used in the everyday life, and that has the deposition of a chicken as one
233 of the main characteristics.

234

Site	Location	CTX info	Date	Inverted?	Bird	Other
Torrentejo	Labastida	Two pits, church renovation	12 th -13 th c.	No, covered	Juvenile galliform	Potter's mark?
				Yes	No	Decorated
Herrería 44	Vitoria-Gasteiz	Pit, building and city walls	13 th c.	Yes	Juvenile galliform	Coin on the top
Zapatari 35	Salvatierra-Agurain	Ditch, construction city walls	mid. 13 th c.	No	Adult chicken	Decorated
Zaballa	Iruña de Oca	Church renovation	12 th -13 th c.	No	Adult chicken	-
Mavilla	Estavillo, Armiñón	Abandonment of silo	12 th -13 th c.	Yes	Juvenile galliform	Decorated

235

Table 1. Summary of the deposits.

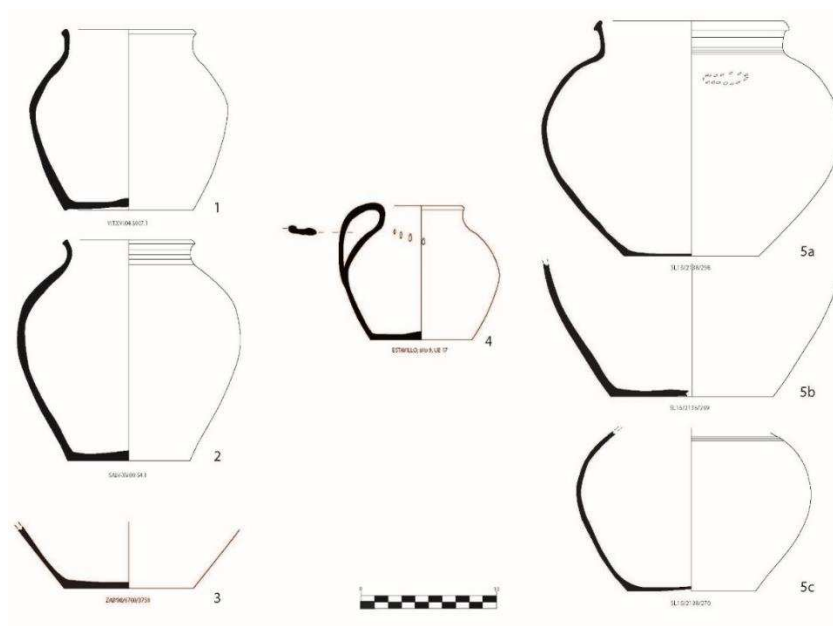
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237 Despite the small number of cases detected so far (six) and the slight variations between them, some
238 common characteristics are visible in these unusual deposits. This, added to the contemporaneity of the
239 remains (12th-13th centuries AD) and to their geographic proximity (they are all located within 50 km
240 distance), allows me to suggest that they might constitute the material evidence of a ritual practice. It is
241 important, however, to highlight that there are some variations of the ritual, such as the number of
242 vessels, their disposition, or the deposition of a coin. Although repetition is a clear characteristic of ritual
243 practices (Moore & Meyerhoff 1977: 8), it is perhaps unrealistic to expect an exact repetition in every
244 case. First, a ritual may not be normative, but rather transmitted by oral tradition for instance, therefore
245 susceptible to misunderstandings or deviations. Second, it would be unrealistic from us, archaeologists,
246 to expect all deposits related to the same ritual practice to look exactly the same, considering the
247 different formation processes of archaeological contexts and sites, and the different taphonomic or post-
248 depositional factors that might affect the deposits, including issues related to the preservation of the
249 remains, and differences in the excavation, recovery, documentation and publication of the evidence. If

250 these deposits are interpreted in the framework of folk religion, as I argue later, these variations may
251 be explained: while institutionalised religion “consists of norms, values, goals, and modes of behaviour
252 which are specified, employing explicit and verbalizable rules” (Pyysiäinen 2004: 152), these may not
253 be the case for vernacular religion, and thus variations might be expected.

254 According to the context information provided by the excavators (see site reports Loza & Niso 2004 and
255 2009; Fernández & Ajamil 2011; Quirós 2012, 2014 and 2015), all deposits seem to be structured. In all
256 cases, perhaps with the exception of Mavilla, pits were purposely made for placing the ceramic pots. The
257 deliberate inversion of the vessel itself, buried upside down, constitutes a very distinctive ritual act,
258 which also occurred in Roman ritual deposits; indeed, it has been suggested that there might be a link
259 to the proto-historic inversion of cinerary urns (Merrifield 1987: 189). In one case where the pot was
260 not inverted (the pot containing the bird in Torrentejo), it was covered with a fragment of another pot,
261 again suggesting the deliberate deposition in a particular organised manner. According to the
262 archaeologists at the sites, all deposits considered here appeared in relation to the construction,
263 foundation or re-foundation of remarkable public buildings, such as churches and city walls (this
264 association will be discussed in the following sections), with the only exception of the deposit found at
265 the bottom of a silo or storage pit in Mavilla.

266 The pots found in the deposits described above are similar to the rest of the ceramic repertoire found at
267 the contemporaneous settlements. The morphology of the vessels and the type of clay are in no way
268 different or unusual to the other pottery fragments recovered at the excavations. Size-wise, the pot from
269 Mavilla is much smaller than the ones found at the other sites. Figures 3 and 4 show the pots found in
270 these ritual deposits.
271



272
273 Figure 3. Ceramic pots found in the building deposits. 1) Vitoria-Gasteiz, Herrería 44, 2) Salvatierra, Zapatari 35,
274 3) Zaballa context 6700, 4) Mavilla, context 17 silo 9, 5a) and 5b) Torrentejo, context 2138, 5c) Torrentejo,
275 context 2125. Photo by L. Elorza and J.A. Quirós.



276
277 Figure 4. Ceramic pots found in building deposits from Zaballa, Salvatierra, Vitoria, Mavilla (from left to right).

278 Photo by L. Elorza.

279

280 An important element to discuss is the chicken remains found inside the pots. Chicken is not very
281 frequent in High and Late Medieval Iberia, but is present at most sites, normally constituting the fourth
282 most common domesticate (after sheep, cattle and pig), and its frequencies vary between the 3% and
283 the 6% (compared to the other three species by Number of Identified Specimens). In most cases they
284 are found as isolated remains, as part of consumption refuse (Grau 2015: 135-136), rather than
285 articulated. Figure 5 shows the faunal remains found in these deposits. Many of them are quite badly
286 preserved (most bones are fragmented and their cortical bone is damaged), probably due to a
287 combination of taphonomic factors (e.g. erosion) and the fragile nature of bird bones, especially of young
288 individuals; there is no evidence that fragmenting the bones was part of the ritual. Although direct
289 evidence of sacrifice (such as cut marks that might suggest the slaughter or consumption of the meat)
290 were not found in any of the examples, this possibility cannot be excluded due to the preservation
291 conditions. Anthropological literature on rituals involving constructions suggests that when animal
292 were involved, they were generally sacrificed, with two main aims: gaining permission or cooperation
293 from the supernatural powers who own the land where the building will be constructed, and
294 guaranteeing protection of the building (e.g. Wessing & Jordaan 1997; Hukantaival 2007: 70), as a safety
295 measure to divert a malign influence (Merrifield 1987: 119). Moreover, such rituals are composed of
296 several stages (Sykes 2014: 124-126) that show that the sacrificed animals were very valued and
297 respected, and that, in many cases, animal sacrifice involved haruspication, or examination of the animal
298 entrails.

299 The use of a bird for the ritual (instead of any other animal) makes us think of the possibility that
300 haruspication might have been part of the ritual. In Ancient times, the movement and behaviour of
301 animals, and in particular birds, was considered to be prophetic and therefore they were widely used in
302 oracles and divination (Sykes 2014: 118-9). Plutarch (mid-1st-2nd centuries AD) mentioned that the gods
303 influenced the behaviour of birds in order to give advice to humans (Bonnechere 2007: 11) and, in fact,
304 Romans used chicken for interpreting that advice (Johnston 2009: 130; Gilhus 2006: 26). Cockerels and
305 hens were important in Ancient times for the cults of Mercury/Hermes, Apollo and Mithra. These are
306 just examples of how important birds were, and in particular chicken, for divination practices in ancient

307 times, a custom that might have survived into the Middle Ages. In fact, there is plenty of evidence that
 308 sacrifice-divination and ritual offerings survived well into the Middle Ages (Jolly et al. 2002; Gilhus
 309 2006). Historical evidence suggests that ornithomancy and avian aurality lasted at least into the Early
 310 Middle Ages (Poole & Lacey 2014), as it is mentioned (prohibited) in Anglo-Saxon laws (Hinton 2005:
 311 70). Also, Isidore of Seville (6th-7th centuries AD) and Augustine of Hippo (4th-5th centuries AD) strongly
 312 opposed this type of rituals (Jolly et al. 2002; Gilhus 2006: 26, 166). Moreover, in the 6th century, Pope
 313 Gregory I decreed that the rooster was the most suitable symbol of Christianity, because of the ties of
 314 this animal to St. Peter (Lawler 2014: 155); in this sense, it seems particularly interesting that some of
 315 these deposits were found in relation to churches, and especially intriguing the fact that one of these
 316 deposits (in Herrería 44, Vitoria-Gasteiz) appeared very close to the church and hospital of St. Peter.
 317 Some authors have suggested that the use of religiously powerful symbols is indeed common in
 318 practices related to vernacular or folk religion (Johanson & Jonuks 2015: 138).
 319



320
 321 Figure 5. Faunal remains in the ritual deposits. Photo by I. Grau-Sologestoa.
 322

323 Another interesting element in the material culture found in these set of deposits is the use of a coin, in
 324 the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz. Metallic objects played an important apotropaic role in many societies (e.g.
 325 Viet & Maué 1982; Daróczy-Szabó 2010), and they are often found in archaeological contexts interpreted
 326 as ritual deposits.

327 Many known unusual ritual deposits in southern Europe are particularly noticeable because of the rarity
 328 of the materials used for the deposit. A good and unique example is the exceptionally luxurious brooch
 329 related to the foundation of a religious building in Montieri (Grosseto, Italy) (Bianchi et al. 2014); in this
 330 case, the foundation of the church of San Niccolò has been attributed to the bishop at the nearby city of
 331 Volterra. However, as opposed to this kind of public exhibit of wealth in ritual deposits, the cases
 332 examined in this paper suggest that the important part of the ritual practice was probably the meaning

333 of it, rather than its material value. Neither the ceramic pots nor the chicken remains are unusual at the
334 same sites of at other contemporary settlements from the same region (Grau 2015: 135-136). The
335 materials used for these ritual deposits in the Basque Country do not seem to be exceptional or
336 particularly costly, but they must have been significant at the local scale. Non-exceptional materials have
337 been found in ritual deposits in other European areas (e.g. Hukantaival 2007: 67; Gilchrist 2012: 234).

338

339 3.2. Rituals associated to constructions

340 What kind of ritual is the one we are dealing with? Rituals can take many forms and be composed of
341 many different activities. In archaeology, however, it is often the final product of the ritual what we are
342 dealing with and so, many aspects of it may be indecipherable for us. For these reasons, one of the rituals
343 most commonly discussed in archaeological literature are those deliberate or structured depositions,
344 sometimes in combination with the potential sacrifice of an animal, that are interpreted as building
345 foundational rituals (or the so-called 'Bauopfer' in the extensive and early German literature on the topic
346 -e.g. De Bruyn 1936). These ritual deposits in buildings are found in foundations, entrances, walls,
347 hearths, under the floor or in the ceiling (Merrifield 1987; Hukantaival 2007). Foundation rituals
348 commemorate, legitimate, elaborate and protect the act of building (Hunt 2006: 1). They are not always
349 related to the foundation of a building, but perhaps associated to the renovation or abandonment of it.
350 Gerritsen (2003) recapitulated three types of ritual deposits associated with buildings: (1) foundation
351 deposits that took place during or soon after the construction; (2) site-maintenance deposits that were
352 made during the habitation or usage of the building, and (3) abandonment deposits. The cases examined
353 in this paper seem to correspond to the first case: foundation or re-foundation deposits. Regardless of
354 the term is used, the medieval cases found in the Basque Country seem to be pointing towards a type of
355 ritual practice related to either the moment of foundation, construction or usage of a building or
356 structure, be it a city wall, a church, or a rural site, taking into account the location of the findings, their
357 chronology, their conformation, and the general occupation sequence of the settlements where they
358 were found as described by the archaeologists who excavated the remains (Loza & Niso 2004 and 2009;
359 Fernández & Ajamil 2011; Quirós 2012, 2014 and 2015; Sánchez 2012).

360 A relevant question to ask is who performed this ritual and what was the intended audience.
361 Anthropologists say that many religious practices are public whilst others belong to a more private
362 sphere (e.g. Groot 2008: 99). I do not believe that the discussed deposits were a product of domestic or
363 private devotion (e.g. Webb 2005; Gilchrist 2012). The fact that some of these deposits were probably
364 associated with major buildings such as city walls (Vitoria and Salvatierra) or churches (Torrentejo,
365 Zaballa, Vitoria) suggests that these rituals probably belonged to a more public sphere. On the other
366 hand, the intended audience seems to be restricted, because the final result of the ritual was a deposit
367 that remained hidden, through the burial of the objects used in the ritual. The variations observed in the
368 different deposits suggest, as mentioned above, that this ritual practice was not completely codified and
369 replicated in a normative form by people specialised in this ritual. In a way, this ritual must have been

370 ephemeral, it did not generate inter-generational ways of communication. These rituals were directed
371 only to the community that attended the process of foundation and legitimization of the building. In
372 other words, they are ritual practices that belong to the sphere of folk religiosity.

373

374 **4. Discussion**

375

376 4.1. An ancient tradition (re)adopted or (re)adapted?

377 Building foundation deposits appear across continents, cultures and centuries. In Europe, a relatively
378 large amount of research has been focused on Iron Age (Wilson 1992; Meniel 1992; Hill 1996; Therkorn
379 2004; Gerritsen 2003), Greek (Hunt 2006) and Roman (Woodward & Woodward 2004; Lauwerier 2004;
380 Groot 2008, 2009 and 2012) cases, but they were also common in other areas of the ancient
381 Mediterranean world (Hunt 2006: 1-5 and 129-181). Some examples dated to the Middle Ages have
382 been discussed in various European areas such as Switzerland (Nießen 2014), Austria (Töchterle &
383 Torggler 2002; Krög 2011), Hungary (Daróczi-Szabó 2010), Czech Republic (Vařeka 1994; Hložek et al.
384 2015), the Nordic countries (Beilke-Voigt 2007; Hukantaival 2007 and 2016; Carlisle & Milek in press),
385 Poland (Baron 2012), Britain (Merrifield 1987; Gilchrist 2012: 227-236), France (Rovira & Chabal 2008;
386 Mouton 2008: 34) and Germany (Capelle 1987). The occurrence of building foundation deposits across
387 central and northern medieval Europe is therefore well attested.

388 On the other hand, ritual deposits of pots in association with bird bones or eggs have been found
389 elsewhere in Europe, mainly dated to the Iron Age and the Roman period, but not necessarily related to
390 foundation deposits. One example is the quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) found under an inverted plate of
391 samian ware in the Netherlands (Lauwerier 2004: 69). Two medieval examples with a chicken are
392 known to us from a site in southern France, dated between the end of the 12th or early 13th centuries
393 (Henry et al. 2007). Other medieval (12th-14th centuries) examples are known from Hungary: at the
394 village of Kána, archaeologists found five inverted pots with chicken bones and two with eggs (of a total
395 of 23 structured deposits) (Daróczi-Szabó 2010).

396 In Spain, ritual deposits of chicken bones and/or eggs in pots have been found, dated to the Iron Age
397 (Barrial & Cortadella 1986; Miró & Molist 1990; Miró 1992; Belarte & Valenzuela 2013) and Roman
398 times (Loriente & Oliver 1992; Pérez 1998; Lluís Marí pers. comm.). But, to the best of my knowledge,
399 apart from the Basque cases mentioned in this paper, no other medieval examples have been found (yet)
400 in Spain; with two potential exceptions: one unpublished case found at the site of Saa (Pontevedra,
401 Galicia) dated to the 5th-6th century AD (it has been mentioned as a brief new in a blog: Gago 2010), and
402 one identified inside a silo dated to the 10th century AD, inside the church of Santa Perpètua de Mogoda
403 in Barcelona (Roig and Coll 2011). However, it is quite possible that this topic might have been quite
404 neglected by southern European scholars and that specific-case studies might be hidden in unpublished
405 archaeological reports or 'grey literature'. Table 1 summarizes the Iron Age, Roman and medieval

406 Iberian examples known to us with ritual deposits formed by chicken bones or eggs. Their location is
 407 shown, in black, in Figure 1.
 408

Site	Location	Period	Find's character	Function	Reference
Turó de Can'Olivé de Montflorit	Cerdanyola del Vallès, Barcelona	Iron Age, 4 th -3 th BC	Egg on top of a sacrificed sheep/goat, all covered by stones and a hand mill.	Building deposit	Barrial & Cortadella 1986
Turó dels Dos Pins	Cabrera de Mar, Barcelona	Iron Age, 3 th BC	Chicken and eggs found in pots in funerary contexts.	Funerary	Miró 1992
Corbins	Segrià, Lleida	Roman, mid 2 nd c. AD	1 pot with an egg and bird remains, on top of a pit filled with the remains of a sheep.	Building deposit	Marí & Mascort 1988; Marí 1993
Antic Portal de Magdalena	Lleida	Roman, 1 st c. AD	7 pots with eggs, below the pavement, around the building's perimeter, inside and outside it.	Building deposit	Loriente & Oliver 1992
Penya del Moro	Barcelona	Iron Age, end of 5 th -4 th c. BC	Egg within wall of household.	Building deposit	Miró & Molist 1990
Lépida/Celsa	Velilla de Ebro, Zaragoza	Roman	Eggs and bird remains in funerary contexts. Also 1 pot with an egg close to a funerary context.	Funerary	Mínguez 1989/90
Uxama	Burgo de Osma, Soria	Roman, second half of 1 st c. AD	1 pot with bird remains close to a funerary context.	Funerary	Pérez 1998
El Romeral	Albesa, Lleida	Roman, 3 rd -4 th c. AD	1 pot with an egg and a coin inside, maybe related to the abandonment of the <i>villa</i> .	Building deposit	Pers. Comm Lluís Marí
Mas Gusó	Bellcaire d'Empordà, Girona	Roman, late 2 nd -early 3 rd c. AD	4 pots outside the walls of the <i>villa</i> , oriented N, with eggs (one a bird's head). Below the pot, chicken remains.	Building deposit	Casas & Ruiz de Arbulo 1997
Tolegassos	Viladamat, Girona	Roman, first half of 3 rd c. AD	15 pots outside the walls of the <i>villa</i> , oriented N, with eggs and bird heads. Below the pot, chicken remains.	Building deposit	Casas & Ruiz de Arbulo 1997
Can Trullàs	Granollers, Barcelona	Roman, 2 nd -3 rd c. AD	1 pot with an egg, in a pit related to a funerary context.	Funerary	Estrada 1993
Vilauba	Camós, Girona	Roman, second half of 2 nd c. AD	1 pot at the foundation levels of the <i>villa</i> , with a bird's head.	Building deposit	Casas & Ruiz de Arbulo 1997
Saa	Pontevedra	Late Antique, 5 th -6 th c.	4 inverted pots found in the abandonment levels of a household. One with an animal inside.	Building deposit	Gago 2010
Santa Maria la Antigua	Santa Perpètua de Mogoda, Barcelona	Early Middle Ages, 10 th c	1 pot with bird remains inside a silo, below the altar of the church.	Building deposit	Roig & Coll 2011
Catedral de Santa María	Vitoria-Gasteiz	High Middle Ages, second half of 12 th c. AD	Inverted pot covering a bird, below the pavement of a defensive tower of the city walls.	Building deposit	Azkarate et al. 2016

409 Table 2. Summary of the sites in the Iberian Peninsula that share some characteristics to the ones examined in
 410 this paper, described in sections 2 and 3.
 411

412 Some authors have suggested that medieval examples found across Europe are later manifestations of
413 practices that were widespread in ancient times. Ralph Merrifield (1987: 116-121), author of a pioneer
414 study of European special deposits dated to historical periods, suggested that the ritual deposits for the
415 protection of buildings continued in post-Roman times. However, other authors disagree with this view.
416 For instance, Hunt (2006: 125-129) does not agree with the idea that medieval and post-medieval
417 building deposits are later cases of an ancient cult practice, and argues that anthropological and folkloric
418 perspectives should not be used in order to interpret ancient foundation rituals: this would ignore the
419 historical context and the specific characteristics of the archaeological evidence, assuming that all
420 foundation rituals are manifestations of relatively homogenous, worldwide phenomena propelled by
421 motivations inherent to all religious systems. It is however important to point out that one of the most
422 efficient strategies for ritualization is the creation of practices that reproduced others from the past,
423 with the aim of empowering agents in the present that often show themselves as the only guardians of
424 the past and experts on the ritual (Bell 1992: 123). The past was in fact a formidable tool in ritualization
425 processes that allowed the construction of power relationships of domination, consent or resistance
426 (Bell 1992: 206).

427 The relatively large quantity of Iberian examples that are very similar to our Basque medieval cases in
428 earlier periods makes us suggest that, contrary to Hunt's view, and, despite the obvious chronological
429 gap between the Roman examples and our high medieval cases, the ritual that produced these building
430 deposits might have its origin in ancient times. I do not mean to suggest that neither the ritual nor the
431 beliefs behind it were exactly the same as in ancient times. These high medieval ritual deposits, rather
432 than being long-lasting ritual practices, are perhaps the material evidence of a re-elaboration or re-
433 interpretation of ancient ritual practices. Some elements could have been inherited from pre-Christian
434 times, but they would have been *reinterpreted* from another point of view (Hukantaival 2013: 104;
435 Johanson & Jonuks 2015: 139), in terms of *transposition* of the functional meaning, while the form of the
436 ritual was kept unchanged (Clack 2011: 232). In fact, in the framework of folk or vernacular religion,
437 "the omnipresent action of personal religious interpretation involves various negotiations of belief and
438 practice including, but not limited to, original invention, unintentional innovation, and intentional
439 adaptation" (Primiano 1995: 43). If my hypothesis is right, our Basque examples would not be isolated
440 cases: it has already been suggested that ancient and pre-Christian practices endured in the collective
441 memory of medieval men and women, but were *adapted* to new cosmologies in response to new socio-
442 political scenes (Gilchrist 2012: 234). In other European areas, for instance, archaeological evidence
443 suggests that the memory of ancient locations and practices survived well into the Middle Ages (e.g.
444 Semple 2013; De Blas 2015; Weiss-Krejci 2015), and the same has been suggested for the early medieval
445 Basque Country (Azkarate & García 1992). The specific cultural context is a key factor for interpreting
446 rituals, and we should not expect universalistic rules of materiality outside of practice (Verhoeven 2011:
447 123; Kapaló 2011: 25; Rowan 2012: 4). The analysis of practices that may appear to be arbitrary,
448 irrational or unusual is only doable if considered within the context that these practices became

449 significant; all in all, “folk religion is a political construct that can be only understood contextually”
450 (Kapaló 2011: 25). In any case, the potential continuity of ancient foundation rituals into the Middle
451 Ages in Iberia is at this point just a hypothesis that will need to be re-examined in the future, but it is
452 important to be suggested here.

453

454 4.2. The ritual in its context

455 If rituals need to be understood contextually, how can we explain the occurrence of these ritual practices
456 in the particular context of the Basque Country in the 12th-13th centuries AD? As a tentative explanation,
457 I suggest that the occurrence of practices of folk religion in this context was related to processes of
458 conformation, negotiation and reaffirmation of social and political communities in this period. In fact,
459 “vernacular religion can develop to contest unequal power relations, to affirm the existence of inequality
460 in the struggle of life, or simply to confirm the social status quo” (Primiano 1995: 47). During the High
461 Middle Ages, new ways of socialization were created, as the result of some major socio-political
462 upheavals in this territory.

463 The 12th and 13th centuries AD constitute a critical period in the processes that served to reconfigure
464 local communities, both in the rural and the urban spaces. In this period, in the Basque Country,
465 successive kings promoted the foundation of more than 70 new cities (or proto-cities), most of them
466 based on rural settlements that already existed (Quirós & Bengoetxea 2005). Through these
467 foundations, the monarchy aimed to consolidate its power at a local scale, frequently opposing the
468 interests of secular and religious elites, gaining dominion over people, resources and goods. This is what
469 happened with the foundation of the city of Vitoria on the location of the village of Gasteiz in AD 1181,
470 and with the foundation of the city of Salvatierra where the village of Agurain was in AD 1256.

471 Although there is still some debate on when did the Christianization of the Basque Country occur or on
472 how did the brief Islamic occupation (8th century AD) impact on the territory (Quirós 2011a), it is known
473 that, by the 12th and 13th centuries AD, the Basque Country was predominantly a Christian society.
474 During the 11th-12th centuries AD, the complex socio-political dynamics that affected the Kingdoms of
475 Castile, Navarre and Aragón in the Ebro valley caused profound changes in the ecclesiastical
476 organization and constant territorial changes of these states, including the disappearance of the
477 Kingdom of Navarre between AD 1076 and AD 1134 (Carl 2011). As the result of this political instability
478 and of the resilience of local elites to be placed under a centralised power, the bishop of Calahorra had
479 remarkable difficulties for establishing his ecclesiastical power in the Basque Country during the 12th
480 century AD (Carl 2008 and 2011).

481 The majority of the Basque churches dated to the Early Middle Ages were private foundations, made by
482 aristocrats, monasteries, bishops and kings, although it is quite likely that some of them were initiative
483 of peasant communities (Quirós 2011b). During the 12th-13th centuries AD, a dense network of parishes
484 was created in this territory, as the result of the functional and architectonic transformation of existing
485 churches (sometimes involving a change in the ownership of the buildings). Other churches were newly

486 built and others were abandoned in this period. The diffusion of the so-called Romanesque style was, to
487 a great extent, due to this process of territorial transformation that implied new ways of habitat
488 hierarchization (Zadora-Rio 2005: 16). One of the clearest results of this process was the
489 reconfiguration of local communities, both in the creation of urban parishes, and in the reconfiguration
490 of villages. The somewhat unusual ritual deposit of Mavilla, placed inside a storage pit on occasion of its
491 abandonment, might perhaps be explained in this context of reconfiguration of the domestic space,
492 perhaps related to the creation of the parish of Armiñón and the subsequent transformation of the
493 village. The multifaceted character (in terms of function, identity, politics and society) that churches
494 played in medieval Christian societies may explain why, related to their foundation, re-construction or
495 expansion, different agents and social practices might have been confronted, with a strong contextual
496 meaning. The processes of ritualization that articulated around churches and other public buildings in
497 the Middle Ages may seem irrational or non-functional from our contemporary perspective (Brück
498 1999), but could have played a fundamental role in the construction of collective identities, in contexts
499 of socio-political stress.

500 However, some of these upheavals were also happening in other regions of Iberia, where the occurrence
501 of similar practices of folk religion are not known at the moment. The potential links between the ritual
502 practice identified in the High Medieval Basque Country and the negotiation of new social and political
503 structures is at present just a hypothesis that should be explored further in the future.

504

505 4.3. Dealing with the unexpected: folk religion in a Christian society

506 Appealing to folk religion and ritual practices in such a context of socio-political instability may be
507 viewed in different ways. The same way that the construction of a city wall or the foundation of a church
508 provides cohesion to a community, rituals legitimise their realization and the leadership of the
509 promoters. The ritualization of these foundation processes constitutes a source of power and authority
510 for the leaders, formally or informally, of the emerging communities that turn to, re-elaborate, build or
511 create a tradition (Bell 1992: 211). The appropriation of foundation rituals in the framework of folk
512 religion has been understood as a process that aimed to undermine the monopoly of social display by
513 the clergy (Kapaló 2013: 11-12). Other researchers have discussed how building deposits may have
514 served as a way to model space, creating a mnemonic device associated with different social spaces and
515 how they were used for negotiating, creating and maintaining social identities (e.g. Carlisle & Milek in
516 press: 265-266). In any case, it can be suggested that the high medieval foundational rituals documented
517 in the Basque Country served as a mechanism for power display by the social or political elites within
518 the emerging and transforming local communities., in a context in which a new social landscape was
519 being constructed, as explained in the previous section.

520 Most research on medieval magic and rituals has been carried out in northern Europe, where
521 Christianity arrived quite late and was disputed by pagan beliefs; the ritual deposits examined here, on
522 the contrary, were found in an area that belonged to the Roman Empire and where Christianity was

523 adopted early. The conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs in medieval Europe has been discussed
524 to some extent (Gurevich 1988; Urbańczyk 1998; Milis 1998; Sommer 2000; Carver 2003; Mitchell
525 2011). In other European areas where the occurrence of ritual practices related to folk religion has been
526 more widely investigated, often they are interpreted and understood as a way of re-affirming local
527 traditions, beliefs and identities against a newly arrived, imposed religion (Christianity). But this cannot
528 explain the Basque cases presented here. For medieval Spain, although the (official) history of the
529 Christian church considers that the Gregorian Reform in the 11th century AD involved a radical change
530 in the organization of the dioceses, the creation of the parish network and the normalization of the
531 liturgy (Faci 1985), available evidence suggests, for the Basque Country, that this process needs to be
532 considered in the framework of a profound social and territorial reorganization that determined the
533 creation of new hierarchies and socio-political communities. It was precisely within this situation of
534 socio-political stress, that the conditions were met for the development of ritual practices that did not
535 follow the official liturgy. In other words, in this case, folk religion was the other side of the coin of
536 institutionalized religion. It was precisely the weak and late reinforcement of ecclesiastical authorities
537 and the emergence of royal towns that caused a context of intense negotiation of local power dynamics,
538 helping the emergence of foundation rituals.

539 Some recent works have focused their attention on the analysis of folk ritualization within Christian
540 societies. However, a comparative discussion of the various approaches and the different socio-political
541 contexts where these forms of religiosity co-existed has not happened yet. Western historiography has
542 revealed a tendency to portray the conversion to Christianity in a triumphalist manner (Mitchell 2011:
543 38), and this has spread certain assumptions about religiosity in historical times. After the Gregorian
544 Reform at the end of the 11th century AD, historians tend to view Christianity as a uniform and fully
545 organised entity, by portraying Christianity as a complete, uniform and evenly distributed spiritual
546 hegemony. However, “it is a theologistic fallacy to think that live religiosity can be understood as some
547 kind of coherent dogma” (Pyysiäinen 2004: 156, referencing Boyer 1994). Historical archaeologists
548 have had difficulties interpreting evidence inconsistent with the expectations of past religiosity
549 (Hukantaival 2013: 100-101) and controversial evidence has generally been dismissed (Mitchell 2011:
550 38; Hukantaival 2016: 37–38, 247–250). Being so, northern European scholars have explained the
551 multiplication of folk religious practices in the Middle Ages as a result of the increasing confrontation of
552 two different belief systems, when local “pagan” communities converted into Christianity, causing a
553 remarkable social instability. According to Baron, “ritual plays a role in the situation of uncertainty and
554 suspense in social relations ordered by the moral codes. The level of intensity of the collectively
555 expressed and enacted ritual depends on the level of uncertainty experienced by individual members of
556 a population. This uncertainty arises from the increasing options available, the crisis of authority,
557 ambiguity in institutional orders, a lack of clarity in values, equivocation in regard to cultural symbols
558 and the precarious nature of social contacts” (Baron 2012: 450-451).

559 Importantly, however, it can be argued that people in the past did not see unusual or folk ritual practices
560 as something contrary to Christianity (Hukantaival 2007: 72), and in fact, different types of rituals that
561 seem to contradict the official religion keep being practiced in different parts of the world even
562 nowadays. It seems quite possible that Christianity had the ability to adopt, combine or hide old pagan
563 traditions in new forms, when confronted with individual and social aspects of daily life (Urbańczyk
564 1998), creating a sort of 'popular Christianity' (Gurevich 1988). The different forms of supernatural
565 power overlapped and intermingled in people's minds (Cameron 2010: 62), experienced by the
566 practitioner(s) as non-contradictory (Hukantaival 2013: 104). Individuals feel their personal belief
567 system as believers to be "official" (Primiano 1995: 47). From a very different perspective, R. Gilchrist
568 has recently explored the ritualization processes that occurred at the private sphere (Gilchrist 2012), in
569 funerary practices (Gilchrist 2008) or in religious contexts (Gilchrist 2014), suggesting that medieval
570 religion had in fact a highly hybrid and dynamic character, and showing that sometimes re-interpreted
571 pagan practices and official liturgic rituals were integrated in different situations. Our Basque examples
572 seem to support this view.

573 Vernacular and institutionalised or official rituals have traditionally often been studied by scholars
574 separately (Pyysiäinen 2004; Johanson & Jonuks 2015), often assigning an unofficial status to the
575 vernacular religion; understanding folk as the 'lived' religion helps overcoming this devaluation
576 (Primiano 1995: 39). Various authors have suggested that a simple distinction cannot be made between
577 institutionalised and non-institutional religion, and that this distinction is just an analytical tool, rather
578 than an empirical typology (Pyysiäinen 2004: 152). In fact, folk religion is syncretic in nature, mixing
579 popular interpretations with Christian liturgical elements (Johanson & Jonuks 2015), as a sort of
580 symbiotic relationship between the two (Whitehouse 2004). Indeed, both are fundamental aspects to
581 understand religiosity and the constant changes of religions, practices and beliefs.

582

583 **5. Conclusion**

584

585 This work has presented the first known set of building deposits that has been interpreted as evidence
586 for folk religion in Christian Spain during the Middle Ages. Although the number of cases considered in
587 this paper is relatively small, it is also true that they were found in a relatively small geographic area in
588 which medieval archaeology has experienced a very remarkable development in the last two decades,
589 as opposed to some other areas in the Iberian Peninsula. There is no reason to think that the ritual
590 practice and its material manifestation discussed in this paper were just limited to the High Middle Ages
591 and to the southern Basque Country; it is quite possible that such practices were much more
592 widespread, as research in other European areas has shown. Quite likely, a more careful excavation, and
593 detailed recording and publication of the findings, would lead to an explosion of the occurrence of ritual
594 deposits in the medieval (and perhaps post-medieval) Iberian Peninsula.

595 The tentative interpretations about these deposits that I have discussed in this paper are mere
596 suggestions, based on sparse evidence and on similar cases observed elsewhere in Europe. The intention
597 of this paper is to bring attention to a rather unexplored topic, particularly in southern medieval Europe,
598 that is of a great interest for understanding religiosity and social practices. It is time to stop considering
599 such ritual practices as something rather unusual, marginal, and opposed to medieval Christianity.
600 Ultimately, folk religion must be considered part of religion, and not a separate field, although “this
601 concept has not yet ‘done its duty’ in the field of archaeology” (Hukantaival 2013: 116). This work aimed
602 to contribute to this idea, by considering the elements and meaning of a particular type of folk ritual
603 practice, by discussing the potential socio-political causes and implications of its occurrence.
604 The main conclusion of this work is, perhaps, that the co-existence of official and popular rituals within
605 Christianity, as within other religions, was not limited to the initial phases of its establishment, and
606 cannot be explained in terms of amalgamating syncretism regarding foreign or previous practices.
607 Indeed, it was a tense, continuous dialogue that was ultimately linked to more profound social dynamics.
608 This co-existence, which sometimes translated into contradictions and contrasts, explains, among other
609 reasons, the regular need to codify and negotiate the liturgical practices by the ecclesiastical elites.
610 Archaeology counts with powerful means to detect the different dimensions of religion in the past.
611 Written sources constituted a tool to direct and articulate the rituals of the institutionalized religion,
612 and also acted as a filter or bias, hiding the practices of vernacular religion, particularly if there was no
613 clear conflict between the two spheres. Only through archaeology it is possible to investigate folk
614 religion, to understand the social and political contexts that made the use of such ritual practices
615 meaningful and rational, and to comprehend how they negotiated with other practices of social action,
616 legitimised by the official religion.

617

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633

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873 **Figure captions**

874 Figure 1. Map showing the location of the sites mentioned in the text. In red, deposits examined in this
875 work, in the Basque Country; in black, other sites (listed in Table 1).

876 Figure 2. Incision mark found in one of the pots of Torrentejo, Labastida, 12th century AD. Photo by L.
877 Elorza.

878 Figure 3. Ceramic pots found in the building deposits. 1) Vitoria-Gasteiz, Herrería 44, 2) Salvatierra,
879 Zapatari 35, 3) Zaballa context 6700, 4) Mavilla, context 17 silo 9, 5a) and 5b) Torrentejo, context 2138,
880 5c) Torrentejo, context 2125. Photo by L. Elorza and J.A. Quirós.

881 Figure 4. Ceramic pots found in building deposits from Zaballa, Salvatierra, Vitoria, Mavilla (from left to
882 right). Photo by L. Elorza.

883 Figure 5. Faunal remains in the ritual deposits. Photo by I. Grau-Sologestoa.

884

885 **Table captions**

886 Table 1. Summary of the deposits.

887 Table 2. Summary of the sites in the Iberian Peninsula that share some characteristics to the ones
888 examined in this paper, described in sections 2 and 3.