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**Society, Community and Power
in Northern Spain: 700 – 1000**

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Short Abstract

The period from c.718 to c.1000 oversaw the reconquest of a significant part of the Iberian Peninsula by the kingdom of Asturias (718–910) and its successor in León (910–1037); the study of this process of *Reconquista* has in recent years focused on two broader social changes: the increasing exploitation of the peasantry, and the eclipse of public power. In the **Introduction**, I argue that it is necessary to integrate the study of peasant societies with analyses of royal and aristocratic power; reframing the subject in this way, we are able to appreciate the diversity of social experience which characterized both peasant and aristocratic life across the two case studies here examined, Southern Galicia, and the Liébana. I argue that the tenth century must be seen on its own terms, and without the benefit of hindsight, if we are to characterize it fairly.

Chapter Two discusses the source material I have used in the elaboration of this thesis, highlighting its uses and problems from a critical perspective. In **Chapter Three** I show that fluid social structures allowed a family to rise to power from amongst the village inhabitants of the Liébana. Public officials such as counts were not able to impose themselves frequently upon this society. In **Chapter Four**, I show how a rich and aristocratic family of lay magnates, based in southern Galicia, were major political operators from the ninth century, but only came to exercise significant social influence amongst local society after the construction of the monastery of Celanova in 936. My **Conclusion** contextualizes these changes; it also argues that more nuanced and less schematic approaches to social relations demonstrate that peasants retained considerable autonomy in this period, and that factional politics influenced the stability of kingship far more than the supposed eclipse of public power.

Long Abstract

In 711, the Visigothic kingdom was destroyed by Arab-Berber armies which proceeded to conquer much of the Iberian Peninsula within ten years; thereafter, a series of Muslim polities would rule over varying extensions of the peninsula until 1492. The period from c.718 to c.1000 oversaw the reconquest of a significant part of the Iberian Peninsula by the Kingdom of Asturias (718–910) and its successor based in León (910–1037); the emergence of these Christian polities in the northern peninsula forms the contextual background to this thesis. In the **Introduction**, I sketch out the basic political narrative of the period, explaining that recent syntheses have tended to interpret the tenth century as one in which the social and political structures of the Christian polities of Asturias and León moved ineluctably towards ‘feudalism’, this latter broadly defined as the eclipse of public power at the expense of private interest, and the increasing subjection of the peasant stratum. I argue that the cohesion of royal rule was not undermined in the tenth century; factional politics simply came to matter more in a larger and less easily defensible kingdom, but royal power survived intact at the end of the tenth century.

The process of *Reconquista* with which these Christian kingdoms regained political control over parts of the peninsula lost to Arab-Berber forces after 711, has come to assume a central role in Spanish historiography, producing two dominant schools in the twentieth century which until recently held an unusually resilient grip on Spanish medieval studies. These schools, very broadly, can be defined as the Sánchez-Albornoz school and the Barbero and Vigil school: the former argued that the Duero valley had been depopulated in the wake of the Arab-Berber invasion of 711, due to the northern migration of peasant farmers seeking to inhabit those areas free of Arab political hegemony; within the Sánchez-Albornoz schema, which depended heavily on a literal interpretation of the propaganda of ninth-century royal chronicles, this process was both spontaneous and royally directed. According to Sánchez-Albornoz and his supporters, the later ninth and tenth centuries saw the

resettlement of many free peasant cultivators in the Duero valley and throughout the northern peninsula, as the Astur-Leonese kingdoms assumed more coherent and stable control of the areas lying to the south of the Cantabrian chain. Thus, after depopulation (*despoblación*) would come repopulation (*repoblación*), which rested on the belief that those seen purchasing or asserting their rights to land in charter material, were in the majority of cases free peasant newcomers. The free peasant would therefore acquire a charged symbolism in the Sánchez-Albornoz hypothesis, since he or she was necessarily a direct agent of reconquest (*reconquista*). Moreover, the small-scale political elites of the Asturian kingdom would expand southwards in piecemeal fashion, only exerting a superficial authority over free peasant proprietors—conditions which did not allow for the violent exploitation and social inequalities thought to be characteristic of the feudal world. Barbero and Vigil countered by suggesting that the Astur-Leonese polity emerged from within the indigenous societies of the Cantabrian fringe of northern Spain. Moreover, their studies located the socio-economic and political context of the changes of the early medieval period in the longevity of *gentilicio* (that is, kin-based, or tribal) social structures; private property, patriarchal social structures, and monetary economy, all of which underpinned Roman and Visigothic society, were argued to have been absent from Cantabrian society, allowing Barbero and Vigil to propose a different basis from which to examine the development of the Astur-Leonese polity. These scholars did not, unlike Sánchez Albornoz, consider feudalism an inherently non-Spanish phenomenon, but rather argued for a path towards a feudal society born directly from the breakdown of tribal structures.

Having explored this historiographical context, I argue that more nuanced approaches need to be brought to bear, so as to integrate the study of peasant societies with analyses of royal and aristocratic power; reframing the subject in this way, we are able to appreciate the diversity of social experience which characterized both aristocratic and peasant life across the two case studies here examined, southern Galicia, and the Liébana valley. Both of these areas are well documented and have not been analysed in comparative fashion before; my comparative analysis emphasizes that an understanding of subregional and regional difference provides firmer foundations for the wider conclusions that historians seek. I conclude my **Introduction** by nuancing the view that this period

should be seen as one in which societies across northern Spain readied themselves for the Feudal Age proper, a position too readily accepted by much of the secondary literature; I argue that the tenth century must be seen on its own terms, and without the benefit of hindsight, if we are to characterize it fairly.

Chapter Two discusses the source material I have used in the elaboration of this thesis, highlighting its uses and problems from a critical perspective. My principal source are charters, documents written for public reference, most (but not all) of which record the transfer of title rights to land from one party to another; the collection, transmission and survival of these documents poses a series of very important questions which I discuss in this chapter. I conclude that when scrutinized with due caution, charters can be used as documents which record aspects of the construction of local societies.

I then move on to my case studies in **Chapters Three and Four**, both of which are subdivided into four smaller sections for the purposes of clarity. **In Chapter Three**, I begin by discussing the complicated historiographical considerations that frame all studies of early medieval Cantabria, the autonomous region of Spain of which my first case study, the Liébana valley, forms the most westerly part. I argue, on the basis of archaeological and written sources, that there are compelling reasons to accept the notion that Cantabria was much more substantially Romanized than was once thought to be the case. In this way, I show that it is no longer credible to accept the Barbero and Vigil thesis without serious revisions of many of its core premises. A subsection in which I discuss local society in the ninth century demonstrates that small peasant proprietors owned and dealt in landed assets which were classically ‘private’ properties; a notable feature of this society was the apparent absence of visible, organized, public structures. Moving on to discuss the better-documented tenth century, I show that a family rose to power from amongst the village inhabitants of the Liébana, proactively enhancing its landed wealth by means of purchase, and joining forces with the already well-established monastery of San Martín de Turieno in order to consolidate its newfound social status. However, after an initial spate of relatively grand donations made by prominent local persons

to the monastery, a process which is documentarily visible until about 965, San Martín de Turieno, and the family with which it was associated, both seem to have lost considerable momentum; the documentation indeed suggests that at no stage before the year 1000 did free peasant proprietors suffer considerable losses of autonomy, and, crucially, neither do they seem to have felt compelled to donate or sell their landed assets to the monastery in significant numbers. The tenth-century was not, in this regard, a notably feudal society within the Marc Bloch schema. In the final subsection of this chapter, I argue that the public sphere of political activity was of reduced dimensions in the Liébana; for much of the tenth century, public officials, such as counts, were drawn from local aristocratic families whose stature did not allow them to play a role in the royal-magnate politics of the period. Overall, I argue that to frame the ninth- and tenth-century Liébana as a classically feudal society risks simplifying the complexity of social relations in this part of the Iberian Peninsula.

In **Chapter Four**, I show how a very rich and well-established aristocratic family of lay magnates based in southern Galicia thrived in the political sphere from at least the ninth century, but only came to exercise significant economic power around their base of operations after the construction of the monastery of Celanova in 936. A very different dynamic was therefore at work in this society. I begin by emphasizing the most important difference with the Liébana case study by demonstrating the extraordinary wealth of the Galician magnate family known to posterity as the family of Rosendo, Bishop of Dumio and abbot of Celanova. This wealth is easily documentable from the ninth century, and was widely dispersed throughout much of present-day Galicia and northern Portugal. It was matched by political prestige which far outstripped anything glimpsed in the Liébana; several members of Rosendo's family held public 'office', including the countship. Furthermore, I contend that there are suggestive indications that Galicia may well have been home to a strikingly rich aristocratic stratum from the ninth century and possibly beforehand; this was a principal factor in the increasingly close relationships that linked the royal house of Asturias-León with Rosendo's family in the ninth and tenth centuries. Rosendo's parents, as I show, were very prominent figures throughout Galicia; his father, Gutier, attended and played key roles at assemblies of the kingdom's grandest magnates and bishops. However, this lay couple did not look to increase

their already large portfolio of landed assets by means of turning their attention to the peasant stratum in proactively acquisitorial fashion. Only after the construction of Celanova did Rosendo and his family monastery exert significant pressure on the peasantry, purchasing land from peasant proprietors on scores of occasions; however, the evidence does not suggest that this process went hand in hand with an increase in ever more onerous burdens on the peasant stratum. My in-depth analysis of the well-documented village of Rabal, from which Celanova made more than thirty purchases in the tenth century, shows that the village world was vibrant and dynamic, and that peasants of differing levels of wealth and freedom lived side-by-side; they were, moreover, capable of acting in ways that they would have considered beneficial to their own interests. To characterize them as little more than the compliant stooges of aristocratic elements is to mischaracterize them completely and should be resisted. Nothing in the Celanova documentation, indeed, suggests that the arbitrary imposition of seigneurial will was a feature of this society in the tenth century.

Throughout this thesis I also argue that the political structures of the kingdom were not irretrievably fractured by centrifugal forces, and that royal-magnate politics not only continued to matter throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, but that they directly shaped the scale and possibilities of aristocratic power. Rosendo's monastery of Celanova was showered with gifts by a succession of kings, affording it such wealth that it was the biggest corporate landowner in southern Galicia from practically the moment of its foundation; it was thus a magnet for peasant society, able as it was to offer material and spiritual patronage and protection, which, it would seem, San Martín de Turieno, in the Liébana, could not. It is necessary to underline that the tenth century, in spite of my nuancing of the feudalizing teleology, was nonetheless a century in which significant change was afoot. But change, where it did happen, was in the concentration of economic power in the hands of aristocracies, and not the ever more intensive infringement on the legal rights of peasants. This concentration of economic power did not *a priori* depend on the genesis of new mechanisms of coercion; these, when they came, would come later, and were not a feature of the tenth-century societies I have analysed in this thesis. However, peasant alienation of land, willing or unwilling, led to the concentration of landed wealth in fewer and fewer hands; the common pool of peasant land was

almost certainly smaller in both southern Galicia and the Liébana as the tenth century drew to a close than it had been in 900. This would provide elites with a platform from which they could increasingly intrude as and when they chose on peasant communities as a result of their expanding monopoly of land. This was not mirrored in the period before 1000 by the development of significant seigneurial rights, but was in itself critical; for as *compra-venta* transactions began to increase, so too did the possibilities for elite domination everywhere, since the less peasants had to sell or donate, the more limited their scope of action would surely have become.

I therefore argue, in my **Conclusion**, that comparative analysis allows us to appreciate both the broader patterns of change, and the significant subregional difference, that characterized the development of the northern Iberian Peninsula before the year 1000.

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Abbreviations

<i>AEA</i>	<i>Archivo Español de Arqueología</i>
<i>AEM</i>	<i>Anuario de Estudios Medievales</i>
<i>AHDE</i>	<i>Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>Archeologia Medievale</i>
<i>AMED</i>	<i>Asturiensia Medievale</i>
<i>AT</i>	<i>Antiquité tardive: revue internationale d'histoire et d'archéologie</i>
<i>ATM</i>	<i>Arqueología y Territorio Medieval</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Boletín Auriense</i>
<i>BEA</i>	<i>Boletín del Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos</i>
<i>BML</i>	<i>Boletín de la Comisión Provincial de Monumentos Históricos y Artísticos de Lugo</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Cadernos de Arqueología</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
<i>CEG</i>	<i>Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos</i>
<i>CHE</i>	<i>Cuadernos de Historia de España</i>
<i>CI</i>	<i>Chronicon Iriense</i> , eds. H. Flórez <i>et al.</i> , <i>España Sagrada</i> (56 Vols., Madrid, 1747–1957), XX, pp. 598–608.
<i>Col. Dipl. Cel.</i>	<i>Colección diplomática del Monasterio de Celanova (842–1230)</i> , eds. E. Sáez Sánchez and C. Sáez Sánchez (3 Vols., Alcalá de Henares, 1996, 2000, 2006). Individual charters cited as Cel1, Cel2, etc.
<i>Crónicas Asturianas</i>	<i>Crónicas Asturianas: Crónica de Alfonso III (Rotense y “A Sebastián”): Crónica Albeldense (y “profética”)</i> , eds. and trans. J. Gil Fernández, L. Moralejo and J. I.

Ruiz de la Peña (Oviedo, 1985). *Rotense* cited as *CAIfIII Rot.*; “*A Sebastián*” cited as *CAIfIII Seb.*; *Albeldense* cited as *Albeldense*.

<i>EJA</i>	<i>European Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>ELEM</i>	<i>En la España Medieval</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>FEMA</i>	C. Wickham, <i>Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800</i> (Oxford, 2005).
<i>Flo</i>	<i>Diplomática española del período astur: estudio de las fuentes documentales del reino de Asturias (718–910)</i> , ed. A.C. Floriano Cumbreño (Oviedo, 1949). Charters cited as <i>Flo1</i> , <i>Flo2</i> , etc.
<i>H&A</i>	<i>History and Anthropology</i>
<i>HC</i>	<i>Historia Compostellana. Cura et Studio</i> , ed. E. Falque Rey (Turnhout, 1988).
<i>ISID, HG</i>	Isidore of Seville, <i>Historia Gothorum, Vandalorum, Sueborum</i> , ed. T. Mommsen, <i>MGH, AA, XI</i> (Berlin, 1894), pp. 241–303.
<i>JB</i>	<i>Juan de Biclario, obispo de Gerona: su vida y su obra. Introducción, texto crítico y comentarios por Julio Campos</i> , ed. and trans. J. Campos Ruiz (Madrid, 1960).
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>JMIS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies</i>
<i>LD</i>	<i>Letras de Deusto</i>
<i>LV</i>	<i>Leges Visigothorum</i> , ed. K. Zeumer, <i>MGH, Leges, I</i> (Hannover, 1902).
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>MRAH</i>	<i>Memorias de la Real Academia de Historia</i>
<i>NCMH2</i>	R. McKitterick (ed.), <i>The New Cambridge Medieval History c.700–c.900, Volume 2</i> (Cambridge, 1995).
<i>NCMH3</i>	T. Reuter (ed.), <i>The New Cambridge Medieval History c.900–c.1024, Volume 3</i> (Cambridge, 1999).

Piasca	<i>Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún (siglos IX y X)</i> , ed. J.M. Mínguez Fernández (León, 1976). Individual charters cited as Piasca1, Piasca2, etc.
PM	<i>Pasado y Memoria: Revista de historia contemporánea</i>
PMH	<i>Portugaliae Monumenta Historica a saeculo octavo post Christum usque ad quintum decimum: Leges et consuetudines. Diplomata et chartae</i> , eds. A. Herculano de Carvalho e Araujo and J. J. da Silva Mendes Leal (Lisbon, 1867). Individual charters cited as PMH1, PMH2, etc.
PMH, Sc.	<i>Portugaliae Monumenta Historica a saeculo octavo post Christum usque ad quintum decimum. Leges et consuetudines. Scriptores</i> , eds. A. Herculano de Carvalho e Araujo and J. J. da Silva Mendes Leal (Lisbon, 1856).
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
Sahagún	<i>Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún (siglos IX y X)</i> , ed. J.M. Mínguez Fernández (León, 1976). Individual charters cited as Sahagún1, Sahagún2, etc.
Sampiro	<i>Sampiro, su crónica y la monarquía leonesa en el siglo X</i> , ed. J. Pérez de Urbel (Madrid, 1952).
Santo Toribio	<i>Cartulario de Santo Toribio de Liébana</i> , ed. L. Sánchez Belda (Madrid, 1948). Individual charters cited as T1, T2, etc.
SdeC	<i>La documentación del Tumbo A de la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela: estudio y edición</i> , ed. M. Lucas Álvarez (León, 1997). Individual charters cited as SdeC1, SdeC2, etc.
Settimane	<i>Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull' alto Medioevo</i>
SHHA	<i>Studia Histórica. Historia Antiqua</i>
SHHM	<i>Studia Histórica. Historia Medieval</i>
Sob	<i>Tumbos del Monasterio de Sobrado de los Monjes</i> , ed. P. Loscertales de García de Valdeavellano (2 Vols., Madrid, 1976). Individual charters cited as Sob1, Sob2, etc.
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
TSP	<i>Territorio, sociedad y poder: revista de estudios medievales</i>
VB	<i>Valerio del Bierzo: su persona, su obra</i> , ed. M.C. Díaz y Díaz (León, 1996).

- VF *La vida de San Fructuoso de Braga: estudio y edición crítica*, ed. M.C. Díaz y Díaz (Braga, 1974).
- VR *Ordoño de Celanova, Vida y Milagros de San Rosendo, edición, traducción y estudio por M.C. Díaz y Díaz, M.V. Pardo Gómez, D. Vilariño Pintos; con un apéndice anatomo–antropológico por J. Carro Otero*, eds. M.C. Díaz y Díaz, M.V. Pardo Gómez and D. Vilariño Pintos (A Coruña, 1990).
- VSA Braulio of Zaragoza, *Vita S. Emiliani*, ed. L. Vázquez de Parga (Madrid, 1943).
- Vives *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. J. Vives (Barcelona, 1963).

Note on Nomenclature, Place Names and Spellings

The approach taken towards the citation of personal names in this thesis is as follows: most names appear as they do in the documents in which they appear; however, where standardized versions or well-known modern forms would make the retention of original versions of certain personal names unhelpful, I have opted for the established modern form. Hence, I write about ‘Rosendo’, not ‘Rudesindus’, and ‘Ramiro’, not ‘Ranemirus’, in this thesis, for the purposes of pragmatism and clarity. Where names referring to the same person are spelt in a variety of ways in the documentation, and there exists a standard Latin form and a standard Spanish form, I have preferred the Spanish form: hence, Hermenegildo over Hermenegildus and its variants; and, likewise, Gutier Menéndez, over Gutierre Menendiz and its variants. Where no standard Latin or Spanish form is known to me, I use the name as it appears in the charter. Where I have wished to make a point that calls for a general reference in adjectival form to the kingdoms of Asturias and León throughout the whole of the period examined in this thesis, I have opted for an English translation of the Spanish term commonly used to denote this political entity: hence, I write of ‘Astur-Leonese kings’.

Place names are given in their modern form (if known) unless lifted directly from the primary sources and used in support or illustration of an example, in which case I have left them as they appear in the original document. Thus, for example: ‘the sale of Salcedo, Vilachá and Domiz represented a major event’, but ‘uillas que dicitur Salzeto, Villaplana et Dominici...’. If I have been unable to trace a toponym, I have spelt it as it appears in the original document. Inevitably, in a thesis of this sort, there will be occasions on which I refer to Galicia, or to Cantabria, when fully aware that these modern designations did not exist in their current forms in the early Middle Ages. However, to insist on Gallaecia would be pedantic when the context makes the meaning clear enough; references to places in modern Portugal, which was in the period covered by this thesis considered part of Galician territory, are made clear throughout. Any other ambiguities are explained in the text and its accompanying footnotes.

Charters, throughout, are cited by the numbers given to them by the editors of the editions used in this thesis, for which, see the details given in Abbreviations. Numbered charters cited in the footnotes are accompanied by the date assigned to the charter unless this has been stated in the main body of the text.

Spaniards have at least two surnames, but they do not always choose to use both. References to Spanish authors follow the standard version of their names (i.e., both surnames) whenever this has been possible, and not their preferred version, since this is not always known to me; hence J. M. Mínguez Fernández, not J. M. Mínguez. Very occasionally, I have been unable to discover more than one surname.

Words are also capitalized in a much less frequently standardized way in Spanish, and titles may therefore look strange to the uninitiated. Although the general tendency is for fewer words to begin with capital letters, this varies from author to author and I have followed the capitalization and grammar as given in the titles of books.

Finally, the Latin in which my documents were written frequently varies from classical norms; where examples are lifted straight from documentary material, I have not changed misspellings or seemingly incorrect case-endings, but these are always written inside inverted commas. Hence ‘uillas’, but ‘the transfer of *villae* was a part of the social process’. When paraphrasing from the documents, the spelling follows exactly the form presented in the transcriptions made by the editors of the charters.

1. Introduction: Northern Spain in the Early Middle Ages

The Narrative Framework

In the decade after 711, most of the Iberian Peninsula was conquered by Arab-Berber armies and swiftly absorbed into the first of a series of Muslim polities which would exert varying degrees of political control over at least some of this large land mass for more than seven hundred years.¹ 711 is therefore a foundational date in the historiography of early medieval Spain, and the redrawn political geography of Iberia which the Arab conquest left in its wake forms the contextual background to this investigation.² Throughout this thesis, my analysis will concentrate on the social and political articulation of two subregions of the Christian northern peninsula from 700 to 1000. Its dual points of focus are the Liébana valley, in Cantabria, and an area centred around Celanova, in the western half of the province of Ourense, in southern Galicia.³ These case studies, when analysed in comparative fashion, emphasize the considerable heterogeneity which characterized the development of early medieval Spain at the subregional level; local society, whilst sharing several similar attributes from one subregion to the next, nonetheless developed differently in the Liébana to how it did in southern Galicia, as did the public sphere of political action, and the scale of aristocratic landholding. To recognize these differences by means of comparative analysis is not only to acknowledge historical

¹ For general accounts of the political developments sketched here, see J. M. Mínguez Fernández, *La España de los siglos VI al XIII. Guerra, expansión y transformaciones* (San Sebastián, 1994), chs. 6–8; A. Isla Frez, *La Alta edad media. Siglos VIII a XI* (Madrid, 2002), chs. 1 and 4; E. Manzano Moreno, *Historia de España: Épocas Medievales* (Barcelona, 2010), ch. 3; Roger Collins's work provides by far the best political narrative in English, for which, see R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity 400–1000* (London, 1983); Collins, 'Spain: the northern kingdoms and the Basques', *NCMH2*, pp. 272–289; Collins, 'The Spanish Kingdoms', *NCMH3*, pp. 670–691; Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710–797* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 2 and pp. 151–168.

² For more on 711, see E. Manzano Moreno, 'La conquista del 711: transformaciones y pervivencias', in L. Caballero Zoreda and P. Mateos Cruz (eds.), *Visigodos y Omeyas. Un debate entre la Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media* (Madrid, 2001), pp. 401–414.

³ The Liébana valley is an area of approximately five hundred and seventy-five kms²; it is not helpful to give the dimensions of the Galician focus of this study as the area known since the late Roman period as *Gallaecia* extended well beyond the current boundaries of Galicia. In this thesis, I use the term Galicia to mean roughly the area that included modern Galicia and northern Portugal down to the Duero, which formed a politico-territorial unit in the early Middle Ages, for evidence of which see J. Mattoso, *A nobreza medieval portuguesa, a família e o poder* (Lisbon, 1981). It is unwise, given that the grandest families of the north-west invariably owned properties in both of what are now Galicia and Portugal, to treat these two as separate entities.

change, but also to acknowledge the diverse manifestations that these changes took. Spain was without doubt transfigured in the early eighth century, although not, perhaps, in quite the ways that the historiography has often led to us believe, as we shall see; nonetheless, a fuller understanding of the nature of its development requires in-depth analyses of specific subregions, for which 711 is the only viable starting point from which to proceed.

Although the speed with which the Arabs set about the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula was impressive, their political control probably never extended to certain isolated pockets of the northern fringe.⁴ According to later chroniclers, resistance first crystallized in the remote mountains of Asturias under the leadership of an aristocrat named Pelayo, whose army defeated a Muslim skirmishing force at Covadonga in 718; thereafter, the Christian kingdoms of Asturias (718–910) and León (910–1037) would expand slowly southwards, experiencing periods of ascendancy and retrenchment.⁵ It is conventionally held that by 800, significant territorial gains had already been made, Asturian kings having overseen the expansion of their kingdom's borders west into Galicia and eastwards towards Álava.⁶ Under Alfonso II (791–842), the royal court was given a new base in Oviedo, and the city was soon adorned with a series of fine churches and ceremonial buildings, already documented in the late ninth century by chroniclers.⁷ Ramiro I (842–850), Ordoño I (850–866) and Alfonso III (866–910) oversaw recurrent attempts to enlarge the territorial basis of the kingdom by means of frequent campaigning and the cultivation of political relationships with the regional aristocracy; the extent to which these kings were able to govern by proxy with the collusion of such groups, or were instead unable to control frontier magnates, has been widely debated.⁸ In this

⁴ See Collins, *Arab Conquest*, pp. 49–50, 143–159; I. Bernard, 'La invasión árabe y los principios de la monarquía asturiana', *BEA*, 108 (1983), pp. 75–86; V. Salvatierra Cuenca and A. Canto García, *Al-Ándalus. De la invasión al califato de Córdoba* (Madrid, 2008), ch. 2; E. Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, emires y califas: los omeyas y la formación de al-Andalus* (Barcelona, 2006), especially pp. 49–53. Basque regions, which fell outside of direct Arab control, are not investigated here for reasons of space. Catalonia is also not treated here and its political history was at any rate entirely separate from Asturias-León in the period analysed here.

⁵ For more on the chronicles, see ch. 2 of this thesis; for more on the Asturian victory at Covadonga, see *CAIfIII Seb.*, 9, 10; *CAIfIII Rot.*, 9, 10.

⁶ Collins, 'Spain', pp. 276–279.

⁷ *CAIfIII Rot.*, 21; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 21; *Albeldense*, XV, 9.

⁸ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 146–151; Mínguez Fernández, *España de los siglos VI al XIII*, chs. 10 and 11; C. Estepa Díez, 'El poder regio y los territorios', in *La época de la monarquía asturiana* (Oviedo, 2002), pp. 451–476; Collins, 'Spain', pp. 278–279.

thesis, I will argue that the process of ninth- and tenth-century government was far removed from the statist-influenced conceptions of the modern world, and that fraught and protracted negotiation, based on personal relationships, underpinned the compliance or otherwise of magnates in the periphery. This was a patrimonial society in which government, limited as it was, necessarily depended upon channels of negotiation, relationships of mutual benefit for the king and his agents, the politics of land, and the ability to corral and punish the disloyal with violence.

The transfer of the royal capital in c.910 to León, south of the mountains which had to some extent protected the kingdom hitherto, exposed its increasingly ambitious kings to the vast Duero valley, a large expanse of some ninety thousand kms², which had probably been under the direct political control of no single central authority for much of the eighth and ninth centuries. The victory of Ramiro II (931–951) over the caliph ‘Abd al-Rahman III at Simancas in 939 temporarily stemmed the advance of attacks from al-Andalus; nonetheless, the political and military power of the Cordoban Caliphate routed the Leonese polity throughout much of what remained of the tenth century.⁹ From c.980, Arab forces under al-Mansur systematically defeated Leonese armies and sacked the kingdom’s key cities with impunity, devastating León in 988, and the cult site of Santiago de Compostela in 997, with which kings had carefully nurtured symbolic and political associations since the *inventio* of the burial site of the apostle St James in c.830.¹⁰ For many scholars, these reverses have illustrated the malaise of royal government and an attendant weakening of royal authority in the face of nascent, centrifugal forces, but this approach needs nuancing, and I argue in this thesis that the problems Leonese kings faced in this period had more to do with the difficulties of political faction-building, a process complicated further by the resurgent and more focused attacks they faced from the Cordoban Caliphate; some kings may indeed have appeared weaker than their mid-ninth-century predecessors, but this debility derived from the exigencies of *realpolitik*, and not the gradual eclipse

⁹ The Umayyad Amirate became the Caliphate of Córdoba when ‘Abd al-Rahman III took the title of caliph in 929; its dissolution in 1031 led to the emergence of smaller, so-called *taifa* kingdoms. For an outline of these events, see C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome. A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), pp. 338–347; and, in more detail, Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, emires y califas*, chs. 8, 9, and 10.

¹⁰ For the *inventio* of Santiago de Compostela, HC, I. II. See B. F. Reilly, *The Medieval Spains* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 84–89, for an introduction to the campaigns of ‘Abd al-Rahman III and al-Mansur. For al-Mansur in Compostela, see M. Fernández Rodríguez, ‘La expedición de Almanzor a Santiago de Compostela’, *CHE*, 43–44 (1967), pp. 345–363.

of royal authority.¹¹ During this period, royal stability was also forced to contend with the concurrent emergence of the county of Castile and the problems that its counts, traditionally portrayed as classic ‘over-mighty subjects’, posed various Leonese monarchs; for the proponents of one branch of conservative Spanish historiography, these events would be interpreted as a portent of the Castilian foundations upon which Spain’s future late medieval and early modern greatness would be built.¹² However, this approach is of questionable utility and is methodologically unsound, relying on a nationalist-inspired teleology which has been significantly criticized in recent years, and which is discussed in detail in what follows.¹³ Furthermore, although it is indeed possible to trace the growing importance of Castile throughout the late ninth and tenth centuries, for much of the tenth century a Galician magnate class, to some extent marginalized by the historiography, was also very influential, as we shall see.¹⁴

Amidst this backdrop of repeated attack from the Cordoban Caliphate, a series of civil wars broke out between the aristocracies of the western and eastern fringes of the kingdom in the second half of the tenth century which threatened to overwhelm the Leonese polity; these were further complicated by the intermarriage of Navarrese, Galician and Leonese factions with the royal line, giving local power bases to the brothers and sons of kings who had been overlooked for the throne, and incentives for rebellion to their supporters. But neither the conceptual nor structural coherence of kingship was undermined by the reverses of the later part of the tenth century: factional discord was just that, and the game of politics necessitated the alignment of regional factions with the king, a process which served the interests of both parties, often to the detriment of others; it needs to be remembered that magnate rebellion need not *always* be a sign of the weakness of central or public

¹¹ On the decline of royal power, see Mínguez Fernández, *La España de los siglos VI al XIII*, chs. 10 and 11; Mínguez Fernández, ‘Ruptura social e implantación del feudalismo en el noroeste peninsular (siglos VIII–X)’, *SHHM*, 3 (1985), pp. 7–32. A broadly similar line is taken in C. Estepa Díez, *El nacimiento de León y Castilla (siglos VIII–X)* (Valladolid, 1985), pp. 25–31, who writes with regard to the tenth-century kings of León of ‘una auténtica declive, favorecido también por las tendencias centrífugas de algunos miembros de la aristocracia’, at p. 30. See also, A. Ceballos-Escalera y Gila, *Ordoño III 951–956, Sancho I 956–966, Ordoño IV 958–959, Ramiro III 966–985, Vermudo II 982–999* (Burgos, 2000), p. 180.

¹² J. Pérez de Urbel, *Historia del condado de Castilla* (3 Vols., Madrid, 1945).

¹³ For criticism of nationalist teleology, see Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, pp. 3–5.

¹⁴ A. Isla Frez, whose emphasis on the essential weakness of royal power I do not share, has nonetheless written the clearest account of the primacy of Galician magnates in the tenth century, for which, *La sociedad gallega en la alta edad media* (Madrid, 1992), pp. 180–202.

authority, but rather of the inability of particular kings to draw support from *certain* sections of their aristocracy, in some cases indeed because of royal assertiveness. The impetus that characterized the much more thorough fragmentation of the West Frankish polity in the ninth and early tenth century developed in part because aristocratic factions opted out of supporting the conceptual and political apparatus tied to kingship with the same zeal that their forebears once had; but very many Galician, and even Castilian, aristocrats of the tenth century were seemingly content to back whichever claimant to the throne operated most closely within their patronage network and their interests. West Frankish kings ran out of land to give to aristocrats, and lost control over the nomination of counts; there is no sign whatsoever that either happened in León. Thus, in spite of the turbulent course of events of the second half of the tenth century, it is too straightforward to portray all kings as the manipulated pawns of the greater magnates in this period; the reign of Ramiro III (966–984), for example, was beset by Muslim defeat and the dissipation of his support base, leading to his violent overthrow in 984 by a Galician clique, but it is telling that Vermudo II (984–999), ruling as king in Galicia since 982, nonetheless attempted to govern a wider kingdom based in León from 984 in an effort to stabilize factional dispute. He was then able to face down numerous challengers and the kingdom would pass to his son, Alfonso V (999–1028), at his death.¹⁵ To this end, we can look to Richard Fletcher, who convincingly argued that the civil wars of the late tenth century were most probably fuelled by the series of defeats and despoliations inflicted upon the Leonese heartlands by the Cordoban Caliphate, which gave kings fewer bargaining chips with which to placate the regional nobility.¹⁶ Under these circumstances, factional politics took precedence; but the most powerful tenth-century factions, mostly Galician, retained a sufficient vested interest in the success of their favoured kings as to make sure that the polity did not, at this stage, fragment totally.

¹⁵ Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, at p. 192, suggests that kings were the puppets of regional magnates. On Vermudo's efforts to gather support in León, see Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, p. 194.

¹⁶ R. A. Fletcher, *St. James's Catapult: The Life and Times of Diego Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela* (Oxford, 1984), at p. 19: 'The halt to expansion imposed upon the Christians of the north by the caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III in the early tenth century would have laid such tensions under further stress by stemming any increase in rewards and thus making more intense the competition for what remained. It is not unlikely that it was factors such as this which lay behind the internal strife which afflicted León, Galicia and Castile in the middle and later years of the tenth century'.

In essence, although aristocrats were becoming richer and more influential, they still relied on royal patronage, land-grants and the investiture in offices such as *comes* (count) for legitimacy, all of which were a direct source of wealth in themselves. Kings were, in fact, surrounded by counts and bishops throughout the tenth century and beyond, and the loyalty of considerable magnate families is documented throughout significant stretches of the tenth.¹⁷ Thus, to paint this period as one in which the centre was irretrievably fractured is to simplify the nature of royal-magnate politics, which were always more complex and multifaceted than much of the historiography would allow; disputed successions and factional rivalries were not necessarily symptoms of the demise of the conceptual cohesion of kingship. In fact, as the eleventh century dawned, the infant Alfonso V was able to claim some degree of political control over a vast area that stretched from the Cantabrian coast (excluding the Basque Country) to the Duero valley, and from the Ebro valley, west to Galicia.

The Historiographical Framework

The narrative framework of royal-magnate politics is not often discussed within studies which focus on local society, but contextual considerations of this sort are vital to a more developed understanding of this world. Likewise it is necessary to offer some framing observations about the historiography of early medieval Spain more generally, and, in particular, the ways in which rival traditions have attempted to situate the Spanish early Middle Ages within a longer and more expansive sweep of ‘national’ history. This is because the national component of historical debates has long been recognized by historians of varying shades as something of a distorting mirror.¹⁸ In recent years, Chris Wickham has written persuasively of the latent exceptionalist streak that lies at the heart of

¹⁷ J. M. Fernández del Pozo, *Alfonso V (999–1028), Vermudo III (1028–1037)* (Burgos, 1999), pp. 65–68. See, for instance, this author’s comments on the opportunities that cooperation with the royal centre offered to certain magnate groups who resisted the temptation to partake in rebellions, at p. 65: ‘asistimos a un enriquecimiento progresivo de familias adictas al monarca que se verán engrandecidas a partir de estas rebeliones como en el caso de Pedro Fernández y Pedro Flaínez’.

¹⁸ P. J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the medieval origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), *passim*.

many national narratives, forged, in part, by borrowing extensively from the medieval past.¹⁹ An awareness of this issue is itself palliative; after all, each and every historian of medieval western Europe works within the broader contextual framework of the particular set of nationalist and methodological concerns which frame his or her debate, and self-awareness can at least allow for adjustments. Few, however, work over such disputed territory as do the historians of Spain. Moreover, whilst many national historiographies have routinely searched for the incipient signs of national identity in the Middle Ages as a matter of course, in Spain this search has acquired unusually potent political significance; as Julio Escalona Monge has pointed out, the debate about the trajectory of Spain throughout the Middle Ages has been treated in the twentieth century as a debate on ‘el ser de España’—that is, the very ‘being’ of Spain itself.²⁰ How this debate came to assume such wide significance has much to do with the utilization, or rejection, of key strands of an even older historiographical tradition associated with the notions of reconquest (*reconquista*), depopulation (*despoblación*) and repopulation (*repoblación*), given their most famous expression in the work of Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz.²¹

The first of the major critical paradigms to win acceptance amongst a broad swathe of medieval historians in twentieth-century Spain owed much to the work of Sánchez-Albornoz, an historian of conservative-liberal temperament whose hostility to the Franco regime would oblige him to work for most of his professional career in Argentina. This notwithstanding, his work was always influential in Spain too, for his preoccupations fitted well with those of more orthodox Francoist historiography. From Buenos Aires he wrote on a number of medieval themes, but one of his most lasting contributions was undoubtedly his promotion of a theory that argued that the Duero valley had been depopulated in the wake of the Arab-Berber invasion of 711, due to the northern migration of peasant farmers seeking to inhabit those areas free of Arab political hegemony; within the Sánchez-

¹⁹ In a Spanish context, *FEMA*, pp. 40–41; C. Wickham, ‘The Early Middle Ages and National Identity’, in N. Fryde, P. Monnet, O. G. Oexle and L. Zygner (eds.), *Die Deutung der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft in der Moderne* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 107–122.

²⁰ J. Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio en la alta edad media castellana: la formación del Alfoz de Lara* (Oxford, 2002), p. 8.

²¹ The classic accounts are C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación y repoblación del Valle Duero* (Buenos Aires, 1966); Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico* (2 Vols., Buenos Aires, 1956), ii, ch. 12.

Albornoz schema, which depended heavily on a literal interpretation of the Chronicle of Alfonso III, this process was both spontaneous and royally directed.²²

Balance would be restored at various stages of the later ninth and tenth centuries, which would see the resettlement of many free peasant cultivators in this same region, as the Astur-Leonese kingdoms assumed more coherent and stable control of the areas lying to the south of the Cantabrian chain. Thus, after depopulation (*despoblación*) would come repopulation (*repoblación*), which rested on the belief that those seen purchasing or asserting their rights to land in charter material, were in the majority of cases free peasant newcomers. The free peasant would therefore acquire a charged symbolism in the Sánchez-Albornoz hypothesis, since he or she was necessarily a direct agent of reconquest (*Reconquista*). Moreover, the small-scale political elites of the Asturian kingdom would expand southwards in piecemeal fashion, only exerting a superficial authority over free peasant proprietors—conditions which were not ripe for the intense exploitation and violent hierarchies thought to be characteristic of the feudal world. This is not to say that peasant studies represented a particularly rich seam of historical investigation in post civil war Spain; as Julio Escalona Monge has pointed out, historians working in this field, until relatively recently, expended their energies in understanding the legal condition of the peasantry rather than ‘lived experience’.²³ What was quintessentially Spanish about these peasants was therefore hard to pin down; Sánchez-Albornoz opted for a vague, rather mystical definition, which owed a great deal to the introspective and essentialist ambience that marked the generation of 1898 so deeply.²⁴ For him, Spain’s identity was born in the crucible of landscape, people, God, and kingship, these heady elements over time imposing an overlapping commonality of Spanish experience. Others, as Peter Linehan has pointed

²² Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp. 3–13, provides an excellent synopsis of the major historiographical paradigms of the twentieth century and their problems.

²³ J. Escalona Monge, ‘The early Castilian peasantry. An archaeological turn?’, *JMIS*, 2 (2009), pp. 119–145, especially pp. 5–8.

²⁴ This is the name given to the large amorphous group of artists, writers and thinkers for whom colonial disaster in 1898 is said to have precipitated an outpouring of artistic and intellectual introspection and a subsequent rejuvenation of Spanish letters. This is most persistently expressed in Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*, *passim*. See J. Millán y García-Varela, ‘El desastre del 98 i la crisi social de l’Estat liberal espanyol’, *PM*, 1 (2002), pp. 183–196.

out, sought their answer in the vehemence of Spanish religious experience; for them, quite simply, ‘Spain was Spain because Spain was Catholic’.²⁵

Whether emphasis was placed on free peasants of Hispano-Germanic stock, or the providential recreation of the glories of the Toledan court, Sánchez-Albornoz thought this trajectory throughout the eighth and ninth centuries sufficiently different to that of other western European nations as to be able to assert the uniqueness of Spanish history. Such claims for unique intangibles lie at the heart of all national metanarratives, and in some cases they are truer than others, but it is particularly easy to see how destructive they have been in the Spanish case, where the desire to be different to the rest of Europe led many of Sánchez-Albornoz’s followers to discount the possibility that feudalism (of any definition) could help explain the Spanish early Middle Ages. Conceptualized in this way, Spain became somewhat isolated from international historical debate in the same way that it underwent political marginalization under Franco; it became a world unto itself which wilfully ignored comparison with the history of its neighbours.²⁶ Consequently, the invasion of 711 marked a crucial break for the proponents of a conservative, Catholicizing tradition of Spanish historical development—a break which would resonate with the sort of influence that 1066 has done for generations of English historians.²⁷ However, if 711 could be recast not simply as the end of Visigothic Spain but more importantly as the foundational date of a process of peninsular reconquest at the hands of Christian polities, a ‘preferable’ teleology could be reaffirmed. So successfully was this done, that this vision held sway outside of Spain amongst noted Hispanists long after Spanish historians had reestablished links with foreign academic communities.²⁸

Opposition to the Sánchez-Albornoz model was not forthcoming in any substantial way until the pioneering work of Abilio Barbero de Aguilera and Marcelo Vigil Pascual.²⁹ (It is interesting, in

²⁵ P. Linehan, *History and the historians of medieval Spain* (Oxford, 1993), p. 17.

²⁶ Escalona Monge is right to remark on the essential irony of the fact that Sánchez-Albornoz was for all of the regime’s duration *persona non grata*, and yet his conception of the history of Spain could not have chimed more perfectly with the vision of Spain that Franco’s propagandists wanted to sell. Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, p. 8, n. 35.

²⁷ R. Allen Brown, ‘The Norman Conquest’, *TRHS*, 5th series, 17 (1967), pp. 109–130.

²⁸ Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, p. 9, n. 43.

²⁹ Above all two works of singular importance stand out: A. Barbero de Aguilera and M. Vigil Pascual, *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la Reconquista* (Barcelona, 1974); and, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península*

fact, that the ‘broader feudalism’ championed by Marc Bloch, was, on the whole, just as indifferently received as the ‘narrow feudalism’ of the fief and homage; this was certainly the case until at least the 1970s).³⁰ Barbero and Vigil based their investigation of the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages on a completely different premise to that which had underpinned the Sánchez-Albornoz interpretation. Their studies of the inhabitants of the northern fringe of Spain located the socio-economic and political context of the changes of this period in the longevity of *gentilicio* (that is, kin-based, or tribal) social structures amongst the peoples of the mountainous northern fringe of Spain (particularly modern Asturias and Cantabria). These scholars did not, unlike Sánchez-Albornoz, consider feudalism an inherently non-Spanish phenomenon, but rather argued for a path towards a feudal society born directly from the breakdown of tribal structures—a path which has never, it must be admitted, been very well lit. It is important to emphasize the ideological resonance that this argument quickly acquired within Spanish academic history, as well as the essential contribution that it made to the wider debate. Barbero and Vigil were not only arguing that Sánchez-Albornoz’s idea of depopulation (and how this fitted in with the wider liberal teleology of the victory of Catholic Spain) was ill-founded; they were proposing that the agents of the eighth-, ninth- and tenth-century Christian political expansion had never been substantially Romanized anyway.³¹

Barbero and Vigil influenced a generation of historians whose work has shaped the debate for the last twenty to thirty years. Due to limitations of scope and space, these historians and their work can only be dealt with briefly, but such has been the expansion of early medieval Spanish studies in the last twenty years, that some analysis of historiographical trends is merited here. Of the myriad historical problems to have been reinvigorated by the legacy of Barbero and Vigil, some of the most significant strands to have undergone development relate to settlement structures, the village

Ibérica (Barcelona, 1978). Hereafter references in the text to their work will take the form which is commonly used in the field when discussing their contribution; that is, ‘Barbero and Vigil’.

³⁰ The phrases are borrowed from J. -P. Poly and E. Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation (900–1200)* (London, 1991), p. 1. The reference to Bloch invokes his analysis of the institutions of feudalism as constituent elements of a broader feudal society, for which, M. Bloch, (trans. L. A. Manyon) *Feudal Society*, 2nd edn (2 Vols., London, 1965).

³¹ Barbero and Vigil claimed that indigenous social structures were completely different to Roman ones due to the absence of private property, patriarchal social structures and monetary economy: Barbero and Vigil, *Sobre los orígenes*, pp. 148–152. Much of this has been argued elsewhere: L. R. Menéndez Bueyes, *Reflexiones críticas sobre el origen del reino de Asturias* (Salamanca, 2001), pp. 22–33.

community, and lordship. The study of lordship had already gathered great momentum in the late 1960s, with a series of studies on the landed assets and peasant client networks associated with large, mostly Castilian, monasteries; as a result ‘an image of tenth-century monks as not only *oratores*, but also estate managers was developed’.³² In the non-ecclesiastical sphere, much discussion has focussed on the emergence of individuals who amassed significant landed assets at the expense of peasantries—these were counts or minor aristocrats, acting ever more independently of the shackles of the supposedly (and implicitly) restraining influence of public power. Although Carlos Estepa Díez’s work has reminded us of the need to tread carefully when discussing lordly power, due to its many expressions and modalities, and Wendy Davies has added to this in recent years, their warnings have often gone unheeded.³³ More precisely, little attempt has been made to question the logic of lord-peasant relationships outside of frameworks which focus solely on conflict and exploitation, in spite of the fact that such an approach risks simplifying the complexity of early medieval society; one does not need to be naïve about the essential unfairness and exploitation of many basic features of this world to realize that lords must have been, on occasion, a force for social cohesion, and their patronage actively sought by many elements of society. An attempt to address these relationships free of this *a priori* conflictual model informs a significant part of my analysis in what follows.

³² Two of the better monastic studies were J. A. García de Cortázar y Ruiz de Aguirre (henceforth García de Cortázar), *El dominio del monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla (siglos X al XIII). Introducción a la historia rural de Castilla altomedieval* (Salamanca, 1969); J. M. Mínguez Fernández, *El dominio del Monasterio de Sahagún en el siglo X: paisajes agrarios, producción y expansión económica* (Salamanca, 1980). For the citation, Escalona Monge, ‘Early Castilian peasantry’, p. 131.

³³ C. Estepa Díez, ‘En torno a propiedad dominical, dominio señorial, y señorío jurisdiccional’, in G. del Ser Quijano and I. Martín Viso (eds.), *Espacios de poder y formas sociales en la edad media: estudios dedicados a Ángel Barrios* (Salamanca, 2007), pp. 67–76; W. Davies, ‘Lordship and Community: northern Spain on the eve of the year 1000’, in C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham (eds.), *Rodney Hilton’s Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 18–33. Typical of the over-generalized approach is the, in many other ways, very useful study of J. López Quiroga, L. Benito Díez and R. Catalán Ramos, ‘*Monasteria et territoria* en la Galicia interior en torno al año mil. El monasterio de San Salvador de Celanova’, in J. López Quiroga, A. M. Martínez Tejera and J. Marín de Pablos (eds.), *Monasteria et territoria. Elites, edilicia y territorio en el Mediterráneo medieval (siglos V–XI)* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 409–428. These authors, who analyse the spatial spread of the influence of the monastery, and not the contents of the documents which record its interaction with local society, have claimed, at p. 411: ‘Durante los siglos X y XI el monasterio de Celanova no dejará de aumentar su patrimonio territorial mediante aparentes donaciones que, sin embargo, esconden bajo esta ficción jurídica la enorme presión que dicha entidad ejerce’. The documents should not be so quickly dismissed if we are to understand their contents, as we shall see later.

José María Mínguez Fernández, influenced by Pierre Bonnassie's work on Catalonia and his treatment of several other key issues, has discussed the interplay between the decay of slave society and the emergence of those peasant proprietors who would later be brought to heel by seignorial power.³⁴ For both Bonnassie and Mínguez Fernández, feudalism took root after a period characterized by the genesis of village communities, but it took root all the same, and in its political dimension at least it had clear tenth-century origins.³⁵ Indeed, the gradual concentration of lordly power, and the gradual degradation of peasant autonomy, have not been significantly challenged within the field, but considerable divergences of opinion have characterized responses to the question of village communities. For Reyna Pastor, collective identity, communal expression of this ideal, and resistance in the face of oppression are where our focus should lie; conversely, for García de Cortázar, heavily influenced by sociology and geography, these themes make more sense when transmuted so as to replace repopulation with 'acculturation', and outright colonization with an emphasis on the organization of social and economic space.³⁶ In hindsight, perhaps the most influential element of Barbero and Vigil's work has been their attempt to reintroduce the problem of feudal change into the Spanish debate, and here they have been very successful. However, it is fair to say that in some areas their emphasis now seems to have been misdirected; it is very hard, for instance, to demonstrate that collective property ownership reached the eighth or ninth centuries as the dominant form of land organization in Cantabria. Indeed, although documents suggest that private ownership did not totally undermine collective ownership in the early Middle Ages, it was nonetheless clearly more extensive. This is certainly the impression we get from the very earliest documents, and Cantabrian society

³⁴ J. M. Mínguez Fernández, 'Sociedad esclavista y sociedad gentilicia en la formación del feudalismo asturleonés', in M. J. Hidalgo de la Vega, D. Pérez Sánchez, M. J. Rodríguez Gervás (eds.), *"Romanización" y "Reconquista" en la Península Ibérica: Nuevas Perspectivas* (Salamanca, 1998), pp. 283–302. P. Bonnassie, (trans. J. Birrell) *From Slavery to Feudalism in south western Europe* (Cambridge, 1991), a collection of papers from which I shall throughout what follows cite specific examples where necessary.

³⁵ P. Bonnassie, 'From the Rhône to Galicia: origins and modalities of the feudal order', in *From Slavery to Feudalism*, pp. 104–131.

³⁶ J. A. García de Cortázar and C. Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad hispano-cristiana del Cantábrico al Ebro en los siglos VIII a XI. Planteamiento de una hipótesis y análisis del caso de Liebana, Asturias de Santillana y Trasmiera* (Santander, 1982); García de Cortázar and P. Martínez Sopena, 'The Historiography of Rural Society in Medieval Spain', in I. Alfonso Antón (ed.), *The Rural History of Medieval European Societies: Trends and Perspectives* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 93–139; R. Pastor de Togneri, *Resistencias y luchas campesinas en la época del crecimiento y consolidación de la formación feudal: Castilla y León, siglos X–XIII* (Madrid, 1980).

was assuredly more variable and less homogenous than either Barbero and Vigil or, for that matter, Sánchez-Albornoz, conceived.

Nonetheless, in one dimension in particular, the premises of Barbero and Vigil have won a more general, albeit implicit, acceptance, and this is that of the progressive fragmentation of the Visigothic polity and the administrative, fiscal and military edifice at its core. The inherently centrifugal force that underpinned the regional power of potentates, to authors such as Martín Viso, left the burden of the local articulation of power structures with local communities themselves. Martín Viso, in a highly stimulating study, proposed that castro settlement, in two areas of the northern peninsula, formed the organizational foundations of a society whose development over the *longue durée* was characterized by what we might term dynamic continuity; that is, the confluence of long-standing community and settlement patterns, with new socio-economic logics derived from the emergence of new poles of power across the peninsula.³⁷ The crucial point, however, is that all of these recent contributions have reacted to the intellectual vitality of Barbero and Vigil. So too, does this thesis, even if I reach conclusions which do not all fit with the views of the foregoing.

Before we leave this brief historiographical survey, it must be added that, on empirical grounds, it is simply no longer possible to claim, as Sánchez-Albornoz and his followers for many years did, that vast areas of the Duero valley were deliberately depopulated by the Asturian kings who had fled northwards in the wake of the Arab-Berber invasion of 711, only to then be repopulated as a more stable monarchy led a southwards offensive in the ninth and tenth centuries. Archaeological excavation in various areas of the northern meseta, although not perhaps as extensive as one would like, has already suggested settlement continuities which disprove the depopulation theory. As early as 1977, Izquierdo Bértiz stressed a more or less unbroken sequence of burial in the necropolis of *Las Vegas de Pedraza* (Segovia), spanning the whole medieval period; needless to say, this contradicted

³⁷ I. Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales en el norte de la Península Ibérica: siglos VI–XIII* (Salamanca, 2000); J. Escalona Monge, ‘De “señores y campesinos” a “poderes feudales y comunidades”’. Elementos para definir la articulación entre territorio y clases sociales en la alta edad media castellana’, in I. Álvarez Borge (ed.), *Comunidades locales y poderes feudales en la edad media* (Logroño, 2001), pp. 115–155.

Sánchez-Albornoz's picture of a desolate wasteland, and hinted at the complexity of settlement patterns and structures prevalent everywhere in early medieval Spain.³⁸

The important work of Francisco Reyes Téllez has suggested that a depopulation model is similarly unhelpful in parts of the province of Burgos, where significant excavations have now been undertaken.³⁹ The archaeological interventions at the site of the *Ermita de Santa Cruz* have revealed continued settlement at this location thanks to excavation of a necropolis which suggests continued active usage from the fourth to the eleventh centuries, datable thanks to a range of coins and ceramics.⁴⁰ Another interesting case study is that of the church of *Santa María de Mijangos* in the Sierra de La Tesla (Burgos); tombs dated to the second half of the eighth century clearly counteract arguments that this area was a barren no-man's land.⁴¹ In recent years, the exceptional work of Julio Escalona on the *Alfoz de Lara* (Burgos) has proposed settlement continuities from the pre-Roman period throughout the Middle Ages in this area.⁴² Added to this, important archaeological work is currently being done on the rural villages of the post-Roman world, particularly in Álava and the Madrid district, but little of this as of yet deals directly with the world of the Asturian and Leonese kingdoms. Nonetheless, depopulation has also been the target of different sorts of theoretical and empirical attack. Ángel Barrios García, for example, showed how toponymical study could be used to question the large-scale abandonment of settlements; taken together, this represents a fairly solid base for research.⁴³

In short, dynamic demographic continuity in these areas seems to have been the norm, with most people staying where they were and farming the land around them. This is not to say that some

³⁸ J. M. Izquierdo Bértiz, 'La necrópolis medieval de las Vegas de Pedraza (Segovia)', in *XIV Congreso Nacional de Arqueología* (Zaragoza, 1977), pp. 1241–1250.

³⁹ F. Reyes Téllez and M. L. Menéndez Robles, 'Aspectos ideológicos en el problema de la despoblación del valle del Duero', in R. Olmos Romera and J. Arce Martínez (eds.), *Historiografía de la Arqueología y de la Historia Antigua en España (siglos XVIII–XX)* (Madrid, 1991), pp. 203–207.

⁴⁰ F. Reyes Téllez and M. L. Menéndez Robles, 'Excavaciones en la ermita de Santa Cruz (Valdezate, Burgos)', in *I Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española* (Huesca, 1985), pp. 7–27.

⁴¹ J. A. Lecanda Esteban, 'El epígrafe consagratorio de Santa María de Mijangos (Burgos). Aportaciones para su estudio', *LD*, 65 (1994), pp. 173–196; Lecanda Esteban, 'De la Tardoantigüedad a la Plena Edad Media en Castilla a la luz de la arqueología', in *VII Semana de estudios medievales de Nájera* (Logroño, 1997), pp. 297–329.

⁴² Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, *passim*.

⁴³ A. Barrios García, 'Toponomástica e Historia. Notas sobre despoblación de la zona meridional del Duero', *ELEM*, 2 (1982), pp. 115–134.

colonization did not take place at a later date, but the meseta was never systematically depopulated in the mid-eighth century in the way that Sánchez-Albornoz claimed it was, and, although alternative readings of the written evidence (plus a sharp dose of common sense) might suggest that this was not likely to have been the case anyway, it is archaeological excavation which has provided the empirical data. This being the case, we might well conclude that neither the small Christian kingdom based in the Asturias, nor the Arab authorities, truly controlled this area during the eighth and ninth centuries.

The northern parts of the Iberian Peninsula nonetheless underwent fundamental political change from c.700 to c.1000; as stated earlier, this thesis explores aspects of local society, and the mechanisms of rule and social power, in two regions of this large area throughout the first three centuries of the period now known to us as the *Reconquista* (Reconquest). The documentary basis of my study is developed in Chapter 2, where I discuss the type, quality, and quantity of the sources which form the bedrock of this investigation. I use these sources to examine empirical data from the regions under study, with the aim of revising and nuancing existing paradigms, many of which retain much of great utility. In this thesis I aim to make three broad points: first, that an uncritical acceptance of one metanarrative commonly applied to the study of this period—namely, that it was one in which social structures moved unerringly towards a later moment of ‘Feudal Revolution’, characterized by the gradual ‘caging of the peasantry’—risks distorting the considerable regional variation and diversity of social experience which the sources describe for this period within northern Iberia and which is reflected in the case studies here examined.⁴⁴ Second, and in relation to the need for the

⁴⁴ Feudalism is a term which resists easy definition; indeed, it has been used in a variety of different contexts to mean very different things by historians of most western European traditions. It needs to be said, however, that Spanish scholars are very infrequently explicit when it comes to how and why they use the words ‘feudalism’ or ‘feudal relations’. This lack of precision is most unhelpful; without it, the concept of feudalism risks uncritical reification. The result, often, is that feudalism is said to explain practically the entire array of changes which historians have described in their analyses of the early and central Middle Ages. The fact that feudalism may also imply ‘unruly barons’, castle-dwelling lords, the fief, or vassalage, in other contexts, is consistently overlooked by Spanish historians, whose own preoccupations and meanings need to be more clearly stated. Here, I use it in a way which I feel best represents what Spanish historians (since Barbero and Vigil effectively reintroduced the concept in the 1960s and 1970s) have most often, by implication, taken it to mean: that is, the systematic conscription of agricultural labour by a newly empowered landed elite whose increasing militarization allowed it to sever its ties with a shrinking ‘public’ centre of political operations, localize its support base, and extract increasingly burdensome rent and/or labour service from the peasantry whilst arbitrating property disputes without recourse to public law. These changes polarized the social order, which process is seen as a direct result of more frequent and arbitrary lordly intrusion into the lives of the peasantry. French proponents of the so-called ‘Feudal Revolution’ argue that these changes transpired with dramatic effect

adoption of a different methodological framework through more critical engagement with the paradigm challenged above, I contend that peasants could, and often did, retain considerable autonomy until the year 1000 (in both Cantabria and Galicia), in this way nuancing a well-established interpretative line which focuses on increasing, but nonetheless ill-defined, peasant subjection.⁴⁵ Third, I also argue that cooperation between kings and magnates, relying on a rudimentary system of devolved government based on the cultivation of personal relationships, although of varying strength according to context and circumstance, helped to shape aristocratic power and thus the scale of social power in both regions here analysed.

Power as an object of study is so vast and complex that no in-depth discussion of its meanings and modalities can be undertaken here. Much in the way of Berkhofer, Cooper, and Kosto, however, I am concerned to ensure that it remains a useful analytical category within medieval history.⁴⁶ Thus, within the context of this thesis, power as an entity is conceived of very broadly; taking my lead from Mann's prodigious analyses, I therefore use it to mean 'the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment', although I extend this so as to include the ability to make others adhere to one's will, by any means, coercive or otherwise, and of any sort, economic, social or

in the short time frame of c.970 to c.1030, for which see Poly and Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation*, chs. 1, 2 and 4; G. Bois, *The Transformation of the Year 1000: the village of Lournand from antiquity to feudalism* (Manchester, 1992), ch. 5; Bonnassie, 'From the Rhone to Galicia', *passim*. The Spanish do not argue for the same drama, but they see similar processes occurring over a longer timescale. The bibliography on feudalism is vast; for classic analyses, see Bloch, *Feudal Society*, ii, pp. 446–447; *FEMA*, pp. 56–62; C. Wickham, 'Le forme del feudalesimo', *Settimane*, XLVII (2000), pp. 15–51; Wickham, *Land and Power. Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1000* (London, 1994), chs. 1 and 2. See the relatively recent debate sparked by T. Bisson, 'The "Feudal Revolution"', *P&P*, 142 (1994), pp. 6–42; D. Barthélemy, (trans. J. Birrell) 'Debate. The "Feudal Revolution". I.', and S. D. White, 'Debate. The "Feudal Revolution". II.', both in *P&P*, 152 (1996), pp. 196–205, and pp. 205–223 respectively. See also, T. Reuter, 'Debate. The "Feudal Revolution". III' and C. Wickham, 'Debate. The "Feudal Revolution". IV', both in *P&P*, 155 (1997), pp. 177–195, and pp. 197–208 respectively. For a recent provocative and stimulating counterblast to the 'feudal revolution' advocates, see D. Barthélemy, *The Serf, The Knight, & The Historian* (Ithaca, 2009). Also of great interest is, E. A. R. Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', *AHR*, 79 (1974), pp. 1063–1088.

⁴⁵ In Chapters 3 and 4, *passim*. For a summary of these interpretations as they have been expressed in the secondary literature, see Mínguez Fernández, 'Ruptura social', p. 32: 'En resumen: debilitamiento de la monarquía, sometimiento del campesinado, fortalecimiento de la aristocracia son los tres pilares sobre los que se sustenta la nueva organización económica, social y política cuya implantación se hace perceptible desde las primeras décadas del siglo X', at p. 32.

⁴⁶ R. F. Berkhofer III, A. Cooper and A. J. Kosto, *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe, 950–1350* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 1–7.

political.⁴⁷ What such a broad definition acknowledges is that we must examine who held power over whom, how they exercised this power, and to what ends. Theorists of power, with few exceptions, have mostly been uninterested in medieval Europe and content themselves with the study of its application and manifestations in early modern and modern societies.⁴⁸ But it clearly has uses for medievalists: how might we characterize and explain, for example, the power that landlords held over their tenants? Did kings have the power to enforce their will in the distant marcher lands of their kingdoms? What sort of mechanisms made the exercise of this power possible? Framed in this way, it becomes clear that discussions of power are, and have always been, integral to the study of medieval social and political history and that they need not be restricted to the theoretical sphere.⁴⁹

However, to understand power relationships, we need to try to test these general assumptions. The possibilities of social power were framed by specific conditions which only empirical study can bring to light; in the Liébana, a powerful local family rose early in the tenth century from amidst the village elite and went on to form links with a well-established local monastery, but it was seemingly unable to attract royal largesse and played little official role in the nominally ‘public’ governance of the region. In Galicia, by contrast, the region’s most powerful family was amongst the kingdom’s wealthiest and most politically important aristocratic factions; the consolidation of the links between this family and their own monastery of Celanova (built in the late 930s) led to the localization of this family’s interest, which came to focus more concentratedly on local communities. In neither region, however, was peasant autonomy significantly reduced before 1000, and this in spite of the huge differences between the scale of regional aristocrats. There was, thus, considerable variation from one region to another with regard to the dynamics that characterized social change.

Although my approach is broadly comparative, I shall deal with each case study separately for the sake of clarity (in chapters 3 and 4 respectively, both of which are heavily subdivided); I shall

⁴⁷ M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. A history of power from the beginning to AD. 1760* (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1986), i, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Classically, M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1997), *passim*, for types of authority.

⁴⁹ For a still stimulating, albeit controversial, discussion of medieval power, see O. Brunner, (trans. H. Kaminsky and J. Van Horn Melton) *Land and Lordship: structures of governance in medieval Austria* (Philadelphia, 1992), especially pp. 1–14, 95–102.

occasionally break this rule in order to offer comparison at salient points throughout the text, before drawing together my findings in the Conclusion. It is vital to stress that this is not, however, a landscape study *per se*; archaeological data has not been incorporated in systematic fashion, partly because so little has been done that its conclusions must remain provisional until they can be tested with more data.⁵⁰ Here, the regions themselves are not the object of study, but form the contextual framework for the analysis of assorted socio-economic and political phenomena as they arose, persisted, changed, or ended, in two large areas, over three hundred years. Its principal aim is to investigate the dynamics of social relations, here understood not as stable entities governed by uni-directional forces (the ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ power relationships envisaged by much of the historiography), but as complex and varied phenomena affected by pre-existing relationships—social, economic, political—and the possibilities and limitations imposed by the landscape and its use.

The importance I place on landscape stems from a wider conviction grounded in the importance of understanding the specific geographical contexts of both case studies here investigated. This position does not seem to me controversial; since the inception of the *Annales*, and perhaps particularly since Bloch and (later) Braudel, social historians of all stripes have been confronted with the idea that the landscape itself is not merely a passive bystander in human history, but that it is one of many factors which conditions and shapes the social, political, and economic possibilities open to human communities.⁵¹ This is not to fall into the trap of geographical determinism, but simply to stress that the realities of landscape were significant in a social world whose inhabitants were so closely tied to the soil, perhaps particularly so in the Liébana, where the limits of the cultivable land were so starkly delineated by the mountains which ring the valley; it is indeed legitimate to conclude that the comparative isolation of the Liébana was a further impediment to the absorption of the

⁵⁰ This study is therefore substantially different to that of M. Fernández Mier, *Génesis del territorio en la edad media: arqueología del paisaje y evolución histórica en la montaña asturiana, el valle del río Pigüena* (Oviedo, 1999), which systematically incorporated landscape and archaeological analyses and remains the best of its type in Spain.

⁵¹ M. Bloch, (trans. J. Sondheimer) *French rural history: an essay on its basic characteristics* (London, 1966), chs. 1 and 2; F. Braudel, (trans. S. Reynolds) *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Phillip II* (2 Vols., London, 1972–1973.), i, ch. 1.

Lebaniegos into the political structures of the kingdom as a whole.⁵² Similarly, we need to ask questions of the economic practices which characterized medieval life in both regions here analysed if we are to understand better their respective communities.

These considerations seem to me crucial, but they are frequently ignored altogether. Indeed, it remains the case that discussions of the geographical characteristics of the regional or local environs which form the backdrop to many historical studies are broached with suspicion and reluctance by a considerable number of historians. Lack of evidence is one reason given by way of justification, but this nonetheless seems to me problematic; the possibilities of what can be farmed, and where, and related issues such as the proximity of mountain communities to political centres and markets, and their ease or difficulty of access, are factors which historians ignore at their peril. Moreover, they are the sorts of details which our documentation, limited as it may be, can actually bring to light. The premise advanced in what follows is therefore that to approach the study of geographically peripheral areas with these factors in mind is to stave off simple determinism in favour of a more complete analysis which accounts for the realities of lived social experience; proximity to water courses and one's landed assets, and the provision of suitable terrain for the feeding of one's animals, were matters of real importance for local medieval society. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the ecological variations within Spain are huge for a country of its size; it would be unrealistic to expect that the differences in economic structure of the fertile huerta of the Valencia region, the semi-desert of Almería, and the mountains of Cantabria can be explained without recourse to geographical realities. Analysed with due caution therefore, geographical considerations are one of many factors which can be used to appreciate local variables and local outcomes when and where possible.⁵³

Of course, all local history has to focus on somewhere, and the Liébana valley, and the Celanova district of southern Galicia, are the chosen geographical settings for this comparative study of local societies in early medieval Christian Spain. They are, of course, not arbitrary choices, but are

⁵² Chris Wickham has written persuasively of the importance of physical settings, stating that 'the impact of geography on mountain society is great, but it is also varied; no two mountain valleys are the same', in C. Wickham, *The mountains and the city: the Tuscan Apennines in the early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988), p. 3.

⁵³ A successful study which has incorporated an acknowledgement of the importance of mountain geographies is L. Feller, *Les Abruzzes médiévales: territoire, économie et société en Italie centrale du IX au XII siècle* (Rome, 1998); W. Davies, *Small worlds: the village community in early medieval Brittany* (London, 1988).

in fact alike in many interesting ways. Both are worlds of green and grey; pleasant summer sunshine and overcast, relatively mild winters, where rain is common but not diluvial. They are both, too, relatively difficult to access from outside, thanks to the impassable Picos de Europa which encircle the Liébana, and the Leonese Mountains of the Cantabrian chain which cut Galicia off from the rest of Spain, simultaneously highlighting the relative ease of southward movement into Portugal. Moreover, these two case studies share other characteristics; they were in the early Middle Ages, and in large part remain, overwhelmingly rural areas characterized by the relative sparsity of urban settlement. Both, too, are areas which have been thought to have undergone a less far-reaching process of Romanization than was broadly typical for Spain, and were far from the political capitals of Roman and Visigothic Spain. There are then, sensible reasons for comparing these two subregions of Cantabria and Galicia, especially when one also bears in mind the appreciable differences that one might reasonably expect to find between the patterns of development of local societies in a mountain valley and a world of modestly rolling hills and meadows, wherein, moreover, appreciable differences in the scale of aristocratic landholdings are visible from the earliest charters.

The advantage of comparative methodology in a study of this sort is that it allows us to test our conclusions from one subregion to another, helping us to arrive at a more global understanding of the social processes and phenomena that characterized social and political relations in this period. Carefully done, good comparative history does not merely select one case study, assign it as ‘the norm’, and treat all difference as deviation. More subtle insights can be drawn from a willingness to compare and contrast, not the least of which is the enhanced capacity it gives us to evaluate broader patterns of change, and, just as importantly, to appreciate the scansion of change; this helps avoid slipping into teleological schemata, be they nationalist or ideological. Put simply, it is not enough to say that because peasantries were heavily subjected in one area, this necessarily must follow for another area; these hypotheses need to be tested, and charters, discussed in Chapter 2, provide us with useful material for doing just that. Chris Wickham has written persuasively on the importance of comparative history in a medieval context, but his analyses in many ways look to the example set by

Marc Bloch's monumental *Feudal Society*.⁵⁴ That some of Bloch's interpretations are now open to question is in large measure unimportant, and is, to some extent, to miss the value of his work; namely, we only know more about the patterns and peculiarities of European history *because* of Bloch's, and his followers', willingness to compare. The spirit of this approach can, and should, be applied to historical study within countries and across their respective regional divisions; for the reasons outlined above, I adopt that comparative approach here.

The chronological delimitations of this thesis are quite deliberate, in particular my decision to write about the period before the year 1000, which I have chosen as a terminal point so as to treat the tenth century on its own terms and not as a precursor to the eleventh, as is often its fate in much historical writing. The eighth century, admittedly, furnishes us with much less in the way of useful material for a study of this sort, but as I am writing about societies whose respective debts, albeit in different ways, to pre-Roman, Roman, and post Roman social, economic and cultural patterns is considered to have been unusually marked, I have included it here in order to begin with the crucial date of 711, which seems less arbitrary than, say, 800, when our documentation begins in earnest. The eighth century does, however, as a result of the evidential limitations mentioned above, receive much less attention than the ninth and, in particular, the tenth century—the historical development of this later period emerging with growing clarity throughout. By choosing to focus on the period before the fabled year of 1000—called variously a transformation, a mutation, and a revolution—I hope to avoid the sort of lengthy terminological discussion (much of which is greatly interesting) which can at any rate be found in many other places for those inclined to search it out.⁵⁵

More important however, is my already stated desire to treat the ninth and tenth centuries on their own terms. The social characteristics said to belong to the feudal world are often identified in different stages of gestation in the period before 1000, as if the small worlds portrayed in the charters from this period only make sense if contextualized with reference to their later aspect—but such an

⁵⁴ C. Wickham, 'Problems in Doing Comparative History', in P. Skinner (ed.), *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 5–28; Wickham, 'Problems of Comparing Rural Societies in Early Medieval Western Europe', *TRHS*, 6th series, 2 (1992), pp. 221–246; Bloch, *Feudal Society*, *passim*.

⁵⁵ See n. 44.

approach runs the risk of reading history backwards. The tenth century in particular seems for many scholars to make sense when characterized, where it cannot be called feudal, as a quasi-feudal century, in which social patterns approximated closely enough to those of the eleventh and twelfth centuries so as to be able to explain social change without having either to identify a relatively short period of time in which the balance of power was altered significantly, or offer a more detailed explanation of why and how change took place. The possibility of significant change taking place within a relatively short chronological window should not be discounted; the ‘mutationists’ have in fact stimulated debate greatly by attempting to locate historical change more concisely. Nonetheless, although conceptually useful, an obsession with the year 1000 can be misleading, and this thesis argues that each window of change, each period of significant socio-economic change, is context-dependent even within the Iberian peninsula, not to mention Latin Europe as a whole.⁵⁶

In the case of early medieval Spain, geographically heterogeneous, home to various polities of changing stability and size, riven by dynamic differences of Roman and pre-Roman imprints, it seems optimistic to be able to find a single explanation for why and how social changes of a broadly similar sort took place at different times in different places. The different paths taken by different societies throughout the early medieval ages have been emphasized above, and I would add to that the need to be as chronologically specific as our evidence allows when treating each example. The only way to do this is by doing comparative empirical work based on detailed local studies. Empirical work of this sort would seem to provide us with more robust building blocks with which to craft broader hypotheses; it may too help us to marginalize historiographical totems of questionable utility and to work helpfully towards more subtle insights.

⁵⁶ As has been argued for the post-Roman period, in M. Carver, ‘Debating Urbanism in Post-Roman Europe: Some Thoughts about Objectives’, in D. Sami and G. Speed (eds.), *Debating Urbanism, Within and Beyond the Walls A.D. 300–700* (Bristol, 2010), pp. 289–291, at p. 290: ‘Lovers of process have been demoralised by the fact that no one explanation works everywhere; our results are looking increasingly historical, or agency-driven, in the sense that the active human minds in every corner of the old Empire came up with different ways of getting through the fifth to the eighth century’.

2. Sources and Approaches:

The Santo Toribio and Celanova Charters

Writing the history of local societies and the political frameworks in which they were distantly embedded in the early Middle Ages is a considerable challenge; in large measure, this is a reflection of the quality and quantity of the source material upon which all analyses must be based. But it also has to do with broader methodological considerations concerning the use of evidence; that is to say, the things that historians try to do with sources, the questions they ask of them, and the sorts of information they seek.⁵⁷ In this chapter, I shall make some framing observations about the principal sources used in the writing of this thesis: charter material and chronicles. My objective here, however, is strictly limited; it is simply to consider some of the problems which historians need to bear in mind, but all too often forget, when trying to analyse various aspects of early medieval Spanish history via these sources, be it the nature of political relationships, or the dynamics of local society.⁵⁸ It seems to me vital to begin by stressing that we need to be honest about the kinds of information we can reasonably expect to extract from the source material at our disposal; this necessarily varies from one source to the next, and it is unhelpful to imagine that—to take the same examples—a charter and a chronicle can shed light of the same intensity on the same lines of inquiry.

⁵⁷ On the questions we ask of different types of sources, see M. Howell and W. Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 17–27; for useful introductions to working with charters, see A. Rio, *Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 11–20; W. Davies, *Acts of Giving: individual, community and Church in tenth-century Christian Spain* (Oxford, 2007); Davies, *Small worlds*; Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1996); M. Costambeys, *Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy: Local Society, Italian Politics and the Abbey of Farfa, c.700–900* (Cambridge, 2007); K. Hieckler (ed.), *Charters and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Society* (Turnhout, 2000), *passim*.

⁵⁸ The myriad questions concerning the development and scope of literacy and the use of the written word more generally cannot be dealt with here; neither do I presume to comment about diplomatic practice in this thesis. For more on orality and literacy, see M. Richter, *The Formation of the Medieval West: Studies in the Oral Culture of the Barbarians* (Dublin, 1994); the opposite line is taken by M. Innes, ‘Memory, orality and literacy in an early medieval society’, *P&P*, 158 (1998), pp. 3–36; R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989). On exchange in the written record see P. Depreux, ‘The Development of Charters Confirming Exchange by the Royal Administration’, in Heidecker (ed.), *Charters and the Written Word*, pp. 43–62.

In what follows, I want to delineate briefly the sources I have used in this thesis whilst also making some broader methodological points about their usefulness; by doing so, I hope to show how chronicles and charters can provide different sorts of information, each contingent upon its own set of qualifications, doubts and partialities, but which nonetheless, when used carefully, can help us to understand better the ninth- and tenth-century historical development of the Liébana and southern Galicia.

Of all the sources used in this thesis, the most important are charters. For non-Catalan northern Spain, these number something in the region of two thousand three hundred for the tenth century, and represent the principal resource for any examination of the local society of Christian Iberia before 1000.⁵⁹ Major collections exist across the northern peninsula, from Galicia to Aragón, and although we possess some original documents, the vast majority of charters are copies collected in cartularies by monks of the central or later Middle Ages, whose interests and prejudices may well have influenced their transcriptions of earlier originals. As in most of western Europe, charters within and across Spanish collections were highly formulaic with regard to structure and language, notwithstanding minor but not insignificant regional variations; the consolidation and repeated utilization of stock phrases led to a uniformity of aspect that lent these documents a formal quality, thereby helping to legitimize the transactions they recorded in the eyes of the participants and the wider community.⁶⁰ That there were accepted ways of writing things down—consisting of more or less widely known invocations, pieties and warning clauses—points to the functional utility of these documents to their owners, and the frequent recourse to this sort of documentation in court cases is proof enough of the legal importance attached to them.⁶¹ This formulaic aspect, however, can cause problems for the historian: for a start, charters can be dry and confusing, their narrative content sometimes only imperfectly coherent. Further difficulties are manifold; these can stem from the Latin in which the charters were written, a subject which has its own historiography, or from the

⁵⁹ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, *passim*, makes use of most of the major collections.

⁶⁰ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, ch. 4.

⁶¹ R. Collins, 'Visigothic law and regional custom in disputes in early medieval Spain', in Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 85–104; Davies, 'Judges and judging. Truth and justice in northern Iberia on the eve of the millenium', *JMH*, 36/3 (2010), pp. 193–203.

inconsistencies or lacunae in their narrative content, or from problems concerning the dates assigned to individual charters, which are sometimes plainly anachronistic.⁶² Similarly problematic is the fact that it is often difficult to distinguish between the participants in transactions, due to irregularities or ambiguities related to the use of personal names, pronouns and patronyms. Nonetheless, that we are able to deal with named, often non-noble, personages, is a great advantage in that charter evidence personalizes local history in a way that other sources cannot; casting the net wider, it also allows us to construct networks of family and patronage, which, in turn, has significant ramifications for our conceptions of the shape of local communities and settlement patterns in this period.

Unlike the vast majority of actors and participants in Spanish charters, the writers of these documents were not always named. On the other hand, at other times, scribes explicitly acknowledged their role in the drafting of a charter; these were in many cases local priests or monks, whose ability to write made them valuable members of the community, quite apart from their pastoral or spiritual duties.⁶³ Thus, although ostensibly private documents, charter production and use necessarily entailed the participation of outside parties, thereby affording us a slightly more detailed picture of local societies than may at first seem apparent; charters were by no means always the colourless formulations of practised local draughtsmen, but wider windows onto several interrelated aspects of local society. The majority of charters documented land transactions, and were usually records of gifts, sales, exchanges, and disputes, often involving the monasteries whose archives stored these documents and ensured that they survived.⁶⁴ On this latter point, it is crucial to recognize that survival was for the most part not a matter of chance; written title to land proved ownership and was therefore a useful tool for institutions and private individuals alike.⁶⁵ Thus, on occasions where the link between the content of a charter and the monastery which collected it is unclear, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the monastery at some later stage may well have held an interest in the

⁶² On Latin, Rio's comments are very interesting, in *Legal Practice*, pp. 15–18. However, the key place to start is R. Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (London, 1982).

⁶³ Adleobus, for example, was the scribe responsible for T28 (921), T39 (930) and T40 (930), all of which involved landed assets located in Cosgaya, a village in the Valdebaró in the Liébana. It is probable that he was a local priest, although this is not explicitly stated.

⁶⁴ Charter participants almost always dealt in land, since this was the principal resource; however, people also dealt in animals, crops, orchards, vineyards and clothing.

⁶⁵ It is quite possible that the accidental retention of documents sometimes took place; we cannot discount that certain charters may have been misunderstood by archivists, or even separated from their original contexts.

persons, places or assets, which the document described. Charters which appear to lack an apparent vested interest are amongst the most difficult to interpret, but documents which would help clarify these confusions may well have been lost, and second-guessing on the back of missing information does not make for convincing historical analysis.

Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that our material comes from a very specific ambit, reflecting the interests of ecclesiastical elites and their patrons to an overwhelming degree. It is important not to lose sight of this when analysing the documentation; given that these interest groups necessarily selected what they wanted to retain and copy, it is very likely that this selection may not offer a representative sample of ninth- and tenth-century charters.⁶⁶ For example, many documents which recorded transactions between peasants may well have been drafted, only to have escaped the attention of institutions with the infrastructure and inclination to have retained them, and thereby been lost to posterity. Put this way, it becomes clear that so much must have depended on the interests and motives of the creators of archives initially, and, later, the compilers of cartularies; as a consequence, patterns of gift and sale must always be discussed with caution, and conclusions nuanced by these considerations. Even allowing for the ways in which this observation may colour our perceptions, some documents which do not seem to follow the broadly dominant pattern of gift or sale to the monastery in whose archives these same documents came to rest, have nonetheless ‘slipped through’, giving us a glimpse of the social logic that characterized the peasant world. Indeed, so great are the differences between the assets changing hands amongst the actors whom we witness in the charters, that it is very difficult to imagine that this was not a world of considerable social variation. Recognizing as much is key, since charter material was in one sense not solely the preserve of the literate and powerful, and this can help us to see society in the round in a way that chronicles, with their focus on the highly selective and unbalanced political narratives of kings and their magnates, simply cannot.

This having been said, charters were also extremely useful documents for kings and their supporters, since they were a mechanism with which formal conferrals of royally-mandated authority

⁶⁶ Rio, *Legal Practice*, p. 12.

could be distributed and enshrined in writing, often, but not always, alongside significant royal gifts to the lay aristocracy—gifts which bestowed considerable wealth and political capital. Royal charters which record donations by the king or his family to monasteries or lay magnates project a clear vision of royal authority in the public domain. However, this has tended to rouse scepticism amongst historians worried that the charters may distort our understanding of the actual proximity of lay magnates to royal power in this period.⁶⁷ Many early royal charters show signs of later modification or interpolation, requiring the reader to assess the usefulness of the document in spite of the fact that what he or she must examine may or may not approximate greatly to its original form.⁶⁸ But interpolation does not render a document useless; on the contrary, it obliges us to question the motives of the writers, and in this way better understand early medieval mentalities and, sometimes, the modalities of political processes. In this thesis I have of course drawn my own conclusions, often informed by scholarly consensus where this exists, with regard to the integrity of royal documents, but it remains important to accept that there is no way to talk around, or overlook, the possible pitfalls of charters.

Beyond their inherent capacity to provide title rights to landed wealth, which was the basis of almost all private wealth in this period, charters may have served other purposes too. In recent years, many studies have emphasized the commemorative aspect of charters, alongside their more immediately obvious practical importance.⁶⁹ Monasteries, housing literate communities, were particularly well placed to produce and preserve documentation of this sort, but Barbara Rosenwein has suggested that the act of acquiring a charter may too have had profound symbolic resonance

⁶⁷ Discussed in much more detail in chs. 3 and 4.

⁶⁸ Royal charters are much the most commonly forged or interpolated of documents, but the clear interpolation of a document is often stimulating, since it allows us to ask why a document would be altered, and in whose interests such interpolation would be undertaken. A very good introduction for issues to do with interpolated royal charter material is J. I. Fernández de Viana y Vieites, 'Problemas y perspectivas de la diplomática de los reinos asturiano, leonés y castellano-leonés en la alta edad media', in C. Sáez Sánchez (ed.), *Libros y Documentos en la alta edad media. Los libros de derecho. Los archivos familiares. Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de Historia de la Cultura Escrita* (2 vols., Alcalá de Henares, 2002), ii, pp. 39–53. Wendy Davies (personal comment) has suggested that 'corruption' may be the most useful term, since the falsification of complete charters would have been an expensive and time-consuming process which is unlikely to have been widespread, except in later periods.

⁶⁹ P. J. Geary, 'Land, language and memory in Europe', *TRHS*, 6th series, 9 (1999), pp. 169–184; B. Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 49–65, and ch. 4, *passim*.

insofar as its ramifications for community membership, social relationships, and custom were concerned.⁷⁰ Giving an agreement written form also seems to have become more commonplace throughout the period studied here, which points towards an increasing usage of, and interest in, documents. These considerations have their origin in a great deal of British and American scholarship which has, since the 1980s, stated the case in favour of using charters to approach medieval society in a way which borrows extensively from the insights of social anthropology.⁷¹ The results have been most illuminating, although it is interesting that this method of approaching the documentation has not found much support in Spanish scholarship, which has primarily used charters to paint pictures of the growth of monastic lordship—to the exclusion of substantial comment which focuses on the diversity of social experience in this period.

Having provided some brief framing observations, the question needs to be addressed of what charters can actually elucidate that other sorts of documents cannot. For the purposes of our investigation, charters must be thought of as documents which record details of the construction of local societies, as well as the ways in which different social strata interacted. Analysis of these matters was for many years undertaken by scholars whose contentions were based on (often masterful) knowledge of the legal sources, but this approach privileged idealized conceptions of how societies worked rather than ‘lived’ social experience. The law, although invoked in many tenth-century documents from northern Spain, was all promulgated in the sixth or seventh centuries, and can have been no more of a reliable guide to how people lived their lives in the ninth and tenth centuries than it is today; in fact, given the overwhelmingly more sophisticated socio-cultural and politico-juridical infrastructure of the modern world, it makes sense to imagine that public law in the early medieval world was most probably less of an everyday fixture in the lives of peasants than it is in ours today.⁷² Social codes of practice do not neatly correspond with legal codes and reality is

⁷⁰ Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbor*, ch. 4, *passim*.

⁷¹ W. Davies, ‘Disputes, their conduct and their settlement in the village communities of eastern Brittany in the ninth century’, *H&A*, I, Part 2 (1985), pp. 289–312.

⁷² The *Forum Iudicum* (also called the *Lex Visigothorum*; here cited as *LV*) was a body of law compiled and added to in the seventh century by a succession of Visigothic kings. The tone of much of this legislation underlines the significant store that these kings placed on the notions of late-Roman style central proclamation and regulation. Its longevity and influence was considerable, and in northern Spanish charter material it is commonly invoked by richer elements of society, although it is arguable how far its precepts were actually well

always messier and more complex than a straightforward acceptance of the application of legislation would imply; with this in mind, we need to be careful about using legal sources to write descriptive and analytical history of social practice, whilst remaining aware that the invocation of the law in charters is at least illustrative of the conception of a public framework in some places and at some times.⁷³ The great advantage of charter material is that it allows us to see societies in action, recording, regulating, and safeguarding their proprietorial interests. The fact that they involve named individuals interacting with their neighbours, allows us to get closer to the actual working of local society than we can by using legal evidence or formularies; it allows us, indeed, to ‘to localize and to particularize’, one of the stated objectives of this thesis.⁷⁴

As we have seen, scholars who work on non-Catalan northern Spain are fortunate to be able to base their analyses on a relatively large corpus of charters for the tenth century. However, charters exist in much smaller numbers for the ninth century, and only a handful date to the eighth, meaning that our picture of early medieval local society is greatly expanded, in a fairly dramatic manner, in the space of one or two generations. Even allowing for the existence of certain other sources of great utility for the study of local societies between 500 and 900, including the slate texts recently studied by Isabel Velázquez Soriano, we need to recognize that our conclusions must remain highly provisional before documents became more plentiful after 900.⁷⁵ For the tenth century, however, it is possible, in places, to establish arguments on firmer empirical foundations, because significant surviving numbers of documents correspond with certain subregions, often detailing several land transactions across a series of documents within a single village, or sometimes within a series of adjacent or neighbouring villages. For example, although the two hundred and thirty-seven Celanova documents from the tenth century (there are only eight for the ninth) occasionally involve land

understood and implemented. For comment, see Collins, ‘Visigothic Law’, pp. 85–86; Collins, *La España Visigoda, 409–711* (Barcelona, 2005), ch. 9; FEMA, pp. 93–100; P. D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1972). For an explanation of the Roman legacy of the legal codes of the post-Roman successor kingdoms, see P. Barnwell, ‘Emperors, Jurists and Kings: Law and Custom in the Late Roman and Early Medieval West’, *P&P*, 168 (2000), pp. 6–29.

⁷³ Wickham, ‘Problems of Comparing Rural Societies’.

⁷⁴ Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes*, p. ix. The phrase used here was part of the mission statement of the Bucknell Group of academics whose work on charters has been a great influence on my own.

⁷⁵ I. Velázquez Soriano, *Pizarras Visigodas. Edición crítica y estudio* (Murcia, 1989); Velázquez Soriano and M. Santonja Gómez (eds.), *En la Pizarra. Los últimos hispanorromanos de la meseta* (León, 2005).

transacted as far afield as the Asturias or the Zamora region, the majority record transactions of landed assets in an area of southern Galicia roughly approximate to the southern fringes of the modern province of Lugo and the western half of the present-day province of Ourense. Thus, whilst we need to be cautious when it comes to drawing wider conclusions about local society in north-western early medieval Spain more generally, it is not unreasonable to suggest that we can argue from fairly solid, if difficult, evidential bases for the Celanova region. Moreover, other collections from the north-west, not studied in such detail here, seem to present a broadly similar picture of the nature of land use and social structures to that gleaned from the Celanova documentation, which serves as an interesting point of contrast and comparison.

This context of comparison is crucial if we are to add to our knowledge in incremental fashion. Hence my decision to focus on the Liébana, and its documentation, as my second, admittedly less well-documented, case study. At the outset it needs to be stated that our documentary base from the Liébana is, in quantitative terms, significantly smaller than that which we enjoy in Galicia; some seventeen ninth-century Santo Toribio documents are augmented by only four Piasca documents, giving us in total twenty-one documents for the ninth century. For the tenth-century Liébana, we possess sixty documents from the Santo Toribio cartulary, plus some fourteen Piasca charters. Whilst these are not large numbers, we need to bear in mind that the particular geographical context from which the documents derive enhances their likelihood of offering a representative picture of Liébana society; this is because the Liébana documents all describe patterns of land use and transaction within a single mountain valley of only five hundred and seventy kms² in extension, of which a large proportion of the territory is uninhabited. The Liébana, although by no means a closed world (especially in a cultural sense, as Beatus' work testifies), was home to a local society whose geographical horizons were very much circumscribed by the mountains that enclosed their landed holdings; in this context, the documents attain a value that their numbers alone might not warrant elsewhere.

Local and particular knowledge is precisely the sort of insight that we cannot obtain from the cycle of chronicles associated with the court of Alfonso III, without doubt the major narrative

accounts of the political history of this period.⁷⁶ Until relatively recently, the narrative content of the chronicles suffered from credulous acceptance which overlooked the fact that the chronicles emerged from circles very close to the royal capital at some stage in the late ninth century and purported to tell the history of the formation of the kingdom, the restoration of the ‘Gothic order’, and the expansion of the kingdom’s political and territorial boundaries; their content is thus not easy to accept at face-value.⁷⁷ The Chronicle of Alfonso III exists in two versions, known, respectively, as the Roda redaction (or *Rotense* in Spanish, *Rotensis* in Latin) and the Oviedo redaction (most often given its Latin title of *Ad Sebastianum*, after a prefatory letter addressed to Bishop Sebastian of Ourense). Both chronicles are thought to date from the 880s, but are known to us in early tenth-century recensions, and they are clearly the product of someone very closely connected to the royal court. Their content covers the demise of the Visigothic kingdom and the first one hundred and fifty years of the Asturian kingdom, contrasting the moral depravity of late Visigothic kings with the Christian righteousness of Asturian kings, in order both to explain the loss of the Visigothic kingdom, and to paint the Asturians as the inheritors of all that remained holy and unsullied of the Visigothic legacy; what we see in both reflects the skilful manipulation of the Visigothic inheritance so as to appropriate certain attributes whilst denouncing others, notably the perfidy of Witiza, and the foolishness of Rodrigo (spared the vitriol afforded to Witiza), both late Visigothic kings. Recent attempts to redress the balance have been impressive, but the claims of the chroniclers need to be tested where possible, using toponymical and archaeological evidence in order to test the core tenets of Sánchez-Albornoz’s

⁷⁶ Two minor eighth-century works, interesting in their own right, provide little essential information within the context of this thesis. These are the Chronicle of 741, written in Latin by an unknown author who focussed mostly on political events in the eastern Mediterranean, showing remarkably little interest in Spain, and the anonymous Chronicle of 754, also a Latin text, of undoubted value for our attempts to reconstruct the conquest and the first half-century of the eighth century; this chronicle does not discuss the genesis of the Asturian kingdom however. For the chronicles, J. Gil Fernández (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum* (2 Vols., Madrid, 1973), ii, pp. 7–14 (for the Chronicle of 741); E. López Pereira (ed.), *Crónica Mozárabe de 754; edición crítica y traducción* (Zaragoza, 1980). For secondary analysis of both see K. B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool, 1990), pp. 28–45; and, more substantial, Collins, *Arab Conquest*, pp. 52–65.

⁷⁷ See *Crónicas Asturianas* for the texts, specifically *CAIfIII Rot.*, 5; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 5, for Witiza; *CAIfIII Rot.*, 6; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 6, for Rodrigo. For more analysis, Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, pp. 46–60; M. C. Díaz y Díaz, ‘La historiografía hispana desde la invasión árabe hasta el año 1000’, *Settimane*, XVII (1970), pp. 313–343; Menéndez Bueyes, *Reflexiones críticas*, ch. 1; Collins, *Arab Conquest*, ch. 6. The Albelda chronicle (*Albeldense*), is contemporaneous to the *Rotense* and *Ad Sebastianum* chronicles, and provides a relatively detailed but shorter narrative of events within the kingdom until 881, for which see *Crónicas Asturianas*. It is noticeably less zealous in its ideological support of the Visigothist tendencies of the Chronicles of Alfonso III, and it seems to place greater emphasis on the Asturian origins of Pelayo.

despoblación y repoblación paradigm, as I argued in the Introduction.⁷⁸ Where this is not possible, critical engagement needs to characterize the study of these chronicles, because the interests they project are infused with the rhetoric of growing governance and providential victory, which are, of course, precisely the sort of *topoi* which we might expect, and which, furthermore, hinder our attempts to tell us about much more than the ambition of Alfonso III and his court by the late ninth century.

The only other roughly contemporaneous, substantial narrative we possess for the period examined in this thesis is the Chronicle of Sampiro, an early eleventh-century chronicle which survives in two imperfect later compilations.⁷⁹ This chronicle has the virtue of being written by a notary of the Leonese court who later governed the diocese of Astorga as bishop from c.1031 to c.1041; it was therefore very much the product of the kind of person who was well placed within the topmost channels of political power. It may well provide a slightly less ‘official’ version of events than the Alfonsine cycle of chronicles does, but its assertions also require critical examination and a healthy dose of scepticism; it is nonetheless, our principal guide to the basic political chronology of the tenth century, and much of what it records stands up to verification in royal documentation. Overall, Astur-Leonese chronicles from this period in Spain provide a political history of the northern kingdoms which very much reflects the ideology of the ruling cliques and their inconsistent attempts to appropriate the cultural legacy of the Visigoths. Nonetheless, they do tell us about the Asturian ideology of kingship, and provide lots of circumstantial information about the political geography of Iberia in the ninth century, although much of this must be accepted with reservations given the ideological objectives of the chroniclers, or checked against charters where possible. Conversely, the ambition of Asturian kings, considering what they had to work with, that is, the agriculturally poor lands of Asturias, is one of the most consistently striking aspects of the ninth-century chronicles. Between them, charters and chronicles accordingly shine a light on a significant sector of the early

⁷⁸ For recent attempts, see J. M. Monsalvo Antón, ‘Espacios y fronteras en el discurso territorial del reino de Asturias (del Cantábrico al Duero en las *Crónicas Asturianas*)’, *SHHM*, 23 (2005), pp. 43–87; for the first sustained attack on secondary accounts which took the chroniclers at their word, see Barbero and Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo*, pp. 232–278.

⁷⁹ For the chronicle, see the edited version and critical commentary of Pérez de Urbel in *Sampiro*, especially ch. 3, for information on its surviving versions, which are substantially similar.

medieval society of the Astur-Leonese kingdoms, with the chronicles offering an Oviedo- and León-centric vision of political events which provides context for the more specific and local information derived from charters. But it has become clear that there are numerous considerations that need to be borne in mind when interpreting the different sorts of evidence pertinent to an investigation of the social structures and political development of the kingdom of Asturias-León.

In order to look more closely at local society however, we need to examine specific collections of documents. In this thesis, my empirical focus falls primarily on two important collections of charters: for the Liébana, the most important collection by far is the cartulary of the monastery of Santo Toribio de Liébana (known throughout the period studied here as San Martín de Turieno); for Galicia, the basis of my comment is an analysis of the charters collected in the *Tumbo de Celanova*, examined in what follows.⁸⁰ The documents of Santo Toribio were edited by Sánchez Belda in 1948, who began the Introduction to his edition with a confident declaration: ‘En los primeros tiempos de la Reconquista’, he wrote, ‘formó la Liébana un foco de vida monástica de extraordinaria importancia’.⁸¹ Few historians today would be so bold as to make such assertive claims about any historical facet of the earliest period of the *Reconquista*, and I suspect that many might have difficulties with the intellectual premise of *Reconquista* itself, but it is beyond doubt that the cartulary compiled at Santo Toribio is our best guide to the history of the region in the early Middle Ages.

Chapter 3 of this thesis investigates the nature of social relations amongst the inhabitants of the Liébana in the period from 700 to 1000, mostly by means of the seventy-seven documents dated to the period before 1000 which comprise a significant portion of the cartulary. Although this is not a large amount of documents, it must be remembered, as stressed above, that this material covers a relatively small area of approximately five hundred and seventy-five kms², thus providing useful information on local society more generally, and particularly for two periods in which the documentation is relatively concentrated; these are, from c.820 to c. 860, and from c.915 to c.970. Where helpful, I have also used documents from the monastery of Santa María de Piasca, a monastery

⁸⁰ The monastery of Santo Toribio, previously San Martín de Turieno, is located in the Valdebaró.

⁸¹ *Santo Toribio*, p. ix.

founded in the middle of the tenth century in the Valdepradó, although these texts are markedly less useful and numerous, mostly because it was not until the eleventh century that Piasca became a major monastery, as Montenegro Valentín has underlined in her study.⁸²

The earliest Liébana documents show that it was a region in which churches and monasteries seem to have been abundant in the early Middle Ages, and the scriptorium associated with Beatus, plus the presence of numerous priests, suggests that the introduction of charter production is likely to have pre-dated the first surviving documents, which date to the late eighth century.⁸³ As I maintained earlier, survival was normally dependent on a given document's relevance and interest to the later compilers of cartularies; thus, given that monasteries grew in importance in the ninth and tenth centuries, and, more importantly, that more people transacted with them too, it is likely that they chose to keep and to produce more documents in the tenth century. This general trend is important, but patterns of giving almost certainly did influence patterns of document writing, and they may have done so before the tenth century. It seems reasonable, after all, to suggest that the more a monastery transacted, the greater need it had for documents. This may explain patterns in the material, such as the spate of San Salvador de Villeña documents from the ninth century, which are not matched by similar tenth-century numbers, probably because the monastery was losing ground to rival local institutions by this later stage. These patterns of relatively rapid acquisition are made much easier to identify by the arrangement of the charters into chronological order—undertaken in the case of Santo Toribio by Sánchez Belda—but there are disadvantages to this approach too. Most pertinently, other

⁸² J. Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca: Estudio de un territorio a través de un centro monástico (857–1252)* (Valladolid, 1993), at p. 21: 'Santa María de Piasca, solamente en el siglo XI, y en condiciones muy peculiares, experimentó un notable desarrollo'. I have used the compilation of Piasca charters which were collected by the monks of the Castilian monastery of Sahagún and published in J. M. Mínguez Fernández, *Cartulario diplomático del monasterio de Sahagún (siglos IX y X)* (León, 1971), cited hereafter as Piasca1, Piasca2, etc.

⁸³ T1 (790). Beatus (?–c. 800) was a learned monk who is thought to have written at San Martín de Turieno in the late eighth century; his erudition extended to a sound knowledge of the Church Fathers, as well as many other Christian theologians, suggesting first-hand acquaintance with a wide array of texts. He became embroiled in the Adoptionist controversy of the eighth century, but he is more famous for a series of works associated with his scriptorium. His most famous work, the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, written in c. 775, became an important text after his death and survives in more than thirty manuscripts, although the original is lost. We ascribe the authorship of this text to Beatus on account of the dedication made to Eterio of Osma in the second redaction of the text (786). For more on Beatus, J. Williams, 'Beato de Liébana y la tradición del Beato', in P. A. Fernández Vega and R. Peña Suárez (eds.), *Apocalipsis: el ciclo histórico del beato de Liébana* (Cantabria, 2006), pp. 107–116.

patterns, apparent or important to the compilers of the cartulary, are lost when the charters are rearranged.

According to Sánchez Belda, the cartulary was one of many items stored in the drawers of the monastic archive at Santo Toribio before the confiscation of much of its documentary collection in the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ This material, including the cartulary, are now stored in the Sección de Clero Regular y Secular of the Archivo Nacional Histórico in Madrid, having been moved at some unidentified stage during the *desamortización*.⁸⁵ Two hands, both dating from the early fourteenth century, have been identified in the cartulary, which is now in a notably poor state of repair.⁸⁶ One of these hands is identifiable with a fourteenth-century prior named Toribio, who affirmed in the seventy-second folio of the cartulary that ‘Esto todo sobredicho fíco el prior don Turibio escribir en este libro porque sepan todos el estado del monasterio e las cosas e cartas nuevas también como las antiguas’.⁸⁷ The second hand cannot be identified but the fact that it is also fourteenth-century, in conjunction with prior Toribio’s comments, suggests that the transcription of the archive’s documents was undertaken at this time as part of a project designed to organize the monastery’s plentiful collection; this was possibly triggered by a relatively important thirteenth century for the monastery, which seems to have followed something of a period of decline or stasis in the monastery’s local status. After sixty tenth-century charters, only twenty-five and twenty-two extant documents survive from the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively; however, sixty-six thirteenth-century charters point to an upturn in the monastery’s fortunes at this time and it is possible that this necessitated the reordering of the monastic archive. Whatever the case may be in this regard, the tenth century was clearly very important for the monastery; most significantly, San Martín de Turieno came under the guidance of Abbot Opila, the son of a lay magnate couple whose consistent purchases of landed assets in the first third of the century forms the backbone of a later subsection. But the monastery, and by

⁸⁴ *Santo Toribio*, p. xxxviii. Sánchez Belda’s edition includes loose charters which for some reason or another had not been written up into the cartulary.

⁸⁵ *Desamortización*, for our purposes, essentially refers to the process of confiscations enacted upon monastic institutions by Spanish liberals in the nineteenth century.

⁸⁶ *Santo Toribio*, p. xl.

⁸⁷ *Santo Toribio*, p. xl: ‘Así, pues, se compuso por orden de don Toribio, quien rigió la vida de la comunidad de 1300 a 1316’.

extension its archive, could not sustain the waves of donation it attracted from c.950 for more than about fifteen years; an examination of why this was the case sheds light on the scale of landed wealth and public power in this region, as we shall see in chapter 3.

Things were quite different in Galicia, where our major repository of documents was and remains an important and prestigious centre. The monastery of San Salvador de Celanova was founded in 936 in what is now a small town of some 6000 or so inhabitants, located in the southern-central zone of the autonomous region of Galicia.⁸⁸ To this day the monastery dominates the centre of Celanova, sitting proudly amidst the hustle and bustle of the town's main square. Although no longer a monastic institution, the building is put to good use by the local community and its *iglesia* fulfils the function of parish church to the inhabitants of Celanova.⁸⁹ That it remains a focal point of the local community says something about its wider historical significance, which has long been apparent to scholars—a particularly learned visitor to express admiration for the monastery and its history was the sixteenth-century humanist and historian Ambrosio de Morales.⁹⁰ '*O vello mosteiro*' also served as a source of inspiration for the poet and intellectual Manuel Curros Enríquez in more recent times.⁹¹ In short, the monastery of Celanova has not wanted for fame, yet its late twelfth-century cartulary has received fragmentary and insufficient critical attention from historians, possibly due to the relatively recent date of its critical editions.⁹²

⁸⁸ The Instituto Nacional de Estadística gave the total population of Celanova as 5, 949 for 2010. This figure was accurate as of February 2011. For more information see, <http://www.ine.es>. The document dealing with the foundation of Celanova, Cel53 (936), and the circumstances of its foundation will be discussed more fully in chapter 4.

⁸⁹ According to the Departamento de Cultura of the Concello de Celanova, 'el edificio está ocupado por el Ayuntamiento (que tiene la casa consistorial, biblioteca, oficina de turismo, información juvenil, policía local, telecentro, salón de actos y otras dependencias), el Centro de Servicios Sociales y el Instituto de Enseñanzas Medias', (Private Correspondence).

⁹⁰ See, A. de Morales, *Viage de Ambrosio de Morales por orden del rey D. Phelipe II a los reynos de León, y Galicia, y principado de Asturias*, 20th edn (Madrid, 1985), pp. 151–153, for Ambrosio de Morales' comment. This text was first published in 1765, some one hundred years after its composition.

⁹¹ These words are taken from the poem *A igrexa fría*, for which I have made use of the following modern edition: M. Curros Enríquez, *Aires da miña terra: e outros poemas* (Vigo, 1995). For confirmation of the likelihood of this hypothesis, I would like to thank María García Lineira of the University of Oxford, and Dra. Dolores Vilavedra and Dr. Xesús Alonso Montero of the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, experts on Galician poetry of the *Rexurdimento* who accepted an historian's intrusion into their field with great enthusiasm and openness.

⁹² The codex which contains the *Tumbo de Celanova* is the result of the seventeenth-century binding of three separate cartularies, all of which date to some point in the twelfth or thirteenth century. Gallego's short study, O. Gallego, *El archivo del monasterio de Celanova* (Madrid, 1991), is a useful if brief account. Fortunately, the

Although several scholars have commented on individual charters in their work, close analysis of the texts as a group has not yet been carried out, restricting our ability to understand the global importance of the contents of the charters in the context of wider debates. This is all the more surprising since the monastery housed a substantial archive of great historical importance. Gallego's study makes it apparent that the monastery suffered from fluctuating fortunes throughout its long history, but the importance of its archive certainly seems to have been fully appreciated and afforded due consideration by the successive generations of monks at Celanova—hardly surprising, perhaps, considering their vested interest.⁹³ These monks were powerless, however, when the unstable political course of nineteenth-century Spain reached a critical point with the process of *desamortización* of monastic institutions in the 1830s; Celanova, of course, felt the full force of these changes. In 1840, the documentation from the monastic archive at Celanova was transferred to Ourense, the capital city of the southern Galician province which bears the same name. A decade later, many of the archive's most prized documents were sent to Madrid, where they have remained ever since.⁹⁴

documents are now at least edited in clear and concise fashion, in *Col. Dipl. Cel.* In this text I follow the numbering used in the aforementioned edition. The documents can also be found in, J. M. Andrade Cernadas, *O Tombo de Celanova* (Santiago, 2005); for the occasional reference to a document dating to after 1006 (where the Sáez Sánchez and Sáez Sánchez edition ends), I cite these documents as TdeC1, TdeC2, etc.

⁹³ It is easy to suppose that these documents would have been highly prized possessions of the monastery, but Gallego has commented on how the actual methods of storage also point us towards this conclusion: 'En el momento en que se hizo el inventario de 1840 para el traslado de la documentación a Ourense se hallaba en 135 cajones con numeración arábica y 12 más con numeración romana... Para proteger algún documento importante sabemos de la presencia de una *caja de madera* [her italics] pintada con las armas del monasterio en la parte superior y forrada toda ella de plomo en su parte interior. Esta era la extraordinaria protección con que se había dotado al tumbo y becerro de privilegios', in Gallego, *El archivo de Celanova*, p.20.

⁹⁴ These documents are to be found at the Archivo Histórico Nacional, in Madrid (Sección de Códices. Tumbo de Celanova. N° 986). Some of the documents taken from Celanova in 1840 remain in Galicia and are currently held in the Archivo de la Catedral de Ourense, and the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Ourense. It should be stressed that this thesis is not a diplomatic study, but rather a study of local society, and to this end here I utilize only those documents which have now been edited by E. Sáez Sánchez, and C. Sáez Sánchez, *Col. Dipl. Cel.* Nevertheless, these authors stress that they have attempted to include every document from the archive at Celanova and not merely those documents which form a part of the Tumbo, implying that every 'documento suelto' which falls within the period covered by their study, which begins with the very first document, dated to 842, is included in their edition. The introduction to Volume One makes this plain: 'Como se ha anunciado, comienza aquí la edición de los diplomas de Celanova desde el más antiguo, del año 842, hasta los de 1230. En sucesivos tomos se editarán los cerca de ochocientos diplomas vinculados con el monasterio que existen en diversos archivos hispanos. No sólo editaremos, pues, los diplomas del Tumbo, sino también de otras procedencias', p. 15.

We can say very little about the monastery itself in its early years, but our sources suggest that this was an area in which monastic activity was well established.⁹⁵ Indicative of this is the fact that the first abbot of Celanova, a certain Fránquila, left a local monastery which had only very recently been founded in order to lead Celanova through its first phase of development.⁹⁶ What makes Celanova such an interesting case study are the special and clearly documented circumstances of its origins.⁹⁷ In fact, the nature of these origins helps to explain the initial trajectory of the monastery. Celanova was founded after a property, originally a royal gift, changed hands within the same noble family with the express purpose of the land being given over to the foundation of a monastery. This family was one of the most politically powerful in the whole of the north of Spain and this fact has significant ramifications for our conception of the dynamics of power in this region.⁹⁸ In short, as I show in chapter 4, Celanova was founded by the most important set of lay landowners in the region, which meant that there was no initial period during which the monastery struggled amongst competing local institutions to assert its position of social dominance in southern Galicia—quite the opposite, in fact, seems to have been the case, for the documents suggest that Celanova was within a decade of its foundation the most important monastic institution in the region. This had a great deal to do with the social and political status of its founding family.

That the tenth century was something of a golden age for Celanova is not easily contradicted, for the charter material from this period reflects the prominent role the monastery played in the articulation of its surrounding territory, as does the charter material from the Liébana. Thus, the surviving evidence is therefore something of a mixed bag; we have the vignettes of social practice

⁹⁵ Or churches at least, what with there being, it seems, considerable confusion between what was a monastery and what was a church, for which, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 47–48. Several of the charters from Celanova which date to before its foundation in 936 make references to monastic communities and churches, often in ways which hint at this aforementioned confusion. Cel3 (871), for example, seems to discuss the church of Santa María in Nantón ('ipsa basilica fundata quod dicitur Monasterio'). In any case, even if monasteries and churches were clearly differentiated by people of the period, it is still hard for us always to be sure what the difference was, given the nature of our sources.

⁹⁶ Gallego has added of Celanova that 'los primeros monjes y su primer abad, Fránquila, llegaron del monasterio de San Esteban de Ribas de Sil, que había sido fundado poco antes, en 921, por Ordoño II'. The document to which she makes oblique reference is dated to 12 October 921, and has been edited in E. Duro Peña (ed.), *El Monasterio de San Esteban de Ribas de Sil* (Ourense, 1977), RdS1.

⁹⁷ Three charters are of particular importance when tracing the origins of the monastery of Celanova and all three are discussed in chapter 4. These documents are: Cel26 (927), Cel44 (935), and Cel53 (936).

⁹⁸ This family was that of Ménéndez–Eriz, its power crystallized by the marriage of Gutier Menéndez with Ilduara Eriz in the early tenth century, discussed in chapter 4.

provided by charter material which tell us something about the actual experience of non-aristocratic elements of society. We also have charters demonstrating royal intervention in the periphery, many of which have not been adequately scrutinized for what they tell us about royal practice, royal prerogative, and high politics. The usefulness of charters therefore lies in the range of insights they can give us.⁹⁹ In the *Chronicles of Alfonso III*, we have a source which emanates directly from the royal centre, with all of the attendant advantages and disadvantages. All of which, taken together, is enough to demonstrate that we are afforded several different angles onto tenth-century society in the Liébana and Galicia; but the pictures we are given only make sense if scrutinized with due awareness and caution.

⁹⁹ P. Fouracre, 'Space, Culture and Kingdoms in Early Medieval Europe', in P. Linehan and J. L. Nelson (eds.), *The Medieval World* (London, 2001), pp. 366–380, at p. 370: 'the use of charters is the strongest evidence there is for the comparability of property rights across Europe, for the correspondence of the legal systems which protected those rights, for the similarity of the social structures which supported the power of elites'.

3. The Liébana

The Contextual Framework: Geographical and Archaeological Considerations and Early Christian Communities

In the conservative paradigm of Spanish medieval history, refined and disseminated in the middle third of the twentieth century, it was very easy to identify the heroes of the piece. For many historians, they were those enterprising Visigothic nobles who fled northwards to the mountains of Cantabria and the Asturias in the wake of the victories achieved by Arab-Berber armies in the second decade of the eighth century.¹⁰⁰ Others, unwilling to countenance direct Visigothic intervention in this region, identified the heroic personages of this narrative with the local aristocratic class which rallied to Pelayo.¹⁰¹ At any rate, scholarly opinion was unanimous that the agents of repopulation, whatever their ethno-cultural origins, were central to Spanish history, and it was for many years perfectly uncontroversial to state that it was from these northern mountains that successive monarchs of the kingdom of Asturias would set about the piecemeal reconquest and repopulation of the Duero valley.¹⁰² But the Islamic invasion did more than send remnants of the Visigothic ruling class north in search of refuge; as we have seen in the Introduction, the invasion of 711 unwittingly gave Spanish historiography a caesura, a cornerstone upon which the myth of the Spanish nation would be built.

¹⁰⁰ A tradition popularized in the nineteenth century, for which, see J. Caveda y Nava, 'Examen crítico de la restauración de la monarquía visigoda en el siglo VIII', in *MRAH*, IX, 2 (1879), pp. 39–90, at pp. 41–48. Its origins are most clearly expressed in the *Ad Sebastianum* version of the Chronicle of Alfonso III, which describes the aftermath of Visigothic defeat thus: 'Sed qui ex semine regio remanserunt, quidam ex illis Franciam petierunt, maxima uero pars in patria Asturiensium intrauerunt sibi que Pelagium filium quondam Faffilani ducis ex semine regio preincipem elegerunt', for which, *CAIfIII Seb.*, 8. However, both the *Rotense* and the *Albeldense* imply that Pelayo had been an important figure in the Gothic kingdom, the *Rotense* identifying him as the sword-bearer of kings Witiza and Rodrigo. See, *CAIfIII Rot.*, 8; *Albeldense*, XV, 1.

¹⁰¹ Menéndez Bueyes, *Reflexiones críticas*, pp. 22–29, and pp. 54–55, discusses this aspect of the historiography. Pelayo (718–737), was the first king of the Asturian kingdom.

¹⁰² The bibliography here is extensive and primarily associated with Sánchez-Albornoz. See, by way of example, Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*, ii, pp. 7–45; Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación*, in which pp. 215–253 deal with Galicia and Portugal, and pp. 253–291, with the territory south of the Cantabrian chain. For a more concise statement, see his *En torno a los orígenes de la nación española. Estudios críticos sobre la historia del reino de Asturias* (3 Vols., Oviedo, 1972, 1974, 1975), ii, pp. 93–95.

The durability of this *idée fixe* can in large part be explained by the distinctly Roman-flavoured legal rhetoric of the Visigothic successor kingdom in what was once Roman *Hispania*, which allowed the *regnum Gothorum* to be easily woven into the broader tapestry of Spanish history with barely the hint of a break. In this way, the teleology of the nationalist narrative, segueing Roman Iberia into Visigothic domination of the peninsula in more or less seamless fashion, was able to delay the onset of the ‘Dark Ages’ until the downfall of King Rodrigo’s realm in 711.¹⁰³ Thus, the end of the late antique world was ascribed to the Arab invasion, which thereafter became the key moment of inflexion in the nationalist narrative. Within this narrative, the events of 711 duly reset the course of Spanish historical destiny, a process brought to a terminal point in 1492 with the fall of Granada and the defeat of the last Muslim stronghold. In the Introduction, I showed how these views have lost considerable ground, except perhaps in their very broadest outlines, but the point remains crucial to anyone venturing upon Spanish historical study: the Cantabrian Mountains and the highlands of the Asturias saw themselves absorbed into the Spanish historical narrative as the source of political, social, and cultural regeneration. They were both the providential refuge, and the point of departure, in a narrative which saw Pelayo’s victory in 718, as the first step towards the recovery of the peninsula.

The very earliest detailed narrative accounts of the beginnings of the Reconquest, the Alfonsine cycle of ninth-century chronicles, demonstrate their authors’ awareness of the symbolism of the mountain setting to the origins of the Asturian kingdom.¹⁰⁴ This conception is one which resonated well into the twentieth century, and with particular force in the Liébana. Celebrated by Sánchez Belda in his introductory comments to the cartulary of Santo Toribio as a stronghold against Arab aggression, the Liébana, we are told, ‘ofreció cómodo refugio en los años de la invasión’.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the fact that it was never conquered by any of the Muslim polities installed in the south of Spain from 711 has been taken to illustrate the Liébana’s providential role in the Reconquest, made plain by the court propagandists of Alfonso III, who chose this dramatic landscape as the setting for

¹⁰³ Wickham, ‘The Middle Ages and National Identity’, especially pp. 115–118.

¹⁰⁴ The symbolism of the Cantabrian chain more generally has been surprisingly under-explored in recent secondary literature.

¹⁰⁵ *Santo Toribio*, p. x.

the first display of divine disfavour to be visited upon the Arabs after their defeat at Covadonga in 718.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the implicit message of the Chronicle of Alfonso III (in both versions) was that victory and rebirth in the mountains were divinely ordained, and the northern mountains which encircled the Liébana would play no small part in bringing this about.¹⁰⁷

In some senses, this story is not unique. Mountains and their uneasy alliance with human populations had been mined for rhetorical or propagandistic value since long before the Asturian kingdom of the eighth century.¹⁰⁸ In more recent times, mountain communities have continued to exercise great interest amongst historians, and particularly amongst those open to the insights of anthropological theory.¹⁰⁹ A direct consequence of studies which have tried to incorporate theoretical premises from other disciplines has been that many historians now attempt to reformulate the stereotypical image of the mountain community, according to which this latter was portrayed as inward-looking, secluded, poor, but free, in the manner of the Spanish paradigm outlined above. Horden and Purcell have contributed to a revisionist analysis which has widened the parameters of the debate and our conceptual frameworks, with the result that we now resist the traditional set of assumptions which went along with discussions of historical geography in all of its many guises, including mountain society.¹¹⁰

However, these theoretical advances cannot disguise the many problems which persist. Most significantly of all, as the complexity of the relationship between history and geography has become better understood, so too has a growing awareness of the diversity of explanation that detailed studies within this 'geographical' framework suppose.¹¹¹ This has made it hard to advance a series of more

¹⁰⁶ *CAI/III Rot.*, 10; *CAI/III Seb.*, 10; *Albeldense*, XV, 1. An Arab army is apparently destroyed by an earthquake caused by the Lord.

¹⁰⁷ This line has more recent advocates too. J. Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, p. 9: 'Liébana, al igual que Galicia, Asturias y las Asturias de Santillana, fue también tempranamente uno de los focos de donde partió el movimiento repoblador a las tierras de la Cuenca del Duero'.

¹⁰⁸ One thinks, to cite just one example, of Tacitus's spirited description of the Caledonians, who suffered the curtailment of their ancestral freedom at the hands of the historian's father-in-law, Gaius Cornelius Agricola. Tacitus (trans. H. Mattingly; rev. S. A. Handford), *Agricola* (London, 1948), pp. 80–81.

¹⁰⁹ P. P. Viazzo, *Upland Communities: Environment, Population and Social Structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989).

¹¹⁰ P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 80–82.

¹¹¹ A. R. Baker, *Geography and History, Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 182–193, is an excellent guide to the usefulness of investigating the complex relationships between both the historical dimension of

subtle generalizations from which the bigger picture of early medieval mountain societies can emerge. Consequently, in spite of the advances achieved by anthropologically-aware historians like Horden and Purcell, *topoi* of various sorts abound. Perhaps this is unsurprising; after all, mountain valleys, delineated as they often are by physical boundaries which seem to present genuine obstacles to human movement, seem particularly susceptible to overly simplistic readings. Some of these readings are straightforwardly socio-economic; for example, the notion that mountain communities were characterized by completely dissimilar economic patterns, or by a total lack of economic integration, with plains-dwelling communities, is one chestnut which has proved particularly resistant. This is in spite of the fact that this observation is based on assumptions which reflect ideal-type economic logics associated, respectively, with mountain economies and plains economies derived from the (better documented and wholly different) early modern and modern period; that these differences may well have not made sense in the context of the early Middle Ages is frequently overlooked.

Geography is thus one of many factors that historians of the socio-economic structures of local society need to account for; but it must also be accepted that it cannot by itself explain historical outcomes. What the analysis of local society in the early Middle Ages demands is an appreciation of the dialectic between geographical and human factors. It also demands an acknowledgement of diversity; just as human actions within a given region or epoch can be extremely diverse, so too can the attributes of different geographical contexts. Hence Chris Wickham's observation that 'no two mountain valleys are the same'—a consideration which obliges us to recognize the need to undertake specific local analyses as the building blocks of the more subtle and comprehensive generalizations we seek.¹¹² The experiences of men and women may indeed have been 'structured first and foremost by the local environments they lived in'; but these environments differed from one to another, and so did the nature of human activity. Studies of the sort undertaken here must therefore be context-specific; they must be based on an appreciation of the complex confluence of factors, geographical

geography and the geographical dimension of history; another excellent recent set of analyses which appreciate the significance of geographical approaches to historical study is R. Balzaretti, M. Pearce and C. Watkins, *Ligurian Landscapes; studies in archaeology, geography and history* (London, 2004).

¹¹² Wickham, *The mountains and the city*, p. 3.

and human, which characterize the historical development of each and every subregion of post Roman Europe.¹¹³

This is perhaps of especial relevance in an area such as the Liébana, where geographical features have been said to define the character of the *comarca*; indeed, geographers recently described the interdependence of geophysical relief, climate, and vegetation, as the cornerstones of any attempt to delineate the development of Lebaniego history.¹¹⁴ Set in a wider context, the Liébana now forms the south-western subregion of Cantabria, a modern autonomous region of the Spanish state. Cantabria can be roughly subdivided into two distinct, morphologically-defined, zones. The coastal strip of the northern fringe is mostly made up of low valleys and sandy dunes. To the south of this zone, the terrain becomes much more difficult as a barrier of limestone mountains running more or less parallel to the Cantabrian Sea dominates the landscape. The most spectacular mountains of this chain form the Picos de Europa, which demarcate the north-western limits of the Liébana. Rather unusually, mountains surround the whole of the *comarca*, effectively encircling it in its entirety, with the Cantabrian chain forming the region's southern boundary, and the Peña Sagra its north-eastern limits. The Liébana is thus an enclosed, mountainous micro-region, in which the cultivable and inhabitable land which could be put to use by its inhabitants was very starkly delineated by the almost complete ring of mountains which defines its geophysical contours. Narrow passes lead to and from the Liébana from both the north and the south, and journeying along these passes must have represented a significant undertaking in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹¹⁵ The mountains which ring the Liébana enclose a system of four major valleys (Valdebaró, Cillorigo, Valdeprado and Cereceda) which meet in the town of Potes, the administrative capital of the modern region and a settlement we know to have existed in the ninth century.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Wickham, *The mountains and the city*, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ J. C. García Codrón and V. Carracedo Martín Gimena, 'Liébana: el espacio en blanco', in *Liébana y Letras* (Santander, 2008), pp. 11–24. These authors state that 'el actual paisaje solo puede explicarse evocando las prolongadas historias de su relieve, clima y cubierta vegetal y de la interdependencia que siempre ha existido entre ellos', at p. 11. For more on the geography, see M. Pereda de la Reguera, *Liébana y Picos de Europa* (Santander, 1972).

¹¹⁵ Even today the Liébana is relatively difficult to access from the north via the mountain route through La Hermida.

¹¹⁶ T9 (847): 'illa strata publica que discurrit ad Pautes'.

In certain respects, the Liébana is rather unusual. Although surrounded by mountains of over 2000 metres in height, the river Deva, which runs through the *comarca* via the most westerly of its major valleys (Valdebaró), descends to just three hundred metres above sea-level at the lowest point of its course through the Liébana. The steepness of the mountain sides is therefore very striking, since the whole area, formed by a natural depression, is only about five hundred and seventy-five kms² in extension. Geographers have explained that this has meant that the Liébana, in climatic terms, is something of an anomaly amidst the northern fringe of the Iberian Peninsula. The proximity of the Cantabrian Sea, which is only thirty kilometres north of the Liébana, works in conjunction with the mountains to create a unique microclimate. Effectively, the mountains trap the banks of humid air which drift southwards from the Cantabrian Sea, forcing them to ascend towards the mountain peaks; this has the effect of causing high levels of rainfall in the higher zones, but reduces rainfall in the lower reaches dramatically.¹¹⁷ Thus, summers in the lower reaches of the Liébana, that is, up to about six hundred metres in altitude, are continental or Mediterranean in many respects, marked as they are by intense heat and little rainfall. The mid-zones of the mountain slopes experience much more rainfall, moderate temperatures and generally damper conditions, whilst the peaks are characterized by Alpine conditions, including heavy snowfall during a significant part of the year.

In conjunction with the steep slopes that characterize its mountain sides, such an environment supports an abundance of flora and fauna; this micro-climate also provides suitable conditions for the cultivation of an extensive range of crops. The warm summers of the lower extensions of the valleys ensure that vines and cereals can be grown successfully in these zones, and fruit trees grow abundantly up to about halfway up the mountain sides.¹¹⁸ Irrigation is not necessary, even in the summer months, since the myriad rivers and streams ensure that the land is well watered.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁷ García Codrón and Carracedo Martín Gimena, 'Liébana: el espacio en blanco', p. 16: 'la montaña detiene y obliga a ascender a las masas de aire húmedo procedente del océano favoreciendo con ello un incremento de las precipitaciones a barlovento y en las zonas más altas pero una reducción muy notable en las bajas que se ven afectadas por el efecto "föhn"'.

¹¹⁸In T3 (826), Froila donated to abbot Lavi and the church of San Esteban de Mieses all that he owned in Lebeña and Vesarbado, including 'terras, vineas, pomiferas'. In T64 (962), Severa donated to Savarico and Vistrili her inheritance in Liébana, with land and various trees: 'terras, almenedebares...et maçanares et perales'.

¹¹⁹M. E. Álvarez Llopis, 'Aldeas y Solares en Liébana: Argüébanes, Turieno y Potes', in J. A. García de Cortázar (ed.), *Del Cantábrico al Duero: trece estudios sobre organización social del espacio en los siglos VIII*

higher reaches are patchily forested, and a wide variety of trees are found in various parts of the *comarca* as a whole.¹²⁰ These conditions are very therefore significant, since they lend the landscape a character and a diversity not normally associated with those of a mountain valley. That land was highly sought after should not surprise us, and the charters bear this out, particularly in certain well documented phases of gift and sale. An appreciation of these conditions also allows us to revisit a Braudelian axiom which, in the case of the Liébana, is found wanting, since his assertion that ‘the plains aimed for progress and the hills for survival’ did not account for cases such as that of the Liébana, where the socio-economic patterns of the mountain valley, thanks in large part to their geographical aspect, were characterized by something akin to a small-scale plains economy, as we shall see.¹²¹

We are on less certain ground, however, when we come to examine the political cohesion of the Liébana at the dawn of the eighth century. The Chronicle of Alfonso III claims that it was during the reign of Alfonso I (739–757) that the Asturian kingdom could first lay claim to some sort of political control over the Liébana.¹²² But how might we characterize those communities that greeted the earliest royal agents of Alfonso I? In the Introduction, I provided a brief overview of what we can call the Barbero-Vigil thesis, but it is important for our purposes here to stress once again that this thesis was based, fundamentally, on the conviction that the Roman and Visigothic imprint upon pre-medieval society in the northern fringe of the peninsula was minimal and superficial, particularly in the isolated Cantabrian chain. Archaeology, still fairly underdeveloped, has already done enough so as to raise serious doubts about this essential proposition of the Barbero-Vigil thesis for significant parts of the northern fringe, but archaeology alone cannot help us to understand the nature of social relationships in any detailed way.¹²³ To do this, we need to return to the written sources, fragmentary

al XIII (Santander, 1999), pp. 189–227, at p. 197: ‘el hecho de que el Deva, debido a la erosión, desposite en sus orillas materiales orgánicos, ha creado una rica vega donde crece el trigo hasta los 900m y la vid hasta los 600m’.

¹²⁰ For more information, see García Codrón and Carracedo Martín Gimena, ‘Liébana: el espacio en blanco’, p. 18–19.

¹²¹ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World* (London, 2001) p. 15.

¹²² *CAIfIII Rot.*, 14; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 14.

¹²³ However, although culturally and socially more ‘Roman’ than Barbero and Vigil proposed, it remains sensible to think about notions of Romanization as flexibly as possible; gradations of nuance and intensity varied from region to region throughout the empire, and it is likely that direct Roman political control and

and unsatisfactory as these are before c.900, in order to say anything about Liébana society in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The historical footprint of Cantabrian society in Late Antiquity has been the subject of great debate, but it is beyond doubt that Cantabrians are only dimly visible in a handful of post-Roman sources.¹²⁴ John of Biclar used the term ‘Cantabria’ to describe the targeted area of one of the Visigothic king Leovigild’s campaigns of 574; this episode was also related in the Life of San Millán (VSA), and mentioned by Isidore of Seville, so we can assume that it was a major royal endeavour.¹²⁵ Perhaps more striking is that the VSA tells us that there existed Cantabrian members of a ‘*senatus*’ in the sixth century, most probably a cohort of local aristocrats who met to protect their landed interest and exercised some claim to social primacy in the region rather than the members of a formally constituted body; nonetheless, they were local aristocrats meeting at some sort of assembly all the same. Whatever their ethnic origin, the very conception of the existence of a body of local aristocrats to which the appellation of ‘*senatus*’ could be applied implies that Roman aristocratic socio-cultural

cultural influence in Cantabria was less intense than it was everywhere else in the peninsula with the exception of the Basque country. Nonetheless, archaeology has conclusively proved that these regions did not remain completely outside of the sphere of Roman influence. For secondary literature, J. A. Quirós Castillo, A. Azkarate Garai-Olaun, R. Bohigas Roldán, I. García Camino, A. L. Palomino Lázaro, and J. M. Tejado Sebastián, ‘Arqueología de la Alta Edad Media en el Cantábrico Oriental’, in A. Llanos Ortiz de Landaluze (ed.), *Medio Siglo de Arqueología en el Cantábrico Oriental y su Entorno* (Vitoria, 2009), pp. 449–500; R. Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos arqueológicos en el sector central de la montaña cantábrica* (Santander, 1982); A. Fuentes Domínguez, ‘La romanidad tardía en los territorios septentrionales de la Península Ibérica’, in C. Fernández Ochoa (ed.), *Los Finisterres Atlánticos en la Antigüedad* (Madrid, 1996), pp. 213–222; M. Unzueta Portilla, ‘El período romano en la vertiente cantábrica de la Comunidad Autónoma vasca: las evidencias arqueológicas del proceso romanizador (siglos I. a. C a II d. C)’, in Fernández Ochoa (ed.), *Finisterres*, pp. 165–170; Fernández Ochoa, P. García Díaz and F. Gil Sendino, ‘La investigación sobre Gijón y su concejo en época romana: estado de cuestión’, in Fernández Ochoa (ed.), *Finisterres*, pp. 157–163. More recently, see J. A. Gutiérrez González, ‘Poderes locales y cultura material en el área ástur-cántabra (ss. VI–VII)’, in P. Senac (ed.), *Histoire et archéologie des sociétés de la vallée de l’Ebre (VII–XI siècles)* (Toulouse, 2009) pp. 183–206.

¹²⁴We cannot be sure about the precise extent of the area that was home to those people identified as Cantabrians in the post-Roman sources; it may, at various times, have extended beyond the modern autonomous region of Cantabria. Santiago Castellanos García warns us that ‘el concepto geográfico de “Cantabria” durante la época tardorrepública y altoimperial comprendía no sólo la actual C.A. de Cantabria, sino también los sectores septentrionales de las actuales provincias de Palencia y Burgos. Esto no cambia durante la *Spätantike*; en todo caso, se amplía la extensión geográfica de esta noción geográfica’, in ‘Aproximación a la historia política del alto valle del Ebro durante los siglos V–VI D.C’, *Brocar*, 18 (1994), pp. 119–138, at p. 127. J. González Echegaray, *Los Cántabros* (Madrid, 1966), is the best of the classic works on Cantabrian society.

¹²⁵*JB*, a. 574, ‘His diebus Leovegildus rex Cantabriam ingressus provinciae pervasores interfecit, Amaiam occupat’; *ISID*, HG, 49, ‘Cantabrum namque iste obtinuit’; *VSA*, XXVI, 33, ‘Eodem igitur anno, quadragesimae diebus reuelatur ei etiam excidium Cantabriae’.

practice had left some imprint on the region.¹²⁶ This is unlikely to have grown weaker with Visigothic annexation under Leovigild.

Seventh-century Cantabria is very poorly documented; the mostly normative sources of the Visigothic kings cannot help us to understand social practice in the remote north of the kingdom. However, Leovigild's efforts to subdue local Cantabrian political elites in the 570s, and, moreover, Sisebut's punitive campaigns of the 610s, show us that powerful Visigothic kings felt that Cantabria lay within their political orbit.¹²⁷ The scarcity of seventh-century evidence of a non Toledo-centric nature means that we can only have a very patchy idea about the extension of the network of dukes which governed their regional base in the name of the king; it is not unlikely that Visigothic kings after Leovigild would have looked to draw Cantabria further into the political structures of the kingdom.¹²⁸ It is very interesting that the ninth-century cycle of chronicles tells us that Alfonso I (739–757), third ruler of the kingdom of Asturias (whose kings were portrayed as the inheritors of Visigothic rule in Spain by the chroniclers), was said to be the son of a certain Peter, Duke of Cantabria.¹²⁹ The chroniclers tell us that Alfonso II (791–842) was keen to restore the Gothic order in Oviedo ('omnemque Gotorum ordinem, sicuti Toletum fuerat, tam in ecclesia quam palatio in Oviedo cuncta statuit'), and they clearly thought nothing of calling upon a Cantabrian aristocrat to bolster the glory of their royal line; Peter may or may not have existed, but Roman-style landowning Cantabrian aristocrats almost certainly did, at least in a slightly earlier period, because some physical evidence for their presence has now been uncovered, in the shape of the aristocratic residential and productive complexes known as *villae*.¹³⁰

¹²⁶VSA, XXVI, 33.

¹²⁷ISID, HG, 61.

¹²⁸ There exists the theory that there was a dukedom of Cantabria in the Visigothic period. This is based on the references given in the ninth-century chronicles, and on the appearance of a duke of Cantabria amongst the signatories of the Thirteenth Council of Toledo in 683, for which, Vives, Tol. XIII.

¹²⁹ *CAI/III Rot.*, 11: 'Infra pauci uero temporis spatium Adefonsus filius Petri Cantabrorum ducis ex regni prosapiem Asturias aduenit'; *CAI/III Seb.*, 13: 'Post Fafilani interitum Adefonsus successit in regnum, uir magne uirtutis filius Petri ducis, ex semine Leuuegildi et Reccaredi regum progenitus'; *Albeldense*, XV, 3: 'Adefonsus Pelagi gener regis an XVIII. Iste Petri Cantabrie ducis filius fuit'.

¹³⁰ For the restoration of the Gothic order, see *Albeldense*, XV, 9. The *villa* (here, Roman aristocratic estate) of Santa María de Hito, in the valley of Valderredible in the south of Cantabria was an elite residence occupied from the end of the third century until the beginnings of the fifth. From the sixth century until the eleventh, part of the buildings were re-used as a funerary space, showing continuity of exploitation of space. For details, see

The opulence of late Roman villas represents only one form of aristocratic cultural expression; another was city life. Much emphasis has been placed on the notion that Cantabria and Asturias were superficially Romanized by stressing that they had few urban sites throughout the Roman and Visigothic period, a view extended to include much of the rest of the northern fringe of the peninsula. But this approach is looking increasingly untenable; aside from the fact that Santander and Gijón are now accepted to have been Roman urban centres, this approach also reflects a methodological prejudice common to many archaeologists and historians who too readily ignore the extra-urban context.¹³¹ Materially, we would least expect to find evidence of this sort in the mountainous zones given the difficulties that such geographical contexts entail for urban settlements. A significant recent contribution to this debate has been Gutiérrez González's contention that in actual fact archaeologists have had at their disposal for quite some time a not insignificant corpus of archaeological data of various sorts from across the Asturias and parts of Cantabria which conclusively demonstrates that it is no longer credible to underestimate Roman influence in these areas.¹³² Indeed, Gutiérrez González has concluded that 'la región cantábrica se nos muestra claramente integrada en las estructuras políticas y socioeconómicas romanas y visigodas', a position which has significant ramifications for much of the historiography.¹³³

This re-evaluation of the levels of Romanization of Cantabria and Asturias has focussed on a variety of sites: the site at Rodiles, in the ría de Villaviciosa, in Asturias, demonstrates Roman and Visigothic occupation, and may have undergone modification from a 'villa a mare' to a militarized stronghold of a Visigothic-era cacique, operating with a degree of independence which we can only

A. Chavarría Arnau, *El Final de las villae en Hispania (Siglos IV–VII D. C.)* (Turnhout, 2007), at p. 290. The Roman villa known as 'El Conventón' (Camesa-Rebolledo, Mataporquera) shows evidence of first to third century habitation, and later functional adaptation, in the form of tombs which have been dated to the sixth century. C14 dating has established eighth-century dates for further tombs found at this site, which point toward continued occupation of the area in the medieval period. A small early medieval church has been found at the site too. M. A. García Guinea, 'Excavaciones en el yacimiento romano-medieval de Camesa-Rebolledo (Mataporquera)', in R. Ontañón Peredo (ed.), *Actuaciones Arqueológicas en Cantabria 1984–1999* (Santander, 2000), pp. 45–48.

¹³¹ Fernández Ochoa *et al.*, 'La investigación sobre Gijón', in Fernández Ochoa (ed.), *Finisterres*, pp. 157–163. On Santander, see J. L. Casado and J. González Echegaray, *El Puerto de Santander en la Cantabria Romana* (Santander, 1995). A much more profitable way of conceptualizing Romanization in the northern fringe of Spain is that proposed by Gutiérrez González; that is, as a particular form of a wider phenomenon, distinct from 'Mediterranean' or 'Meseta' Romanization, perhaps best termed 'romanización septentrional' or 'Atlántica', for which, see Gutiérrez González, 'Poderes locales', at p. 184.

¹³² Gutiérrez González, 'Poderes locales', pp. 183–206.

¹³³ Gutiérrez González, 'Poderes locales', at p. 183.

guess at. Diverse objects of a late-antique date, and a Visigothic or Germanic typology, have been found all over the Asturias, notably at sites at Valdediós, San Juan de Nieva, and Alesga. Cantabria shows a slightly different expression of Roman and Visigothic cultural penetration, given that few *villae* have been found in its western and most northerly zones, but it nonetheless seems to have formed part of this wider cultural world; funerary goods, described by Gutiérrez González as ‘objetos de ascripción hispanogoda (broches de cinturón liriformes, tremises, cucharillas, calderos y otras piezas litúrgicas)’, have been found at many sites, including La Hermida, Cudón and Portillo de Arenal. These burials, possibly of regional aristocrats, may have been designed to reflect the high status of the individuals involved. Clearly, future archaeological excavation can only shed more light on this still rather obscure world; it is, nonetheless, a world which has undergone serious revision in recent years, and, perhaps most significantly, a world which is considerably more ‘Roman’ than was thought even as little as ten years ago. Many of these advances are due to archaeology.

It should be borne in mind, too, that the archaeological and written registers demonstrate that Roman influence surrounded the mountainous zones of Cantabria; the northern meseta, and, in particular, the Ebro valley, which in their most northerly zones may well have included territory thought to have formed part of the lands of the Cantabrians, display this influence very clearly. Indeed, the Visigothic period is now believed to have overseen something of a revival for certain smaller scale urban settlements in eastern Cantabria and surrounding areas. Quirós Castillo *et al.* have described a range of phenomena which have contributed notably to an on-going reassessment of the quality and extent of Roman influence in these regions: in Contrebia Leucade, the fragmentation and reoccupation of dwelling places from the later Imperial period has now been verified archaeologically; further east, Pamplona is now known to have remained a dynamic centre throughout the early Middle Ages; similarly, fortifications, such as that of Amaya, may too have been revitalized by a more stable Visigothic presence in the region after Leovigild’s campaigns.¹³⁴ Thus, whilst we cannot say much about Cantabria in this period, taken together, the arguments for discarding the notion that Cantabria at the end of the eighth century (when the Liébana re-appears in the documents)

¹³⁴ For which, see Quirós Castillo *et al.*, ‘Arqueología en el Cantábrico Oriental’, at p. 7.

remained a 'tribal' society, are compelling. As in other parts of the empire, a self-generating fusion of Roman and native came to the fore in Cantabria, with pockets of heightened Roman influence.

Very little archaeological work has been carried out in the Liébana, a situation much lamented by historians whose interest has been drawn to the region on account of its relatively rich documentary sources, but the small amount of archaeological work which has been undertaken has yielded suggestive, if provisional, results.¹³⁵ The single largest problem has been that of accurate dating; thus far, sites such as the defensive fortification at Pico del Castillo (Piasca) and Cueva Santa (Camaleño), have been assigned dates spanning the long and unwieldy period from c.500 to c.1000.¹³⁶ This sort of information is simply not accurate enough to be of great use to historians attempting to reconstruct Lebaniego society in the early Middle Ages. Cueva Santa is a particularly interesting site, however: here a small chapel and cell seem to have played host to a hermit; decorative motifs similar to those at Ramiro I's royal palace at Naranco, on the foothills outside Oviedo, suggest a certain Asturian influence, making it probable that this hermitage was occupied in the eighth or ninth centuries.

A series of excavations at several other Liébana churches has yielded inconclusive results.¹³⁷ However, these same projects were responsible for the excavation of early medieval structures at Collado de Pelea in Colio where a settlement and walled zone was found, and an 'estructura defensiva altomedieval muy arcaica' at Bolero de los Moros (an intriguing name) in Piñeres. At this latter site, Van den Eynde Ceruti has stressed that 'uno de los mejores lotes de cerámica de Repoblación de Cantabria' was recovered.¹³⁸ The strategic value of the location of this site, which is formed by many elements, including a tower, a central patio, and an *atalaya* (watch-tower), is most suggestive. This is because it is situated at an altitude of seven hundred and fifty metres on the Monte de Santa Catalina, in the northern extremities of the Liébana; from this position, a north-south route which runs through

¹³⁵ Such is the sceptical approach of C. Díez Herrera, 'La Liébana altomedieval: del espacio "escrito" al espacio interpretado', in *Liébana y Letras* (Santander, 2008), pp. 25–46.

¹³⁶ R. Bohigas Roldán, 'Proyecto de conservación de la ermita de Cueva Santa (Monasterio de Santo Toribio de Liébana, Camaleño, 1995–1996)', in Ontañón Peredo (ed.), *Actuaciones Arqueológicas en Cantabria 1984–1999* (Santander, 2000), pp. 261–262.

¹³⁷ E. Van den Eynde Ceruti, 'Plan General de Investigación de la arquitectura monástica altomedieval. Prospecciones arqueológicas en los yacimientos de los monasterios altomedievales de Osina, Aguas Caldas, Cosgaya y Naranco', in *Actuaciones Arqueológicas en Cantabria 1984–1999* (Santander, 2000), pp. 87–88.

¹³⁸ Van den Eynde Ceruti, 'Plan General de Investigación', at p. 88.

the Liébana and connects the Meseta with the Cantabrian Sea was presumably rendered more secure at its northern end.¹³⁹ Analysis of the excavated area, and of the ceramics found at the site, have led Sarabia Regina to suggest a date of construction of around the middle of the eighth century; to what extent a venture of this scale might have been local or ‘central’ in its origins is impossible to say, but its scale is without doubt impressive.¹⁴⁰ Excavations at Santa María de Piasca, a monastery whose existence is documented from 930, have yet to shed light on the early medieval structures.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, the overall picture, even from these relatively few sites, is of a region which was partially Christianized and home to monumentally significant churches and defensive structures. In other words, the Liébana fits very neatly indeed into the framework described by Gutiérrez González above.

These developments are not always reflected in the secondary literature. Writing about the Liébana at the dawn of our period, Álvarez Llopis has argued that Roman and Visigothic influence in the region was minimal; furthermore, she has characterized Liébana society within the framework offered by Barbero and Vigil in certain key particulars, whilst couching her characterization in terminology which betrays the influence of García de Cortázar.¹⁴² Thus, for Álvarez Llopis, society in the Liébana was ‘de base gentilicia’ throughout the post-Roman period and into the eighth century. Yet it is clear that Roman-style landholding practices are visible from the early ninth century in the Liébana, which is more or less when land transactions begin to appear in charter documentation across the whole of non-Catalan and non-Muslim Spain.¹⁴³ These Roman-style practices are unlikely to have been newly introduced just before the production of documents started to gain a foothold in

¹³⁹ P. M. Sarabia Regina, ‘Excavaciones en la fortaleza medieval de la Bolera de los Moros (Piñeres, Peñarrubia). Campaña de 1999’, in *Actuaciones Arqueológicas en Cantabria 1987–1999* (Santander, 2002), pp. 269–275, at p. 269.

¹⁴⁰ Sarabia Regina, ‘Bolera de los Moros’, at p. 274.

¹⁴¹ R. Bohigas Roldán, E. Campuzano Ruiz and J. González Echegaray, ‘La intervención arqueológica en Santa María la Real de Piasca (Cabezón de Liébana) (2000–2002)’, in *Actuaciones Arqueológicas en Cantabria 2000–2003* (Santander, 2008), pp. 179–184.

¹⁴² M. E. Álvarez Llopis, ‘Introducción a la Liébana Medieval’, in M. Estrada Sánchez and M. A. Sánchez, *La Liébana. Una aproximación histórica* (Santander, 1996), pp. 78–92: ‘se puede deducir que la población indígena era una sociedad de carácter tribal, de base gentilicia, con una escasa especialización del espacio, colectivo, en el que se practica una agricultura nómada unida al pastoreo’, at p. 82.

¹⁴³ A study of these charters forms the next subsection.

Liébana society, as some documents make reference to inherited land which stretches back in to the eighth century.¹⁴⁴

Christianity was probably quite well established by the seventh century in Cantabria, although it is to be hoped that future archaeological work can help to fill in some of the considerable gaps in our knowledge with regard to this particular. Loring García has made a plausible case for accepting that Christianity must have received considerable impetus from the last quarter of the sixth century, once Leovigild's campaigns had brought the Cantabrian region back under Visigothic hegemony.¹⁴⁵ Sixth- and seventh-century dates have been assigned to bronze objects of liturgical use found in caves throughout Cantabria, and church building was certainly common to Visigothic aristocrats.¹⁴⁶ The Cueva Santa, mentioned above, is also testament to currents of Christianity in the Liébana itself. But perhaps just as telling is the appearance of apparently stable Christian communities of various sorts in the Liébana charters.¹⁴⁷ The absence of a strong central power in the eighth century, unable to sustain a network of bishops, ensure proper practice, and encourage the proliferation of Christian worship in formal settings, means that the many pious invocations of the charters, and the documented churches and monasteries which we identify in the Liébana documentation from late eighth century, should encourage us to think that Christian worship was well established by the Visigothic period, and that it continued throughout the eighth century without significant disruption after the Visigothic state had fallen. It should not be forgotten that the Liébana was also the home of Beatus, an eighth-century churchman who became embroiled in the doctrinal disputes of his day and produced a famous version of the Apocalypse which enjoyed great popularity in medieval Spain.¹⁴⁸ Should the Liébana have genuinely remained impervious to the Christian religion, or to Romano-Visigothic cultural currents

¹⁴⁴ T3 (826) shows Froila donate to abbot Lavi 'de omne mea hereditate quidquid uisus sum abere de parentum meorum'.

¹⁴⁵ Historians have argued for or against the presence of Christian communities in Cantabria, mostly on the basis of divergent readings of enigmatic inscriptions on 'estelas'. For a summary, see M. I. Loring García, *Cantabria en la Alta Edad Media: organización eclesiástica y relaciones sociales* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 93–105.

¹⁴⁶ Loring García, *Cantabria*, pp. 118–125.

¹⁴⁷ Monasteries and churches appear in our very earliest documents, such as that of the pactly-founded monastery of Aguas Calidas of T1 (790).

¹⁴⁸ This is quite apart from the implications that can be drawn from the acknowledgement that the Liébana must have been home not only to theological experts such as Beatus but also to an active scriptorium. The proviso needs to be added however, that we do not know that Beatus was trained in the Liébana.

more generally, then it seems unlikely that Beatus would have been able to correspond with Alcuin of York, as he did, or to pen tracts contingent on his awareness of contemporary theological debates.¹⁴⁹

It is important that our earliest written documents present us with a late eighth and early ninth-century landscape which was home to numerous churches and monasteries.¹⁵⁰ Susan Wood has written extensively about the genesis and consolidation of early monasteries in early medieval Europe and one form of monastic foundation in particular has been the subject of a great deal of attention from scholars of the north of Spain.¹⁵¹ I refer to the form enshrined in the monastic pact, an agreement ratified by a specific sort of foundation document in which the actions of the participants of the pact were expressly bound by a series of regulations set out therein. These regulations were variations on a model form, but essentially they described a bilateral agreement between an abbot and a community of monastic followers. The community agreed to recognize the abbot's authority, and its members acknowledged the transfer of their worldly goods to the new community whose foundation they commemorated in the pact; it was also stipulated in the pact that should any party contravene the regulations which were to govern the newly founded community, he or she would face the penalty of expulsion.

The origins of the monastic pact are not entirely understood, but the most likely explanation is that they are to be found in an adaptation of a model formula given in the *Regula Monastica Communis*, or Common Rule, of c.650, ascribed to Fructuosus, abbot-bishop of Braga-Dumio.¹⁵² Fructuosus was a tireless reformer, as the *Vita Fructuosi* tells us, and apparently went to great lengths to counteract what he considered to be the inappropriate foundation of 'private' or 'family' monasteries, and to police improper religious observance more generally.¹⁵³ In particular, he wished to ensure that family-run monasteries should not escape the watchful eye of church hierarchies, lest

¹⁴⁹ Díez Herrera, 'La Liébana altomedieval', p. 30, for Beatus.

¹⁵⁰ Montenegro Valentín discusses documented Liébana monasteries in some detail in *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 22–28.

¹⁵¹ S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006). Charles Bishko, in an influential series of articles, looked in great detail at the monastic pacts. See, C. J. Bishko, 'The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism', and, 'Gallegan Pactual Monasticism in the Repopulation of Castile', both in his *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History* (London, 1984), respectively pp. 1–43 and pp. 513–531.

¹⁵² J. Campos Ruiz and I. Roca Meliá (eds.), *Santos Padres Españoles* (2 Vols., Madrid, 1971), ii, pp. 172–208.

¹⁵³ For examples, VF, 3–8, 15.

they fall prey to superstition and unorthodox practice. This spiritual zeal was exalted in the *Vita Fructuosi*, but if we look beyond the basic hagiographical tropes, it is clear that Fructuosus' influence was just as significant with regard to its effect on the course taken by Spanish coenobitism in the early Middle Ages as it was on spiritual regeneration.

Charles Bishko's pioneering studies of the middle of the twentieth century made a convincing case for the Galician origins of the monastic pact.¹⁵⁴ Bishko showed that the success of pactual monasticism was built on the creation of a federation of monasteries (the *Sancta Communis Regula*), most of which were based around Braga and the Bierzo, and each of which was governed by the strictures laid down in the *Regula Monastica Communis*, attributed to Fructuosus and his circle. Regular synods brought together the abbots and, theoretically, ensured proper practice and a degree of uniformity. These regulations, and their geneses in the supposedly urgent need for reform which motivated the work of Fructuosus, may have reflected this latter's prejudices more than it did the moral wretchedness of seventh-century Galicia. How it came to be that the monastic pact of the Iberian north-west was successfully implanted in the Liébana remains unknown, but it may simply be the case that earnest holymen took the pactual tradition eastwards on their travels.¹⁵⁵ Certainly, there are no grounds to believe that it was ever a directed policy, implemented by ecclesiastical authorities; indeed, the fact that the pactual tradition seems to have been successfully implanted in Galicia, the Liébana, the Rioja and Castile, in marked contrast to most of the Astur-Leonese heartlands, suggests that it enjoyed little 'central' support of any sort.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ The existence of such a strikingly original and singular monastic practice in late antique north-western Spain has not been greeted without scepticism by certain branches of the historiography. As Bishko recounts, J. Pérez de Urbel argued that Bishko's contention regarding the Galician origins of the pact, in spite of the clear links between its origins and the circle of Fructuosus, was a misreading of the evidence. For Pérez de Urbel, the monastic pact was a Galician adaptation of earlier, Visigothic, monastic practice, a point which Bishko convincingly argues against in 'The Pactual Tradition', pp. 6–16. It is not the objective of this thesis to examine the origins of the monastic pact in detailed fashion, but this brief synopsis shows the vehemence of certain strands of the historiography with regard to its support of the legacy of the Visigothic state.

¹⁵⁵ I do not accept Bishko's belief that the monastic pact is best understood 'in terms of its place in the frontier colonization of Castile and the Rioja between the ninth and eleventh centuries', since the entire premise of this 'frontier colonization' is of dubious usefulness as a theoretical model, as outlined in the Introduction. See, Bishko, 'The Pactual Tradition', at p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Bishko, 'Gallegan Pactual Monasticism', p.1, on the geographical spread of the monastic pact.

However, the wider significance of the monastic pact in local societies of the early Middle Ages has given rise to considerable discussion. With regard to the specific case of the Liébana evidence, Loring García interpreted the monastic pact as a prism through which we are able to see new forms of social relationships undermining more ancient ones—that is, relationships based on communal activity, characteristic of egalitarian *gentilicio* social structures, giving way to private lordly influence and sharpened social hierarchies.¹⁵⁷ For her, Liébana society underwent a process of more or less straightforward ‘feudalization’, in the Marxist conception of the term, throughout this period, with its distinguishing forms of social organization, such as commendation, becoming defining elements of the Liébana’s social logic before the tenth century.¹⁵⁸ But this conception, regardless of its applicability elsewhere (which would need to be tested in every case), rests in its Cantabrian context on accepting that tribal society reached the year 800 in vigorous health, which, as we have seen, is very difficult to sustain in light of the cumulative information provided by archaeology. Thus, it is possible to take issue with the initial premise of Loring García’s hypothesis. However, given that the oldest surviving document from the cartulary of Santo Toribio is a monastic pact, it is at least possible to test the textual basis of these contentions too.

T1 seems to have honoured the foundation of a monastery by six men and twelve women (amongst whom a certain Álvaro is singled out), who renounced their worldly possessions in order to partake in the monastic life. As far as can be told, the basic aspects delineated in the text were as follows. Álvaro and his brothers and sisters, inhabitants of Aguas Calidas (modern day Caldas, more than 10 kms north of Potes), gave up all of their goods to the Church and an abbot named Albarone. They agreed to stay henceforth in the monastery (which is unspecified, but almost certainly the one whose foundation the text is recording); the charter also makes it plain that the details of the pact inhibited freedom of movement to the extent that each individual member could not leave unless the

¹⁵⁷ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 440: ‘tenía como consecuencia el separar al individuo o individuos de su parentela e integrarlos en un nuevo grupo constituido por el patrono y sus encomendados’.

¹⁵⁸ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 256: ‘En conjunto el contenido del pacto se corresponde con el de una encomendación, en la que existe una entrega de bienes materiales a un patron, en este caso el abad y la iglesia, y a su vez el reconocimiento de una dependencia con respecto al mismo’.

community decided to allow it.¹⁵⁹ The authority of the abbot was clearly recognized as outstanding in some way ('abrenunciamus tam abbati nostro domino Albarone'), and it is probable that the abbot may have enjoyed authority of some sort over his 'monks' and 'nuns'.¹⁶⁰ This pact seems to have applied to anyone who joined the monastic community from the point of the realization of the pact onwards, and regulated how, and under what circumstances, monastic life should be abandoned.¹⁶¹

Albarone's seniority was implied by his description as 'nostro domino', indicating that the community recognized distinctions of hierarchy and was itself subject to internal divisions of some sort or other. Álvaro may too have enjoyed some sort of authority over his colleagues ('Ego Alvaro, una cum fratribus meis') given that he seems to have overseen the drawing up of the foundation document; moreover, of the six males named as participants, two are given the title of 'presbiter' meaning that their status must have differed in some respects to that of their colleagues. This, clearly, was not a 'democratic' community of equals even at the moment of the drawing up of the pact, which makes it hard to imagine how pactual monasticism can be viewed as a catalyst of the sort of social changes which Loring García believed the pact as a genre implied.

Admittedly, the way in which the document lists the participants in the body of the text hints at a small initial community (perhaps the inhabitants of a village, or a group of relatives, all separately property-owning) whose members were, in theory, closely tied to the conditions laid out in the text. But this in itself does not imply that those singled out were simply subject to the whims of Albarone, Alvaro and the named priests. In fact, as Díaz Martínez has implied, Loring García mischaracterized the monastic pact by overlooking the extraordinary powers that the members of the community enjoyed as individuals—powers which allowed them to convene meetings of the whole group with the objective of correcting abbatial abuses. Regulations of any sort are not normally a reliable guide to social practice, and these might have been emphasized in the pact so as to lend a formal quality to the

¹⁵⁹ T1 (790): 'Quod factus et pactus firmiter teneatur et qui voverit ingredi in monasterio, tam pro culpa quam ecciam et pro melioracione anime et corporis, non abeat aliut potestatem nisi quodilli comunis collacio dederit'.

¹⁶⁰ As I have already shown, the characterization of the nature of local communities in the north as elaborated by Barbero and Vigil (i.e. flat, peer-based, tribal, un-Romanized communities) no longer seems wholly tenable. Hierarchical structures were a necessary corollary of all attempts at religious order; thus, the utilization of a word like 'domno' surely makes it plain that this was not a community of 'equals' at any stage.

¹⁶¹ See n. 159.

foundation and to have been of use in the context of dispute settlement, but they did, theoretically, confer significant powers upon the monastic community, which were aimed, moreover, at preserving an agreed set of rules.¹⁶²

The naming of the individuals actually seems to have recognized the creation of a personal bond between the abbot and the members of his community, reminiscent of what Isla Frez has, in my view, rightly characterized as a very Roman perception of ‘la autoridad como actuación benigna y protectora’.¹⁶³ This would make sense within the context explored earlier, which made a case, supported by archaeology, for the existence of social groups fully used to Roman and Visigothic cultural practices in Cantabria. But the aspect of the social relationship stipulated by the monastic pact which is most interesting is without doubt the measures it concedes to ordinary ‘monks’ and ‘nuns’, whose donations, and willingness to adhere to the rules, were most probably the bedrock of the pacts’ success. Susan Wood has characterized the basis of the pact as a community of goods, and it may indeed be possible to conceive of them within a framework which sees those involved as the inhabitants of small rural settlements, grouping their possessions for the benefit of the community.¹⁶⁴ There is thus a communal aspect in one regard implicit in the pactual tradition, as it implied community obligations of some sort; this was, nevertheless, a community formed by individuals whose foundation document suggested a clear sense that private ownership was well established. Should this not have been the case, the pact could not have taken the form it did.

It is therefore very hard to accept Loring García’s conclusions, which go so far as to draw parallels between the sorts of relationships inherent in the monastic pacts and those which defined relationships of full commendation, as described in numerous documents from across western Europe in the Middle Ages. For Loring García, T1 was essentially an example of the commendation of a series of individuals, mediated via the mechanism of the monastic pact. The commended individuals,

¹⁶² T1 (790): ‘ut potestatem non habeat unus ex is quod super nominavit aliut nisi quod a moiori (*sic*) acceperit ipsut’. P. C. Díaz Martínez, ‘Monasteries in a peripheral area: seventh-century Gallaecia’, in M. de Jong, F. Theuvs and C. van Rhijn (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 329–359, at p. 343: ‘To call upon a meeting of the entire community, on the initiative of the rank and file of the monks and in cases when the authority of the abbot was called into question, was not common in monastic rules, which usually upheld the principle of obedience and the disciplinary superiority of the abbot or his representatives’.

¹⁶³ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 257.

¹⁶⁴ Wood, *Proprietary Church*, p. 148.

according to Loring García, entered into the dependence of a more powerful individual whereupon ‘se obligaba a prestarle servicio’; this seems an ambitious reading of what is an ambiguous document, characterized by a lack of detail, and devoid of any reference to personal service.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the power enjoyed by Albarone seems to have been a power entrusted to him by those partaking in the pact; this was no community of equals, but the charter nonetheless does not suggest that the power enjoyed by Albarone was that of a lord over his dependents since the pact seems to have allowed for mechanisms by which unscrupulous abuse of this power could be checked. Similarly, although used as evidence to sustain the same argument, Loring García’s characterization of T6 (829) seems to rest on an equally ambitious reading of the content of the pact. It is true that Valeriano and his father Teodario describe their donation to San Salvador de Villeña as a ‘pactum’, but the phrase ‘abrenunciamus nos et omnes facultates nostras’ is by no means conclusive proof of the forced concession of personal autonomy.¹⁶⁶ It actually seems to suggest that the entry into the community necessitated the donation of the personal belongings of all who joined the community, a feature that was common to all monastic rules; these would become the basis of the community’s sustenance. Relationships such as that enshrined in the monastic pact demanded that both parties make sacrifices in order to see realized the security they sought in the pactual community.

Rather than attempting to introduce ‘feudal’ relationships of dependence into the monastic sphere, the pacts, in my view, were a response to a completely different set of social forces and were designed to introduce an element of stability and order by means of establishing a basic and fairly ‘flat’ social hierarchy, without ceding personal or collective autonomy in any totalizing way. Thus, the complicated legacy of the conflation of cultural influences in this region, in the absence of firmly established church hierarchies, probably led to attempts to create local religious communities which looked to police themselves and to acknowledge formally their foundation. The pact, in my view, needs to be placed much more closely within the context of northern Spanish monastic foundation whence it derived, and not that of the meta-narrative of the steadily growing genesis of feudal social structures.

¹⁶⁵ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 258.

¹⁶⁶ T6 (829).

The pact, it seems, makes more sense when placed into this context; monastic settlements were still very much open to a variety of cultural pressures and inheritances in late eighth-century Spain, and that a community should be subject to internal divisions which nonetheless allowed for the expression of communal powers which reflected collaboration between villagers or family members is highly plausible. Equally plausible is to ask very different questions of T1. For example, why should we not propose that those named in the pact also benefitted in some sense from the formation of this new community? Might they have gained a stable and steady share of the community's produce, benefitted from its influence as a focal point of the local community (even if small-scale), and possibly also from the weight of local authority enjoyed by its abbot? More simply, might we not be seeing a pact which describes the entry of a series of individuals into the patronage network of an abbot? All relationships of social interaction in the early Middle Ages do not by definition have to be ones of commendation or exploitation and it is important to be aware of the variety of social action which we see documented in the ninth century; in this particular case, cooperation seems to have been just as important. Indeed, T1 shows a monastic community seemingly not too far removed from the 'house community' so detested by Fructuosus. Thus, that monasteries had formalized their influence to such an extent that they effectively brought a new class of dependents into being by the time of 790 should be discounted. More generally, we need to think about community formation and power relationships with a fluidity which has not always been easy to locate in previous studies.

Local society in the Ninth Century

On 15 April 868, Pedro and Leudesinda, their children Ervigio and Emiliana, and a certain Egeredo, sold a vineyard in Grandovelía to the monastery of San Salvador de Villeña.¹⁶⁷ This group seems to have consisted of a nuclear family and perhaps a more distant relative, a friend, or simply a neighbour.¹⁶⁸ Three of the group stated what they accepted for their part in the sale, each receiving various quantities of meat, wine, barley and animals.¹⁶⁹ The document was brought to a close with a warning clause, admonishing future wrongdoers who would contravene the agreement (as do the majority of transactions of this sort), and then made reference in its dating clause to the ruling monarch, Alfonso III (866–910), before listing those who witnessed or confirmed the document. This template is fairly typical of many ninth- and tenth-century charters from northern Spain and can be said to include many of the basic elements of structure and content of the majority of non-aristocratic sales or donations.¹⁷⁰ It does, nonetheless, provide us with a useful window onto certain aspects of Liébana society in the ninth century, telling us, for example, that ordinary people could deal with ecclesiastical institutions; that they could freely sell parts of their own property, and that this property could be jointly owned with persons not explicitly associated with the nuclear family. Moreover, it tells us that small-scale proprietors could make these sales alongside other parties, or on behalf of their families, in exchange for a price which they could seemingly help to negotiate ('quod mihi et uobis bene et de ipso precio placuit').

¹⁶⁷ T11. Grandovelía was situated in Turieno, in the Valdebaró, according to Sánchez Belda, in *Santo Toribio*, p. 491.

¹⁶⁸ 'Ego Petrus et ego Leudesinda, una cum filiis suis Erugio et Emiliana, et ego Egeredus placuit nobis'.

¹⁶⁹ 'Pro ut conuenimus accepi ego Petrus a uobis in quantum valuit mea porcio in ipsa vinea carne, uino et ceuaria in tremise; et ego in Leudesinda dedi uobis ipsa mea porcione in ipsa vinea, preciata in tremise et uos mihi dedistis precium carnarium et ceuaria in termise (*sic*); et ego Egeredus sic uendo uobis mea porcione in ipsa vinea, preciata in quator modios, sed uos mihi dedistis precium animalium in quatuor modios, quod mihi et uobis bene et de ipso precio placuit (*sic*), apud uos non remansit, ut ex hodierno die et tempore habeatis illud perpetuum abiturum.'

¹⁷⁰ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, ch. 5.

The monastery of San Salvador de Villeña, the purchasing party of T11, was a major local entity in the ninth-century Liébana and its origins can be traced back to at least the eighth century.¹⁷¹ It was, in fact, one of many churches and monasteries documented in the Santo Toribio charters before the year 1000.¹⁷² Although later overshadowed by the monastery of Santo Toribio (at this stage still known as San Martín de Turieno) in the historiography, San Salvador de Villeña seems to have attracted the donation of local inhabitants, and bought from them, with consistent success throughout much of the ninth century. For example, in 827, Aurelio and the brothers of Santa María de Cosgaya sold to abbot Moisés and the monks of Villeña four plots of land close to the monastery.¹⁷³ Just a couple of years later, in 829, Valeriano, with his father Teodario and his ‘gasalíanes’, transferred the monastery at Osina and all of its belongings and landed wealth to San Salvador de Villeña.¹⁷⁴ Whatever the size of the monastery at Osina (which may not have been large), it is telling that San Salvador de Villeña was able to incorporate another monastery. Moreover, other clues point to its importance; significantly, of fifteen ninth-century Santo Toribio documents, San Salvador de Villeña was the direct beneficiary of donation or exchange, or was the purchasing party, in at least nine of them.¹⁷⁵ Admittedly, this documentary spread is not large; but it probably demonstrates that this was the richest monastery in at least the Valdebaró throughout the ninth century.¹⁷⁶ At any rate, this run of documents from the monastery probably formed part of its own

¹⁷¹ In T2 (796), Pruello, with his fellow holy brothers and sisters, sold to the monks of Villeña an inherited plot of land in Villeña itself. The monastery of San Salvador de Villeña was located in Cosgaya (Valdebaró). See Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁷² Montenegro Valentín has recorded eleven churches or monasteries (the difference is not always made clear in the charters) in the Liébana, which can be traced to before the year 1000 (not including San Martín de Turieno or Santa María de Piasca); Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 22–28. Of these, San Esteban de Mieses (T3 826), San Pedro de Viñón (T5 828), San Salvador de Osina (T6 829), Santa María de Baró (T7 831), and San Adrián y Santa Natalia de Sionda (T17 885), were all documented for the first time in the ninth-century documents from Santo Toribio.

¹⁷³ T4. Santa María de Cosgaya was situated in Cosgaya (Valdebaró).

¹⁷⁴ T6. San Salvador de Osina has been traced to La Hermida, in Cillorigo, by Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 24–25. The term ‘gasalíanes’ is understood to mean ‘miembros de la comunidad monástica’ by Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, p. 111.

¹⁷⁵ The donations to San Salvador de Villeña are: T6 (829); T8 (843); T9 (847); T10 (852); T12 (873). The sales made to San Salvador de Villeña by other parties are: T4 (827); T11 (868); T15 (884). T16 (884) is an exchange of assets between the monastery and local peasants. T2 (796) may also record a transaction involving San Salvador de Villeña, since monks from Villeña are depicted as the purchasing party in a small-scale transaction. However, it is not made expressly clear that these monks were part of the monastic community of San Salvador. Should we accept T2, then ten of seventeen pre tenth-century charters involved San Salvador de Villeña.

¹⁷⁶ Given that document writing was by the ninth century clearly established in the Liébana, it seems odd that a more powerful monastery would not appear in the charters should such an institution have existed. This need

archive, later added to the Santo Toribio archive by the compilers of this latter. The transaction of 829, mentioned above, involved a monastery situated some thirty kilometres to the north of San Salvador de Villeña, which demonstrates that this latter was by the 820s prepared to engage in deals with institutions and people based outside of the Valdebaró, where many of its documented landed holdings lay.¹⁷⁷ But on what sort of relationship with the local community was this prominence built and why did it falter in the tenth century?

In the opening section of this chapter, I criticized Loring García's examination of the ulterior motives which, according to her, lay hidden in the dry and austere language of the monastic pact. But this represented only one strand of her broader belief in the ninth- and tenth-century genesis of feudal social structures in the Liébana.¹⁷⁸ For Loring García, throughout the period examined in this thesis, socially dominant groups would come to exercise local influence of an order that effectively obliged less solvent members of society to enter into their dependence; these weaker elements, it seems, were no longer protected by the umbrella of community ethos and collective action which hitherto characterized Liébana society.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Loring García has it that these new relationships of dependence were often already enshrined in mechanisms of formal commitment between men in the eighth century, with dependence even reflected in the socio-linguistic register; people were thus 'commended' to others.

In this section, my analysis will focus on the social relations that existed between the many disparate elements of the social formation, both within and beyond the village world, as I attempt to characterize ninth-century Liébana society as fully as possible. In the following section, entitled *The Emergence of a Village Elite*, I will examine social relations in the tenth-century Liébana, before

not be the case, but it is very likely, since it is hard to see how the greater landed wealth of a hypothetical, larger institution, would not have survived in the documentation.

¹⁷⁷ I have traced landed holdings situated in Valdebaró that were donated or sold to, or exchanged with, San Salvador de Villeña, in T4 (827); T8 (843); T9 (847); T10 (852); T12 (873); T15 (884); and T16 (884).

¹⁷⁸ Loring García, *Cantabria*, at p. 440: 'Se reproducía así en el campo de la organización eclesiástica modelos institucionales de la sociedad civil, como el patrocinio con encomendación y entrega de bienes, que también tenía como consecuencia el separar al individuo o individuos de su parentela e integrarlos en un nuevo grupo constituido por el patrono y sus encomendados'.

¹⁷⁹ This is the focus of much of Chapter 6 of Loring García, *Cantabria*, part 2 of which is entitled 'La formación de los grandes dominios y la generalización de los lazos de dependencia. El ejemplo de la Liébana en el siglo X'.

reflecting in my final section of this chapter on the nature and efficacy of public structures in the valley. Insofar as social relations are concerned, it will become clear that although isolated examples from the ninth- and tenth-century Liébana documentation make relationships of sharp degrees of dependence explicit, these remain very much the exception rather than the rule, and a more consistently striking aspect of social activity seems to have been the autonomy and ingenuity of a significant part of the peasant community. It is equally striking that social elites in this region emerged from amongst the village world in the tenth century, rather than an already established and documented landed aristocracy with links to public structures, and seem to have exerted what was, on a pan-European scale, remarkably little social pressure on the villagers of the Liébana before the year 1000.

It is necessary to qualify these framing observations by stating that any attempt to describe aspects of local society in the early Middle Ages is made more difficult by the limitations of our evidence, in both quantitative and qualitative terms.¹⁸⁰ Yet although limited in number, it is interesting that a range of different social practices can be seen in the handful of ninth-century documents at our disposal. Of the fifteen Santo Toribio documents which date to the ninth century, three record straightforward sales, and nine, donations of varying sizes and sorts; most of these, as we have seen, involved the monastery of San Salvador de Villeña.¹⁸¹ These twelve documents are augmented by one exchange of property, one dispute, and one document of *profiliatio* (adoption). Four ninth-century charters survive from the monastery of Santa María de Piasca, and these four also paint a broadly similar picture of Liébana society to that which we encounter in the Santo Toribio documents, describing small-scale transactions between members of village society.¹⁸² This being the case, if prepared to proceed with due caution, it is possible to imagine aspects of the world that these charters describe with a certain degree of coherence.

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter 2 of this thesis for more information on the Santo Toribio charters.

¹⁸¹ The sales are T4 (827); T11 (868); and T15 (884); the donations, T3 (826); T5 (828); T6 (829); T7 (831); T8 (843); T9 (847); T10 (852); T12 (873); and T13 (875); the exchange T16 (884); the dispute T17 (885); and the 'profiliatio' T14 (875).

¹⁸² The four are Piasca1 (857); Piasca2 (861); Piasca3 (861); and Piasca4 (869).

It is clear that the major resource in the ninth-century Liébana was land, and it seems to have been bought, sold, and given away, in parcels of varying extension at all levels of society. Parcels of land (mostly ‘*terras*’ in the documents) were put to use in various ways. For example, in 826, Froila gave all he possessed in Lebeña and Vesarbado to Lavi, abbot of the church of San Esteban de Mieses; this involved an unspecified amount of land which had clearly belonged to his family for some time, and included vineyards and orchards (‘*omne mea hereditate quidquid uisus sum abere de parentum meorum...terras, uineas, pomiferas*’).¹⁸³ It is illuminating that Froila framed his donation in the context of his personal inheritance, fully in the style of Romano-Visigothic practice; these were his private assets, and were clearly in no way communal, or collectively owned.¹⁸⁴ Amongst these assets were vineyards and orchards, as we have noted, and these latter were common features of the ninth-century landscape, cropping up frequently in early medieval charter documentation from across the northern peninsula, albeit in greater numbers in Cantabria and Galicia, given the geographical characteristics of these regions. Hence the exchange of vineyards which took place between the brothers Grato and Egila (‘*nos germani qui sumus Gratus et Egila*’) on the one side, and the monks of San Salvador de Villeña in 884, on the other; or the ‘*terras, uineas, pomares*’ included in the transfer of the monastery at Osina to San Salvador de Villeña in 829.¹⁸⁵

The mountains were also used for grazing animals, which appear abundantly in the documentation; indeed, the indications are such that we should imagine the ninth-century Liébana as a mixed farming economy, and this wide range (from cereal growing to viticulture and the cultivation of orchards) must in large measure reflect the possibilities offered by the microclimate of the Liébana.¹⁸⁶ References to the mountains, and to meadows presumably used for hay cropping, can also

¹⁸³ San Esteban de Mieses is clearly called a church in the document (‘*ecclesie Sancte Stephani in locum Mesa ynaet*’), although the title of monastery has been preferred by Montenegro Valentin, *Santa María de Piasca*, at p. 27. Lebeña is situated in the valley of Cillorigo, approximately eleven kilometres from Mieses. That such a transaction was possible in a difficult natural landscape is illuminating; perhaps the transfer and movement of goods and land was not as limited as one might imagine. I have been unable to trace the toponym of Vesarbado.

¹⁸⁴ Chris Wickham, on land-owning patterns in northern Spain has stated that ‘there is very little sign in Asturian documentation of anything other than Roman traditions of land-owning; at most, there is reference to the standard forms of collective silvo-pastoral exploitation that can be found in any mountain area’, *FEMA*, pp. 227–232, at p. 227.

¹⁸⁵ T16 and T6 respectively.

¹⁸⁶ Parcels of land were also given other names, particularly when subdivided into smaller units: T16 (884) ‘*nostras porciones quem abuimus*’; T12 (873) ‘*in Siondeuelia mea racione*’. Uncultivated land was sometimes

be found in ninth-century documents and it is here in the higher areas used for the collection of wood, if anywhere, that we can realistically conceive of common rights of access.¹⁸⁷ The built environment, although small in scale, was not restricted to the dwelling places of the villagers, nor to the monasteries and churches with which they dealt from at least the ninth century, but also included buildings necessary for the production and storage of important staples; hence the appearance of ‘casas, orrea, molina’ in the documents.¹⁸⁸ The homes of individuals are rarely specified in the charters, but there are exceptions (‘terra in vila que dicitur Artinaba subtus domum meam’).¹⁸⁹ On occasion, more precise plots of land were described in land transactions (although we are never given dimensions) and these could be joined by other goods of a diverse range. In 873, Ausanio and his wife Lallina, together with Domingo and his wife Ailo, made a donation to San Salvador de Villeña of, amongst other things, ‘agrum ad Mus subtus strata, iusta illa fonte, et illas salges et macanares in uilla Lones’; in this instance, features of the landscape seem to have acted as communal reference points and to have helped the transactors to specify the location of their landed possessions.¹⁹⁰

Thus, the horizons of those involved in these ninth-century transactions were local in the sense that they were confined to the Liébana, and often, indeed, probably to no more than one or two villages, but an appreciation of the features of the landscape, using these latter as points of reference in the documents that recorded their transactions, holds a wider significance. This is because it suggests that a degree of internal articulation within the Liébana also existed, which it indeed must have done, as is demonstrated by references to roads, some of which were described as ‘public’ roads, in the charters.¹⁹¹ Although this may have been a world which looked inwards rather than outwards due to the nature of its geophysical attributes, its social landscape was far removed from the staid caricature of the isolated non-urban medieval environment which frequently dogged peasant studies

distinguished in the documents from that which had been put to use: for example, from T15 (884), ‘placuit nobis ut uinderemus uobis Cesao et Agapio uel ceteris fratres de Uellenia de Sancto Saluatori in Grandouelia terram uacabilem’.

¹⁸⁷ For utilization of mountains, meadows, and for mixed farming, see T9 (847), which lists Sempronio’s donation of the following assets in Mus; ‘baca, boue, res, promiferas uasa, ferramenta, prata, montes et fontes’. Also, Piasca4 (869), ‘in alio loco mea portione in ipso prato Felitis’.

¹⁸⁸ T14 (875).

¹⁸⁹ Piasca4 (869).

¹⁹⁰ T12.

¹⁹¹ T9 (847): ‘illa strata publica que discurrit ad Pautes’.

until the 1970s. Indeed, the flux of ideas which characterized the world of Beatus' scriptorium is testament to the fact that the Liébana of the eighth century was by no means an indigenous remnant of a pre-Roman world, but an ambit receptive to new intellectual currents and Christian practice. Beatus, indeed, would only have been able to engage in correspondence, and gain access to important literature, thanks to the network of roads which were to be found in the medieval Liébana, no matter how rudimentary this network might have been.

The designations given to settlements joined by roads, and what these designations might helpfully be taken to mean, is harder to understand, but has not escaped the attention of modern scholars. Díez Herrera, tracing what she characterizes as the 'feudal society' which emerged from the eighth century, imposing itself upon a 'sociedad indígena' in the process, argues that the valley was the spatial unit of territorial organization *par excellence* in early medieval Cantabria.¹⁹² The valley, she explains, was the most basic element of a three-tiered organizational structure which framed progressively smaller social units: the village or its equivalent (*locus*, *villa*, even *ecclesia*); and the *solar* ('relacionado con la unidad familiar'), both of which became focal points of the newly emerging feudal society which she envisages to have been characteristic of Cantabria from c.800.¹⁹³ This model relies *ab initio* on the acceptance of theoretical premises concerning *gentilicio* society, and it is too rigid and schematic to be accepted without serious reservations. Moreover, the notion that a new society emerged from novel forms of social organization in the early Middle Ages (processes given the name of 'organización del espacio' in much Spanish historiography), carries with it implications of 'directed process' which cannot have approximated to reality in a world where organizational structures were predominantly *sui generis* in the absence of strong central authorities.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, the

¹⁹² C. Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad feudal en Cantabria: la organización del territorio en los siglos IX al XIV* (Santander, 1990), p. 17: 'Se parte de la premisa de que la unidad conocida como "valle" constituía una forma de organización del espacio propia de comunidades ligadas por unas relaciones de parentesco, por una costumbres derivadas de la ocupación gentilicio, y por un aprovechamiento económico ganadero basado en la ocupación seminómada'.

¹⁹³ Díez Herrera, *Sociedad feudal*, pp. 14–15. The *solar* is in fact rare in the ninth-century documents. Piasca2 (861) is a rare early example: 'in alio loco solarem'.

¹⁹⁴ The Liébana, and Cantabria more generally, may have been subject to greater central political influence in the late sixth and seventh centuries than they were in the eighth and ninth, when the area is assumed to have been assimilated into the Asturian polity.

echo of any attempts at ‘central’ governance in the Liébana is only faintly heard before the year 1000, as we shall see.

I have already shown in the opening section of this chapter that interpretations which attempt to downplay the extent of Romano-Visigothic socio-cultural influence are increasingly open to question, especially in the face of an ever-growing archaeological corpus which seems to indicate the contrary. For this reason, it is hard to accept Díez Herrera’s opening premise. Further to this, and more important here, the role she affords to the *valle* in her schema seems misplaced; Lebaniegos of all periods, of course, would have been aware that they inhabited mountain valleys, but it is not necessary to assume that these valleys helped define strongholds of tribal societies whose social logic was governed by ‘comunidades suprafamiliares’, as Díez Herrera claims.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the importance of the valley cannot have been that it represented a social reference point of great significance in the creation of supposedly new, smaller communities, such as villages (‘aldeas’ in her lexicon), since the early Santo Toribio documentation does not support this contention. Of the pre-tenth-century charters, only one uses the word *valle*, and it is arguable that this is not within the context of its being a ‘macrounidad de ocupación’, but simply a geographical description.¹⁹⁶

The structure of settlements in the ninth-century Liébana resists simple classification. Sometimes, as is the case in a document from 831, churches were used as reference points; hence Ordoño’s and Proflinia’s description of churches in the following terms; ‘notum sit ecclesie id est domini et patroni nostri gloriose Sancte Marie, cuius basilica sita est in locum quod dicitur Barao, sibe et Sancto Petro, cuius basilica sita est in locum que dicitur Sexenia’.¹⁹⁷ *Locus* may well have simply been a reference to a small settlement in a given named place; this is certainly the impression one gets from references such as ‘ut uideremus uobis fratribus qui estis abitantes in locum Bellenie, territorio

¹⁹⁵ These claims are also unclear. Having claimed that the *valle* was the principal macro-unit of spatial organization, Díez Herrera goes on to muddy the waters, for which, see *Sociedad feudal*, p. 22: ‘Para su identificación, se utiliza prioritariamente la expresión “valle” pero también es frecuente el recurso a otros vocablos relacionados con una dimension territorial similar como *territorium*, *alfoz*, *castrum*, *villa*...’; (quotations mark and italics follow Díez Herrera’s). If use was as arbitrary as this then surely this counters her claim that the term *valle* was very important.

¹⁹⁶ T2 (796): ‘et pro ipsum *ualle* usque ad Deva’. For the quotation, Díez Herrera, *Sociedad feudal*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁷ T7.

Liuanense', with 'territory' clearly being used as a larger socio-territorial contextual framework.¹⁹⁸ *Villa*, too, is to be found amongst the ninth-century documents ('terra in vila que dicitur Atrinaba') but it is not entirely clear that we can establish a hierarchy or system of terminological classification based on size or scale alone.¹⁹⁹ It is interesting, for example, that the place of Sionda is referred to as a *villa* in 885, but is called a *locus* in 921.²⁰⁰ It may have been the case that a *locus*, on occasion, could be described within the context of a *villa*, but we should be careful before generalizing on the back of so few texts and evident ambiguities.²⁰¹

Thus, it seems more sensible to conceive of terms like *villa* and *locus* as context-dependent phenomena, possibly suggesting something as simple as a named location at which—say—a mill or a church was to be found with a few houses, or possibly just a small conglomeration of houses and plots of land. Clearly, terminological usage also depended to some extent on the preferences of individual scribes, who are bound to have had different notions of the correct usage of terms like *locus* and *villa*; this is a problem which we cannot account for. I shall use the English term 'village' here, and throughout this thesis, for the large or small settlements in which nuclear families lived and farmed, tended to orchards and vineyards, and possibly went to church, whether called *villa* or *locus* in the documents. What is certain is that the ninth-century documents describe transactions in a linguistic register which suggests that the small-scale, village-like settlement, was the most important spatial and social frame of reference for the members of local society themselves—and this, it seems to me, should guide our discussion.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ T11 (868). *Locus* was not uncommon to these early documents, hence, in T12 (873): 'Et ego Dominicus et uxor mead abo uinea in Torenau in locum dicitur Sautu'. Also, T10 (852): 'in loco Uellenie'; T9 (847): in locum Uellenie; T7 (831): 'in locum quod dicitur Barao'. This list is by no means exhaustive. It also occurs in Piasca documents, thus: Piasca4 (869) 'in alio loco mea portione'.

¹⁹⁹ The example here is taken from Piasca4 (869) but Santo Toribio furnishes examples too: T17 (885) 'ecclesie uocabulo Sancti Adriani qui est in uilla Sionda in Liuauna'; T9 (847) 'Trado mea et omnia hereditate que abeo inter meos germanos uel heredes in uilla Causecadia'.

²⁰⁰ In T17 (885) and T29 (921) respectively.

²⁰¹ T12 (873): 'Et ego Dominicus et uxor mea dabo uinea in Torenau in locum que dicitur Sautu...in uilla Lones'.

²⁰² The question of the utility of the term village has generated much debate. Chris Wickham is right to say that the debate about the suitability of the term 'village' to denote rural settlements in the post-Roman period is 'an argument only about words'; 'village', as I use it here, meaning a rural settlement in a geographically defined territory (however imprecise this conception), seems a more useful analytical category to me than the 'pre-village' or 'non-village', mostly because of the insuperable difficulties involved in pinning down a moment in

This language of common reference points was not restricted to ‘places’ but relied on descriptions involving mills, store-houses and fountains in order to locate plots of land or vineyards more precisely.²⁰³ Sometimes these descriptions were fairly detailed: (‘agrum ad Mus subtus strata, iusta illa fonte’).²⁰⁴ More often than not however, we see simple lists of properties and appurtenances, and these could range in size from the very small to the very large.²⁰⁵ Taking this further, Aurelio’s donation to San Salvador de Villeña is very interesting in this regard because it demonstrated his awareness of the proprietorial presence of this monastery in the region (‘parti uestre in Carauanio super agrum domni Iquilani’); such knowledge must have been a crucial factor in Aurelio’s decision to make his own donation, since the monastery had already established a presence in his locality and was already known to him.²⁰⁶ Thus, turning to San Salvador de Villeña, be it for spiritual solace or material assistance, represented a strategic choice informed by the monastery’s status in the community.

Aurelio’s donation is one of nine donations from the ninth-century Santo Toribio documents.²⁰⁷ It is striking that many of these described the alienation of considerable quantities of landed assets; in every case where we see this happen, the recipient is a local religious institution, and it is more often than not San Salvador de Villeña.²⁰⁸ For example, the donation to San Salvador de Villeña made by Valeriano, together with his father Teodario and the members of the religious

which these latter came to be sufficiently nucleated, ordered and large to become ‘villages’ proper. This moment, too, seems to me too bound up with concepts such as the ‘Transformation of the Year 1000’ to make it a useful way of discussing rural settlement. For Wickham, see ‘Rural Society in Carolingian Europe’, in *NCMH2*, pp. 510–537 at p. 529. For rural settlements as ‘pré-villageois’, see R. Guadagnin, *Un village au temps de Charlemagne. Moines et paysans de l’abbaye de Saint-Denis du VII^e siècle à l’an mil*, (Paris, 1988), p. 116. See also, J. A. Quirós Castillo, ‘Las aldeas de los historiadores y de los arqueólogos en la Alta Edad Media del norte peninsular’, *TSP*, 2 (2007), pp. 65–86. The village in its Galician context is discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁰³ T4 (827): ‘et illas alias uarcinas que sunt de presa de Molino in Deba usque ad illum barum que est iusta Legiam ribu’.

²⁰⁴ T12 (873).

²⁰⁵ T9 (847): Sempronio’s donation to San Salvador de Villeña was considerable; ‘idest terras, pomares, uineas, in Mus et terra bacabile...baca, boue, res, promiferas (sic) uasa, ferramenta, prate, montes et fontes’.

²⁰⁶ T10 (852).

²⁰⁷ These are: T3 (826), a gift to San Esteban de Mieses; T5 (828), a gift to San Martín de Turieno; T7 (831), a gift to Santa María de Baró; T13 (875), a gift between two sets of lay parties. T6 (829); T8 (843); T9 (847); T10 (852); and T12 (973), are all charters in which San Salvador de Villeña is the recipient of donation. The purpose, meaning, and significance of gift in the Middle Ages has a long and complex historiography, for which see Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*, pp. 35–48.

²⁰⁸ Only in T10 (852) and T13 (875) are more modest donations made. Of the large-scale donations mentioned in the body of the text, these are made to San Salvador de Villeña on every occasion except in T3 (826); T5 (828); and T7 (831).

community at Osina, of the monastery there and all of its effects, represented the transfer of a sizeable list of assets.²⁰⁹ This document, examined briefly in the first part of this subsection, whilst not a pact in the strictest sense of the term, was perhaps drawn up so as to commemorate or ratify a factual agreement which has since been lost; this would explain references such as ‘pactum istum’, and ‘in oc pacto’.²¹⁰ In any case, the transfer of a relatively large amount of goods was not unusual in the ninth-century Liébana, as charters dated to 828, 843 and 847 also make clear, and we need to think of the circulation of private wealth in the ninth century Liébana as a going concern for richer elements of the village world. In 828, Pependio and Nonita donated the church of San Pedro de Viñón, which they built, together with its appurtenances, to San Martín de Turieno.²¹¹ In both 843 and 847, San Salvador de Villeña received a wide range of land and possessions stretching across several villages; these were probably the gifts of wealthy villagers who may have been prominent community figures.²¹²

The construction of these property portfolios has, however, escaped the documentary record; this may to some extent reflect the extension of charter writing in the ninth century, which could quite easily have been variable from one area to the next, but it also emphasizes the need to proceed cautiously when gauging the scale of the richer elements of local society. Although Pependio and Nonita, having built their own church, must have been amongst the richer inhabitants of the Liébana, we cannot be sure that they were aristocratic, and they may, in fact, be better described as medium-scale landowners. The charters demonstrate that people like Pependio and Nonita owned fairly extensively, often in more than one village, but they are not frequent fixtures of the documentary record and they do not appear to have come from families of extra-local renown; we cannot be sure of the latter, but they did not make gifts of land outside of the valley. Their social activity was probably confined to the sphere of the village world and they held no visible ‘public’ authority of any sort.

²⁰⁹ T6 (829): ‘terras, uineas, pomares, libros, solares, molina, gresu adque regresu tam mobile quam ecciam et immobile uel ubicumque hereditantem nostram’.

²¹⁰ It may suggest that in some regard the pact approximated more closely to a normal business transaction than has previously been considered.

²¹¹ T5.

²¹² T8 (843): ‘dabo uobis mea quinta in Caosecalia, in Fracserio in Uaodo, I terra, pumares, uineam in Mus, res, uestitum, ferramenta, exitum adque regresum’; T9 (847) ‘omnia mea hereditate que abeo inter meos germanos uel heredes in uilla Causecadia, in Frasino, in Penbes, idest terras, pomares, uineas, in Mus et terra bacabile usque illa strata publica que discurrit ad Pautes: baca, boue, res, promiferas (sic) uasa, ferramenta, prata, montes et fontes’.

Whether they worked the land with their own hands is doubtful, and some of the people we see in the ninth-century Liébana documents may not have needed to farm their own land, perhaps using tenant farmers to this end. These were rich local men and women who probably took pride from the prestige that donations to monasteries would have afforded them in the local community, but they were small fry when compared to medium landowners in other parts of Europe.²¹³ Thus, it may well be the case that landowning best described as ‘medium-scale’ was simply as grand as landed interest got in the ninth-century Liébana; divisions of wealth from family to family certainly existed and some clearly had much more than others, but this does not necessarily make the likes of Pependio and Nonita aristocrats, it simply reshapes our conception of the shape and scale of local communities.

It hardly needs stressing that the repeated donation of privately owned landed interest on this sort of scale shows that private interests predominated over the sort of collective or communal proprietorship which Loring García identified in the pactual arrangement. In fact, even in documents where some sort of community is discussed, such as that of T6, discussed above, a very clear sense of property rights (and of increasing exploitation of the land) is manifest; hence Valeriano’s comments on the assets he planned to transfer to San Salvador de Villeña (‘ego prendidi de eos calido’).²¹⁴ Private ownership is claimed too, perhaps more explicitly, in 828, in the description of Pependio’s and Nonita’s donation of the church of San Pedro de Viñón to San Martín de Turieno (‘fundauimus

²¹³ Compare, for example, Gundualdo of the Garfagnana in Tuscany, an eighth-century medium owner whose range of landed holdings, admittedly better documented, saw him own much more extensively than, say, Pependio and Nonita. It could be argued that this apparent difference is a trick of the surviving documentation, but I would counter that given that Pependio and Nonita owned a church, and saw fit to document its donation (demonstrating that the recording of the transfer of possessions was already an aspect of ninth-century Lebaniego life), it makes little sense to imagine that they would not have documented their other transactions, should they have been extensive. For Gundualdo, and medium landowners more generally, see Wickham, *The mountains and the city*, pp. 40–45, and p. 55, respectively.

²¹⁴ For which we should read, according to the editor of the charters, ‘de scalido’, that is, the clearing and cultivation of previously unused land. See T6 (829) and Sánchez Belda’s accompanying footnotes. This should not be confused with ‘colonization’, an unhelpful term in this context. At any rate, the ninth-century Santo Toribio documentation furnishes not a single example of the word ‘presura’, said to be the classic hallmark of newly settled colonists. The historiography on this is vast but a good recent contribution is E. Peña Bocos, ‘Las presuras y la repoblación del valle del Duero: algunas cuestiones en torno a la atribución y la organización social del espacio castellano en el siglo IX’, in J. L. Hernando Garrido and M. A. García Guinea (eds.), *Seminario ‘Repoblación y Reconquista’: Actas del III Curso de Cultura Medieval* (Aguilar de Campoo, 1991), pp. 249–260.

ecclesiam Sancti Petri per manibus nostris in locum qui vocatur Uinionem, et concessimus ibidem terras, uinias que plantauimus et pumares’).²¹⁵

What tied these donations together, apart from the relatively large-scale of the assets donated, was quite often the stated motivation of religious piety which inspired a good deal of donation to churches in the ninth-century Liébana, just as it did across medieval Europe. Most of these ninth-century documents featured strongly expressed statements of the righteousness of the act of donation and some of them included a variation on the stock phrase ‘pro remedio animae’; thus, the desired effect of donation appears to have been reward in the afterlife.²¹⁶ Religious zeal was not the only motivation, however; peasants could and did donate for reasons which were altogether more practical. Donation offered the less wealthy (although not necessarily just the very poor), a mechanism by which they could enter the patronage network of richer, or more influential, neighbours.²¹⁷ One way to do this without endangering one’s means of support was to donate a small amount of land, although not insubstantial amounts were also donated for this purpose, as we have seen. Of the humbler members of ninth-century society seeking the patronage of richer members of society there is some ninth-century evidence. Pepino and Petronio gave Fraterno and Vistregotona an orchard in Argüébanes in 875, seemingly for this purpose.²¹⁸ It seems fair to imagine that Grato and Egila swapped their vineyard with a vineyard owned by the monks of San Salvador de Villeña for the same objective of becoming unofficial clients of a richer group of people.²¹⁹ The possible economic benefits of such an operation for this peasant pair cannot be known from this charter, and it is hard to imagine San Salvador de Villeña would consent to the deal should they not have looked positively upon the exchange, but it is clear that Grato and Egila would have been aware of the gestural or symbolic value of committing this act of loose patronage to the documentary record.

²¹⁵ T5.

²¹⁶ In the ninth-century documents from Santo Toribio, four feature this phrase or some variation: T7 (831); T8 (843); T9 (847); and T10 (852). This formulation could also be claimed as a motivating factor on occasion, as it was in T2 (796): ‘partem uendimus partem donamus ut pro mercedem anime nostre’. On the ‘pro anima’ formula, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 115–120.

²¹⁷ Wickham, *Rural Society*, at p. 532.

²¹⁸ T13. This charter is discussed more fully in a different context in what follows.

²¹⁹ T16 (884).

Interestingly, land could be alienated or incorporated in fractions, and the Santo Toribio charters contain references to ‘fifths’ (*quintae*), as do documents from other areas of the peninsula.²²⁰ Wendy Davies has noted that ‘fifths’ almost always formed part of donations and not sales which suggests that the symbolism of the donation was paramount.²²¹ Should a genuine fifth of a property have been given or sold then this could have varied in size considerably from one occasion to the next (depending, of course, on the size of the whole holding), but its desired effect was probably that of forming loose ties of patronage. It is indeed plausible, as Davies argues, that the meaning it conveyed was that of ‘our share’, or ‘our portion’, rather than strictly one fifth; after all, the terminology would have resonated with anyone writing up these charters who had a basic knowledge of Visigothic law, the ‘fifth’ being the legally alienable portion of family property.²²² Given that people frequently alienated more than a fifth, there are further reasons to doubt that it commonly described a precise fraction; thus, more often than not, it is here understood within the context laid out by Davies, that is, to describe a portion of property (the ‘act of giving’ here being the most important aspect, quite apart from its strict implication), given away so as to foster closer relationships between donor and recipient.²²³

On the back of such a small number of documents, it is hard to claim that sales of land were less frequent in the ninth-century Liébana than donations, especially as small-scale sales between peasants, if ever documented in greater numbers, are less likely to have appealed to the custodians of Santo Toribio’s archives than relatively grand donations of churches or land spread over many villages. The few sales we possess seem to show more modest assets changing hands; for instance, we have already seen that Pedro and Leudesinda, their children Ervigio and Emiliana, and Egeredo, received various everyday goods from San Salvador de Villeña in exchange for a vineyard.²²⁴ Likewise, Sunto and Valencio sold uncultivated land to the same monastery, which was clearly

²²⁰ T8 (843): ‘dabo vobis mea quinta in Caosecalia’; T10 (852): ‘concedo meam quintam’.

²²¹ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, p. 76.

²²² For Davies’ discussion, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 76–80. Also, L. García de Valdeavellano, ‘La cuota de libre disposición en el derecho hereditario de León y Castilla en la alta edad media’, *AHDE*, 9 (1932), pp. 129–176. For the Visigothic precedent, *LV*, IV. 5. 1.

²²³ It is interesting to note that *quinta* means estate in modern Portuguese.

²²⁴ T11 (868).

looking to expand its holdings at this time, at a value of six modios, paid in goats, a useful commodity for people who have the appearance of small-scale peasants, certainly in comparison to many of their neighbours.²²⁵ Nonetheless, there is no obvious indication that these people were in dire straits (they do not profess hardship or recognize having received the assistance of neighbours, which we sometimes see in charters), and there is no evidence of vertical pressure forcing the sale; they may simply not have been able to afford the luxury of giving their land away when they could enjoy the twin benefits brought by entering the client network of a local institution and selling for profit. We should not discount too, that this peasant couple not only willingly entered into the agreement, believing it to be in their strategic interest, but that they may have instigated it. Clearly, this cannot always have been the case, but it must have happened on occasion.

It has become something of a cliché within the field of Spanish medieval peasant studies to assume that such sales (and, to a lesser extent, donations) of the ninth and tenth centuries represented the last desperate attempt of many peasants to preserve their means of existence by selling or donating their assets.²²⁶ In this way, peasants could obtain material reward and the protection of the powerful, but they would lose their economic, if not always their legal, freedom. I have argued in the Introduction that if we are to characterize local society fairly at the regional level before the year 1000, then we need to be cautious about the risks of reading history ‘backwards’ in an attempt to plot a clearer path towards the sorts of social relations which are indeed documented much more clearly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Assumptions regarding the ‘feudalization’ of social structures look less firmly grounded in the realities of ninth and tenth-century village life as it is presented in the Santo Toribio charters than many of the authors of recent secondary literature would have us believe; indeed, a more balanced analysis cannot but recognize the range of wealth and influence which we see in the ninth-century Liébana. This range becomes even clearer in the better-documented tenth century, as we shall see. This is not to say that relationships of dependence did not exist as early as the ninth-century, and the notion that the post-Roman period was some sort of rural paradise for

²²⁵ T15 (884): ‘terram uocabilem super illum lacatar eremus, que fuit adpreciata in seccemodio, et uos dedistis nos cabronem in secemodio, quod nobis placuit et de precio uos non remansit’.

²²⁶ Davies, ‘Lordship and Community’, at pp. 26–27.

peasants should be resisted, even if they were in many places less burdened than they had been, as Wickham has underlined.²²⁷ However, the documentary examples we have of anything other than straightforward lordly power from c.800 to c.1000 are too few to claim that the social relationships they described were characteristic of the socio-economic logic of Liébana society at this time. Moreover, the clearest example of a characteristic form of feudal dependence from the Liébana before the year 1000, T13, is unique in our surviving evidence.

T13 describes an act of commendation between two lay parties in 875, in which Pepino and Petronio were commended to Fraterno and Vistregotona as reward for their gift of an orchard in Argüébanes in Valdebaró. The commended pair clearly sought the material protection of their presumably richer protectors and the language of the charter makes it clear that this relationship went beyond the simple entry into a patronage network (*‘pro quod nos commendatos habetis et bonum facitis’*). Nonetheless, given that this is the single unambiguous documented example in the Liébana before 1000, we would do well to remain cautious when thinking about the extension and incidence of this sort of social relationship in the Liébana of the ninth (and tenth) centuries. As Wendy Davies has recently pointed out, commendation, especially when associated to a variant of the formula *‘bonum mihi facere’* (concerned with the concept of receiving ‘good things’, such as protection, as a reward for gift), as is T13, ‘need not imply personal, much less exclusive, commitment’.²²⁸ Neither was the act of giving oneself over to more powerful neighbours or institutions necessarily indicative of the renunciation of one’s social, economic, or legal rights. The explicitly religious contexts of T6 and T9, dated respectively to 829 and 847, means that phrases such as *‘abrenunciamus nos’* and *‘trado me’* probably signified entry into a religious community rather than the surrendering of personal rights.²²⁹

Occasionally, we are afforded a glimpse of the poorest members of society. For instance, for the sake of their souls, Ordoño and Proflinia, recognizing that they had already freed ‘homines’ from

²²⁷ *FEMA*, pp. 535–540.

²²⁸ Davies, ‘Lordship and Community’, pp. 26–27.

²²⁹ In the tenth century, eight women and two men gave themselves over (using the formulation *‘trado me’*) with their assets to Santa María de Piasca in a similar way; this was to enter a religious community and to commit themselves to the monastic life, but it did not suppose what we might call ‘tied dependence’. The charter is Piasca153 (957).

their service, made provisions for the freeing of others in 831.²³⁰ It is most likely that these latter were the domestic servants of this couple rather than tied peasant cultivators, since no contractual arrangement is made explicit; neither are they likely to have been slaves in the classic sense of the word.²³¹ Even where we see evidence of the cultivation of the land of larger institutions by peasants, it is not made clear that this represented onerous servile dependence. Thus, Ausanio's description of the land he worked for San Salvador de Villeña ('uinea in Torenao in locum que dicitur Sautu quem abui ad laborandum ad partes de uos') seems to make reference to what was a simple landlord-tenant relationship.²³² It is probably best, in fact, to nuance the approach adopted hitherto in the secondary literature, by thinking of these relationships as the result of business transactions, albeit in the context of social inequalities of the sort that exist in most societies: the extra-economic dimension was not framed by visible violent coercion or social pressure.²³³ Personal freedom and private assets in fact characterize what seems to have been a world where small families of varying wealth depended more on unofficial ties of patronage than binding oaths of dependence. Payment of dues and specific duties are not clear from the evidence at this stage, but must have existed in some measure, and whilst there clearly were landlords for whom others toiled, such as Ausanio, there was certainly by early medieval western European standards a significant number of free peasant proprietors in the Liébana before 900, and even well beyond this time, as my later analysis will demonstrate.²³⁴

The family was the most important social unit in the ninth-century Liébana, and the language used to describe the whereabouts and origins of land and possessions must have meant something to peasants and medium landowners themselves, especially within the context of family inheritance. Sales or donations were sometimes in the ninth century described by way of reference to the

²³⁰ T7: 'de homines uero nostra quod liberabimus sibe etiam quodquod in seruicio abemus sint liberi post nostrum obitum...pro animabus nostris'.

²³¹ For the general absence of slaves from the Liébana see, Montenegro Valentín, *Santa Maria de Piasca*, pp. 63–64.

²³² The relationship defined by the 'ad laborandum' agreement has been defined by L. Garcíade Valdeavellano, *Curso de historia de las instituciones españolas: de los orígenes al final de la edad media* (Madrid, 1968), p. 250: 'Por el contrato *ad laborandum*, el propietario cedía el disfrute de una tierra a un labriego para que la labrase o la plantase de viña y el labriego se comprometía a pagar un censo al dueño en reconocimiento de su dominio'.

²³³ T12 (873).

²³⁴ Davies, 'Lordship and Community', at p. 26: 'These are extremely low levels of seigneurialization by European standards, despite much stronger comment in the literature, where Estepa's reminder has not always been heeded'.

provenance or location of the land or goods involved in the transaction; for instance, the record of the donation from 873, discussed above, specified amongst other things, ‘in Siondouelia mea racione que abeo de mea patre Mazane agrum in illa spundia’; this seems to demonstrate a similar concern to that which was expressed by Froila in 826 (also examined above) to locate one’s possessions within the context of family inheritance.²³⁵ On occasion, straightforward recognition of one of the party’s familial connections presumably added practical information, but also legitimation, to what were, after all, documents between local inhabitants who would in many cases have been known to each other at the village level. Hence, for example, the fact that Sempronio’s donation of his landed possessions and associated goods to San Salvador de Villeña, began with a simple description of his familial background: ‘Ego Simpronius qui sum filius patris mei Seueri et matris mee Seure’.²³⁶ Individuals such as Sempronio could act alone, but couples also bought or gave together, as we have seen. Invariably, the husband would be named first, followed by his wife, whose name was more often than not given too. But this was not always the case. A ninth-century charter from Piasca demonstrates that, whilst the normal practice of mentioning both man and wife remained important, women could take the lead, especially if they played a key role in the transaction; Recoire, who in two other Piasca documents is dutifully named as the wife of Argemundo, was nonetheless singled out in 857 by her brother, the donor.²³⁷

To mention one’s immediate family, it seems, held some appeal with certain Liébana inhabitants who were perhaps looking to emphasize the origins of the land they were selling or donating. This may have lent the deal legitimacy in some way, or have been considered worthwhile within these small village communities when the parents of those involved were well known and may indeed have given leverage to the transactors. Perhaps it is just as important to underline that these references to parents, brothers and sisters, and husband or wife, reflect the dominance that the small nuclear family seems to have enjoyed in the ninth-century Liébana. Familial legacy, as we have seen,

²³⁵ T12 (873). In T3 (826), Froila mentions his inherited land, as we have seen, but also memorializes his parents: ‘Ego Froilla, quia sum filius quondam patris meo Galle uel matris mei Rubine in Domino salutem’.

²³⁶ T9 (847).

²³⁷ Piasca1 (857): ‘Ego Nunnila qui sum filius patris mei Ariulfi. Tibi iermane mee Recoire et marito tuo Argemundo’. The other two documents see the couple styled as ‘Argemundo, et uxori tue Recoire’. They are Piasca2 (861) and Piasca3 (861).

was frequently evoked as a reference point when it came to describing the origins of land due to undergo transfer of ownership.

Large group collectives are sometimes glimpsed in the documents—the pact of T1, from 790, is one such occasion—but there is no indication given in this document that these people identify as anything other than the signatories of a pact; neither is there any implication of ethno-cultural group recognition. Indeed, a more marked tendency in the ninth-century documents is for the witnesses or signatories to be explicitly identified according to their ecclesiastical office; hence the appearance of ‘Comericus presbiter’, ‘Fradila presbiter’ and ‘Moyses presbiter’, who appear in 829, or ‘Salamirus diaconus’, in 885.²³⁸ The status of very many of the people witnessing documents is not specified. The unnamed, as well as those specifically described as witnesses, may have been neighbours, or perhaps members of what Matthew Innes has helpfully called the ‘practical kin’—that is, the ‘relatively restricted immediate family’, but to imagine that the witnesses of these documents might be identified as members of a wider collective, bound together by ties that extended beyond the kernel of the family home, has no basis in the evidence.²³⁹ In fact, the evidence is such that it is actually very hard to make a solid case for the presence or influence of wider kin collectivities in these documents at all.

The ninth-century inhabitants of the Liébana also donated on a more significant scale without making the fact of inheritance explicit, and neither was this an impediment to owning a relatively large amount of land. Thus, Severa’s donation of various possessions to the monks of San Salvador de Villeña in 843 included ‘I terra, pumares, vineam in Mus, res, uestitutum, ferramenta, exitum adque regresum’, which is an excellent example of the range of possessions that a seemingly ordinary member of local society could own, and, just as importantly, decide to alienate.²⁴⁰ Severa clearly

²³⁸ T6 and T17 respectively.

²³⁹ M. Innes, *State and Society in the early Middle Ages: the middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 53.

²⁴⁰ T8. This particular text is exceptionally interesting, since it might best be described as a quasi-pact. Unusually, Severa made a donation on an individual, private, basis, which is nonetheless recorded as a pactual agreement, ‘Ego Seuera, placuit mihi et fuit uoluntas ut facerem pactum domino Saluatori et Sancto Iohanni sibe fratres qui ibidem habitant’). This donation was seemingly realized for pious reasons, ‘et pro remedium anime mee et quidquid inde facere uel uindicare uoluerits liberam in Dei nomine abeatis potestatem’. It is interesting to consider that this might show the recorded entry of an individual into a pactual agreement, but it may too

owned in more than one village ('in Caosecalia, in Fracserio in Uaudo...uineam in Mus'), and this was not uncommon practice in the ninth-century Liébana. Sempronio's donation to San Salvador de Villeña, made in 847, included a wide range of possessions and plots located across three villages ('in uilla Causecadia, in Frasino, in Penbes'); Aurelio made a donation drawn from two villages to the same monastery in 852, specifying his possessions in both places ('uineam in Befares', and 'in Carauanio...res, uestitum, ferramenta, uel alia utensilia').²⁴¹

But definitions of wealth and status only make sense in relative terms. It has become clear that alongside those who could donate possessions held in more than one village, there also existed people who owned less, and some who probably owned very little, or none, at all. In fact, although we only possess seventeen Santo Toribio documents from before 900, it is interesting that this divergence of wealth is nonetheless apparent; evidence for the sort of peasant subjection we see in much of western Europe is very thin on the ground indeed. Striking too is the fact that there is not much evidence of public presence in this world. One ninth-century charter provides an interesting exception to this general rule; in 885, a judicial meeting was held in which Lellito and Lillo surrendered their right to the church of San Adrián ('qui est in uilla Sionda'), which was awarded by six judges to the monastery of San Martín (presumably San Martín de Turieno, hence the document's survival in the cartulary).²⁴² Lellito and Lillo had been taken to court by a deacon named Salamiro, who acted in the name of San Martín and a bishop, mysteriously called both Sisacando and Sisperiado in the document, whose seat was not stated. Lellito and Lillo claimed to have received the church of San Adrián from the same bishop who was supposedly responsible for the case brought against them, but they did recognize that the church of San Adrián had been ceded by its founders to San Martín, and that they had therefore been unlawfully in possession of San Adrián for some six years. It is interesting that the bishop was not present at any stage of the proceedings, and it has not been possible

simply betray the influence of the pact in this area and reflect diplomatic practice. It is interesting however, that the Sempronio of T9 (847) identifies himself as the son of Severo and Severa; this latter could quite conceivably be the son of the same Severa mentioned in T8 (843) given the close dealings, on both occasions, between lay persons and the monastery of San Salvador de Villeña.

²⁴¹ T9 and T10 respectively.

²⁴² T17.

to corroborate his existence or his seat on the basis of any other contemporaneous sources.²⁴³ Given that this is the case, it does not seem sensible to interpret this document as one which demonstrates the well-established projection of episcopal power in the Liébana in the ninth-century; indeed, a much more crucial role seems to have been enjoyed by abbots, who were most probably the real arbiters of power in the local sphere as we shall see in what follows.

Of other ‘public’ figures we can say very little. The references to the ruling monarch which brought most charters to a close are most likely best interpreted as an aspect of documentary practice which at the most attested a very generic conception of the existence of a distant authority. Perceptible links to royal authority within the Liébana are virtually non-existent. Ordoño’s and Proflinia’s donation of all of their assets to Santa María de Baró in 831, is one important exception to this general rule, suggesting as it does that they must have been amongst the richest of the Liébana’s inhabitants, because they included amongst their donation that which they had received ‘de donatione regis’.²⁴⁴ Similarly, the recognition of some sort of basic administrative structure is referred to in 828, with the authority of the count and the king invoked, although this reference, discussed in more detail in the last section of this chapter, is not proof of direct royal power, or of its projection, or indeed, of devolved royal power in the hands of regional agents, in the ninth-century Liébana.²⁴⁵ This was a landscape indeed, in which the exceptionally powerful, and the magnificently rich, whether loyal and cooperative magnates or ‘over-mighty’ subjects, were conspicuous by their absence in a way that they most certainly were not in contemporary Galicia, as we shall see, with profound consequences for the scale of landed holding in this region. This was then, in 900, still very much a world where free peasant proprietors were abundant and there remained a possibility for entrepreneurial locals to make a name for themselves.

²⁴³ A connection between the bishop of T17 and Sisnando of Iria-Compostela, based mostly on a tradition which has it that this latter was a native of the Liébana, is too speculative to merit much investigation; discussion of it can be found in Loring García, *Cantabria*, pp. 235–241. It dates back to the *Chronicon Iriense*, for which, see *CI*, 6–7.

²⁴⁴ T7.

²⁴⁵ T5.

The Emergence of a Village Elite

One of the most interesting aspects of the ninth-century documents analysed in the previous section of this chapter was the apparent absence of lay persons in the ninth-century Liébana who sought to engage consistently in transactions and deal-making within their local community; many people owned on a fairly substantial scale, sometimes across several villages, but they do not seem to have engaged, in our few documents, in the construction of large property portfolios by means of frequent purchase, or to have consolidated this position by securing strategic marriage alliances with suitable families.²⁴⁶ Indeed, it is simply not possible to identify prominent local landowners of this sort in the ninth-century Liébana with the evidence at our disposal. It may be the case that this scale of activity did indeed take place and that it has escaped the documentary record, but we have no way of knowing; nonetheless, in such a relatively small area, the existence of any couple who had made themselves substantially rich by means of recurrent purchase would most probably have led to the retention of the documents recording these transactions, should any local monasteries have later come to own these assets. For this reason, fourteen documents from the first third of the tenth century are very revealing, because the transactions they record describe for the first time the fairly rapid rise to local prominence of a lay couple in the Liébana: Bagaudano and Faquilona.²⁴⁷

First documented in 914, this couple clearly came to own substantial assets in the Liébana, but it is the extension and enlargement of their property portfolio via the regular acquisition of landed assets that marks them out in the documentary record of Santo Toribio with regard to what came before. One of their sons, Opila, would become abbot of the monastery of San Martín de Turieno in the 940s, and another, Savarico, would marry Vistrilli, the daughter of Munio and Gulatrudia, another Liébana lay couple of substantial means.²⁴⁸ This is the sort of family consolidation and networking

²⁴⁶ See, for an Italian example for the late ninth century, L. Feller, A. Gramain and F. Weber, *La fortune de Karol: marché de la terre et liens personnels dans les Abruzzes au haut moyen âge* (Rome, 2005), pp. 61–72.

²⁴⁷ The fourteen documents are: T18 (914); T21 (915); T23 (916); T25 (918); T26 (920); T27 (921); T28 (921); T32 (925); T35 (927); T36 (927); T39 (930); T40 (930); T41 (932); T42 (915–932).

²⁴⁸ We know about the family links between these individuals thanks to explicit references in the charters: in T28 (921), Opila and Savarico are named as the sons of Bagaudano and Faquilona in a letter of adoption ('ut

which was conspicuously absent in the ninth-century Liébana documentation. But a detailed examination of the nature of the social prominence enjoyed by Bagaudano and Faquilona can help us to appreciate its overwhelmingly local scale and origins—a scale which did not approach that of lay elites in many other parts of the peninsula, including Galicia, as we shall see in Chapter 4, and which did not see their local influence crystallize, or extend at all, beyond the Liébana at any stage. Bagaudano and Faquilona are perhaps most helpfully characterized as very wealthy and locally important people, who emerged from village society to obtain and consolidate privileged social status in the Liébana in the tenth century. Their origins and background, on either side, are totally unknown to us; they were most probably of non-aristocratic lineage, and, furthermore, when we first encounter them there is no evidence to suggest that they enjoyed aristocratic associations within their community. Yet by the 940s, their local influence was such that their son was able to become abbot at San Martín de Turieno, and thereafter to oversee and administer an important series of donations to his monastery. Their impact on landowning patterns is thus a very useful framework within which to analyse the shape of social relations in the tenth-century Liébana, because the Santo Toribio documents allow us to follow the process by which they became locally important landowners, brought about by the significant inroads they made into the landed wealth of their fellow villagers.

This lay couple's efforts to consolidate their landed wealth in the tenth century have been at the heart of much of the secondary coverage that the tenth-century Liébana has received as a whole.²⁴⁹ As one would expect, there have been divergences in opinion amongst the writers of the scholarly literature, but these have mostly been minor; the majority, in fact, have seen in the emergence of Bagaudano and Faquilona evidence of newly formed social relationships of a manifestly feudal

facermus uobis iam dictis Bagaudani et uxori tue Faquilone et filios uestros Hopilani et Sauarico'); in T54 (951), Vistrilli is clearly shown to be the daughter of Munio and Gulatrudia in a donation she makes to San Martín de Turieno ('Ego Vistrilli, qui sum filia Monioni et Gulatrudiene'); in T64 (962), it is made clear that Savarico and Vistrilli were married as they are shown to be joint recipients of a donation of land ('uobis Savarico et uxori tue Vistrilli'). Munio and Gulatrudia first appear in T19 (914), where they are given a domestic servant from a certain Silo: 'ut donarem uobis iam dictis Munioni et uxori tue Gulatrudie mancipella nomine Facquina, qui est filia Monderici et matris sue nomine (sic), sicut et dono uobis perpetim abiturum'.

²⁴⁹ Barbero and Vigil looked at the proprietorial activity of this lay couple in *La formación del feudalismo*, pp. 377–380; likewise, Loring García paid them considerable attention, and analysed them in very similar fashion, in *Cantabria*, pp. 314–328; see too, Díez Herrera, *Sociedad feudal*, pp. 229–231, for a similar line; J. Gautier-Dalché, 'Le domaine du monastère de Santo Toribio de Liébana: formation, structures et modes d'exploitation', *AEM*, 2 (1965), pp. 63–117, is a more balanced account.

nature. However, in order to arrive at this conclusion, scholars have had to rely on a reading of the documents which to some extent depends upon hypothesizing about what the documents do not tell us, rather than what they do. Particularly pertinent in this regard is the way in which it is assumed that peasants who sold to their richer neighbours (especially to Bagaudano and Faquilona) did so because of vertical pressure, as elites developed new powers over the persons and labour of peasant cultivators, leaving this latter group with, it is claimed, little option but to cooperate.²⁵⁰

But this is an argument with little grounding in the tenth-century charters themselves and is therefore by definition an argument which looks to extrapolate upon later, better-documented, conditions in order to project a reading backwards onto an earlier time. A dearth of sources cannot explain this methodological practice; the tenth century in Spain is relatively well documented, especially with regard to sources descriptive of social process, but the dramatic increase in the number of documents from the ninth to the tenth century has tempted some to frame their observations by simply imagining that social relationships made explicit in the eleventh century make more sense if their genesis can be vaguely located in the ninth and tenth.²⁵¹ Thus, this interpretation derives not from a lack of evidence, but rather from claiming that what the evidence purports to tell us in actual fact misleading and deceptive, or simply silent on a number of key matters.²⁵² It is of course true that there may be more to a given written source than a literal reading of the text would imply; one need only think of the propagandistic or idealized pronouncements of ‘centrally’ produced literature, such as royal chronicles and legal texts, to understand this.²⁵³ Nonetheless, charters allow us to approach local societies in more detailed fashion than do many types of written evidence, because they are less susceptible to the problems which afflict normative sources; this is because they do not reflect idealized pictures of social behaviour, but its actual expression ‘on the ground’. Charters therefore allow us to look at real social practice more closely than any other sort of source for this period.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 314.

²⁵¹ For a description of the major collections of charters, Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 22–26.

²⁵² Loring García, for example, characterizes the adoption, or *profiliatio*, documents, as ‘subterfugios legales’, in *Cantabria*, p. 317.

²⁵³ *FEMA*, pp. 383–385.

²⁵⁴ Some charters were without doubt interpolated at later dates, mostly in order to make anachronistic claims to the title rights over land, but this, in any case, was much more common amongst royal documents, or else those

Accordingly, in this chapter I have preferred to base my analyses on an examination of the extant evidence in the form in which it has come down to us, rather than to risk ‘reading history backwards’ by envisaging, to take one example much discussed in the secondary literature, relationships of commendation, where they are not made explicit in the documentation. In what follows, I am therefore wary of interpretations which emphasize increasing checks on peasant autonomy throughout the tenth century in the Liébana, given that the documentary basis for these assertions is frequently ambiguous. It seems to me revealing, too, that no evidence of peasant resistance to supposedly new lordly constraints in the tenth-century Liébana can be divined from the tenth-century material, whereas peasant resistance beyond the year 1000 is clearly identifiable in the documentation for Spain as a whole and is most probably a good indicator of new social pressures.²⁵⁵ The case for the employment of a different approach to the hitherto characteristic line of enquiry adopted in the study of social relations in the tenth-century Liébana is therefore compelling, resting as it does on a return to the content of the charters themselves. This can sometimes be hard to achieve amidst the white noise of the ideologically charged historiographical background of this debate, but we cannot simply ignore these issues.

In what follows in this section, I will analyse the proprietorial activity of Bagaudano and Faquilona, and their family’s activity within the Liébana, and contend that the tenth-century Liébana did not mark a period of significant change insofar as social relationships between landlords and their tenants or dependants was concerned. It is interesting, in fact, that the tenth-century Liébana seems to have been in many ways rather like its ninth-century forerunner. This being the case, one of its most striking attributes appears to have been the considerable variations of wealth enjoyed by its inhabitants, some of whom were happy to receive modest quantities of grain for the sale of their land, whilst others received more substantial rewards. Of course, these prices were conditioned by the

of large, corporate, monastic institutions. For the usefulness of charters, see Wickham, ‘Problems of Comparing Rural Societies’, at p. 227.

²⁵⁵ For resistance, see Pastor de Togneri, *Resistencias y luchas campesinas*, *passim*. For different social relationships post 1000 in the valley, see T84 (1036): ‘et teneas illa casa de nostro dato et facias nobis con illa seruicio’; T94 (1065): ‘nos commendamus seruire et concedimus nos’; T95 (1066): ‘et abate nostro ac ceteris fratribus serbiencium nos comendamus seruire et concedimus nos’; T104 (1125) ‘ut teneatis illan in prestamo et seruiat uobis omnibus diebus uite uestre’.

quantities sold (which we cannot measure), and the leverage of the individuals involved, but the characteristic variety of the assets described from charter to charter indicates that some villagers certainly had more to give or sell than others.²⁵⁶ If we tie this together with our earlier observations, we can see that social inequality was not a tenth-century innovation, but a permanent fixture of village life throughout the early Middle Ages.

Fortunately, our efforts to understand certain aspects of tenth-century village life in the Liébana rest upon greater numbers of documents than they do for the ninth century. Total numbers of Santo Toribio documents stand at sixty for the tenth century, of which twenty-one are sales, twenty-nine donations, three adoptions, three exchanges of assets, two records of court cases, one a monastic pact, and one a record of the return of land to the monastery of San Salvador de Villeña which had been wrongfully taken from this institution's possession. These are augmented by fourteen tenth-century charters from the monastery of Santa María de Piasca.²⁵⁷ Whilst not a large quantity in relative terms, certainly within the context of the Iberian Peninsula, we must remember that the Liébana is a relatively small area, with the bulk of the population resident in the lower reaches of the valleys; our documentary sources therefore describe the social logic of a relatively small world in quite concentrated fashion.

Without doubt, the most striking aspect of these figures is the predominance of sales and donations. A detailed examination of the documents suggests that the tenth-century Liébana was an area characterized by a buoyant property market which saw assets change hands with a certain fluidity—an observation which fits neatly with the provisional conclusions I drew from my analysis of the ninth century too. The first documented sale from this century dates to the year 914 and describes how Pacencio and Hitila sold a vineyard in Mieses to Bagaudano, who on this occasion was

²⁵⁶ T42 (915–932) for modest recompense; T36 (927) for greater recompense.

²⁵⁷ These fourteen are: Piasca39 (930), the foundation document (aristocratic donation); Piasca5 (904) and Piasca52 (933), both peasant sales to lay parties; Piasca79 (941) a monastic pact; Piasca134 (951), Piasca135 (951), Piasca136 (952) and Piasca154 (957), all peasant sales to Piasca; Piasca96 (945) and Piasca 242 (966), donations to Piasca; Piasca153 (957), in which a group joined the monastic community of Piasca; Piasca293 (978), an interpolated document in which Ramiro III (966–985) returned property to Piasca which had been usurped from its possession; Piasca304 (980), in which a peasant gave the monastery what he had been given by his mother; and Piasca305 (980), in which a peasant ceded the rights to a mill to Piasca.

engaged in business without his wife.²⁵⁸ The content is very straightforward, and is, indeed, typical of the majority of the tenth-century sales in many respects. It begins with the identification of the parties involved in the sale, clearly identifying both seller and buyer in their respective roles ('Ego Pacencius et Hitila tibi Bagaudane'), before going on to describe the location and amount of the assets sold (this latter is not always made clear but in this instance the transactors dealt in thirds or 'tertiam porcionem').²⁵⁹ It is then stated that a price was agreed and met, before warning clauses, in which individuals were warned against the penalty (material or spiritual, sometimes both) for contravening the agreement, closed out the main body of the charter.²⁶⁰

Via frequent purchases of this sort, Bagaudano and Faquilona rose to become one of the richest landowning couples of the tenth-century Liébana. But the documents actually give very little direct information about what the transactions supposed for the relationship between buyer and seller, especially with regard to what might have occurred beyond the sale. For example, none of the sales made to Bagaudano and Faquilona in the early tenth century made reference to the economic aspect of the sale, bar the formulaic reference to the establishment and due payment of an agreed price. It seems probable that on at least some of the occasions on which Bagaudano and Faquilona bought from Lebaniego peasants, the transaction only went as far as the sale suggested; that is to say, the selling party probably did not become a tenant of this couple and thereafter would not have been obliged to deal with Bagaudano or Faquilona again in any way. Some may have become clients of Bagaudano and Faquilona, and this could have been very informal indeed, but none can be shown to have become dependent cultivators of Bagaudano's and Faquilona's land.

An imposition thought to have underpinned the property-owning portfolios assembled by locally eminent people in the early Middle Ages is the burden of rent and services. However, it is illuminating that these documents do not discuss, let alone establish, rents or dues of any kind,

²⁵⁸ T18. In every other transaction of the Bagaudano-Faquilona cycle, the two are seen operating in tandem. Indeed, generalizations about gender roles in the charters are hard to sustain, as Davies has emphasized, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 187–188: 'Men and women did things together, exercised property rights together, and did both separately as men or as women'.

²⁵⁹ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 75–80.

²⁶⁰ For more on the form of the sales, see R. M. Blasco Martínez, *Los cartularios de Cantabria* (Santander, 1986), pp. 68–77.

whereas, as we have seen, the one-off payment which they do customarily describe is couched in language that suggests that all obligations had been met at the time of the writing of the charter. Hence, in 916, Liberio described his sale to Bagaudano and Faquilona in the following terms: ‘dedi ego, iam dictus Liberius, uobis Bagaudane et uxori tue Faquilone terram in Patrinnana...et de alia parte latus terra nostra, in aderato precio III solidos et tremise et dedistis mihi precium uaca et uinum in solo et tremise, in quantum ipsa terra ualuit et de precio aput uos nihil remansit’.²⁶¹ Here one gets a very clear sense that this charter recorded a specific moment in time in which a business deal was negotiated, struck, and fully completed.

Indeed, one element we would do well to bear in mind when trying to evaluate the willingness or otherwise with which peasants sold to richer local lay persons (such as Bagaudano and Faquilona) is the very clear link that existed between the notion of sale and price in documents of sale. Davies has highlighted how tenth-century sales from across the northern peninsula were invariably associated with an explicit expression of their value; this was usually accompanied by a statement in which we are told how the price (sometimes expressed in a monetary denomination such as modios) was met in kind.²⁶² This was met in a variety of different ways, and probably depended to some degree on what the peasant transactors needed, in material terms, as recompense for the sale of their assets, as well as what the buying party could offer. These assets ranged from grain and wine, to animals such as cows and horses, to items such as barley and wax, indicating a regime of mixed farming in the Liébana, but also the presence of a small element of the social formation engaged in bee-keeping and artisanal crafts.²⁶³

Given that the sale documents do not indicate any element of coercion, it seems probable that the notion of price as expressed in the sale documents reflected a notion of consensus between the two parties; indeed, the freedom with which peasants entered into these deals suggests that bartering and negotiation were central to the fixing of price. There may too be another aspect to consider, for

²⁶¹ T23.

²⁶² W. Davies, ‘Sale, price and valuation in Galicia and Castile-León in the tenth century’, *EME*, 11 (2002), pp. 149–174, at p. 155.

²⁶³ T36 (927) and T39 (930) are just two examples of payment taking the form of animals; likewise, T48 (942) and T26 (920) for barley; T43 (933) for payment in wax.

although sale was more business-like than donation in the sense that it did not carry with it such gestural significance, it may too have created unofficial links of patronage, or simply have established good terms between both parties. Unofficial links of natural loyalty have characterized all human societies and these need not have been, nor indeed appear to have been, contingent upon formal relationships of dependence in many cases in the tenth century.

The sorts of transactions in which Bagaudano and Faquilona engaged in the first third of the tenth century were notably more variable with regard to the range of the people from whom they bought than they were insofar as the geographical spread of their purchases was concerned. Peasant proprietors who appear to have been relatively rich sold to Bagaudano and Faquilona, but so too did those who have the appearance of being much poorer. It is interesting, however, that the vast majority of their purchases took place in a single valley of the Liébana, which indicates a scale of influence characterized by relatively local contours. Indicative of the village level scale of their ownership is the fact that this couple's landed acquisitions were concentrated in the Valdebaró of the Liébana, and primarily spread quite thickly across a handful of villages (Padriñana and Cosgaya were both the site of acquisitions by Bagaudano and Faquilona on more than one occasion).²⁶⁴ On one documented occasion, they can be seen buying land somewhere in the Asturias, but this is the only major exception to a pattern of acquisition based on the villages of the Valdebaró, in which we must presume that they lived too.²⁶⁵

It is interesting that of the fourteen charters which comprise the Bagaudano and Faquilona cycle, eleven are straightforward *compra-ventas* in which the couple made purchases, mostly in land.²⁶⁶ Whereas the ninth-century documentation furnished little in the way of evidence of truly

²⁶⁴ Padriñana is discussed below; Bagaudano and Faquilona acquired assets in Cosgaya in T28 (921), T39 (930), and T40 (930).

²⁶⁵ T32 (925) is the 'Asturias' document. T26 (920) describes a very small-scale operation in which Bagaudano and Faquilona bought a vineyard from a peasant couple of seemingly modest means, paying for the vineyard just one cow. The transaction was of a vineyard in Autura, which I have been unable to trace. However, it is not unlikely that it was a hamlet or small settlement in the Valdebaró, given that this was the area in which Bagaudano and Faquilona predominantly operated. T41 (932) saw Bagaudano and Faquilona exchange a vineyard they owned in Valdeprado with another owned by Juan and Paterna in Valdebaró.

²⁶⁶ The sales are T18 (914); T21 (915); T23 (916); T25 (918); T26 (920); T27 (921); T32 (925); T36 (927) T39 (930); T40 (930); and T42 (915–932). These are supplemented by a donation from a lay party to Bagaudano and

small-scale proprietors, this is not the case in the tenth century, and Bagaudano and Faquilona seem to have bought on occasion from people who must have been peasant proprietors who owned modest assets. Such is the case in their dealings with Liberio, from whom they bought ‘terram in Patrinnana’ for the sum of one cow and some wine (‘dedistis mihi precium uaca et uinum’) in 916.²⁶⁷ Likewise, León sold Bagaudano and Faquilona ‘terra in Patrinnana’ for the price of ‘caballum colore bagium et asinum et boue varium’ in 927.²⁶⁸ Emiliana’s modest looking sale, for which we do not possess a precise date, saw her sell a ‘terra in Patrimana’ to Bagaudano and Faquilona for ‘VI quartarios de cevaria’.²⁶⁹ Cesolido may have been richer; he received barley, wine, and livestock, for half of his orchard in Cosgaya in 930.²⁷⁰ What seems beyond doubt is that some of the people with whom Bagaudano and Faquilona were dealing in this period were members of peasant society.

These sales demonstrate that Bagaudano and Faquilona were relatively thoroughgoing in their acquisition of territory in the Valdebaró. Padriñana was one place in which they clearly developed an interest, making five documented purchases there; it is clear too, that their proprietorial acquisitions did not go unnoticed by the inhabitants, who as usual referred to land that their neighbours owned in order to locate their own property.²⁷¹ Hence Emiliana’s description of her land ‘iusta ipsum uestrum agrum et iusta agrum Leocagi’ in a document dated to 915–932.²⁷² Similarly, Flacencio, Severo and Monesta sold Bagaudano and Faquilona a plot of land in Padriñana in 918 which they located in reference to a fountain and a privately owned field (‘iusta illa fonte et latum agrum Iulani’).²⁷³ Much as we saw in the ninth century, there seems to have been a real sense of the need to locate property

Faquilona, an exchange of assets with a lay party, and an ‘adoption’: respectively T35 (927); T41 (932); and T28 (921).

²⁶⁷ T23.

²⁶⁸ T36. In this instance, the fact that both parties agreed to the price paid is emphasized in unambiguous terms (‘et uos dedistis et ego accebi’). Normally, we simply see a variation of the formula which states that the agreed price has been fixed and paid, such as, in T37 (928): ‘de ipso precio aput uos nihil remansit debitus’.

²⁶⁹ T42 (915–932).

²⁷⁰ T39 (930).

²⁷¹ The Padriñana documents: T21 (915); T23 (916); T25 (918); T36 (927) and T42 (915 – 932). Padriñana was situated in Turieno, *Santo Toribio*, p. 496.

²⁷² T42.

²⁷³ T25.

geographically, or by way of its provenance.²⁷⁴ *Locus* and *villa* remained the terminology of choice to describe settlements, which were, as I have already said, villages of greater or lesser nucleation and population. Many, as we have seen, clearly had churches too.²⁷⁵

The descriptions of transactions that we have examined thus far imply that cultivable land was quite closely packed together, with individual parcels lying at many times in between those that belonged to neighbours. Something of a land market clearly existed for Bagaudano and Faquilona to exploit; but as we shall see, peasant cultivators clearly dealt amongst themselves too and not only with more powerful lay couples. Indeed, in order to understand the social logic of the village world more fully, it seems to me crucial to evaluate the activity of peasants when and where we can see them acting independently of both Bagaudano and Faquilona, or major monasteries, such as San Martín de Turieno. It needs to be stressed that we have very few unambiguous documented examples in the Liébana charters of this sort of peasant activity, but this may not mean that peasant exchange or sale within the peasant stratum was rare; it could also reflect the fact that the sort of everyday small-scale transactions in which, say, two peasant couples exchanged an onion bed for a small plot of land, would only have interested the archivists of monastic institutions when that plot of land went on to form part of its property portfolio. Where it did not, it may not have been considered worth keeping, and we should not discount the possibility that the monastery may never have had access to this sort of document at all, should it not have been involved in any way in the original transaction. Thus, it is plausible that many charters detailing transactions of this sort have simply not survived; similarly, it is probable that on many occasions transactions on this scale may never have been committed to the written record but ‘preserved’ and ‘adhered to’ by means of the memory of the village community, or those involved, who had witnessed the original deal or were simply aware of its existence.

Nonetheless, some evidence of dealing within the peasant stratum has survived, as has evidence that small-scale operators may have dealt in land more frequently than the surviving

²⁷⁴ T50 (946): ‘concedo uobis ecclesiam uocabulo Sancto Petro et Paulo loco predicto Quiuiassa super ribulo que uocitant Deua’; T35 (927): ‘ipsa uiniola et terra medietatem, quem comparaui de Gumesindo; T39 (930): ‘ipso pumare quem abemus de patre nostro Recefredo’.

²⁷⁵ T76 (990): ‘locum quem uocatur Pantes’; T31 (924): ‘in ecclesia Sancti Christofori locum uocabulo Cesaria’; T38 (929): ‘in uillas prenominate Meses, Barago’; T39 (930): ‘in uilla nostra Causecadia’.

documents imply. For example, making a sale to Bagaudano and Faquilona of three plots of land in 915, Ayerio and Munio described their location by reference to a purchase that they had already made ('Et ego Aierius dedi uobis altera terra ibidem iusta ipsum quod comparaui de Terasie'). In 920, Hobelio and his wife Baquina sold a vineyard in Autura to Bagaudano and Faquilona next to one which belonged to a neighbour, and another which they had already sold to Bagaudano and Faquilona ('uineam in Auturam iusta uineam de Mirelli et iusta alia uestra uinia quem in antea uobis uendidi').²⁷⁶ In 961, Donnina sold a parcel of land in the unidentified place of Cabello to Millán and his wife Emetria, who received just 'II quartarios de ciuaria' by way of payment; clearly, members of local society chose to sell to people who have the appearance of being non-elite members of society.²⁷⁷ Thus, the land market, and the flux of buying and selling, were not elements introduced to peasant society by voracious landlords, but rather characterized what was still a society in which the opportunity for the acquisition of landed wealth was not restricted to a lay or ecclesiastical aristocratic class, which latter was, at any rate, arguably not very well established by the early tenth century.

The few examples we have of peasant dealing not dependent on the proprietorial interests of aristocratic parties also reveal a world in which peasants looked to neighbours and family for support in times of difficulty. They also serve to confirm that the peasant stratum was not a homogenous mass, but was in fact composed of small family groups whose assets varied considerably from one family to the next—this was almost certainly the case even within the same village; it is likely, for example, that Recoire and Argemundo, who made three modest purchases in Piasca in the ninth century, were or became richer than the neighbours from whom they bought.²⁷⁸ These neighbours seem to have accepted modest reward for their sale, but possibly benefitted from closer associations with the village's leading family. There may, in other words, have been benefits attached to sale other than those which the documents describe, and we need to think about questions related to standing in the community and networks of support.

²⁷⁶ T26.

²⁷⁷ T59.

²⁷⁸ Piasca1 (857), in which this couple bought a small part of a vineyard in Piasca; Piasca2 (861), in which the same couple bought a small plot of land (the 'porcione' of a peasant couple, worth only 'duos modios et semodio et sextario'), also in Piasca; and Piasca3 (861), in which a similarly modest purchase was made by Recoire and Argemundo in the same village.

In times of difficulty, richer peasants would have been able to help others, but it needs emphasizing that there are few documented signs of peasant hardship in the tenth-century Santo Toribio charters. This notwithstanding, some texts do record peasant cooperation. In 922, a deal was struck in which Eulalio, not obviously a major figure (see below), agreed to adopt two neighbours, Vicente and Bronildi, and to leave them his assets, so long as they agreed to care for him and clothe him until his death ('Et ego dum uixero facias mihi bonum et uestitum et post obitum me ut abeas ipsa sorte ab integritate tu et filii uestri').²⁷⁹ This document of *profiliatio*, discussed more fully below, shows the mechanisms with which peasants could circumvent the need to turn to the richest members, or institutions, of local society, in their efforts to find assistance.

Help within the family was presumably commonplace and is also documented; in 928, Adorario sold a vineyard in Baró to the monks of San Salvador de Villeña, in order to cover a payment his brother owed to the monastery ('et dabo uobis illa pro illa scala argentia quam dedistis ad germanum meum Lucidum, quod mihi bene placuit').²⁸⁰ Clearly, the horizontal ties of the family unit to some extent shaped the social logic of tenth-century peasant existence in the Liébana.²⁸¹ Neither is it necessarily the case that the wealthiest elements of society should not have assisted sometimes; in 962, Matecia and her nephew Vicente made a point of recognizing the assistance that they had received from Savarico and Vistrilli ('alia bona que fecistis nobis in anno malo').²⁸² Matecia and Vicente may have made a sale to this powerful lay couple as a way of acknowledging their gratitude for the help that they received; but they could also have felt obliged to reward people of such exalted status, if not for fear of reprisal, then at least as a token gesture. Such action was part and parcel of the normal give and take of hierarchical social relations. Some peasants chose to transact with their fellow peasants, and others, with richer people, buying or selling according to what they believed to be in their strategic best interests; opportunism, so difficult to determine in the documentary record, must also have been a factor.

²⁷⁹ T22.

²⁸⁰ T37.

²⁸¹ T37.

²⁸² T65.

What sales tell us about the composition of society is very illuminating. For a start, it is striking that the Lebaniegos we have seen buying and selling to Bagaudano and Faquilona, and amongst themselves, manifestly enjoyed legal and economic freedom; they were classic free proprietors who were able to alienate their land as and when they chose, within the stipulations of Visigothic law which theoretically governed this society. The wealthiest of these free proprietors could presumably become medium landowners whose wealth might have afforded them the luxury of employing others to tend to their landed assets. This medium landowning group is not well represented in the tenth-century Santo Toribio material, in large measure because of the limitations of the material. In fact, it is often difficult to differentiate between medium landowners, who still operated within the confines of the village world, sometimes owning across several villages, but probably not farming land directly, and richer peasants, who remained personally involved in the labour process; this is made doubly difficult by the considerable number of people who seem to have owned not substantial personal assets but who nevertheless appear only once or twice in the documentary record. However, as Davies has stated, there are too many documents, even in an area of modest numbers of charters such as the Liébana, and too much divergence with regard to the range of personal assets changing hands, to suppose that many of the rural cultivators we see in the charters were not peasants who worked the land, normally, but not always, their own.²⁸³

So far we have concentrated on sale. This is to a large degree because Bagaudano and Faquilona were unable to inspire consistent donation from smaller-scale proprietors.²⁸⁴ The implications of this are very interesting, since it implies that their authority and social standing was not so great as to convince peasants to part with their assets should they not be able to secure some material reward in return. But donation may have had more than one manifestation. Few questions concerning peasant autonomy in the tenth-century Liébana have been subject to so much critical attention as that surrounding the type of document known as an ‘adoption’, signified in the texts as the

²⁸³ For Davies’ comments see *Acts of Giving*, p. 18: ‘It makes no sense to view such landowners as anything other than members of peasant society. Some will have been relatively rich and some will have had relatively high status in their local communities; others will have been relatively poor’.

²⁸⁴ T35 (927) is the only example in the Bagaudano-Faquilona cycle of them receiving a donation. On this instance they received half a vineyard and some uncultivated land from a certain Rodanio in an unspecified place.

act of *profiliatio*.²⁸⁵ What this actually entailed has profound ramifications for our conception of social relations in the context studied here, since it has again been interpreted by many as a mechanism via which social elites imposed themselves on the autonomy of weaker or less powerful persons by acquiring rights in family property to which they hitherto had no familial connection. For Díez Herrera, the *profiliatio*, ‘institución de origen arcaico’ was transformed in the early Middle Ages into a ‘forma clara de encomendación a un señor o a una familia poderosa’.²⁸⁶ Likewise, Loring García interpreted the adoption as yet another example of the insidious extension of lordly rights, describing it as a ‘subterfugio legal’ which allowed the wealthy to intrude on the landed holdings of peasant society.²⁸⁷ But there seems to have been more to the *profiliatio* than these descriptions imply.

For a start, if we look at the examples of *profiliatio* amongst the Santo Toribio documents, we can see that it was not only the very rich who partook in this practice; indeed, on occasion it seems that richer elements played the role of provider rather than that of the ‘adopted’ party who stood to gain. In 915, as we have seen, Eulalio agreed to ‘adopt’ the couple Vicente and Bronildi on the condition that they care for him throughout his lifetime.²⁸⁸ Eulalio was clearly not poor, because he owned, amongst other things, ‘terras, uineas, casas, res, uestitu’, spread across two villages. But the cartulary provides no indication that he was anything other than a wealthy peasant or medium owner who chose to find a way to alienate his property as he saw fit, which in this case meant by making provisions for its donation to a peasant couple and their children (‘Ego Holalius tibi Uincencio et uxori tue Bronilli...et filii uestri’).²⁸⁹ Framed this way, the *profiliatio* seems less like an instrument of oppression and more like an institution from which ordinary members of society might have profited. It seems, in fact, to have been intimately associated with the phenomenon of donation more generally.

²⁸⁵ The *profiliatio* could sometimes be associated with more straightforward donation and classification is not always easy. The following examples, in keeping with my general rule, are based upon the specific reference to the act of *profiliatio* in the body of the text.

²⁸⁶ Díez Herrera, *Sociedad feudal*, p. 57.

²⁸⁷ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 317.

²⁸⁸ T22 (‘dum uixero facias mihi bonum’).

²⁸⁹ He does not appear again in the cartulary.

For some members of society, *profiliatio* allowed them to join client networks; it may in fact have been one of the few avenues of entry into patronage networks consisting of two sets of lay parties, which seem to have been more complicated than ordinary sales. In another case of *profiliatio*, Bagaudano, his wife, and their children, were adopted by Vincebiles and Savilli; despite clearly owning fairly substantially themselves, with a wide range of assets in Cosgaya, Baró and Congarna (all in the Valdebaró), they saw the benefit of establishing a client relationship with this up-and-coming family of landowners.²⁹⁰ An even earlier example from the Santo Toribio material also makes sense if understood in the same context because the adoption described in this instance also seems to have allowed peasants to dispose of part of their assets in a way that pleased them, bringing with it no servile or onerous obligations. In this example from 875, a couple promised not insubstantial assets to a certain Adeit; this couple may have simply wanted him to take possession of a part of their assets, or have considered him a good person with whom to establish closer relations. Thus, the option of giving one's landed interest away may actually have been very useful to those who were concerned to ensure that their property ended up where they wanted it to, either after their death, or within their lifetime.²⁹¹ Indeed, contrary to Díez Herrera's claims that the institution of 'adoption' was characteristically feudal, it seems hard to see it as anything other than another option open to peasants as well as aristocrats, when it came to the alienation and disposal of part of their property.²⁹²

Loring García maintained that the *profiliatio* charters betrayed the survival, and gradual disintegration, of 'lazos de parentesco' in the tenth-century Liébana.²⁹³ This argument is constructed upon the belief that the repeated presence of certain individuals, either as witnesses or sellers, in the Bagaudano and Faquilona cycle, indicates that said individuals formed part of a wider supra-familial

²⁹⁰ T28 (921).

²⁹¹ T14 (875): 'ut profiliaremus te sicut lex docet in logo filio constitutum in nostram hereditatem in uilla Cesaria... in uoce nostra adquirere potueris easdem porciones prendas sicut unus de filios nostros, ita ut ex hodierno die uel tempore abeas Adeit iure tuo in perpetuo uindices et defendad, tam tu quam eciam et posteritas tua in perpetim abiturum'.

²⁹² Díez Herrera, *Sociedad feudal*, p. 57: 'En todos los casos es evidente que esta institución, tal y como se la conoce en la Alta Edad Media, está ya maracada por su carácter feudal'.

²⁹³ Loring García, *Cantabria*, pp. 314–317.

group who sold their land into private hands in piecemeal fashion.²⁹⁴ For Loring García, the fact that Didaco and Ienesio appeared amongst the witnesses in 915 and then again in another document (which Sánchez Belda was unable to date accurately but which clearly belonged to the Bagaudano and Faquilona cycle) was proof enough of their wider kin connections with Bagaudano and Faquilona.²⁹⁵ However, the supra-familial links which supposedly linked these individuals are merely assumed and at no point stated in the documents, and this, in an area in which we have already seen the frequent recurrence to the links of the nuclear family in the documentation.

Loring García attempted to build a stronger case for the communal ownership of wider kin collectives, and its tenth-century fragmentation, by analysing a document from 925 in which Bagaudano and Faquilona were sold various plots of land in the Asturias.²⁹⁶ But her interpretation of this charter, in my view, misreads the document's essential content, which is simply that of a sale made by various members of a family to Bagaudano and Faquilona; admittedly, this is a sale which highlights that property rights could be held by more than one member of a family, but I would only hesitantly call this 'collective ownership'. The fact that several individuals, Boronta, his brother Genesio, and two other brothers named Pepi and Aurelio, were together the stated participants in the sale of 925, did not in itself imply 'collective ownership'; it is simply illustrative of the fact that family groups were free to choose whether they wanted to be involved in what Davies has described as 'wider or narrower circles of relatives'.²⁹⁷ Moreover, this land was certainly 'family' land in one rather narrow regard, in that the two sets of brothers who led this sale describe the land as 'nostras raciones quam habemus in Asturias'; it is plausible, furthermore, that the produce derived from this land may have been shared between this wider family group. But we need to be careful before we accept that this document implies the survival (and fragmentation) of archaic forms of property ownership, since there are indications that certain parts of the total amount of land which was on this occasion sold to Bagaudano and Faquilona corresponded to certain individuals; hence, Genesio,

²⁹⁴ Loring García, *Cantabria*, p. 315: 'Teniendo en cuenta las repeticiones de nombres, que se dan en estas tres cartas, unas veces como vendedores y otras como testigos, habría que pensar en la existencia de lazos de parentesco entre todos ellos y que los diferentes lotes vendidos formaban parte de un patrimonio colectivo'.

²⁹⁵ These are T21 and T42 respectively.

²⁹⁶ T32.

²⁹⁷ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, p.67.

acting on behalf of his sister too, it would seem, specified that part which approximated more closely to his own, and his sister's, property ('et ego Ienesius meam rationem et de germana mea Maxita Fredisnandi').

Two key events, only imprecisely traceable in the documents, underpinned the translation of Bagaudano and Faquilona's carefully constructed proprietorial gains into a more solid and institutional expression of their social power—but this was to prove fleeting, as we shall see. The first of these was the marriage of their son Savarico to Vistrilli, the daughter of another important set of local landowners, Munio and Gulatrudia. The standing and landed wealth of this couple is poorly documented; the indications are, however, that it almost certainly matched or even exceeded that of Bagaudano and Faquilona.²⁹⁸ Second, and more important, however, was their son Opila's stewardship of the local monastery of San Martín de Turieno, of which he was abbot from the 940s. His abbacy seems to have been a central factor in the period of ascendancy which the monastery enjoyed throughout the middle third of the tenth century; it also allows us to see how the programme of purchase undertaken by his parents was matched or superseded during the middle of the tenth century by the donations that San Martín de Turieno was able to attract under Opila's guidance.

Between 945 and 964, San Martín de Turieno's patrimony grew at an impressive rate as this already old and well-established monastery came under the sway of Opila.²⁹⁹ In this way, Opila's activity seems to correspond with a phenomenon which is easily identifiable in a number of cases from across medieval western Europe, in which a family of extensive riches and a network of clients based in the locality, went on to establish direct familial links with a monastery or church, in which latter a member of the family would sometimes serve. But prior to Opila's abbacy, the fact that he was a member of the monastic community and also the son of important local landowners does not seem to have had much effect on the scale of the monastery's holdings. San Martín de Turieno received sporadically in this pre-Opila documented phase and it had no discernible links with

²⁹⁸ T38 (929) states that they owned in the Asturias as well as the Liébana.

²⁹⁹ The first reference we have to San Martín de Turieno is found in T5 (828). Opila became abbot there between 942 and 945. We know this because he was named abbot in T49 (945) ('abbate meo Hopila'), but was clearly still a monk at San Martín de Turieno in 942, as his presence is attested in T48, in which we see him listed amongst other monks and an abbot named Gonzalo ('uobis abbati Gundisalbo et Iohannes et Sendino et Opila').

Bagaudano and Faquilona, who for the most part seem content to have accumulated landed wealth via the more direct route of purchase.

The speed and scale of the monastery's growth under Opila's aegis is for this reason all the more striking. Furthermore, it was built almost entirely, it would seem, on donation. If we include the document from 945 in which Opila was first named abbot, then San Martín de Turieno received fifteen donations during Opila's abbacy.³⁰⁰ In addition to this, the main donation, although undocumented, must have been Opila's own gift of his share of his parents' land, for this must be the reason why his parents' transactions appear in the cartulary. Many of the surviving donations demonstrated a new development with regard to the proprietorial tactics of Opila's family, as they began to see their efforts at playing family politics come to fruition. These had begun in earnest with the marriage of the son of Bagaudano and Faquilona, Savarico, with Vistrilli, the daughter of Munio and Gulatrudia, to which I referred on the first page of this section. Throughout, I have shown how the purchasing spree of Bagaudano and Faquilona, although elevating them to near or genuine 'aristocratic' status in real, economic, terms, had little of the 'aristocratic' about it in many respects. True aristocrats from across medieval Europe in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries marked out their status by means of donation to the Church, as well as lifestyle, and the holding of public office; many seem to have emphasized high birth, which was an important determinant, as were royal favour and the respect of one's peers. Although it seems reasonable to suspect that Bagaudano and Faquilona lived a privileged lifestyle, it is notable that they do not seem to have discharged public office, enjoyed royal favour, claimed illustrious heritage, or donated to the Church to make manifest their social prominence; it is true that an absence of evidence is not proof that this was categorically the case, but it is at least unlikely that these individuals, who appeared frequently in the documents, enjoyed the sorts of public links listed above and chose not to mention them. However pronounced their *de facto* aristocratic status, and we must remember that aristocracy was not theorized or set in legislation in this period, it is significant to recognize, in relation to our conception of the dynamism

³⁰⁰ The donations to San Martín de Turieno (and sometimes, explicitly, to Opila too) are: T49 (945); T50 (946); T51 (946); T52 (947); T53 (950); T54 (951); T55 (952); T56 (959); T58 (961); T60 (961); T61 (962); T63 (962); T67 (963); T68 (963); and T70 (964).

of social structures in the tenth-century Liébana, that Bagaudano and Faquilona, are perhaps best described as very successful social climbers.³⁰¹

Munio and Gulatrudia, on the other hand, and especially their children, seem to have been more typically aristocratic; they clearly owned slaves, and their children witnessed documents and made grand donations, as aristocrats were wont to do. Public office, once again, was not part of their visible social experience (though they had relatives with office, as we shall see below), and the ownership of land must have been the basis of their status. Munio and Gulatrudia first appeared together in the charters in 914, whereupon they received ‘mancipella nomine Facquina’ in donation from a certain Silo.³⁰² The same Silo then sold to Gulatrudia, and her children, including Vistrilli, that part of his property that he had originally received from Gulatrudia’s husband Munio, a relative of his (‘subrinus meus’), by way of *profiliatio*.³⁰³ This document, unfortunately, is our only significant example of the scale of their landed assets, but it shows that Munio and Gulatrudia owned on a truly grand scale by the standards of the Liébana, their wealth spreading beyond the borders of the *comarca*: ‘tam in Liuana quam in Asturias, in uillas prenomintas Meses, Barago, in Cabamzone, in Camilianes’.³⁰⁴ Thus, the marriage of Savarico with Vistrilli paired the children of two of the region’s richest families, further concentrating the inroads that these elite families had made in the tenth century. On the one hand, social hierarchy was clearly beginning to matter, but on the other hand, society had by no means calcified to such an extent that only the high-born and office-holding were able to aspire to landed wealth.

Savarico and Vistrilli were evidently important landowners in the tenth-century Liébana too, as one would expect given the wealth of their parents, and they donated separately and, later, together,

³⁰¹ On aristocratic status, see Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, p. 524; Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 82–85.

³⁰² T19 is one very few references to slaves from the tenth-century Liébana. I have found only one other clear example: in T34 (925), count Alfonso, discussed in much more detail in the following subsection of this chapter, included unnamed ‘seruas’ in his donation to the church of Santa María de Lebeña. Both of these contexts are special, and it seems to me reasonable to infer from them that the slaves we see in both of these examples were attached to unusually rich households.

³⁰³ T38. The *profiliatio* documents are discussed on pp. 103–105, but it is worth remarking at this juncture that this example demonstrates the fluid nature of property movement in the tenth-century Liébana, where it was clearly subject to the whims and strategies of families.

³⁰⁴ In T20 (915), Munio and Gulatrudia also appeared together, being sold some land in Mieses by the monks of San Martín de Turieno.

to Opila and San Martín de Turieno, often making very generous gifts: in 947, Savarico gave to his brother and San Martín de Turieno ‘quantum uisus sum abere, terras, uineas, pomiferos, utensilia, montibus, casas, orreos, tam mobile quam eciam et immobile’ in Cosgaya.³⁰⁵ Three years later, Vistrilli made a donation to Opila and San Martín de Turieno of a fifth of all she owned in five villages.³⁰⁶ Indeed, Savarico and Vistrilli were most probably a natural beacon to less wealthy persons looking to gain support and patrons.³⁰⁷ As we have seen in their dealings with Severa in 962, they were also capable of offering support to those in need and it is probable that they were pillars of local society, certainly in the Valdebaró, where once again the majority of their assets seem to have been located.³⁰⁸ Patronage at the lay level was important to certain elements of local society, even if these elements were not always poor, like Severa, but it does not appear to have impacted upon average peasant members of society quite as much as one would expect, even throughout the period in which Opila was abbot.

Although San Martín de Turieno very probably became the richest corporate entity in the Liébana within very few years of Opila becoming abbot, it did not in the latter half of the tenth century manage to reach peasant society as Bagaudano and Faquilona had once done. The vast majority of the donations that San Martín de Turieno received in the middle third of the tenth century were quite clearly the work of large-scale owners who had aristocratic associations. Diego Muñoz, the son of Munio and Gulatrudia, made two donations to San Martín de Turieno, in 963 and 964, which attested to his privileged status; some years beforehand, he had been asked, as a figure of authority in the Liébana, to witness donations made by other rich landowners, including one by his sister Vistrilli.³⁰⁹ Significantly, emerging aristocrats were beginning to see the importance of the legitimization of their status, and that of their peers, by acting in cooperation and creating group

³⁰⁵ T52.

³⁰⁶ T53.

³⁰⁷ Savarico and Vistrilli first appear together in a document in T64 (962). Vistrilli may have been married previously to Vermudo Hañiz, who made two large scale donations to San Martín de Turieno in 946; in T50 Vistrilli appears amongst the confirmers of the charter (‘Vistrilli confirmans’), although it is not specified that she is his wife. However, in T51, amongst those confirming the act appears a certain Guestrilli (‘Guestrilli uxor mea confirmans’).

³⁰⁸ T64.

³⁰⁹ For his donations, see T67 (963) and T70 (964). Confirming donations, T54 (951): ‘Didaco Moniz confirmans’; T55 (952): ‘Didaco Munoz’; T60 (961): ‘Didacus Munuizi’.

cohesion; for example, having confirmed donations himself, Diego Muñoz's donation to San Martín de Turieno was endorsed by Savarico and Vermudo Adefonseiz, this latter the son of a count.³¹⁰

Clearly a figure of some importance, Vermudo Adefonseiz assiduously forged links with San Martín de Turieno and its associated family groups, witnessing and donating to the monastery.³¹¹ He also courted the support of the family in a 'private' and non-institutional context, donating a vineyard to Savarico and Vistrilli in 969, albeit with the stipulation that they leave it to San Martín de Turieno when they die.³¹² This was only to be expected, since his family had at some indeterminable stage forged wider links of family kinship with that of either Savarico or Vistrilli, whom he addressed as his nephews or cousins in 963, as T67 demonstrates ('tibi Sauarigus et uxori tua Vistrilli, qui estis mei sobrini'). Thus, denser networks of interrelations were probably forming at the top of Liébana society at this time, and these richer elements were, overwhelmingly, the agents of donation. For example, other donors about whom we know much less were also very wealthy: Cesabo gave three churches to San Martín de Turieno in 952; similarly, Vermudo Hañiz made two big donations to Opila's monastery in 946, one of which included the church of San Pedro and San Pablo de Quiviesa by the river Deva.³¹³

It is important not to simplify the act of giving, nor the significance of the status of the givers, where this can be attested. It is clear that donors in the tenth-century Liébana were invariably not ordinary folks, but richer elements of society looking to make manifest their largesse and to ensure comfort in the afterlife; correspondingly, their gifts represented "'total occasions'", in which 'social, legal and spiritual factors were simultaneously operative'.³¹⁴ They also stabilized social mechanisms designed to consolidate group coherence amongst aristocrats. But this cycle could not go on indefinitely, especially if the monastery could not draw the interest of non-aristocratic donors, which

³¹⁰ T67 (963): 'Savaricus Bacaudaniz' and 'Vermudus Adefonsit'. I explore the public sphere, including counts and their roles, in the next section of this chapter.

³¹¹ Also, in the capacity of a witness or signatory, T55 (952). His donation to San Martín de Turieno was memorialized in T60 (961).

³¹² T69.

³¹³ Cesabo's donation is T55 (952); Vermudo Hañiz's donations T50 and T51.

³¹⁴ Innes, *State and Society*, p. 17.

it singularly failed to do.³¹⁵ Some individuals clearly gained spiritual solace from the idea of giving themselves over to San Martín de Turieno and the religious life, but by and large small owners simply did not donate to the monastery in the tenth century.³¹⁶ But unless motivated by religious reasons, which were of course a considerable factor in many cases, we should not automatically assume that peasants would have been moved to donate, since the scale of the landed assault on them had not been such that they lived in fear of the loss of their own status as landowners. The small world of the Liébana, it seems, had changed in the space of twenty or thirty years; peasants had for a time done business with Bagaudano and Faquilona, but they would not simply give away their assets to a monastery which was effectively an extension of that family's patrimony.

In spite of their connections with rich local families, indeed, the monastery lost considerable momentum after Opila's death, and the family seems to have fallen away as quickly as it had emerged in the first third of the century. After Opila's last documented appearance as abbot in 964, San Martín de Turieno seems to have made very few transactions before the year 1000.³¹⁷ Only seven texts have survived for this period, which represents a full third of the tenth century, suggesting that San Martín's initial inroads into Liébana aristocratic society had been heavily indebted to the impetus that the monastery's association with Opila's family had given it.³¹⁸ These seven documents record what were for the most part minor deals, and it is significant that three of them were directed to a local priest, Vermudo, not San Martín de Turieno.³¹⁹ Throughout the tenth century, there is no substantial change either with regard to the geographical range of San Martín de Turieno's assets; it owned and operated overwhelmingly in the Liébana, owning and operating very little outside of it. In fact, its landed holdings were mostly restricted to the Valdebaró. It was then, the corporate embodiment of new aristocratic union, but its effects on peasant society are harder to discern.

³¹⁵ Only one document from the period of Opila's abbacy, T49 (945), seems to me most probably a record of a peasant donation.

³¹⁶ For individuals entering the monastic community, see T56 (959); T61 (962); and T63 (962).

³¹⁷ T70, for Opila's last documented appearance.

³¹⁸ These are T71 (966); T72 (967); T73 (975); T74 (977); T75 (980); T76 (990); and T77 (990–999).

³¹⁹ T72, T73 and T74 were all very small deals (two donations and one exchange) involving no more than one vineyard on any of the three occasions.

To characterize all of these changes is no easy task. By and large, the tenth-century charters from the Liébana present us with a peasant world which seems to have been relatively dynamic, but not, because of this, inherently unstable. For the most part it was peopled by a range of landowners, the majority of whom owned quite small properties, but the documents suggest that these latter rubbed shoulders with richer people too; the peasant couple Vincebiles and Savilli, who sold ‘casas, orreos, cortes, res mobile, uestitum, uasa, uineas, pomares, prate, terras, busta, moilina’ in 921 to Bagaudano and Faquilona, probably owned more land in Cosgaya than did Fefello, who sold to the same buyers, in 930, a small plot of land in the same village (‘in ipso agro subtus uilla’), for wine and meat.³²⁰ The upshot is that we need to appreciate the differences of degree and nuance which characterized the varying scale of assets enjoyed amongst the small family groups of the village community. Villagers relied on self-sufficiency and the help of their neighbours to get by, and this must have been true long before we begin to see the horizontal logic of the village world described in charters.³²¹

But there is no indication that village-level existence was significantly harder in 960, when our pre-1000 documents effectively stop, than it had been in 860, as the historiography generally assumes; indeed, there is little sign of small-scale proprietors actively seeking the formal protection that exclusive, committed dependence would have given them, or even of them relying on schemes of rural credit, as there is elsewhere.³²² Evidence for the regular payment of rent and contracted farming is extremely thin on the ground, and although many Lebaniegos must have been tenants, this group resists easy identification in the sources. Others were perhaps not so lucky; but, as we have seen, a servile element is only very dimly visible and it is the range of landowners which remains the most striking aspect of local society in the tenth-century sources. Indeed, peasants drop out of the documents from the middle of the tenth century, only reappearing in the eleventh (not treated here), demonstrating that they were able to avoid the newly emboldened aristocratic stratum, but that they were perhaps more suspicious of it than they were in 920.

³²⁰ T28 and T40.

³²¹ Wickham, ‘Rural Society’, p. 526: ‘Neighbours, above all, mattered: they were the authorities, often the only authorities, as to which land belonged to whom, or—most importantly—where its bounds actually lay’.

³²² García de Cortázar and Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad hispano-cristiana*, p. 88: ‘La solidez de las formulas feudales es ya en este siglo patente’.

The family group of Bagaudano and Faquilona demonstrate that village elites could be made or consolidated in this period, so flexible was the market of land transactions, and so unstructured was village society. It is also worth considering for a moment just how unstructured at the institutional level village communities seem to have been in the tenth-century Liébana. There is no indication whatsoever, in fact, that these communities had quasi self-regulatory bodies of prominent men who met to debate legal cases or anything of the sort, such as the *concilia* which occur occasionally in the documentation for other parts of northern Spain.³²³ Again, when placed in a comparative frame of reference, in this instance with Brittany, one is struck by just how well structured life in the Breton villages (*plebes* in Breton terminology) seems to have been. There is no comparative village-level figure of authority in the tenth-century Liébana, no person or persons who seem to have shared the responsibilities of the *machtierns* of Brittany, delineated by Davies as the leading figures at village gatherings; there is scant evidence, indeed, of there having been any sort of village-level assembly at all.³²⁴ Local political authority insofar as it depended upon public structures forms part of the analysis of the next section of this chapter, but it is apposite to add here that it must have resided on a day to day basis with the family members of the powerful and wealthy, such as Savarico and Vistrilli, and also with local priests, monks and abbots. Hierarchies within the nucleus of the village may have therefore been subject to the petty squabbles of local people, which for the most part went on without regulation of any sort; but these loose structures were precisely what gave society its characteristic dynamism in this period.

Nonetheless, the creation of large property portfolios was itself not without significance. Logically, the more Bagaudano and Faquilona—and, later, San Martín—owned, the less there was for smaller elements of the social formation to own. Peasants, as a result, had less to barter with, as the cumulative pool of land that had hitherto existed at the peasant level of society, carved up into portions of differing size, probably changing hands relatively frequently, saw its total volume progressively decrease. This did not necessarily, in the tenth century at least, lead to a rupture in the social fabric, and peasant recourse to the richest members of society did not significantly expand

³²³ Pastor de Togneri, *Resistencia y luchas campesinas*, pp. 28–29.

³²⁴ Davies, *Small worlds*, pp. 63–65.

during the course of the tenth century. Indeed, the creation of ties of more formal patronage than the informal associations between people of unequal means which are detailed in the charters, and which have, it bears repeating, characterized many human societies, may simply not have been necessary; ambitious and ruthless families could make themselves rich without having to resort to these tactics, and peasants, by and large, may not have needed to search for assistance beyond the village community.

The documents demonstrate that the connection established between Opila and San Martín de Turieno coincided with a spate of donation which made the monastery, in all probability, the biggest landowner in the Liébana. How this happened is clear enough; from the 940s, the early cycle of peasant sales to Opila's family seems to have given way to a tendency for Opila's family to enrich their monastery by means of aristocratic donation. The monastery, after all, could offer spiritual solace and a more extensive, physically rooted, network of patrons, to rich and poor alike. But it was not peasant society at the village level, the owner of one or two fields and perhaps half an orchard, who interacted on a consistent basis with the San Martín de Turieno after c.950. Rather, many donations seem to have been the work of the richer elements of society, attempting to solidify inter-familial links, and, crucially, to avoid the problems of division of family property that family ownership was plagued by. But the ramifications of this pattern of donation were far from wholly advantageous to the monastery in the long run.

It is beyond doubt that, in some measure, Bagaudano's and Faquilona's family profile became progressively more 'aristocratic' throughout the century, from one generation to the next; indeed, their cycle of purchase had paved the way for something altogether grander by the time their son became abbot of San Martín de Turieno in c.943. But being aristocratic in a landscape which still seems to have been relatively fragmented, such as the Liébana was in the second half of the tenth century, brought its own challenges; peasants were not sufficiently subdued, their options not sufficiently limited, for them to have to participate in meaningful numbers with the cycle of donations. That this is a mirage, contingent upon evidential survival is highly unlikely; peasant donations were precisely the sort of documents that it was in the interests of monasteries to keep. Thus, Bagaudano and

Faquilona were a *de facto* landowning elite in the sense that they owned on a scale which was beyond the imagination of most of their fellow Lebaniegos, but this did not stop the momentum of their family waning after one generation; this must say something about the fluidity of social structures regardless of its implications for the personalities of the individuals involved.

The upshot of this is that it seems that the social and economic framework within which peasants operated in the tenth-century Liébana was not much expanded by the alliance of the Bagaudano-Faquilona family group with San Martín de Turieno, because peasants, who stood to gain very little from donation, seem to have preferred the element of exchange that characterized the *compra-venta*; thus, where and when they thought it in their interests, they sold their assets to Bagaudano and Faquilona, but it made little sense for them to reduce their sum total of private assets until the monastery was also able to offer protection and patronage the like of which they could not obtain from the village community. This was not a tenth-century development, and, in the absence of developed mechanisms of elite coercion, it may help explain why the family of Bagaudano, Faquilona and Opila lost so much momentum so quickly once the grand cycle of donations made to them by other elite families came to an end. There was a ceiling level to how rich one could be in the Liébana, and it seems to have been reached by Opila before seigneurial developments saw the influence that went along with this wealth transmute into a very different sort of power well after 1000. The implications of this analysis are such that it is not possible to continue to paint a schematic and chronologically imprecise picture of feudal change in the tenth-century Liébana. In the tenth-century Liébana, social power in the local ambit derived principally from owning land, not men, and there was, as a general rule, no extension in the rights that the rich enjoyed over their less affluent neighbours. Village notables with dependent tenants, free tenants, some servile elements, and very many small to medium landowners jostled for position in a far from static world.³²⁵ To claim otherwise is to discredit the range of peasant activity in this century and to mischaracterize tenth-century socio-economic development in the Liébana.

³²⁵ The observation of Innes on the middle Rhine valley seems to tally with the Liébana in certain regards. Innes, *State and Society*, p. 93: 'This was not yet a world of *territorial* power, of rights of command over land that one did not own'.

The Public Sphere: Kings, Counts and Courts

The year 925, according to a heavily interpolated charter from the cartulary of Santo Toribio, was an eventful one for Count Alfonso.³²⁶ Wishing to transfer the body of St. Toribio to the church at Santa María de Lebeña, which he and his wife had built ('ego Alfonso comes et mea uxor Iusta cometissa hedificauimus ecclesiam Sancte Marie de Flebenia'), he ordered his servants to dig up the body of the saint ('famulis meis precepi ut foderent'), only to be struck blind, as were all his men, in an act of divine retribution on account of his improper behaviour ('cum cepissent fodere diuino iudicio flagellatus sum usque adeo quod factus fui cecus et milites mei qui errant immunes a culpa, qui cum sarculis cepissent fodere, lumen amisserunt').³²⁷ Fortunately for Count Alfonso, on offering the churches of Santa María de Lebeña, and San Román, plus the *villae* of Maredes and Bodia, to San Martín de Turieno (anachronistically called 'Sancto Toribio et Sancto Martino' in the charter), the count and his men were rewarded by Christ with the return of their sight ('recepi lumen...et famuli receperunt lumen').

There are, of course, myriad problems with this text, ranging from the apocryphal nature of its narrative, to its numerous anachronistic references to people and institutions.³²⁸ Indeed, given the falsehoods and embellishments which later monks wrote in to this document, it seems prudent to adopt a highly sceptical approach with regard to the utility of its content. But so overt are its exaggerations that they oblige us to consider a question hitherto unexplored in our analysis of the Liébana: namely, the extent to which there existed in the tenth century a functioning 'public sphere' of political action and how this operated in league with, or without, the cooperation of local elite

³²⁶ T33.

³²⁷ This church, still standing, is in the village of Lebeña, in Cillorigo.

³²⁸ For example: 'principe Ordione in Legione et comite Ferrant Goncavet in Castella' is a reference which is chronologically erroneous since no king Ordoño governed at this time and Fernán González was not Count of the Liébana in 925, nor, even, of Castile, until c.930, for which, see M. Torres Sevilla, *Linajes nobiliarios en León y Castilla (siglos IX–XIII)* (Valladolid, 1999), pp. 209–213. The first documented indication of the adoption of the name of Santo Toribio is found in T104 (1125), in which the monastery was referred to as that of San Martín and Santo Toribio. By the time of T111 (1181), the appellation of San Martín de Turieno seems to have disappeared, hence the reference 'in domo Sancti Toribii'. Later documents, analysed below, at least prove that Count Alfonso existed.

groups. Counts and their men may not have witnessed miracles, but they almost certainly were amongst the regulators and arbiters of social power in the Liébana in the ninth and tenth centuries; it is therefore instructive to try to understand the public framework within which their activity was mediated.

At its heart, the question of government in the tenth-century Liébana depends upon an understanding of the political geography of the region.³²⁹ Accordingly, it is essential to try to establish the extent to which the Liébana had been successfully integrated into the larger political unit of the Astur-Leonese kingdom. The Alfonsine cycle of chronicles from the later ninth century claims that the Liébana was in some measure subject to the political control of Asturian kings from as early as the reign of Alfonso I (739–757), but evidence in support of this contention is extremely thin on the ground.³³⁰ The teleology of Christian victory which overshadows much of the study of Spanish history has meant that many of the basic premises of the Alfonsine chronicles have been accepted too readily; ideological reasons have been a factor, but this situation to some degree reflects the impossibility of testing some of the chronicles' core assertions, of which the speed and manner of territorial expansion is a particularly germane example.

Nonetheless, it is very likely that Asturian kings in the eighth century considered the Liébana to form part of their wider (and expanding) kingdom. Although this is not demonstrable in any conclusive way (because the chronicles date to the late ninth century), there are reasons to suspect that this was indeed the case, and that the Liébana was one of the first outlying areas to be absorbed into the kingdom. For a start, there are the bald facts of geography; the Liébana lay just to the east of the eastern fringes of the Asturian kingdom's early nucleus in the valley of Cangas de Onís.³³¹ Thus, any eastward expansion of the kingdom which did not take the coastal route, and thereby circumvent the western and middle sectors of modern Cantabria, must have reached the Liébana. Archaeological excavation of the fortification in Piñeres has allowed for the postulation of Asturian origins in relation to this site, suggesting eighth-century utilization of what seems to have been a fortification along the

³²⁹ Collins, 'Spain', is without doubt the best brief overview of the period from 700 to 900.

³³⁰ *CAIfIII Rot.*, 14; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 14.

³³¹ *CAIfIII Rot.*, 11; *Albeldense*, XV, 1.

north-south route into and out of the Liébana.³³² We are given an indication too, in the chronicles, in the shape of explicit references to Cantabrian ruling elites, that Asturian elites enjoyed strong links with their Cantabrian counterparts shortly after the kingdom of Asturias had been founded, links which may not have been new by the first half of the eighth century; at the very least, the famous reference to Peter, duke of Cantabria, father of Alfonso I, seems to signify that the aristocratic groups of both areas were known to each other.³³³ Charters have also provided clues. The earliest Santo Toribio documents demonstrate an awareness of the existence of a distant political authority and implicit acquiescence to its theoretical rule; both surviving eighth-century Santo Toribio documents are dated by means of reference to the ruling monarch in Asturias, a practice which continued throughout the ninth and tenth centuries.³³⁴ T1, dated to 790, acknowledged the rule of ‘domno Vermudo in Asturias’; this king, Vermudo I (788–791), had only come to power two years before the charter was written, and it was clearly assumed knowledge, at least amongst certain Lebaniegos, that he represented a higher earthly authority.³³⁵

Taken together, there are thus good reasons to believe that the Liébana formed part of the Asturian kingdom’s territorial basis from the middle of the eighth century, but a conception, and even an acknowledgement, of overlordship, does not in itself mean that political authority was successfully translated into the genuine projection of ‘central’ power on the ground. This has not impeded the creation of a substantial amount of secondary material which has more or less accepted that the political consolidation of territorial gains by kings in the Liébana (and elsewhere) was illustrative of an attendant expansion of government, a process which began in the eighth century, as the chronicles

³³² Sarabia Regina, ‘Bolera de los Moros’, pp. 269–275.

³³³ *CAIfIII Rot.*, 11; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 13; *Albeldense*, XV, 3.

³³⁴ In the tenth century, of course, most references were to the king in León.

³³⁵ The other eighth-century charter is T2 (796) which correctly made reference to the ruling monarch, Alfonso II (791–842): ‘regnante domno Allefonso’. Compare with the observations of Davies regarding the patterns of royal styles throughout the ninth and tenth-century Liébana documents: ‘the charters are consistently dated with reference to the León ruler, and more often than not they call him *princeps*. In other words, from their vantage point across the mountains, where observers could in fact see several kings, the León ruler was the chief one’, W. Davies, ‘The incidence of *princeps* in the ninth- and tenth-century charters of northern Spain’, in J. M. Picard, H. Oudart and J. Quaghebeur (eds.), *Le prince, son peuple et le bien commun* (Rennes, forthcoming), pp. 1–15, at p. 8.

imply, before going on to gather significant momentum from c.900.³³⁶ This way of framing the history of early medieval political institutions, practices, and cultures is by no means restricted to an Iberian historiographical context, and it is worth pausing for a moment to express some initial forewarnings before we turn to the study of counts, kings, and courts on which this section will focus.

This is because it is crucial to recognize the risk of anachronism when discussing something as complex and heterogeneous as ‘government’. We need to be particularly cautious about expecting chronological progression from one decade to the next to be matched by undeviating growth in the institutions and mechanisms of government. This line of interpretation actually rests on assumptions that are very hard to support in Spanish charters, where delegated royal authority, although visible, most clearly in the shape of individuals holding the comital office, is nonetheless at no stage before 1000 sufficiently well drawn so as to be able to give us a clear picture of the range of duties with which royal agents were charged; this is not to say that counts, for example, were not important, merely that we do not know exactly why or how.

Counts in the Carolingian world are much better served on the evidential balance sheet than are their counterparts in the Astur-Leonese kingdom, allowing us to paint a more detailed picture of certain aspects of their activity in a way which is not possible in a non-Catalan Spanish context.³³⁷ George Molyneaux’s recent reappraisal of the role of royal agents in Anglo-Saxon England, in which he has made a strong case in favour of a more cautious estimation of the scope of action of ninth-century ealdormen, has demonstrated that the assumption of steady, incremental, institutional growth, as a natural consequence of stable kingship, even where this supposed growth cannot be shown, remains a common pitfall in the approaches of modern historians.³³⁸ ‘Such teleology’, as Molyneaux has underlined, ‘marginalises both the possibility of alternative paths of development and the

³³⁶ García de Valdeavellano, *Instituciones españolas*, chs. 20 and 21; Ceballos-Escalera y Gila, *Ordoño III*, pp. 35–48; G. Martínez Díez, ‘Las instituciones del reino astur a través de los diplomas (718–910)’, *AHDE*, 35 (1965), pp. 59–168; C. Sánchez-Albornoz, ‘Imperantes y potestates en el reino astur-leonés’, *CHE*, 45–46 (1967), pp. 352–373; Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, chs. 6 and 7, is much more measured.

³³⁷ For brief overviews on counts in a Carolingian context, see J. L. Nelson, ‘Kingship and Royal Government’, in *NCMH2*, pp. 383–430, especially pp. 410–413; R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians 751–987* (London, 1983), pp. 87–91; J. Jarrett, *Rulers and ruled in frontier Catalonia, 880–1010* (London, 2010), ch. 4.

³³⁸ G. Molyneaux, ‘The Formation of the English Kingdom, c.871–c.1016’ (Oxford Uni, DPhil. Thesis, 2010), pp. 178–189, on royal agents.

experience of contemporaries'.³³⁹ Seen this way, to accept the interpretative paradigm of increasingly coherent institutional growth, as many Spanish historians do, is to risk characterizing this period as one of systematic progression—from the murky outlines of government only vaguely discernible in ninth-century references to the holding of comital title, to the better evidenced manifestations of regalian and seigniorial prerogative which we see after the year 1000. Unfortunately, across part of the northern peninsula, the evidence is such that we cannot know what being a count implied 'on the ground' in the eighth and ninth centuries; but the temptation to imagine that this was necessarily what it implied for later royal agents should be avoided at all costs.

Yet some have gone further still, choosing to frame the political developments of the period from c.900 to c.1000 within the context of a public to private transfer of power, suggesting that centrifugal forces pulled the royal authority of the Leonese kingdom apart in the latter half of the tenth century.³⁴⁰ This does not seem to me a useful way of framing the political history of this period, which makes more sense when based on an analysis of the *de facto* realities of the power of political operators as they are presented to us in the documentary record. In part, this approach stems from traditional views predicated on the suppositions that medieval society bridged two better documented (and more illustrious) periods, the ancient world and the modern age, and that its history therefore told the story of a steady climb back towards 'civilization' after an initial Dark Age. All the same, the approach needs to be resisted, particularly perhaps with regard to the study of government and political structures, as Matthew Innes has warned, stating that 'we cannot go on seeing early medieval politics as simply inchoate or less developed forms of the "perfected feudalism" of the high Middle Ages, or degenerate and messy continuations of ancient society'.³⁴¹

There are thus significant methodological and historiographical considerations to be taken into account when approaching the study of government and its exercise in early medieval Europe, of which I have here only provided a basic outline for the purposes of context. But a more specifically Iberian hazard should be discussed before I consider the evidence from the Liébana in the light of

³³⁹ Molyneaux, 'Formation of the English Kingdom', p. 129.

³⁴⁰ Mínguez Fernández, *La España de los siglos VI al XIII*, chs. 10 and 11.

³⁴¹ Innes, *State and Society*, p. 11.

these initial framing observations. This is that an inherent danger of focusing on the gradual disintegration of central power and its increasing inability to control the periphery, a process thought to go hand-in-hand with the emergence of new, private, expressions of political power, is that this line risks over-generalizing what were still relatively complex and diverse political conditions in Iberia at the dawn of the tenth century. From their base in Oviedo, throughout the ninth century successive kings had come into increasing contact with the frontier aristocracies upon whose loyalty and cooperation they would depend in order to achieve some measure of political coherence and stability.³⁴² Expansion into new territories brought more wealth, plus larger and more sophisticated networks of aristocratic patronage, and was probably a significant factor in the creation of a stable and thriving court, first in Oviedo, evidenced by an array of striking ninth-century churches and a palace complex, and then, after c.910, in León, which soon became an active centre of political operations.³⁴³ But it did not stop frequent disharmony, both in the first few decades of the kingdom's existence, and in the later ninth and tenth centuries. There was thus from the outset a straightforwardly militaristic aspect to royal rule, as kings had no option but to send armed supporters into the field to persuade recalcitrant regional aristocracies of the benefits of cooperation. Allusions in the sources to eighth-century rebellions in the frontier regions, particularly Galicia, probably represent attempts to render royal conquest or the violent intimidation of regional aristocrats more palatable, in accordance with the ideological requisites of the Asturian court.³⁴⁴

Ninth- and tenth-century political conflict, abundantly documented, may however have had different roots altogether.³⁴⁵ Kings could not hope to govern a large and expanding realm by means of personal intervention alone; this latter did happen, but its disproportionate appearance in the documentary record reflects the fact that royal business was precisely the sort which would have been

³⁴² Collins, 'Spain', p. 278.

³⁴³ On the Oviedo buildings, see J. D. Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain* (London, 1990), pp. 27–46; M. Berenguer, 'Puntualizaciones sobre los edificios ramirenses del Naranco', *AEM*, 8 (1972–1973), pp. 395–404; C. García de Castro Valdés, *Arqueología Cristiana de la Alta Edad Media en Asturias* (Oviedo, 1995); on León, M. D. Campos Sánchez-Bordona and J. Pérez Gil, *El Palacio Real de León* (León, 2006), pp. 35–36; C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *Una Ciudad de la España Cristiana Hace Mil Años* (Madrid, 1965), pp. 57–85.

³⁴⁴ *CAI/III Rot.*, 16, 18; *CAI/III Seb.*, 16, 18.

³⁴⁵ C. Sánchez-Albornoz, 'Rebeliones en Galicia', in *Estudios sobre Galicia en la temprana edad media* (A Coruña, 1981), pp. 159–182.

recorded and kept, as well as its structural importance to the kingdom's rudimentary system of government. Kings relied on inducing cooperation, but this meant that they therefore had to choose between magnate factions, giving preference to some over others. To choose meant to make allies, who mostly revelled in the king's patronage and the access to enormous wealth it gave them, but to choose also meant to make enemies.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, favoured supporters may have stayed loyal for a time, but kings had to be wary of over-rewarding them, lest they strike out on their own; on the other hand, not to reward one's supporters with due generosity was to risk losing their support. Government, in the most limited sense of securing consensus and establishing a chain of command, was therefore a difficult balancing act contingent upon the creation of solid political ties at the personal level.³⁴⁷

What I have underlined above is that the study of government in tenth-century Spain is plagued with the sorts of difficulties from which it suffers in other contexts: namely, anachronistic assumptions derived from legal-institutional paradigms which assume that government signified the successful, top-down, marshalling and regulation of a system of delegated royal commands and decrees.³⁴⁸ But practice is likely to have been far more variable and less coherent than this view assumes; and, in fact, in the Liébana, effective delegated royal authority is very difficult to discern in any shape or form before the tenth century. The division of the kingdom into various districts for administrative purposes is often assumed to have been a relatively early phenomenon, and generic references to *territoria* have been considered signs of an aspiration on the part of the king's administrators to circumscribe specific politico-territorial areas, each placed under the jurisdiction of a royal officer.³⁴⁹ It may well be likely that the royal centre had before 900 demarcated the Liébana in this way, especially in light of the notice in the Alfonsine chronicles regarding the early 'population' of the Liébana, but evidence of governance of any sort is absent from the documentary record.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ Consider, to take a well-known example, the riches lavished upon Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and his family, analysed at length in Chapter 4.

³⁴⁷ Bloch, *Feudal Society*, ii, chs. XXVIII, XXX and XXXI.

³⁴⁸ Particularly influential has been F. L. Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne* (Providence, 1968), pp. 11–12.

³⁴⁹ Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 149–150.

³⁵⁰ Proponents of the view that the Liébana was established as a district of the embryonic Asturian kingdom in the eighth century have been able to draw upon Menéndez Pidal's sensible comment on the meaning of the verb

Ninth-century references to the *territorium* of the Liébana, whatever this might mean, are at any rate not very common.³⁵¹

It follows that we can say very little about administrative structures and their upkeep before 800. Nevertheless, one early Santo Toribio charter from 828 makes reference to an administrative framework mediated via the king, a bishop and his count: ‘et pro temporali iudicia insistente pariet post partem regi, episcopo, uel comite terri’.³⁵² The document does not seem to have been interpolated and its essential content—a sale made by Popendio and Nonita of the church of San Pedro de Viñón to San Martín de Turieno—is not inherently suspicious. It is true that the expression used in this charter to make this allusion to political structures is not found in any other ninth-century Liébana documents, but variations of it are found in certain tenth-century Liébana charters; at any rate, its exceptionality need not necessarily imply documentary corruption since it may simply be that certain phrases over time embedded themselves in the lexicon of scribes less successfully and uniformly than others. The allusions to an episcopal seat and to an area under the jurisdiction of a count are clear enough, even if the details of the incumbents of these important posts are not known to us.

Kings, if anything, are even more enigmatic figures in ninth-century Liébana material than are counts and bishops. A document from 831 allows us to postulate the existence of royally-owned lands in the Liébana, but it tells us nothing more.³⁵³ In this document, Ordoño and Proflinia included in their donation to Santa María de Baró all they owned ‘de donatione regis’, but this sort of reference plainly cannot help us to put together a more detailed notion of how royal power, in either its most direct or delegated form, worked in reality. Even more striking in this regard is the fact that kings did not visibly attend to business directly in this region. Indeed, not a single ninth-century document

‘populare’ in the context of the Alfonsine chronicles, in which he stated that the traditionally held notion of repopulating the territory with new settlers was better understood in the context of organizing or administering the territory in some, nonetheless, still rather vaguely understood way. For the original reference, *CAI/III Seb.*, 14: ‘Eo tempore populantur Primorias, Libana...’ Also, R. Menéndez Pidal, ‘Repoblación y tradición en la cuenca del Duero’, in M. Alvar López, A. Badía, R. de Balbín, L. F. Lindley Cintra (eds.), *Enciclopedia Lingüística Hispánica*, (2 Vols., Madrid, 1960–1967), i, pp. xxix–lvii.

³⁵¹ T11 (868) is an exception: ‘uinderemus uobis fratribus qui estis abitantes in locum Bellenie, territorio Liuanense’.

³⁵² T5 (828).

³⁵³ T7.

attests to royal presence in the Liébana—kings are simply not actors in our charters—even if it was evidently standard practice to allude to the Asturian monarchy in the dating clauses of documents.³⁵⁴ As we have seen, it seems that the ninth-century Liébana, in the minds of at least some of its inhabitants, formed part of a wider political entity whose king was considered to hold nominal control in the region; but proving that this control ever manifested itself on the ground, allowing royal will or instruction to be enforced, either via direct royal presence or the activity of leading figures acting in the king's name, is nonetheless beyond us.

In León, the king relied on a body of court officials, probably much like the *officium palatinum* of Visigothic tradition, of which the most significant appear to have been the *comes palatii*, the highest ranked magnate at court, and the *maiordomus*, or chief of staff.³⁵⁵ There are, however, reasonable grounds to suspect that kings intensified their relations with the greater magnates of the kingdom in the tenth century; this does not imply an expansion of government in the modern sense of the word, but rather an effort to delegate royal power more comprehensively throughout the kingdom. In a world of such limited and ineffective transport, the transfer of news was vital; to this end, delegations and regional representatives were summoned to León, and documents record the congregation of councils, at which the news and business of the realm were discussed.³⁵⁶ Given that governing necessitated personal contact, oaths of loyalty, and the fostering of small groups of trusted advisers, stronger links with regional aristocracies were indispensable, and they were deliberately nurtured as a result. Often, as between Galicia and León, this would be achieved by the cultivation of dense networks of patronage, fortified by marriage alliance.³⁵⁷ Kinship bonds therefore extended beyond the royal household, and invitations to form such close alliances with the royal centre would surely have been rarely spurned. But for the king to make any pretence at notional government beyond León, he was obliged to entrust magnates with considerable decision-making responsibilities,

³⁵⁴ Davies, 'The incidence of *princeps*', p. 8.

³⁵⁵ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 143–146.

³⁵⁶ For assemblies, see Cel29 (927), Cel191 (982).

³⁵⁷ For which, see Chapter 4.

as it was they who would hold courts, safeguard the security of the inhabitants of the regions under their jurisdiction, and, in places, collect tax or tribute for the king.³⁵⁸

Government therefore necessitated the delegation of power to the localities, with all of its attendant risks. Some of these risks materialized towards the end of Alfonso III's reign (866–910). In the early tenth century, certain magnate factions were so strong that they were able to ingratiate themselves with the sons of kings who had been given the rulership of an outlying region, or even raised to the status of *princeps*; indeed, the extent to which Alfonso chose to afford his sons increasing power in their own right during his lifetime, or had his hand forced by the *de facto* power of regional aristocracies and princely ambition is much debated.³⁵⁹ These tendencies were mutually reinforcing to some extent however, because although the instability of royal power in the provinces inspired princes and regional magnates to conspire, their physical dislocation from the centre may actually have seemed a useful solution for kings looking to keep both their sons and the frontier aristocracy in check. There was, however, clearly no easy way of guaranteeing stability. But this should not obscure the fact that the circle of people who actually mattered in the kingdom throughout the tenth century was very restricted; only was this not true in cases of extreme royal wealth—Charlemagne's circle, for example, must have been a good deal larger. The realities of politics at the time meant that this had to be so, since so much depended upon constructing relationships of trust and mutual benefit; whereas in the Roman Empire salaried officials could be fired and replaced, this was not the case in tenth-century Christian Spain, where the realities of kingship were such that political power was negotiated to a larger degree between centre and periphery.³⁶⁰

By the late ninth century, and throughout the tenth, the Kingdom of Asturias-León was divided into politico-territorial units of varying extension known as *comitatos*, *commissos* (or *commissa*), and *mandationes*, at the head of which, normally, seems to have stood one of the

³⁵⁸ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 130–131.

³⁵⁹ Alfonso III's kingdom was split into three sub-kingdoms on or around his death, each of which was governed by one of his sons. For some historians, this sort of division indicated the concentration of regional power; see Nelson, 'Kingship and Royal Government', p. 407: 'The establishment of a king's son in a sub-kingdom was an acknowledgement of regional power, and only to a lesser extent a limitation on it—an intrusion from the centre'.

³⁶⁰ *FEMA*, p. 58.

kingdom's greater magnates acting in the name of the king.³⁶¹ It seems that there was no single defining pattern which underpinned the creation and naming of these units, and we must avoid conceiving of this rather basic political system in terms of a state superstructure overseeing a network of tidily organized nodes of power. It is actually the case that the development of these politico-territorial units depended in large measure on the local manifestations of social structure which hitherto characterized each region. In the north-west, these circumscriptions were often quite small, and possibly based on ancient divisions which corresponded to the names of various ancient *populi*; in León, the system of *mandationes* was less well developed, possibly reflecting the royal centre's greater control of the areas that lay closer to the *sedes regia* and the political heartlands of the kingdom.³⁶² Regardless of the size of these political units, the importance of putting local knowledge to use in the creation of rudimentary systems of medieval government was paramount, which is why new men from the centre very rarely seem to have assumed roles in the periphery, with these positions apparently falling to groups of elite local men who were already significant regional landowners. The richest men in these outlying zones were best placed, after all, to utilize their knowledge of the geography—that is, of the location of central places and other rich families, of the courses of rivers and the whereabouts of good quality land—in order to regulate society.

It is not possible to make precise distinctions between the meanings of the terms *comitatos*, *commissos* and *mandationes* in the documentation from Liébana and Galicia which I have consulted in this thesis.³⁶³ It is in fact more significant to realize that all of these words had to do with an assumption of the exercise of royally delegated power. The specific duties for which these royal agents were responsible are hard to determine; certainly, they often presided at law courts, but there is only sparse evidence of their uniform involvement in tax collection.³⁶⁴ Sometimes the magnates who discharged these duties were invested with the title of *comes* (count), a title of long historical

³⁶¹ There is a full and lively debate on these terms. See Estepa Díez's paper for the classic statement in a Castilian context, C. Estepa Díez, 'Formación y consolidación del feudalismo en Castilla y León', in *En torno al feudalismo hispánico. I congreso de estudios medievales* (León, 1989), pp. 157–256. On Galicia, where public activity is very clear, including the taking of tax, see Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 144–151, and, for tax, pp. 151–159. More generally, see Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 146–151.

³⁶² Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 146.

³⁶³ I discuss the conferral of these responsibilities on to Galician magnates throughout chapter 4. The later *mandamentum* receives considerable coverage in Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, p. 243–248.

³⁶⁴ Davies, 'Judges and judging', *passim*.

tradition, conspicuously tied to the notion of public service in the Visigothic period.³⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the question of whether comital power approximated more closely to the public or private exercise of power in the ninth and tenth centuries is less clear-cut.³⁶⁶ As we shall see, these ideal-type conceptions of the organization and expression of political power should probably not be drawn in such sharp contrast as they often are.

In the tenth-century Liébana, it is not easy to understand the strength of public power or the facility with which it was projected onto society. In 924, Count Alfonso and his wife Justa (with whom we began this section), this time in a reliable charter, completed an exchange of orchards in Cesaria with Sona and Citi (*‘Sonna et Citi uobis comiti nostro domno Adefonso et uxiri tue Iuste’*).³⁶⁷ This is the first example from the Liébana charters in which a count featured as a principal actor in the events relayed in the document, but it is striking that he was not engaged in what we might consider ‘official business’, but rather completing a small-scale private transaction. Neither was this sort of transaction new for the count; the document informs us that as part of the exchange he handed over an orchard which he himself had bought from a certain Asperino, as Sona and Citi make clear (*‘Et uos dedisti nobis pumare circa ecclesia Sancti Christofori quem comparastis de Asperino’*). The count, it would seem, was not so far removed from local society that it prevented him from interacting with it on a private basis. Indeed, were he not styled ‘count’ in this document, it would be hard to distinguish him from any of the small- or medium-scale landowners which we have encountered in the documentation thus far.

³⁶⁵ This term has late Roman and Visigothic antecedents. In the Visigothic period, it was a title given to the grandest regional magnates.

³⁶⁶ To see the public order and the private order as the most representative forces of two diametrically opposed systems of the exercise of power, is probably unhelpful in relation to tenth-century Spain; in early medieval societies, the state of repair of surviving or reconstituting ‘central’ elements (strength of kingship, governmental apparatus, *etc.*) undoubtedly affected the exercise and the expression of social power in the peripheral areas of a kingdom, but both the public and the private had always co-existed to some extent, playing respectively a lesser or greater role in the political articulation of a given society. In its most local aspect, the regional manifestation of public power cannot but be characterized by its private exercise—agents acting in collusion with a central power—and local lords were infrequently so strong so as not to need to look to some higher authority. The usefulness of these terms is therefore only salvageable if we recognize that they are ideal-types; sets of criteria which rarely or never existed in their ‘perfect’ form.

³⁶⁷ T31.

Although it is impossible to provide any details with regard to the count's origins, it is evident that he was an extremely rich man; in 925 he and his wife made a large donation to Santa María de Lebeña, which they had built ('ecclesia que nos laborauimus'), of all they owned in that village, and in Cesaria ('in Plebenia sibe et in Cesarea'), including 'ipsos palacios cum suo exitus et regressus et terras et uineas et pumares et oliuares et figares et pumiferos et molinos, siue de donatione regis'.³⁶⁸ This is quite clearly a reference to an aristocratic residence of some sort, and given the range of assets that surrounded it, it may well have been a large house set amidst an estate. This would tally with the reference made in the charter to land which the count had received from the king, as it would also with the scale of assets one would expect to see in the possession of a regional magnate. Indeed, in this document we see a list of riches which outstrips anything we have seen thus far in the cartulary; quite apart from all of the landed assets included in this donation, the count possessed church treasures which only the richest can have been able to offer in private donations.³⁶⁹

Of the count's relationship with the rest of the community we can add little, in part because he featured in so few documents, although this in itself may be revealing. At any rate, evidence of interaction or cooperation between Count Alfonso and Bagaudano and Faquilona is not visible in these documents, and these powerful families seem to have pursued separate business transactions in the tenth century. It is very interesting that they did not witness each other's documents, given that they inhabited the same small world where the few richest families must have been known to each other. What makes all of this even stranger is the fact that the count's son, Vermudo, affirmed in the 960s that he was the nephew of Savarico and Vistrilli, and thus part of the wider kin group of the family, as we saw on page 110. Indeed, as we have said, the tenth century was a time of the creation and consolidation of an aristocratic class in the Liébana; however, the expression of these relationships may have changed from one generation to the next, as more stable ties took hold.

The count and his wife did not appear as actors in Liébana charters after 925, although the count did lend his signature to several other documents, in which repeated references to his office

³⁶⁸ T34.

³⁶⁹ 'de tesauo ecclesie crucem argenteam mirabile ex auro, et casa similiter, lucerna erea, candelabrum ereum, calice argenteum et patena'.

legitimized his nominal role as the voice of public authority.³⁷⁰ Count Alfonso's visible involvement in the public business of the Liébana was steady rather than prolific, since it was spread over more than twenty-five years and amounted to no more than three occasions in which the count did more than witness a document. At no stage are we given an idea, however, of the jurisdiction under the count's command; that is to say that we do not know whether he had been granted the powers associated with *comitatos*, *commissos*, or *mandationes*.³⁷¹ Furthermore, not a single document describes the delegation of royal authority of any sort to the count, and his links with the kings in León appear to have been infrequent; it cannot be insignificant though that Count Alfonso's regional authority was juxtaposed with the king's more comprehensive power, in dating clauses.³⁷²

Whatever sort of power the count enjoyed, it would appear that it was one which was only very vaguely tied to the notion of public government. He was, of course, powerful in one rather narrow regard, because he would probably have been able to get others to do his bidding simply by virtue of his status; however, the charters do not allow us to say that he shared actively in the projection of the king's power in order to influence or decide the outcome of local events. We therefore need to conceive of power as flexibly as possible in the tenth-century Liébana; having the comital title clearly did not necessarily make one a conduit for royal authority and local power did not automatically lead to supra-local influence. Count Alfonso and his wife Justa, for example, were wealthy individuals who employed officers of their own and witnessed documents—they are likely to have been amongst the richest and most influential members of Liébana society—but it is impossible to claim that their social activity as recorded in the Liébana charters suggests that they oversaw a regulated system of public justice, or were instrumental in the projection of royal power on the ground in the Liébana.³⁷³

It is possible that Count Alfonso's apparently rather limited ties to the king's court are illustrative of his status; a magnate he may have been, but perhaps a lesser magnate nonetheless.

³⁷⁰ Alfonso appears in T45 (941); T46 (941); T50 (946) and Piasca136 (952).

³⁷¹ His comital title is explicitly linked with the Liébana in Piasca136 (952): 'comite nostro Adefonso in Levanensem'.

³⁷² For example, from T46 (941): 'sub principe Ranemiro rex et comite Allefonso'.

³⁷³ T31 (924) is witnessed by a certain Emilianus 'uicarius de comite', who we might assume to be the count's deputy.

Without a certain physical and psychological proximity to the royal centre, it was probably very hard for regional magnates of less exalted status to win a place amongst the king's most trusted supporters. The king's inner circle would have been, after all, a jealously guarded theatre of operations, and to take one's place amongst the kingdom's grandest aristocrats may have required landed wealth on a scale which it was simply not possible to accrue in the Liébana. Kings had to prioritize, and it is likely to have been the case that the regions in which they would have cultivated a more intensive royal presence in the form of titled nobles holding court, convoking councils, and leading armies, promoted the crystallization of deeper rooted public structures in those places than it did in small regions such as the Liébana. In the absence of very well developed comital power and top-tier magnates, local elites, people like Bagaudano and Faquilona and their family, may well have been those most closely tied to the regulation of the peasant world.

This much is suggested by a document from 932, in which Bagaudano and Faquilona exchanged a vineyard which they owned in Basieda for one owned by Juan and Paterna in Turieno.³⁷⁴ This document was analysed by Barbero and Vigil, for whom it represented a clear sign of the growing seignorial power of Bagaudano and Faquilona.³⁷⁵ These historians arrived at this conclusion on the basis of the role that Bagaudano and Faquilona played in the resolution of a theft, said to have taken place sometime before the time of the writing of the document. The document tells us that the vineyard in Basieda given by this rich village couple to Juan and Paterna in 932, had originally been given to Bagaudano and Faquilona by a certain Toribio, as a compensation fee, on account of the assistance that Toribio had given his brother, whom he had helped hide after he (the brother) had stolen cattle from Egerio, Flacenco and Suinito.³⁷⁶ Barbero and Vigil suggested that Bagaudano's receipt of the vineyard is illustrative of the fact that the three peasants from whom Toribio's brother had stolen were Bagaudano's and Faquilona's dependents. This they may have been—Bagaudano and Faquilona made a small purchase from a certain Flacencio in 918—but the

³⁷⁴ T41.

³⁷⁵ Barbero and Vigil, *La formación del Feudalismo*, pp. 378–379.

³⁷⁶ 'et uos dedistis nobis Iohanni et Paterne aliam uiniem in Bosita, quem pariabit uobis Turibius filius Florenci et Teudille, pro eu quod celauit suum germanum ab bodimium qui furtabit illos III boues, unum de Egerio, et alium de Flacenco et tercium de Suinito et inuenit eum lex et ueritas et parabit uobis ipsa uinea'.

documentation from across northern Spain shows that a characteristic feature of judicial process was that magnates could and did receive the profits from ostensibly public procedures; thus, Bagaudano's and Faquilona's activity need not be unusually redolent of the exercise of private justice.³⁷⁷

Moreover, Bagaudano and Faquilona seem to have fulfilled a quasi-public role in the episode related by this document; they not only resolved a dispute but went on to frame it very pointedly in language which was unambiguously that of public justice ('inuenit eum lex et ueritas'). This invocation of due legal procedure is more likely to suggest that, in the absence of firmly established comital responsibility for this sort of dispute resolution (it needs to be stressed that counts in the tenth-century Liébana charters do not act as judges), the task fell to Bagaudano and Faquilona as important local operators, known amongst the society of the village world as people with the purchase and stature necessary to act as moderators for the public good. Count Alfonso, for some reason or another, had not been responsible for delivering justice in the episode related in T41. Thus, the implications are clear; the public sphere may have existed by c.930, but it was of very reduced dimensions.

Throughout the middle of the tenth century, although still theoretically subject to the appointment of kings, comital title and the holding of *commissos*, *comitatos*, and *mandationes* became ever increasingly associated with greater magnate families, transmuting into something akin to an hereditary honour.³⁷⁸ We shall see in Chapter 4 how three generations of one family held comital title, *commissos*, and *mandationes* in southern Galicia. A similar pattern can be discerned in what would become the important county of Castile too. Kings could, and did, on occasion, confiscate honours and titles associated with royal prerogative, such as *mandationes* and *commissos*, from those who challenged their authority, but they were mostly happy to allow families to retain this honour; to re-appropriate land and title would have been potentially troublesome, and sustained loyalty within

³⁷⁷ Innes, *State and Society*, p. 147. In several Sobrado documents, a payment was made to Count Hermenegildo for his adjudication of a number of criminal cases. See, Sob21 (931), Sob24 (931), and Sob29 (931). See Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 143–149.

³⁷⁸ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 148–149.

families depended in some measure on the development of precedent.³⁷⁹ Accordingly, the bearing of these titles and honours in certain circumscribed areas tended to become the hereditary right of many magnate families; but this was not the case in the Liébana.

The last reference we have to Count Alfonso from the Liébana material dates to 952, where reference is made to him as ‘comite nostro Adefonso in Levanensem’.³⁸⁰ How the public sphere operated, if at all, after his death, is not easy to clarify. In 959, Count Alfonso’s son Pepi Adefonsiz sold a vineyard in the *villa* of Frama to the priest Adica; although he was at no stage in the body of the document described as ‘count’, he made some claim to this office when signing the charter (‘Ego Pepi et comite in anc carta quem fieri uolui et relegendo cognoui manus meas’).³⁸¹ However, there is in the Liébana documentation no other evidence of his being titled count, or even engaging in the sorts of duties which we might expect of a public official. Moreover, a charter from 962 casts doubts over his ability to intervene in a public capacity.³⁸² This document records a court settlement made in relation to a dispute brought by the monasteries of San Salvador de Villeña and San Martín de Turieno over rights to land; the judge is in this instance named as Memne ‘qui est iudici de Pepi Adefonsus’. In other words, a professional judge acted on Pepi’s behalf in this dispute and yet neither Pepi (who is not called a count in this text) nor any other members of the Liébana’s leading families appeared at the settlement or signed the document. To be able to get a judge to act for him shows at least some degree of authority, but Pepe may not have understood comital office to connote direct personal involvement in judicial functions at this time in the Liébana.

Similarly, a very loose conception of what public authority implied can be deduced from the frequent appearance of Fernán González, count of Castile (c.930–c.970), in the dating clauses of the Liébana documents. There are no other grounds for imagining that the count of Castile held authority over the Liébana in the tenth century, as he is not once an actor in these charters. Furthermore,

³⁷⁹ It is not likely that these phenomena show that tenth-century kings were either inherently too weak to remove counts, therefore having no influence over who held comital title, or consistently so strong so as to be able to remove them as and when they chose, as conflicting branches of the historiography maintain. For confiscation, see Cel110 (955).

³⁸⁰ Piasca136.

³⁸¹ T57.

³⁸² T62.

Fernán González's appearance in the dating clauses of some Santo Toribio and Piasca documents make no claim to royally-invested authority of any sort. In fact he appears in formulations which merely reflect his role as count of Castile, demonstrating his political influence at court at this time rather than direct control of the Liébana.³⁸³ These allusions to him may too reflect the very loose conception of a public political authority characteristic to the Liébana at this time; it is, after all, highly significant that a document from Piasca could make allusion to 'Fredenando Gontesalbes comite in Kastela' during the period when, to the best of our knowledge, the actual count was Alfonso. At the very least, on the other hand, García de Cortázar and Díez Herrera were right to underline that it would appear that Count Alfonso's political authority was not 'uniformemente admitida en la totalidad de los valles lebaniegos'.³⁸⁴ But the implication that comital authority in the 930s in the Liébana did not even extend from one valley to the next poses serious questions of the nature and development of government in the region as a whole at this time.

We are on more certain ground in the 960s, during which time it seems that the royal centre may have taken more direct action, with the aim of drawing the Liébana further within its rudimentary structures. Fernando Rodríguez is in this period named as count of the Liébana in two documents, in which he seems to have overseen a donation to San Martín de Turieno, and another to Piasca.³⁸⁵ As Montenegro Valentín has highlighted, Count Fernando Rodríguez is conspicuously absent from any other Liébana documentation, and he has no traceable family or proprietorial ties in the region.³⁸⁶ Rather, he was a staunch ally of Sancho I (956–966), firmly entrenched amongst the king's most senior palatine supporters and very closely related to Leonese factions; his name appeared in many royal diplomas alongside that of the king and he was clearly a political operator on a scale that far outstripped the previous holders of comital office in the region.³⁸⁷ We can easily suspect that he was therefore assigned to the role by the king, perhaps in an attempt to impose more official regulation on the region.

³⁸³ Montenegro Valentín, *Santa Maria de Piasca*, pp. 158–159

³⁸⁴ García de Cortázar and Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad hispano-cristiana*, pp. 201–202.

³⁸⁵ T60 (961): 'et comite Fredenando Roderici in Lebana confirmabit istum testamentum de Vermudo Adefonsiz'; Piasca242 (966): 'Regnante rex Sanctius in Legione et comis Fredenandus Ruderiz terra libanensi'.

³⁸⁶ Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, p. 160.

³⁸⁷ PMH92 (966); Sahagún175 (960) and Sahagún176 (960).

Whatever the case may be, we do not hear of him again in the Liébana documentation, suggesting that he may not have attended to business there with great frequency; but there are further signs that the Liébana was gradually being absorbed into the political structures of the Kingdom of León.³⁸⁸ From some imprecise moment in the last third of the tenth century, it seems that the Banu-Gómez, a leading family associated with the countship of Saldaña, took comital title in the Liébana too.³⁸⁹ A long tradition held that this family descended from Diego Muñoz, the son of Munio and Gulatrudia, but it has now been convincingly shown that they were in fact another family entirely; the fact that one of the Banu-Gómez's most illustrious ancestors was also named Diego Muñoz has only added to the confusion, but this latter was in fact the Count of Saldaña, and Montenegro Valentín has shown how the lives of these men, who shared the same name, only partially coincided, the Count of Saldaña dying shortly after 951, whereas his namesake can be seen in Santo Toribio documents from the 960s.³⁹⁰

The Banu-Gómez were amongst the most trusted supporters of the Kings of León, and their links with the counts of Castile were well established. Gómez Díaz, the first of the line to hold comital title in Liébana as well as Saldaña, was consistently involved in court politics throughout the 960s and the early 970s.³⁹¹ But here too we should be cautious about the level of personal intervention of the new count in the Liébana; although we know he was count of the Liébana from at least 977, neither he nor his successor, García Gómez, actively partook in the government of the region on an important scale.³⁹² In light of the relatively poorly-documented presence of the Banu-Gómez counts as actors in the Liébana, it remains difficult to assess the significance of these changes. It is true that we have seen that a much more important magnate family became associated with the region in the late tenth century, possibly with the active support of kings who may have grown tired of the apparent lack of public authority in the Liébana hitherto, but it is striking that counts did not begin to appear in the Liébana documents conducting court proceedings or taking tax, as they did elsewhere.

³⁸⁸ Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 178–190.

³⁸⁹ Torres Sevilla, *Linajes nobiliarios*, pp. 236–274, for the Banu-Gómez.

³⁹⁰ Montenegro Valentín, *Santa María de Piasca*, pp. 171–173.

³⁹¹ Gómez Díaz was a royal favourite under Sancho I, witnessing two documents in 960, in Sahagún175 and Sahagún176. In 971 he remained a senior magnate, appearing amongst the supporters of Ramiro III (966–985), in Sahagún261.

³⁹² Sahagún288 (977): ‘comite Gomizi Didaz in Libana’; T76 (990): ‘et comite Garcias Gomez in Levana’.

Indeed, although the late tenth century may have been an important time insofar as the organization of governmental structures in the Liébana was concerned, it is nonetheless no small irony that the Liébana, one of the most symbolically important territories of the Kingdom of Asturias-León, seems only to have been a meaningful fixture of its political structures from after the late tenth century.

Fittingly, it was Bagaudano's and Faquilona's son Opila, who, much as his parents had done in 932, seemed to represent some sort of public authority, thirty years later, in the eyes of a local community which was still overwhelmingly defined by the fluid dynamism of its social structures.³⁹³ In 962, the abbot oversaw a dispute over the ownership of a vineyard in Mus between Sisecuto and Fernando which had more of the 'public' about it than any of the actions we saw undertaken by the various people invested with the comital title throughout the century. Accompanied by an important retinue ('In iudicio Hopila abbas, Uermudo Allefonsiz (the count's son), Gotini et Martinus, puerum regis, uel aliorum multorum iudicium'), and aided by court officers named, as in all public courts, *saiones*, Opila passed judgement ('quod iudicaui manus mea feci').³⁹⁴ Accordingly, justice was a very local matter in the Liébana of the tenth-century, and it did not depend on sophisticated administrative structures to function. Not only does this reinforce our earlier remarks on the need to imagine government in terms free of anachronism, it also serves to highlight the spectacular rise of Opila's family, who rose to wealth and influence of a scale which saw them take on quasi-public functions in the local community, consolidate their status with another rich family, and install their son as abbot—only to disappear within fifty years. A tenth-century trend in the Liébana seems to have been that of local elites controlling the judicial process; and this local influence did not really fall away throughout the documented period of the tenth century. It seems doubtful, though, that these local counts ever really held the reins of authority in a significant way; this will become even more clearly delineated when we come to analyse the sort of public authority we see throughout the tenth century in Galicia.. It is said that politics, when ones peels away all of the layers, is always local; in the tenth-century Liébana, the public sphere of kings, counts, and public courts was so ephemeral, that it had to be thus.

³⁹³ T66.

³⁹⁴ 'in presencia Hopila abbas et sagoni Allorito'.

4. Southern Galicia

The Family of Rosendo: Contextual Considerations

In early March 934, Bishop Rosendo of Dumio, together with his brothers and sisters, Munio, Froila, Adosinda, and Ermesinda, confirmed a document which ratified the division amongst these five siblings of lands inherited from their grandparents and parents.³⁹⁵ This act of division survives in the form of a charter from the cartulary of Celanova, known to us as the *colmellum divisionis* of 934, and its importance rests in that it allows us to appreciate the huge wealth enjoyed by Rosendo's family for at least two generations prior to his own ('Denique placuit nobis ut faceremus inter nos colmellum divisionis de uillas ex successione auorum nostrorum Hermenegildi et Ermesinde, Eroni et Adosinde, uel etiam genitorum nostrorum Gutieris et Ilduara').³⁹⁶ The text is unequivocal with regard to the origins of this wealth, affirming that it was at least in part long standing, from which we can deduce that it stretched back into the ninth century. We are also told something about how this wealth was acquired; the named ancestors of Rosendo and his siblings had accumulated such riches by means of both outright purchase and the strategic consolidation of family assets ('comprauerunt uel donigum acceperunt atque de stirpe prendiderunt'). In short, what we face is a document which provides evidence of sustained family interest in land and property in Galicia, on a very large scale, throughout what we must assume to be more or less the century from 850 to 950.

The family at the heart of this document was very probably the most powerful in late ninth- and tenth-century Galicia.³⁹⁷ They are particularly well known to us because one of their number, Bishop Rosendo, was the subject of a hagiographical text written by the twelfth-century monk,

³⁹⁵ For discussion of Rosendo's identification with the see of Dumio, see pp. 174–175.

³⁹⁶ Cel40.

³⁹⁷ Isla Frez has written of their 'extraordinario poderío económico y político', adding that the family 'ocupaba el más alto nivel entre los magnates gallegos', in Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, p. 81.

Ordoño of Celanova.³⁹⁸ Rosendo served as abbot of Celanova in the mid-tenth century, guiding the monastery through a momentous period in which its patrimony grew at an impressive rate. Numerous charters from tenth-century Galicia also provide proof of the very high status which Rosendo enjoyed both within and beyond the monastic community of Celanova; he is seen, for example, conducting transactions and forming relationships of patronage on several occasions both before and during his abbacy.³⁹⁹ The basis of his power is clear enough too; in the *colmellum divisionis* of 934, Rosendo alone was apportioned the following share of his ancestors' landed wealth:

The share of Bishop Rosendo comes from: in the Porto district, Leza with Labra⁴⁰⁰; in Buvalé⁴⁰¹ Caneto de Auriense, Adisso and the pass of Reza and its pastures (*saltos*), that is, the pass and also the pastures beyond that part of the river up to the stream which flows from Castro Laureto and joins the river Miño, Mauregi with the orchards of Vizoi, and Viduas and Fraseneto; in Caldelas, half of Pinaria⁴⁰²; in Monte Roso, the *villa* of Insula, and the fifth part of Bustos and

³⁹⁸ This text is available, along with a critical study, in VR. Their analysis has led the authors to posit a date of around 1170 for the text, in VR, pp. 47–54.

³⁹⁹ From the foundation of Celanova in 936 until his death in 977, Rosendo is explicitly named either as the sole or joint recipient of donation, or one party of a *compra-venta*, in approximately seventy Celanova documents; this figure can only be approximate because there are some occasions on which the precise nature of Rosendo's involvement is ambiguous.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Leza', according to the index compiled by Emilio Sáez Sánchez and Carlos Sáez Sánchez is a 'felig. del antigo concejo de Maia', in Portugal, *feligresía* meaning a rural parish in modern Castilian, for which *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, p. 192. Also, note that there is a river Leça which runs through northern Portugal, which seems to firm up this identification. 'Labra' is also given by Emilio Sáez Sánchez and Carlos Sáez Sánchez as 'felig. del antigo concejo de Maia', in *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, p. 192.

⁴⁰¹ The precise location of the territory known as Búbal is still a matter of debate. Ermelindo Portela Silva has neatly summarized the problem (personal comment): 'Para Búbal, los límites no están tan claros. Es ciertamente el territorio en que se halla el monasterio de Celanova y se sitúa por tanto en la zona suroccidental de la provincia de Ourense. La conservación actual del topónimo en el río Búbal y en las parroquias situadas en su valle de Santa María y San Salvador de Búbal nos remiten a un espacio diferente en el suroeste de la provincia de Lugo. No es imposible que, pese a la coincidencia toponímica, se trate en la edad media de ámbitos distintos'. Whilst it is not impossible that there were indeed two regions in southern Galicia both known as Búbal, this seems to me unlikely, given their proximity. It is more likely that Búbal was a designation given to a large area, or to certain zones of a large area, which today includes parts of the provinces of Ourense and Lugo. Díaz y Díaz, in VR, at p. 137, n. 56, is surely right in this regard, describing Búbal cautiously as 'extensa región que comprendía una parte pequeña al Sur de Lugo, desde Chantada, y parte de la provincia de Ourense, desde San Esteban de Ribas de Sil hasta el Sur de la ciudad de Ourense, abarcando las cuencas del Búbal, afluente del Miño, y del Arnoya. Dentro del valle de este último está Celanova, que en consecuencia aparece a menudo, como aquí, relacionada con el Búbal'. With regard to the specific *villae*, Emilio Sáez Sánchez and Carlos Sáez Sánchez identify 'Caneto de Auriense' as 'vila en Búbal', in *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, p. 180. For 'Adisso', similarly we are told that is, 'en Búbal', *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, p. 176. Likewise 'Castro Laureto' and 'Mauregi', also in Búbal, for which see *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, p. 180 and p. 194 respectively. Toponyms can be of some help in the location of places cited in the charters; in Cel40 two toponyms seem to be identifiable with locations in contemporary south-western Ourense, which makes sense given that Cel40 describes them as close to 'flumine Minei' (the river Miño). These are 'Castro Laureto', today Castro de Louredo, situated in between the *parroquias* of Mugares and Alongos in the *municipio* of Toén, *comarca* of Ourense, thirty kilometres north of Celanova. Similarly, 'Reza' is situated only 12 kilometres to the east of Toén, on the banks of the Miño, on the outskirts of the city (and thus *municipio* and *comarca*) of Ourense.

⁴⁰² Literally, the place of the pine-trees ('Pinaria'), in what is almost certainly Castro Caldelas, situated in the *municipio* of the same name, in the *comarca* of Terra de Caldelas, in the province of Ourense, approximately

Ulturaria and Sardinaria⁴⁰³; in the outlying areas (*sub urbe Lucense*) of the city of Lugo, Tamega⁴⁰⁴; in Toronio, Santa Eulalia with Sisnandi and half of Enisio⁴⁰⁵; in Saliense, Arra⁴⁰⁶; in Carnota, Tauiro and Curis and Ienigo with its hill (*monte*)⁴⁰⁷; likewise he has received in the suburbs (*suburbio Conimbrie*) of Coimbra, Botton, and the fifth part of Quiagios, and a fifth of Peraria and a fifth of Avellanas⁴⁰⁸; similarly he has accepted a fifth of the *villa* Cipriani and of the *villae* of Pinione; and also in Anta, Villela, in Abbazes, in Oliuaria, and in Goianes and in the *villae* of Lampazas, a fifth⁴⁰⁹; in Baroncelli, a fifth of the *villa* that belonged to the king⁴¹⁰; in Lemos, a fifth of the *villa* Mauri⁴¹¹; in the *villae* of Navia, Sabatelli and Angulo Malo, a fifth⁴¹²; of the *villa* Sicca, in Berido, a fifth⁴¹³; in land far away from here (*Terra de Fora*), that is, the fifth part of Ordas, of Ripa Ruvea, Aleisonza, Sollantio, and in Octario those lands that belonged to lord Ero, and in Pessó near Zamora; in Asturias, likewise, a fifth part: that is, in Cordouario, in Canneto and in Quinto; and subsequently that which he obtains pertaining to the lands of the church, that is; in Búbalo, Varzena; by the banks of the river Minei; in Laurentiana, Sancto Adriano.

This much Rosendo owned in 934—that is, before the main cycle of his property acquisition at the helm of Celanova really got underway—and it is the geographical range of his wealth which is immediately most striking, for his family owned all over the north-west of Iberia, their landed wealth spilling beyond the modern boundaries of Galicia into northern Portugal, the Bierzo, the Zamora region, and Asturias. Nonetheless, the greater part of the extension of the landed wealth of Celanova which took place during Rosendo's abbacy did so within the confines of present-day Galicia,

seventy kilometres to the north-east of Celanova. On the derivation of 'Pinaria', see M. P. Álvarez Maurín, *Diplomática Asturleonese. Terminología Toponímica* (León, 1994), pp. 251–252.

⁴⁰³ All small places or hamlets in modern-day Monterroso, a *municipio* of the *comarca* of Ulloa, in the province of Lugo. Monterroso is approximately ninety kilometres north of Celanova.

⁴⁰⁴ It is unclear whether Tamega is here a name for territory in the outlying suburbs of Lugo, or else, less likely, refers to the modern-day river named the Tamega. The confusion stems from the fact that Lugo sits on the river Miño, and the Tamega, a tributary of the river Duero, runs from Verín in the extreme south of the province of Ourense, through into Portugal. However, the text states 'Sub urbe Lucense', which should incline us to favour this identification.

⁴⁰⁵ Almost certainly *villae* in Toronio. Ermelindo Portela Silva (personal comment) has arrived at the following definition of the territorial limits of Toronio, claiming that it was 'limitado por el mar y la ría de Vigo al oeste y al norte, el río Avia al este y el río Miño al sur'. This included most of the southern third of the modern province of Pontevedra. For more on this topic, see M. Fernández Rodríguez, *Turonium: Aproximación al estudio de una tierra medieval* (Santiago de Compostela, 2004).

⁴⁰⁶ Arra, a *villa* in modern day Salnés, a *comarca* on the west coast of Galicia between the *rías* of Arousa and Pontevedra, in the province of Pontevedra, given in *Col. Dipl. Cel.* p. 178.

⁴⁰⁷ Presumably all located in the modern day *pueblo* of Carnota, a *municipio* of the *comarca* of Muros, on the north-western coast of Galicia, in the province of A Coruña.

⁴⁰⁸ All places in the Coimbra region of Portugal; see Cel12 (916) for Peraria.

⁴⁰⁹ We have no further information about any of these, except for 'Oliuaria', which is in Céltigos, a *parroquia* of the *municipio* of Ortigueira, in the *comarca* of Ortegal, in the province of A Coruña.

⁴¹⁰ We know Baroncelli was situated in the extreme south of the province of Ourense, thanks to a reference in Cel34 (931), which gives details of a transaction in which a 'villa qui iacet in Baroncelli, riuulo Tamega, villa que vocitant Berini' is exchanged for another.

⁴¹¹ The area known today as the *comarca* of Terra de Lemos, covered an extensive area whose principal nucleus since the medieval period has been Monforte de Lemos, some seventy kilometres north-east of Celanova, in the south of the province of Lugo. This area lay at the heart of the sphere of landed interest of Rosendo's family.

⁴¹² Navia probably located by, and named after, the river of the same name in the province of Lugo, which descends from modern Pedrafita do Cebreiro to the mouth of the *ría* Navia in contemporary Asturias.

⁴¹³ I have been unable to trace these places via their toponyms; Berido, however, refers to the modern Leonese *comarca* El Bierzo.

Rosendo's grand familial affluence acting as a secure basis from which Celanova was to cast an increasingly large shadow over southern and central Galicia during the middle decades of the tenth century.

It is argued here that this process, which I call the 'localization of aristocratic landed interest', was a major change of the tenth century within the context of this Galician case study. Under Rosendo's guidance, the monastery would entrench itself within the local community, allowing aristocratic interest to coalesce at the centre of a vast property and patronage network, which latter was far less susceptible than private lay landholdings to the divisions and complications wrought by inheritance and family dispute. The sheer speed with which the monastery grew in wealth and social reach throughout the middle third of the tenth century indicates that Rosendo's agency must have been crucial to this phase of expansion; this is to some extent reflected in the documentary record, for he was more often than not singled out in the invocations of charters by noble and non-noble alike. Wealth was attained from diverse sources; royal gifts and concessions were offered to the monastery throughout the tenth century, but significant non-aristocratic gifts and *compra-ventas* also added to the steady accumulation of landed assets.⁴¹⁴ Celanova's story in the tenth century therefore seems to offer us a paradigmatic example of a monastery's insertion into a rural milieu and the subsequent alteration of that milieu's social dynamic as a result of the effects of the monastery's proprietorial policy on local society. But in what follows I shall look to explain how, why, and when this happened, with the object of understanding how this change affected both aristocratic and non-aristocratic elements of the social formation.⁴¹⁵

It is hardly controversial to state that Rosendo could not have attained the influence and prestige he enjoyed by the time of his death in 977 were it not for his familial background, and it is the process by which his family were able to retain and to build upon their hegemonic position in

⁴¹⁴ We know from the *colmellum divisionis* that Rosendo's family had been the objects of royal largesse before 934, since a portion of the assets inherited by Rosendo is described as 'in Baroncelli uilla qui fuit de rege V parte'.

⁴¹⁵ For an example of the orthodox approach to monastic landholding in tenth-century Galicia, see M. I. Carzolio de Rossi, 'La constitución y organización de un dominio monástico benedictino: Celanova (s. X–XI)', *CHE*, 73 (1991), pp. 5–74.

Galicia during this period that forms the centrepiece of my analysis in this chapter.⁴¹⁶ It is unlikely, however, that Rosendo's grandparents and great-grandparents were men 'made' by the Asturian kings, since these latter would have most likely striven to compel the loyalty of the already well-established aristocratic stratum of the north-west of Iberia when they first made contact with these distant frontier magnates in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁴¹⁷ Although much remains unclear about Galician history from the installation of the Suevic kingdom in the early fifth century, this latter's absorption by the Visigothic state in the late sixth, through to the beginnings of eighth-century contact with the Asturian kingdom, it is remarkable that Galician aristocrats were amongst the richest of early medieval, non-Catalan, Christian Spain.⁴¹⁸ This, at least, is the impression given in charters from more or less the moment that our surviving documents begin, across the peninsula, in the early ninth century. The evidence for long-standing, extremely wealthy aristocrats in Galicia, discussed in detail in the next subsection of this chapter, is indeed compelling, but for now we need to appreciate the significance of this large-scale aristocratic wealth within the context of Rosendo's family and the monastery of Celanova. This is because Rosendo's familial wealth was crucial in its own right to the social changes which took place in southern Galicia throughout the middle of the tenth century, for this wealth ensured that the monastery was able to purchase from, and, to a lesser degree, attract the donation of, the peasant element of local society. Thus, wealth of this sort was a stable platform for the accumulation of further wealth, and this brought political power too.

Such political power, crystallizing in the early tenth century in the form of marriage alliances with the royal house of Asturias, contributed to a decisive consolidation of the westward shift of the political gravity of the kingdom, which had been underway since at least the time of Alfonso III (866–

⁴¹⁶ For Rosendo's death, see VR, pp. 156–159.

⁴¹⁷ Collins, 'Spain', pp. 278–279; C. Baliñas Pérez, *Gallegos del año mil* (A Coruña, 1998), pp. 88–97; Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 171: 'todo apunta a que estos grupos aristocráticos norteños estaban enraizados en realidades anteriores, es decir, a que con algunas salvedades, la aristocracia de este período proviene de la de la época visigoda'.

⁴¹⁸ Baliñas Pérez, *Gallegos del año mil*, p. 88: 'Primeramente, eran ricos, bastante ricos para lo que era el conjunto de la Península en los siglos VIII y IX, muy ricos si los miramos en el contexto de la España septentrional del momento. Efectivamente, en cuanto empezamos a disponer de informaciones documentales a raíz de la incorporación de Galicia al espacio político del reino asturiano, lo primero que nos llama la atención es la existencia de un grupo de acomodados propietarios dueños de extensas posesiones territoriales'. For Suevic and Visigothic Galicia, see P. C. Díaz Martínez, 'Gallaecia: de reino suevo a provincia visigoda', in G. Pereira Menaut and M. X. Fernández Cerviño (eds.), *Galicia fai dous mil anos. O feito diferencial galego* (2 Vols., Santiago de Compostela, 1997), i, pp. 253–278.

910). Contrary to the line taken in much of the historiography, recognizably public power, at least nominally, underwent consolidation in tenth-century Galicia, as kings continually conferred office on Galician magnates, including several members of Rosendo's family (discussed below), thereby drawing the region's aristocrats into an ever more complex nexus of ties with the royal centre.⁴¹⁹ That this was concurrent with the extensive 'private' accrual of large-scale landed assets, achieved by aristocratic groups working in unison with local monastic institutions, shows that schematic notions based on the displacement of public power by the emergent private sphere significantly undervalue the complexity of the dynamics that characterized social change in early medieval Galicia. Here I plan to address these problems by first sketching out the family history of Rosendo, examining the wealth and influence attained by his forebears; these initial observations will be set within a wider framework that explores considerations of geography and the little we can say about the social formation of Galicia before the foundation of the monastery of Celanova in 936. Thereafter, I turn my attention to questions broadly related to Rosendo's role as a political operator, as well as its ramifications for our understanding of the political structures of the kingdom more generally. From here, I argue that the political content that constituted the basis of these relationships was not significantly altered throughout the tenth century. I follow this with an examination of local society in the region, asking how the villagers of Rabal experienced the shockwaves created by the unification of the region's wealthiest family with the monastery of Celanova.

Rosendo was born in the early tenth century, possibly in northern Portugal, an area in which his family possessed land on a large scale, as evidenced by the *colmellum divisionis*.⁴²⁰ His parents

⁴¹⁹ On fragmentation and localization, see S. Castellanos García and I. Martín Viso, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)', *EME*, 13 (2005), pp. 1–42. On feudalizing forces, Mínguez Fernández, *La España de los siglos VI al XIII*, chs. 10 and 11.

⁴²⁰ M. C. Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara, una aristócrata del siglo X* (Sada, 1998), pp. 12–17. Three principal theories have been advanced with regard to the identification of Rosendo's birthplace. These all interpret differently the following clue given in the *VR* and relate to the place in which Rosendo's mother Ilduara found herself when, after much prayer, she fell pregnant: 'ut coniux eius Ilduara remaneret apud Salam, nequaquam cessans a proposita oratione (erat autem Sala villa regia, ab ecclesia que super montem Cordubam in honore sancti Salvatoris fuerat consecrata, distans fere per duo miliaria)', *VR*, pp. 118–121. This Sala has been identified as a settlement close to Santo Tirso, in the district of Porto, Portugal. This makes great sense since the 'montem Cordubam' recounted in the *VR* is easily recognizable as the current parish of Monte Córdova in the Santo Tirso municipality. It has also been suggested that this Sala may refer to a toponym from the area of Celanova itself, Cela de Salas. In support of this latter assertion, 'montem Cordubam' has been identified with

were Gutier Menéndez and Ilduara Eriz, who were themselves members of well-established aristocratic families. Emilo Sáez Sánchez has shown that on Rosendo's paternal side it is possible to trace his family back to his great-grandparents, Gutier and Elvira, and Gatón and Egilo.⁴²¹ Documentary evidence for these ninth-century persons is scant, but a document from the Tumbo de Sobrado records a transaction made in the early eleventh century involving land which can be traced to the property portfolio of these distant ancestors of Rosendo.⁴²² It is very likely that Rosendo's great-grandfather Gutier was the individual seen confirming two royal donations under that name in the second half of the ninth century.⁴²³ Significantly, if this mid-ninth-century Gutier, Rosendo's great-grandfather, was indeed an influential aristocrat of the sort who consorted with kings or was involved in witnessing royal documents, then Rosendo's family enjoyed elite political status from at least the mid-ninth century.

Pena Corbeira. Either of these two hypotheses seems plausible; a third suggestion, linking Sala with the village of Salas in the Asturias, is not based on firm foundations and is consequently not discussed here.

⁴²¹ E. Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes de San Rosendo', *Hispania*, 8 (1948), pp. 3–76 and pp. 179–233, at pp. 3–5.

⁴²² In order to explain this link to Rosendo, it is necessary to untie various strands of this complicated genealogy. Although the *colmellum divisionis* of 934 gives us the names of Rosendo's parents and grandparents (respectively, Gutier and Ilduara; and Hermenegildo and Heremesinda [paternal], and Ero and Adosinda [maternal]), it does not give any information about Rosendo's great-grandparents. For that information, one needs to look further afield, to a document from the Tumbo of the monastery of Santa María de Sobrado de los Monjes, situated close to the source of the Tambre river, in the Présaras valley in the modern province of A Coruña. Sobrado was founded in 952 by local aristocrats, Hermenegildo and his wife Paterna, counts of Présaras. This Hermenegildo, Count of Présaras, is patronymically known as Hermenegildo Aloítiz, and he is the figure who holds the key to unravelling this part of the family tree, for it is the documented inheritance of the son of Hermenegildo Aloítiz and his wife Paterna, Sisnando Menéndez, bishop of Iria-Compostela in the mid-tenth century, which explains Rosendo's links to Gutier and Elvira, his great-grandparents. A document from Sobrado dated to the year 1016 tells us the following: 'sicut illa obtinuit domnus Sisnandus episcopus, et ille habuit de susceptione parentum suorum Hermegildus et Paterna, et illi habuerunt ea de parentes suos et avios Aloitus et Argilo, Gutier et Gelvoire'. This Aloitus was Aloito Gutiérrez, as Sáez Sánchez has convincingly demonstrated, the brother of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, Rosendo's grandfather named in the *colmellum divisionis*; Aloito Gutiérrez and Hermenegildo Gutiérrez therefore must share the same parents. The Sobrado document of 1016 tells us that these were Gutier and Elvira. Rosendo's descent from his great-grandparents Gutier and Elvira, through to his grandparents, Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and Ermesinda, and his parents Gutier and Ilduara, can therefore be reconstructed via the analysis of two key documents: one from Sobrado from 1016, and the *colmellum divisionis* of 934. The Sobrado document is Sob9. For Aloito Gutiérrez, Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', pp. 4–6.

⁴²³ The first of these documents, Flo69, is from the year 860 and it records a royal donation in the time of Ordoño I to Frunimio, the bishop of León; unusually amongst these documents, this diploma is unanimously considered to be authentic. The Gutier mentioned here could quite conceivably be Rosendo's great-grandfather, since the role he is seen performing, (witnessing a royal document), corresponds with the duties of magnates. The second of these documents, Flo112, shows a Gutier witness a document from 875 in which Alfonso III donates and concedes ('donamus atque concedimus') the *villa* of Avelicas to the priest Beato and to Cesario, which they had taken by means of *presura* in the middle of the ninth century.

By the tenth century, we are on firmer evidential ground, and it is by now clear that Galicia had a sizeable aristocratic class which included some of the kingdom's grandest frontier magnates. These magnates not only had to negotiate power with the royal centre, becoming in many cases, as we shall see, less or more pliable royal agents who nonetheless enjoyed significant autonomy; they also had to channel and balance their ambitions amongst themselves.⁴²⁴ Indeed, crucial to the development of the power of the great Galician magnates of the tenth century is the shared ancestry of the two leading families: the Gutiérrez family, of whom Rosendo was a prominent figure, who became the chief supporters of the monastery of Celanova; and the Menéndez family who became associated with the rival monastery of Sobrado. In the mid-tenth century, Rosendo, abbot of Celanova and bishop of Dumio, vied with his second cousin, Sisnando Menéndez, bishop of Iria-Compostela, for the political support of a series of kings.⁴²⁵ That both monasteries operated in league with leading members of two branches of the region's most aristocratic family is highly significant; there was a political aspect to the patrimonial growth of these institutions which could manifest itself as open rivalry. Indeed, the geographical spheres of influence in which the monasteries operated led to factional disputes, as Sisnando's clashes with Rosendo indicate.⁴²⁶

Gatón and his wife Egilo, Rosendo's paternal great-grandparents, were 'personajes muy influentes en la corte asturiana hacia la segunda mitad de nuestro oscuro siglo IX'.⁴²⁷ Sáez Sánchez claims that Gatón was most probably the brother of Nuña, queen to Ordoño I (850–866), but a thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Arab chronicle, probably based on a tenth-century account, claims that he was the brother of the king himself, and this tradition found more support in the early thirteenth century in the works of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Archbishop of Toledo (1209–1247).⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ See I. Martín Viso, 'La monarquía asturleonense en el Bierzo (siglos IX–X)', unpublished paper. I wish to express my gratitude to I. Martín Viso for allowing me to see this text.

⁴²⁵ E. Portela Silva, 'El rey y los obispos. Poderes locales en el espacio galaico durante el período astur', *TSP*, 2 (2009), pp. 215–226. For the basis of this rivalry, *CI*, 11; *HC*, I, II.

⁴²⁶ *HC*, I, II; *CI*, 11.

⁴²⁷ Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', p. 37.

⁴²⁸ For references, see Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', p. 37. For the texts themselves, Ibn Idharī, and Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (these two probably both based on a text written in the tenth century by Ahmed al-Razī), I have consulted the following critical editions of these texts: for al-Razī, see D. Catalán (ed. and trans.), *Crónica del Moro Rasis: versión del Ajbār mulūk Al-Andalus, de Ahmed ibn Muhammad ibn Musa al-Razī, romanizada para el Rey don Dinís de Portugal hacia 1300 por Mahomed y Gil Pérez*, (Madrid, 1975). For Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, see the excellent critical edition in J. Lozano Sánchez, *Historia Arabum–*

Either way, some sort of family relationship seems very probable between Gatón and the Asturian royal family of the mid-ninth century, and close blood ties may explain his leadership of Asturian armies in several missions against Islamic forces in the middle of the ninth century.⁴²⁹ The documentary record suggests that Gatón oversaw the conquest of Astorga in the 850s, setting forth on his mission with supporters from the Bierzo, possibly his stronghold ('tempore Domni Ordonii, quando populus de Bergido cum illorum comite Gaton exierunt pro Astorica populare').⁴³⁰ Significantly, Gatón appears to have been one of the earliest major counts of the Asturian kingdom, and although it is hard to pinpoint the areas which fell under his territorial jurisdiction, it is reasonable to suggest that he held this honour in relation to the territory of Astorga and the Bierzo.⁴³¹ A document from 878 places him in Astorga, acting as a judge ('judicum Gatoni') in a case over the *villa* of Brimeda, alongside Alfonso III.⁴³² That he acted in the capacity of a judge in a case involving the king proves beyond doubt that Gatón held the confidence of the royal court in a way which few nobles would have enjoyed; significantly, it also suggests that the king could summon and gather his magnates on at least some occasions when there was business to attend to. There is no doubt therefore, that Rosendo represented at least the fourth generation of his family to enjoy socio-political

Introducción, Edición Crítica, Notas e Índices de José Lozano Sánchez (Sevilla, 1974). For Ibn Idharí, I have consulted a French translation, E. Fagnan (ed.), *Histoire de L'Afrique et de L'Espagne, intitulée, 'Al-Bayno'l-Mogrib', traduite et anotée par E. Fagnan* (2 Vols., Algeria, 1904), who tells us that 'En moharrem 240 (juin 854), l'émir Mohammed en personne marcha contre Tolède; ce qu'apprenant, les habitants de cette ville députèrent á Ordoño [I], fils d'Alphonse et roi de Galice, pour demander son aide, et ce prince leur envoya son frère Gaton á la tête de nombreuses troupes chrétiennes.', at, ii, p. 154.

⁴²⁹ For details of which, see Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', pp. 37–48. It is worth adding that Gatón was not a common name, and that we are therefore able to identify the figure named Gatón in the documentary record with Rosendo's great-grandfather.

⁴³⁰ Flo120 (878).

⁴³¹ The Alfonsine cycle of late ninth-century chronicles states that Astorga was reconquered in the reign of Ordoño I. The *Rotense* redaction states that under this king, 'Ciuitates ab antiquitus desertas, id est, Legionem, Astoricam, Tudem et Amagiam Patriciam muris circumdedit, portas in altitudinem posuit, populo partim ex suis, partim ex Spania aduenientibus impleuit', *CAI/III Rot.*, 25. The *Ad Sebastianum* version tells a similar tale: 'Ciuitates desertas ex quibus Adefonsus maior Caldeos eiecerat iste repopulauit, id est, Tudem, Astoricam, Legionem et Amagiam Patriciam', *CAI/III Seb.*, 25. This would place its conquest in the period from 850–866; but these chronicles do not expressly name Gatón as a participant in this venture, a point which Sáez Sánchez notes in 'Los ascendientes', at p. 41. The basis for this tradition is Flo120 (878), in which we are told that Count Gaton set forth on a mission to conquer Astorga with 'populus de Bergido'. It is therefore surmised that the Bierzo was conquered before Astorga, which seems a reasonable deduction, but at no time is Gatón described as the count of either of these places. The conquest of Astorga, and consequently therefore, of the Bierzo too, must have taken place before 854 because in a document from this year (Flo60) Ordoño I addresses the document 'ad posidentem Astorica', which we must assume to be the count of Bierzo, and probably Gatón.

⁴³² Flo120.

pre-eminence on an extra-local scale, because both of his paternal great-grandfathers, Gutier and Gatón, were figures of great political and social weight in the ninth-century north-west of Iberia.⁴³³

Rosendo's grandfather, Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, the son of Gutier and Elvira, has passed into the historical record as one of the great *repobladores* of the mid- and late ninth century.⁴³⁴ Throughout the late ninth and early tenth century, Hermenegildo attained great prestige and exercised considerable public powers, rising to become *maiordomus* of the royal palace as a favourite of Alfonso III.⁴³⁵ He married directly into the royal family, wedding Hermesinda, who was the daughter of Gatón and probably the niece of the king, as Sáez Sánchez has underlined.⁴³⁶ Hermenegildo's career is traceable via a series of diplomatic references in which his full political weight is made explicit. Particularly telling appearances in governmental business recorded in the charters take place throughout the 870s and 880s. In 878, we see him in Astorga, acting in the capacity of a judge alongside Gatón, his father-in-law.⁴³⁷ Above all, the year 878 also saw Hermenegildo undertake his most well-known royally-mandated mission, the reconquest of Coimbra, recorded in the twelfth-century *Chronicon Laurbanense* or Chronicle of Lorvão ('Era DCCCCXVI premdita est Conimbria ad Ermegildo comite').⁴³⁸ Coimbra lay a long way south of the Christian strongholds of the north-west, and the city may have been raided and garrisoned in much the same way that Porto had been some years previously; at any rate, Rosendo and his siblings shared amongst themselves a large amount of property from the Coimbra region in the *colmellum divisionis* of 934, suggesting that magnates made

⁴³³ We know next to nothing about Egilo, but it is reasonable to assume that her origins were Galician or Berciana since a later donation text made by her great grandchildren, Ordoño II and Elvira, seems to refer to property that she owned in the Bierzo. For the text, see SdeC25 (914), which tells us: 'Adicimus adhuc alias villas, quas auia nostra egilo testavit supradicto loco, id est Villam Ameo cum ecclesia Sancti Mameti cum omnibus suis terminis in circuitu; in Vadapia villa quam dicunt Penna alua cum suos villares et adiacenciis; item villam quam vocitant Paratam cum ecclesia Sancti Salvatoris in Bergido'.

⁴³⁴ The relationship between Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and Rosendo is stated plainly in the *colmellum divisionis* of 934: 'Nos omnes subter notati: Rudesindus episcopus, Munionem, Froilanem, Adosinda et Ermesinda, salutem a nobis eueniat a Domino, amen. Denique placuit nobis ut faceremus inter nos colmellum diuisionis de uillas ex successione auorum nostrorum Hermengildi et Ermesinde, Eroni et Adosinde, uel etiam genitorum nostrorum Gutierres et Ilduare, quos comparauerunt uel donigum acceperunt atque de stirpe prendiderunt uel construerunt quantum exinde in hoc testamentum uel collmellum resonat'.

⁴³⁵ Flo128 (883), shows Hermenegildo confirming donations made by Alfonso III to Sisnando, bishop of Iria-Compostela ('Ermegildus maiordomus conf.). This was not Sisnando Menéndez, the mid-tenth-century bishop of Iria-Compostela discussed on p. 143, but Bishop Sisnando I of Iria-Compostela, for more on information on whom, see HC, I, II.

⁴³⁶ Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', pp. 186–197.

⁴³⁷ Flo120.

⁴³⁸ PMH, Sc., p. 20.

significant inroads into this part of what is now Portugal in the ninth century.⁴³⁹ Consistent loyalty to Alfonso III brought responsibilities for Hermenegildo, such as those embodied by his confirmation of an important document from 886 in which Alfonso III and his wife received a sizeable donation of several *villae*; calculated public displays of the fidelity of his magnates were indeed a key part of the king's legitimating propaganda.⁴⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the opportunities for reward must have been a significant incentive behind Hermenegildo's participation in such public displays of allegiance; we know from a much later text, for example, that he received property confiscated from the rebel, Duke Vitiza, as direct recompense for his continued loyalty.⁴⁴¹

Royal patronage of this sort would have altered the scale of Hermenegildo's family as political players and counts like Hermenegildo were most probably the king's key points of contact outside of Asturias at this time. This political power was in the tenth century enshrined in rudimentary political structures which were intended to create a framework for the government of outlying regions.⁴⁴² At the end of Chapter 3, I argued that it is notoriously hard to say exactly what constituted 'government' in the early Middle Ages and I warned against some of the possible pitfalls open to historians, including the underestimation of regional difference. In Galicia, in fact, power was visibly more organized than it was in the Liébana; indeed, these provisos notwithstanding, charters suggest that counts and members of aristocratic families in tenth-century Galicia attended assemblies of magnates and bishops, and presided over disputes in the public legal sphere (as did several members of Rosendo's family, Rosendo himself included).⁴⁴³ Some individuals were invested by kings with the authority to govern; hence the bestowal of *commissa* (sometimes *commissos*), *mandationes*, or *comitatos* on the kings' favourites. These words seem to have signified the

⁴³⁹ Vimara Peres, styled count of Porto in the Chronicle of Lorrvão, is accredited with the reconquest of this city in 868, for which, see PMH, Sc., p. 20. His descendants are discussed in Mattoso, *A nobreza medieval portuguesa*, pp. 106–115. The Pelayo redaction of Sampiro's chronicle identified Hermenegildo's comital jurisdiction with Tui and Porto ('Ermegildus Tude et Portucale comes'), at *Sampiro*, p. 291.

⁴⁴⁰ Cel6.

⁴⁴¹ For the document, which postdates the charters edited in *Col. Dipl. Cel.*, one needs to consult the edition of the Tumbo of Celanova undertaken by Andrade Cernadas in 1995. These documents are not listed chronologically in Andrade Cernadas's edition, but rather follow their appearance within the Tumbo, meaning that the document in question, from the year 1007, is TdeC3. On rebellions, Sánchez-Albornoz, 'Rebeliones en Galicia', *passim*.

⁴⁴² Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 146: 'se emplea la terminología del condado o la mandación allí donde se configura un cierto poder sobre un área'.

⁴⁴³ Cel86 (950).

administrative and military governance of specific areas, and have generated a vast bibliography.⁴⁴⁴ In Galicia, Isla Frez has shown how these circumscriptions were in many cases relatively restricted in scope, whilst in others, indigenous *populi* or geographical features informed the shape and size of these units of political authority.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, the application of local knowledge may have played some part in the circumscription of these units; this suggests that whilst kings may have legitimated their bequeathal of power to magnates by issuing documents in which they presented themselves as the sole architects of such political relationships, local rich men probably played their part in this political negotiation, using their local knowledge to carve up the north-west into political units of some coherence.

Hermenegildo's destruction of Vitiza suggests that policing duties are likely to have been central to the comital office. But sometimes kings chose to make the authority of royal agents more explicit, alluding within documents to the transfer of power 'ad imperandum'.⁴⁴⁶ It is also possible that counts or magnates received a share of taxation or tribute collected within the area under their command, although it seems that their collection was at best patchily done in our period.⁴⁴⁷ It is crucial to acknowledge that at the very least, the expectation of government, and its rhetorical force, were held to be significant by the powerful in tenth-century Galicia, both at the royal centre and in the periphery. Davies has noted that a 'sense of royal authority pervades many tenth-century texts'.⁴⁴⁸ This manifested itself in a variety of ways, from 'dating by reference to regnal years, royal

⁴⁴⁴ I cannot be exhaustive here. For the works I have found essential, see C. Sánchez-Albornoz, "'Commissa, comitatus, mandationes'", in *Studi storici in onore di Ottorino Bertolini* (2 Vols., Pisa, 1972), ii, pp. 619–655; Sánchez-Albornoz, 'Los "homines mandationis". Su declinación histórica', in Sánchez-Albornoz, *Estudios sobre Galicia*, pp. 305–334; Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 140–151; Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 146–151.

⁴⁴⁵ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 146; Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, p. 130.

⁴⁴⁶ Cel73 (942).

⁴⁴⁷ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 151–166. Sánchez-Albornoz wrote about the taking of a tax known as the *quadragesima*, discussing the possibilities of it being a north-western variant of the *quaragesima Galliarum*, a Gallic customs tax, or a one-off tax paid in March of every year, in Sánchez-Albornoz, 'El *tributum quadragesimale*. Supervivencias fiscales romanas en Galicia', in Sánchez-Albornoz, *Estudios sobre Galicia*, pp. 269–284. Isla Frez, however, has demonstrated that although tribute was probably paid throughout the tenth century and possibly before, 'la definición y cuantía de este tributo no nos es conocida', *Sociedad gallega*, p. 159. We only know of its (possible) existence, in fact, from documents in which the king appears to be affording his magnates the right to collect tribute which was presumably beforehand channelled back to him; for example, Cel85 (949) shows Ramiro II award Celanova the decanía of Triós, confirm their holding of the decanías of Sorga and Bande, and give them the 'comisso de Eires'; along with these privileges went 'omne censo quod persolvere consuetas erant in uso uel debito regis'.

⁴⁴⁸ Davies, 'Lordship and Community', pp. 24–25.

authorizations and confirmations, royal initiatives, royal confiscations, royal handling of cases of dispute'.⁴⁴⁹ All in all, tenth-century Galicia strikes us as a place where a sense of the importance of the public arena had not been abandoned by any means by those who exercised power. Indeed, the active participation in political affairs undertaken by public figures in tenth-century Galicia contrasts notably with the much more ephemeral public presence documented in the tenth-century Liébana material. For example, Ilduara, Rosendo's mother, oversaw court cases which saw to it that serious breaches of the peace were corrected in a court of law; in 940, Pelayo compensated Ilduara 'in iudicatio' for killing one of her retainers—the document was witnessed by a group of local persons and framed within the context of the correction of an abuse against public precepts. Similarly, in 947, Offino compensated Ilduara 'coram testibus publicatum' for his failure to pay a debt. Locally important people were often the beneficiaries of court procedures, but mostly because they, or their retainers, ran court cases; the arbitrary imposition of seigneurial justice this most certainly was not.⁴⁵⁰

Theoretically, the authority of these counts derived from the king and was not hereditary, but the fact that Rosendo's brother, father, and grandfather were all styled count and invested with the king's authority in royal documents suggests that the *de facto* acceptance of the hereditary nature of these offices was established practice in this region in the tenth century. But this in itself does not imply that kings were unable to impose their power over regional magnates when necessary. At the very end of the chronological period covered in this thesis, in 994, *mandationes* previously conferred upon the Galician aristocrat Suarion Gondemaris were stripped from him, who, a charter tells us, had become 'puffed up with pride' and rebelled against Vermudo II ('superbia elatus et spiritu malicie ductus, reuelavit'); the king was clearly no mere puppet of forces over which he held no control, and was able to move against rebels.⁴⁵¹ In 994, these *mandationes* were then transferred to Rosendo's family monastery of Celanova by Vermudo II; magnate families and monasteries were therefore more than poles of power which could buttress royal authority—they could reap its rewards too and stood to gain from its largesse. However, the dynamic that characterized these relationships has led to

⁴⁴⁹ Davies, 'Lordship and Community', p. 25.

⁴⁵⁰ These examples are Cel64 and Cel80.

⁴⁵¹ Cel221.

widely differing interpretations of the actual degree of autonomy that framed magnate action. Recent work on this matter has come to the conclusion that Sánchez-Albornoz over-estimated the capacity of kings to confer and divest comital office, or the command of *commissa* or *mandationes*, as and when they saw fit.⁴⁵² We should not, however, overlook the fact that the interests of kings and those magnates with whom they chose to cooperate were not mutually incompatible. It is not coincidental that we begin to see significantly more interaction between Galician magnates and kings from the mid-ninth century, when some kind of concordat seems to have been struck by Alfonso III and his frontier magnates in the west. As Isla Frez has underlined, this stimulated a ‘gran auge expansivo’, designed to conquer new territories and thus gain new resources by driving Asturian political influence, under the command of the Asturian kings, further south towards and beyond the Duero.⁴⁵³ The riches on offer to all parties, and the creation of an expanded political framework over which kings could delegate power to frontier magnates, was a crucial development of the middle and later stages of the ninth century; in fact, rebellion in the ninth and tenth centuries frequently seems to originate amongst aristocratic elements who did not enjoy the king’s favour and therefore had less incentive to cooperate. At any rate, the crucial point is that royal-magnate relationships in ninth- and tenth-century Galicia were framed by political parameters of at least a quasi-public sort.

As we have seen, the *colmellum divisionis* of 934 shows Rosendo and his siblings acknowledging the provenance of their respective inheritances, part of which is said to have been passed down via their grandparents. Added to this, are the various *villae* and their appurtenances which have arrived in their hands thanks to their parents (‘genitorum nostrorum’) Gutier and Ilduara. This couple were amongst the most significant set of aristocratic lay landowners in tenth-century Spain, and together with their children they were without doubt the most influential landowning noble family in Galicia.⁴⁵⁴ Gutier was the son of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and Hermesinda Gatóñez; Ilduara Eriz’s background was probably similarly patrician, but we can say less about it.⁴⁵⁵ Our first

⁴⁵² Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 140–151.

⁴⁵³ Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, p. 172.

⁴⁵⁴ Gutier’s sister, Elvira Menéndez, was married to Ordoño II, the son of Alfonso III.

⁴⁵⁵ So sparse is our knowledge of Ilduara’s great grandparents and grandparents that it seems futile to discuss them here. A very little light is shed by M. R. García Álvarez, ‘Ilduara Eriz, madre de San Rosendo’, *BML*, 6

documentary indication of the wealth of Gutier comes in a charter dated to 916, in which he can be seen making an enormous donation to his wife, Ilduara, of property in Portugal, Galicia and the Asturias.⁴⁵⁶ Over the next twenty years this couple made a steady stream of acquisitions; very infrequently, however, did they transact with the peasant stratum as Celanova was later to do. Indeed, it is striking that the majority of the documents in which Gutier and Ilduara appear seem to show them operating within the aristocratic orbit.⁴⁵⁷ Gutier certainly inherited a great deal of political authority from his father, seemingly taking on an important public presence in southern Galicia in the first third of the tenth century. In 927, for example, he was given a royal villa by Sancho Ordóñez (regent in Galicia 926–929) which would later become the site of the monastery of Celanova.⁴⁵⁸ In the same year, he was effectively given the authority by the kings Sancho and Alfonso IV (925–931) to chair an assembly of the kingdom's most important bishops and nobles, in which the assembled magnates deliberated as to what should be done with the monastery of Santa María de Loio.⁴⁵⁹ This meeting, furthermore, seems to have taken place in Portomarín (Lugo), an area in which Gutier was a prominent landowner, as shown in the documentation.⁴⁶⁰ This was the sort of role reserved for the most senior of the king's aristocratic supporters, highlighting Gutier's unusual political power.

These framing observations already demonstrate significant differences between the major families at the heart of each regional case study analysed in this thesis; wealth and political power, it seems, were of a different scale from one region to the next. Furthermore, Rosendo's family owned across a far larger area than the richest families of the Liébana, and its holdings were spread across a range of topographies whose geographical attributes varied greatly from one area to another, resisting coherent characterization. Thus, the family of Rosendo's landed interest cannot be so easily defined

(1958–1959), pp. 217–232; García Álvarez, 'Gutier e Ilduara, padres de San Rosendo', *BA*, 7 (1977), pp. 119–153. Also, Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara, passim*. Nothing is known of Ilduara Eriz's mother, Adosinda, but her father, Ero Fernández, may have been count of Lugo, as Sáez Sánchez postulates in 'Los ascendientes', pp. 50–57.

⁴⁵⁶ Cel12.

⁴⁵⁷ For documents detailing direct purchase from peasants, see Cel20 (923) and Cel21 (923).

⁴⁵⁸ Cel26.

⁴⁵⁹ Cel29.

⁴⁶⁰ In Cel12 (916), Gutier gave Ilduara the *villa* 'quam dicunt Portum Marini'. That the areas through which the Miño runs in northern Ourense and southern Lugo (where Portomarín is located) formed a nucleus of the family's landed interest is shown by a document from 922 (Cel17), in which bishop Recaredo of Lugo donated to Gutier and Ilduara 'ecclesia vocabulo Sancte Marine, ripa Minee, ubi vos habitabatis'. Portomarín is approximately one hundred kilometres to the north of Celanova.

in spatial terms, and its growth is much harder to track than was that of Bagaudano and Faquilona, which was mostly confined to one valley of the Liébana. However, one area in which a certain concentration of Celanova's property acquisitions seems to have occurred roughly approximates to the modern *comarca* of A Limia in the province of Ourense. The *comarca* takes its name from the homonymous river which carves its way through a series of valleys, interwoven by a patchwork of arable, this latter mostly concentrated in the lower reaches.⁴⁶¹ Although the lower Limia is in places quite mountainous, these mountains do not encircle, and thus delineate, a subregion of territory in the way that the uplands surrounding the Liébana do; they are, in fact, much more easily passable, and the fractured relief which characterizes much of southern and central Galicia results in valley floors whose quaternary sediments allow for the cultivation of a wide range of crops and, in parts of the south and along the western coast, extending into Portugal, viticulture too. The other principal base of Celanova's landed interest was the *comarca* of Celanova itself, situated between Allariz, in Ourense, and modern Portugal. Its most striking attribute are its many rivers, including tributaries of the Sil and the Miño, which irrigate this land sufficiently so as to enable it to support widescale cultivation; this is in spite of the dry, Mediterranean summers, whose heat and relative lack of rainfall differentiates the region from much of Galicia, especially the wet north-western corner and coastline. For reasons of space, this sketch of the geographical conditions that characterized the heartlands of Celanova's landed assets has been necessarily impressionistic. However, it is clear that landscape offered no impediment to the growth of Celanova's landed interest in the way that it did in the Liébana; in this way the possibilities of landscape were a factor when it came to shaping the scale of the aristocratic profiles of the major families in each region.

This small excursus into the familial background of Rosendo has been undertaken to provide crucial contextual information and to emphasize that Rosendo was born into extraordinary circumstances. He was the favoured son of the wealthiest and most politically powerful couple in Galicia, and both the affluence and political authority of his family were well established long before

⁴⁶¹ 'The river valleys of the Limia and the Tamega, draining in a south-westerly direction from the highlands of southern Galicia, form natural routes respectively from Ourense through Celanova to Braga and from Verín through Chaves towards Viseu and Coimbra', in Fletcher, *St James's Catapult*, pp. 2–3.

Celanova's foundation. The rapid growth of the powerful monastery of Celanova in the middle of the tenth century should therefore in part be ascribed to the wealth and political influence (these latter characterized by a dynamic which was mutually reinforcing) of the family with which the monastery was associated.⁴⁶² Celanova thus represents the institutionalization of the wealth and public influence of Rosendo's family and the social ramifications of this union were felt at the level of local society as the monastery became more proactively acquisitorial throughout the tenth century. The room in which peasant societies operated with full economic autonomy was progressively reduced both geographically and socio-economically as a result.

⁴⁶² Much useful discussion is found in, E. Portela Silva, and M. C. Pallares Méndez, 'Elementos para el análisis de la aristocracia alto-medieval de Galicia: parentesco y patrimonio', *SHHM*, 5 (1987), pp. 17–32.

Southern Galicia before Celanova

A handful of documents from the Celanova cartulary date to the period before the family of Rosendo began to see its unusually grand political power reflected in the charter material.⁴⁶³ Seven charters date to the ninth century, the earliest dating to 842, some fifty-two years after surviving charters begin in the Santo Toribio cartulary, and ninety-four years before the monastery of Celanova was founded in 936.⁴⁶⁴ We need to recognize that we possess too few Celanova documents with which to make anything other than provisional observations about ninth-century society in Galicia; furthermore, these seven charters are not qualified by the mitigating factor of originating from a relatively small and delimited area, as the seventeen ninth-century Santo Toribio documents do. The insights that these seven documents provide can be augmented by information garnered from ninth-century documents belonging to other Galician cartularies, such as Sobrado, although the range of territory that these documents cover is extensive, meaning that they are quite thinly spread; for this reason, and for reasons of space, the ninth century cannot be discussed here in the same level of detail that has been possible in the much smaller Liébana.⁴⁶⁵

By the mid-ninth century, Galicia was almost certainly part of a wider political unit based in Oviedo. The Alfonsine chronicles claim that the territory to the west of the mountains of León now known as Galicia was annexed in piecemeal fashion throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Rosendo first appears receiving a large donation of half of the *villae* of Quintela, Sá, and Fenales from his uncle Nepociano and his aunt Alagundia in Cel11 (916). It is almost certain that Rosendo was still a very young child at this stage, since in Cel185 (977), he draws up what is effectively a will and a set of instructions regarding the future of the monastery after his imminent death. His parents, Count Gutier Menéndez and Ilduara Eriz, first appear in the Celanova documentation in Cel12 (916), some two months after their son Rosendo, although Gutier may well have been an active public figure before this, since he witnessed a document of Ordoño II and his sister Elvira in northern Portugal in 915, for which PMH19.

⁴⁶⁴ The seven ninth-century charters are: Cel1 (842), Cel2 (856), Cel3 (871), Cel4 (871), Cel5 (879), Cel6 (886), and Cel7 (889).

⁴⁶⁵ The *comarca* of Terra de Celanova covers an area of five hundred and eight kms², and the province of Ourense approximately seven thousand, two hundred and seventy-five kms². Eighteen ninth-century charters survive from Sobrado; they cannot be examined in detail here, but they present a strikingly autonomous stratum of free peasant proprietors, see Sob34 (842), Sob58 (865) and Sob73 (883) for examples.

⁴⁶⁶ According to the chronicles, this began under Alfonso I in the mid-eighth century, absorbing ‘pars maritimam Gallecie’ for which, see *CAIfIII Rot.*, 14, and *CAIfIII Seb.*, 14. This venture reached the Miño under Fruela I, according to the *Rotense*; *CAIfIII Rot.*, 16. In the middle of the ninth century, under Ordoño I, the chronicles recount the absorption into the kingdom of the Tui region; *CAIfIII Rot.*, 25; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 25;

Notices in these same sources which purport to tell of the rebellions of various elements of the populace of the north-west in the eighth century indicate that this was by no means an entirely peaceful process; an aristocratic class capable of offering resistance was clearly a factor in this (negotiated) process of annexation.⁴⁶⁷ Significantly, Galicia was only very briefly a fixture of the Arab-Berber world which dominated the rest of the peninsula after 711. If we accept this period to have been at most one of thirty or so years of nominal Arab political control, as our sources indicate, then we can see how Galician aristocracies would not have felt the same cross-generational pressure to adapt to new political structures imposed from al-Andalus which were felt in, say, the Ebro valley, or Andalucía.⁴⁶⁸ Galicia, therefore, was practically the only large area of relative lowland that the Arabs failed to conquer permanently, which might help explain the persistence in this region of a rich, indigenous, aristocratic stratum. Aristocrats were very probably able to preserve and consolidate their wealth throughout the early eighth century, but they may too have been a fairly disparate group, since they did not crystallize around a single family of local kings; their political development therefore does not seem to have matched their economic power.

The fact that most scholars agree that the Muslim socio-political imprint on Galicia was transitory and insubstantial is interesting in this regard, for it supports the notion that there existed something of a vacuum with regard to public power in eighth-century Galicia; the corollary of this is that local Galician elites may well have got stronger in the post-Visigothic period, free from central responsibilities, possibly standing at the head of the sort of patronage networks we see in Cel1.⁴⁶⁹

Albeldense, XV, 11. Ourense was seemingly integrated by the Asturian kingdom under Alfonso III, *Albeldense*, XV, 12.

⁴⁶⁷ *CAI/III Rot.*, 16, 18; *CAI/III Seb.*, 16, 18.

⁴⁶⁸ Collins, *Arab Conquest*, pp. 153–154. E. Portela Silva and M. C. Pallares Méndez, ‘Idade Media: A continuidade e a transmissão (séculos VIII ó X)’, in *Nova Historia de Galicia* (A Coruña, 1996), pp. 165–185.

⁴⁶⁹ Cel1 (842) tells the story of Abbot Astrulfo and the members of his congregation, who donated all of their possessions to the monastery of Santa María de Barreto, over which the abbot presided. Abbot Astrulfo traced the foundation of his community’s extensive assets (including several churches and plots of land) back to his uncle, Abbot Senior (‘domnus Seniorinus tius meus’). By 941 (Cel69), Abbot Senior’s possessions had found their way into the ownership of Ramiro II (931–951), and the antiquity of their provenance and even grander scale is made explicit (‘ecclesias quarum vocabula sunt Sancta Maria cum villa Berreto, Sancta Eogenia et Sanctum Martinum et Sanctum Andre, alias Sanctum Romanum, Sancta Marina in Enuolati, Sancto Iacobo in Laureto, items Sanctum Martinum in Portum Titi, omnes has ecclesias vel villas per omnes suos terminos antiquos secundum easprehendit Senior abbas’). That these churches, which had in the early ninth century belonged to abbot Senior, were in 941 given by the king of León to Celanova, suggests that Senior’s wealth was extensive, since it ended up in the property portfolio of the king. Compare Senior’s wealth and church-building

The first clear indication we possess of public political engagement in Galicia comes from the early ninth century. A Sobrado document from 818 informs us that Alfonso II (791–842) dispatched an individual named Count Aloito to settle a dispute in Montaos, near the river Tambre, in the present-day province of A Coruña. The dispute, between two families, concerned properties in the territory of the village identified in the document as ‘uilla Ostulata’.⁴⁷⁰ In his capacity as judge (‘et per ordinationem domni Adefonsi principis concessi ego iam nominatus Aloitusi), Count Aloito successfully resolved the dispute and received some of the disputed assets by way of payment; significantly, this is the first documentary notification we have of the realization of comital business in Galicia.

Abbot Senior, from Cel1, and Count Aloito are therefore the best documented examples we have of wealthy and politically important elites, active in Galicia, emerging from the documentation in the early ninth century.⁴⁷¹ However, for the most remarkable indication of the strength of the Galician magnate class, we need to return to the Alfonsine chronicles of the late ninth century, and specifically, to the events which took place after the death of Alfonso II, whose devotion to the newly discovered cult site of St James is attested in the *HC* and almost certainly represented part of an attempt to establish the Asturian monarchy in Galicia.⁴⁷² Western Galicia from the mid-ninth century became a centre of spiritual devotion as Santiago de Compostela became a fundamental part of the ideological basis of the Asturian monarchy, undoubtedly intensifying a process by which a sector of the lay and ecclesiastical aristocracy of the region became increasingly assimilated into the Asturian

activity to that of Ricimir, a Visigothic aristocrat of the seventh-century Bierzo; it is suggestive that the scales of their wealth are not dissimilar. For Ricimir, *VB*, *Ordo querimoniae*, 5.

⁴⁷⁰ It is very interesting, when we are thinking about continuity of settlement, to note that this document describes the location of the disputed area in relation to a pre-Roman or Roman period castro settlement, (‘subtus castro Brione’). The document is Sob43.

⁴⁷¹ Castellanos García and Martín Viso have put together a plausible account of the consolidation of new poles of power in Suevic, Visigothic and Asturian Galicia, which, according to these scholars, built upon a diverse legacy, utilizing the *civitates* of the north-west, where political control was made manifest by the attendance of high-ranking churchmen at councils in Braga and Toledo. Simultaneously, within their schema, *castra* and *oppida* were absorbed into wider settlement patterns in rural areas. Different scales of political power, characterized by both ‘official’ elements, such as bishops, and independent elements which sat outside of fairly weak central structures, such as the *senior* Aspidio, a local *cacique* of the Ourense region whose local power was such that Leovigild sent an army against him in the late sixth century, at least suggest that concentrations of political power and landed wealth were probably well established in Galicia throughout the early Middle Ages. For the main argument summarized here, see Castellanos García and Martín Viso, ‘The local articulation of central power’, pp. 4–10. For Aspidio, see *JB*, a. 575.

⁴⁷² *HC*, I, II.

kingdom. The indications are, however, that Galician aristocratic groups were already able to exert considerable political influence by the middle of the ninth century. The Chronicle of Alfonso III tells us that Ramiro I (842–850) was the legitimate successor to Alfonso II, but that the new king had been wickedly deprived of his rightful place on the throne by Nepotiano.⁴⁷³ This latter, we are informed, seized power in the royal capital of Oviedo by launching a coup after Alfonso II's death in 842. But the circumstances surrounding these events arouse strong suspicions. The *Rotense* version of the chronicle has it that:

Era DCCCLXXXI post Adefonsi discessum Ranemirus filius Ueremudi principis eligitur in regnum. Eo tempore absens erat a propria sede et in Uarduliensem prouintiam fuerat aduectus ad accipiendam huxorem. Dum idem prefatus princeps Adefonsus migravit a seculo, Nepotianus palati comes regnum tyrannide est adeptus. Ranimirus princeps ut factum audiuit, Gallecie in partibus se contulit et in ciuitatem Lucensem exercitum quoadunauit. Post paucum vero temporis spatium in Astores inruptionem fecit. Quo Nepotianus ut eius aduentum audiuit, ad pontem flubiii cui nomen est Nartie cum exercitu obuius fuit. Inito vero certamine a suis omnibus est destitutus et sine mora fugatus; in prouincia Premoriensem a duobus comitibus Scipionem et Sonnanem est comprehensus et oculis execatus.⁴⁷⁴

But an acceptance of this narrative overlooks several important considerations. First, Nepotiano, 'palati comes', must in all probability have been in Oviedo at the time of Alfonso's death, or shortly after, fulfilling the duties which went along with his office as count of the royal palace. It certainly makes sense to imagine that he was a senior figure at the royal capital of Oviedo and thus part of an Asturian faction. We are told by the *Rotense* that on hearing the news of Nepotiano's move for the kingship, Ramiro made for the region of Galicia, and assembled his army in the city of Lugo ('Gallecie in partibus se contulit et in ciuitatem Lucensem exercitum quoadunauit'); thus, Ramiro clearly had a support base in this region, including an armed retinue of sufficient size as to enable him

⁴⁷³ *CAIfIII Rot.*, 23; *CAIfIII Seb.*, 23.

⁴⁷⁴ Translated by Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, p. 174: 'In the era 881 (843), after the death of Alfonso, Ramiro, son of the Prince Vermudo, was elected king. At that time he was away from the throne because he had travelled to the province of Vardulias to take a wife. When King Alfonso departed from this world, Nepotianus, count of the palace, rebelled and seized power. When he first heard what had happened, King Ramiro made for the region of Galicia and assembled his army in the city of Lugo. After a short period of time, he invaded Asturias. When Nepotianus learned of his arrival, he went with his army to meet him at the bridge over the river Narcea. But when the battle began, Nepotianus was deserted by all of his men and was quickly put to flight. He was captured in the province of Primorias by the two counts Scipio and Sonna and his eyes were put out.'

to march on Oviedo. Indeed, similarly crucial as an indicator of Ramiro's role at this time is the chronicler's telling admission that after a short period of time, Ramiro *invaded* Asturias ('Post paucum vero temporis spatium in Astores inruptionem fecit'). An *invasion* of Asturias by an army mobilized in Lugo looks suspiciously like a classic *coup d'état*, as Estepa Díez has underlined.⁴⁷⁵ It seems, indeed, that a Galician magnate faction had helped Ramiro I wrestle the throne from the Asturian group assembled around the royal palace. This would help explain the clear concern of Ramiro I's son (Ordoño I 850–866) and grandson (Alfonso III 866–910) to involve themselves in magnate politics with the grandest aristocratic families of Galicia, which we see on scores of occasions in the charters.

The dynasty of Ramiro I needed to cultivate this support network in Galicia, because this region's rich magnate class had helped win it the throne, and would help ensure that Galicia remained within the fold whilst kings themselves ruled from Oviedo; as we have seen, foundations were quickly laid, and the kings of Asturias were by the time of Alfonso III intricately linked to Galician nobles such as Gatón and Hermenegildo Gutiérrez. But it is arguable that as much as rich Galician aristocrats would have desired these unions in order to obtain political eminence on a scale previously beyond their reach in the fragmented world of private lordship which had characterized Galicia since the early eighth century, so too would the incoming Asturian political class, tied to the royal capital of Oviedo, have desired the wealth and support of the Galician magnates. Asturian kings from Alfonso II onwards were strikingly ambitious, but it is at least open to doubt whether the agriculturally poor lands of the Asturias provided the economic resources able to match that ambition. Taken together, these factors may help to explain why the political gravity of the Asturian kingdom seems to have been pulled westwards in the late ninth century.

Political negotiation, backed up by the force of arms, would therefore have to be the foundation upon which these very rich Galician elites and their would-be Asturian masters would have to build some sort of agreement. A document from 886 demonstrates this point in action very

⁴⁷⁵ Estepa Díez, 'El poder regio', pp. 455.

well indeed.⁴⁷⁶ In this document, we are told that Argemiro, Silo, Aloito, Pedro, and Kindulfo made a donation of three entire *villae* in Lemos, southern Lugo, to King Alfonso III ('Donamus uobis uillas qui dicitur Salzeto, Villaplana, Dominici, et sunt ipsas uillas territorio Lemaos, secus riuulo Laure'); this was a donation of a scale which leaves little room for doubt as to the social rank of the donors.⁴⁷⁷ These people displayed a marked concern to stress their descent from another person named Aloito ('qui sumus nepti et pronepti Aloyti'); this descent is claimed over three and four generations, suggesting that the Aloito referred to here as the distant ancestor of the donors was most probably a man of wide repute who was almost certainly an aristocrat himself.⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, if he was the grandparent or great-grandparent of the donors in Cel6, as is claimed, then it is reasonable to assume that the donors were claiming descent from a nobleman who must be traced to the early ninth century. These considerations notwithstanding, Cel6 is a difficult document to decipher, because it records a donation of three *villae* to the king, made by a group of his subjects, and provides few further details and little contextual information.

It is probable that the extension of political patronage was one of the objectives of this donation, since the document proclaims that it honours the symbolic act of *incommuniatio*, aptly described by Davies as 'the act of including another body in the group of sharers'.⁴⁷⁹ However, this consideration cannot help us to understand how the *villae* Aloito *et al.* gave to, or shared with, Alfonso III in 886, came into the possession of the group of donors of Cel6, nor why they felt compelled to hand over landed assets to the king. Interestingly, one piece of information that Cel6 does tell us is that Alfonso III and his queen officially awarded the rights to these *villae* to the donors at some prior stage, probably at court, as the donors make clear ('quod in presentia uestra in iudicium conquisimus'). But why had the king chosen to give these properties to Aloito and his supporters in the first place? Fortunately, we are able to trace some of this property via other charters from the Celanova cartulary. In Cel30, dated to 928, two of the *villae* mentioned in Cel6 ('siue et in Lemaos villas Salizeto, Dominici') appear once again. In this document, King Sancho I (926–929) and his

⁴⁷⁶ Cel6.

⁴⁷⁷ Modern Salcedo, Vilachá and Domiz.

⁴⁷⁸ It is plausible that he was the Count Aloito of Sob43 (818).

⁴⁷⁹ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, p. 80.

wife Gota made a large donation to a certain Oduario of several properties, including the *villae* of ‘Salizeto’ and ‘Dominici’, which, we are told, had at one time belonged to the grandfather of Oduario, also called Oduario, but which this latter had lost as a result of a royal confiscation made by Alfonso III. Cel30 states that the king had intervened directly, with the aid of royal advisors (‘per collegium regis’) in order to take away this property from this ancestral Oduario. So it appears that these *villae* must have been royal possessions given to Oduario’s grandfather, stripped from his possession before 886, and given back to his grandson in 928. Cel6 is perhaps the missing link in this chain of events, since having taken estates back from Oduario at some stage in the late ninth century, the king, based in Oviedo, would have needed to rely on their safeguarding. Thus, although these lands were now part of the patrimony of Alfonso III once again, they most probably passed into the jurisdiction of some of the king’s aristocratic supporters in Galicia, most probably the Cel6 group. This group may indeed have been related to, or have been allies of, the group of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, hence the document’s retention in the Celanova cartulary; this we cannot know for sure, but Hermenegildo witnessed this piece of *realpolitik*, featuring as one of the signatories, which is highly suggestive.

Royal government in this period, based in a small royal capital in the mountainous terrain of Asturias, must have been of limited reach and effectiveness in the peripheral zones of the Asturian kingdom which theoretically swore allegiance to Alfonso III. The king therefore relied upon the loyalty of certain noble factions in these areas in order to rule, and we know that this dependence on local aristocratic alliance crystallized throughout the late ninth and early tenth centuries in the increasing incidence of the naming of allies to the office of the countship. Cel6 might be best conceived of, then, as a charter which shows the re-allocation of royal estates to the king by the leading loyal magnate faction of the region, these *villae* having previously been given to another magnate, taken back by the king, and then given to the magnate family of 886, who finally offered to donate or share these properties with the king in a symbolic act of political good will.

The documents before Cel12 (916), when Gutier and Ilduara first appear, follow no discernible pattern which would suggest that a dominant family, institution, or one in league with the other, had by this stage taken control of the locality by means of a concerted programme of property

acquisition. Atypically large donations, often featuring people (lay and ecclesiastical) about whom we can say very little, are not uncommon. Yet our attention is already drawn to the social make-up of southern Galicia, for in spite of the paucity of documents at our disposal and the reservations which must naturally follow this acknowledgement, we can say that a landowning peasant class, so visible in the Liébana in the ninth century, is as of yet not a common feature of the Celanova documentation. Interestingly, church donations, such as those in Cel1 (842), Cel3 (871), Cel6 (886), and Cel7 (889), are characterized by a significant common feature, since those giving, whether lay or ecclesiastical, seem to own on a large scale, and family interest seems to figure prominently. Indeed, it is reasonable to say that at least some ninth- and early tenth-century landowners in this region (not drawn from the peasant class—for these are *invisible*), enjoyed considerable wealth. That this wealth may have manifested itself via relatively high levels of political power, including the ability to act as fixers in a fairly proactive manner, is tantalizingly suggested by Cel6. The ramifications of this are significant; clearly, rich members of southern Galician society can be identified in the documents before Gutier and Ilduara began to augment their already considerable wealth from 912. Viewed in conjunction with the evidence that demonstrates the power of Rosendo's family in the ninth century, the evidence therefore suggests that Galicia was by 900 at the very heart of royal political scheming.

The landed wealth and political influence of Rosendo's family, described in the opening subsection of this chapter, started to force its way into the documentary record of Celanova in 916. In this year, Gutier Menéndez, the son of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez and father of Rosendo, made a very substantial donation of diverse possessions to his wife Ilduara Eriz, consisting of properties or goods located in 'territorio Asturiense' (Asturias); 'territorio Galliciense' (including a *villa* in 'Portum Marini'); 'territorio de Buuale' (Búbal); 'in Uillanova' (Vilanova); plus 'alia villa Perarias' (Coimbra).⁴⁸⁰ In the same document, Gutier also agreed to confer upon his wife considerable landed assets, as part of the settlement, save for those of his possessions to which she had no legal claim—such as for example, Gutier's possessions 'de munificentia regis'.⁴⁸¹ This detail is interesting since it

⁴⁸⁰ Cel12 (916).

⁴⁸¹ Cel12 (916): 'Adicio etiam tibi, per hanc scripture donationis, quantumcumque ganare valui de qua dote inconiugio copulaui vel ganare aut aucmentare potuero, que usque oitum meum de munificentia regis, de preda

indicates at least a theoretical conceptualization of the place of legal procedure in early tenth-century southern Galicia. It is also striking that Gutier's donation makes it clear that he (and his family before him) had been the recipients of royal largesse even before we begin to see incontrovertible proof of this phenomenon recorded in the documentation dated to Gutier's lifetime; we therefore face conclusive evidence that Gutier did not have to make his fortune and attain influence, as, perhaps, Bagaudano and Faquilona may have done, but merely to consolidate it.

Over the period of fifteen years covered by the next twenty-three documents from the cartulary of Celanova, Gutier and Ilduara received donations, acted as judges or councillors (often in an official capacity), and made outright purchases themselves, in twelve of them.⁴⁸² These documents are very significant because they represent the first dozen occasions in the cartulary of Celanova in which we are able to see the family of Rosendo proactively adding to its already considerable landed wealth and political prominence. In this way, they confirm a pattern of aristocratic landowning, and the fulfilment of political duties closely associated with the royal court, which we first saw in the middle of the ninth century. These dozen documents, on occasion, also take us out of the realm of aristocratic politics and into a world of which hitherto Celanova has barely afforded us a glimpse—a social world not solely populated by grand aristocrats. It is this more varied social world, characterized above all by rural labourers who enjoyed different degrees of legal, and in practice, economic freedom, seen side by side with large-scale aristocrats, which allows us to paint a more detailed picture of tenth-century Galician society; however, this view, before 950, is at best imperfect, since peasants do not form a significant proportion of the actors of Celanova charters until the middle of the tenth century, from which time charters survive in greater numbers. It is possible that the statistics reflect a marked increase in the production of charters in southern Galicia (or at least in their retention) from the 920s; in comparison with just seven surviving ninth-century Celanova documents,

vel de ex aliquo ganato, quod te per lege gotorum non competebat, tam in argento, in seruos vel origine maurorum, medietatem tibi et posteritati tue dono adque concedo'. Most of the place names in this charter are sufficiently similar to their modern equivalents to require little detective work. The '*villa Peraria*', on the other hand, is listed in the *colmellum divisionis* of Cel40 (934), in which we are told that it is located in the Coimbra district.

⁴⁸² These twelve are: Cel12 (916); Cel13 (918); Cel14 (919); Cel17 (922); Cel20 (923); Cel21 (923); Cel23 (925); Cel25 (927); Cel26 (927); Cel29 (927); Cel32 (929); Cel35 (931).

we are able to work with seventy-eight documents which date to the first half of the tenth century, seventy of which date from 920 to 950.⁴⁸³ However, it is equally likely that as transactions increased, so too did the need to be able to provide written title to land.

The practical aspect of the charter was significant to both rich and poor alike, and even amongst themselves Rosendo's family enshrined the transfer of assets in documentary form. This was perhaps most important of all though, when dealing with kings; indeed, that the family of Rosendo still cultivated links with the royal dynasty, now of León, is proven by Cel13, from 918, in which Gunterigo made a substantial donation to Gutier and Ilduara of two thirds of the 'villa que dicent Fana'.⁴⁸⁴ This was a large scale donation of a considerable property.⁴⁸⁵ Moreover, the donor stated that the property and goods which he gave to Gutier and Ilduara came into his possession by way of a royal gift, made to him by Ordoño II (910–924) and his queen Elvira, of whom he claimed to be the nephew.⁴⁸⁶ Gunterigo, nephew of the king and queen, was by extension a blood relation of Gutier too, since this latter was the brother of Elvira. This suggests that the very richest and most powerful Galician aristocrats clearly valued the retention of property within the same family group; furthermore, by this time they clearly saw the value of the creation of documents which gave these arrangements firmer foundations.

⁴⁸³ Of these seventy-eight documents, the split by decade is as follows: 900s –3; 910s –5; 920s –17; 930s –28; 940s–25. Of course, when trying to discuss charter production, we run the risk of assuming that the time from which charters seem to have begun to be produced in great numbers reflects an increase in production rather than a growing concern to keep charters or chance survival. This question is to a large degree unanswerable; we cannot work on the basis of second-guessing the evidence which we do not have. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that our Iberian corpus as a whole, which, excluding Catalonia, totals some two thousand charters, reflects a general pattern characterized by a sharp increase in the numbers of documents dating to 930 and afterwards in comparison to the period before this date. There may well have been a strong well-established tradition of charter writing in Spain before 920 or 930, but even allowing for this, it still seems to me probable that charter production and use grew in the middle of the tenth century.

⁴⁸⁴ Most probably modern day Feá, located in the modern day *ayuntamiento* of Toén on the western outskirts of the city of Ourense, some forty kilometres north of Celanova. I have identified the Fana in the charter with Feá because the document tells us of a road 'que vadit pro ad illo pozo de Puga'. Modern day Puga, still named thus, is three kilometres from Feá.

⁴⁸⁵ The scale of the donation made in Cel13 is made obvious by the extent of the possessions described: 'de ipsa villa tercias duas integras in domos, in vineas; in pumares, insautos, arbores fructuosas, pomiferis, omnia quantum in ipsa villa ad prestitum [hominis] est'. It is instructive to add that Gunterigo seems to appear in another document which confirms his wealth. In Cel24 (926), Gunterigo is seen pledging what may be a dower to his wife Guntroda ('do atque concedo tibi in huius dotis') of ten servant boys, ten servant girls, ten horses, many villas, and a tenth of all he might own in the future. For more on the lineage of Guntroda, far from clear, and not strictly relevant here, see Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', pp. 70–74.

⁴⁸⁶ Cel13 (918): 'villa que dicent Fana, que nobis dedit rex domno Hordonio et regina domna Geluira'. Gunterigo's claim that he was the nephew of the monarchs: 'et concedit nobis ipsa villa tius noster Hordonius rex et regina domna Geluira'. For more on Gunterigo, see Sáez Sánchez, 'Los ascendientes', pp. 74–76.

In one respect, a donation such as that of Cel13 must have functioned in much the same way as the donations made to Bagaudano and Faquilona which we saw in the Liébana, in the sense that its aims were principally the same; namely, to keep on the good side of a local person of influence so as to enjoy his or her patronage. This document also informs us that Gutier had seen his local influence, the consequence of immense inherited wealth, officially recognized by royal appointment. This much becomes clear from his being named a count, which might have taken place shortly before this document was made, since no reference to this (important) particular is made in Cel12, but reference is indeed made in Cel13, in unambiguous terms, ('Ego Gunterigo, vobis comes domno Guttier').⁴⁸⁷ Cel14, dated to 919, presents us with another interesting example of the expansion of Gutier and Ilduara's patronage network. Consisting of one paragraph and only one further line, dating the transaction, we see a certain Ermegildo make a donation of his current possessions in *Buuatella* (Bobadela), plus any future possessions he may obtain, to Gutier and Ilduara, stipulating that they inherit half of the sum total of these possessions, the other half passing to his son Mundino.⁴⁸⁸ By 919, this already amounted to a lot of property.⁴⁸⁹ We can deduce from the size of this donation, indeed, that the main protagonist of this charter, Ermegildo, was a relatively wealthy man who seems to have sought the patronage of Gutier and Ilduara, presumably because he considered it in his strategic interests; there is, it should be noted, little sign of coercion in deals of this sort and the desire to forge closer links with important people may have been reason enough to donate to the powerful. In fact, the benefits of such support may have been thought to outweigh the loss of part of one's landed assets.

Gutier and Ilduara remained loyal subjects of the kings of Oviedo and León for the duration of their lives, as the Celanova documents demonstrate, and these documents occasionally give us a glimpse of the extent of their power. Cel17, from 922, is one such document. In this charter, Bishop

⁴⁸⁷ Of course, it is very hard for us to be sure about when this took place, since it may simply have been the case that this detail was not given in earlier documents.

⁴⁸⁸ Quite clearly, this was not Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, father of Gutier, since even allowing for shoddy documentary manufacture or practice, it is inconceivable that this relationship, between two figures as important as Hermenegildo and Gutier, would not have been noted by the scribe, should it have been possible to do so. Thus, the Hermenegildo of Cel14, despite being wealthy, should not be identified with Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, father of Gutier.

⁴⁸⁹ This wealth is unambiguous: 'habeatis inde medietatem in villas, in domos, in eclesia, in pumares, in vineas'.

Recaredo of Lugo, ('cum omnem congregationem Sancte Marie Baragarense et Lucense sedis'), made a donation of the church of Santa Marina to Gutier and Ilduara, on the understanding that they complete the construction of a monastery which had been half-built there, and later exercise their power over it. Most probably, this implied simple lordship of a domanial quality, Gutier and Ilduara perhaps benefitting from a share of its rents, but this responsibility almost certainly fell to Gutier and Ilduara because they were the most important people in the immediate locality. After all, the church of *Sancta Marine* was located in the charter as close to *ripa Minee* (that is, by the banks of the river Miño) in southern Galicia, and within an area in which this aristocratic couple had resided ('ubi uos habitabatis'). Ordoño I also confirmed the charter despite not being an actor in any way in the narrative it recorded—a sure sign of the influence of Gutier and Ilduara. Thus, the value of this particular document lies in what it can tell us about the royal favour conferred upon Gutier and Ilduara, which was considerable, and without parallel in the Liébana. More broadly, it is already becoming clear just how quickly magnates could accumulate landed wealth solely by means of donation. In just three documents, over four years, Cel13 (918), Cel14 (919) and Cel17 (922), we have seen Gutier and Ilduara inherit a quite remarkable array of possessions. They have not, in contrast to what we saw in the Liébana in the case of Bagaudano and Faquilona, actively purchased land either. The wealth of Gutier and Ilduara seems to have been of an order that made this mode of property accumulation largely unnecessary.

The only document from the Celanova cartulary in which Gutier and Ilduara together made an outright purchase is Cel20. In this charter, Trasuario and his wife Savildi sold to Gutier and Ilduara a quarter of a vineyard in the *villa* of Froyani, in the territory of Tybris, receiving in return 'pretium pannos in tres soldares'. The document is perfectly formed in the sense that it contains typical formulae, but it is puzzling in some respects;⁴⁹⁰ why would, for example, people as wealthy as Gutier and Ilduara make a purchase as small and seemingly insignificant from what we might reasonably assume to be a peasant couple?⁴⁹¹ The answer seems to lie in client-patron relations, for if we imagine

⁴⁹⁰ The language of sale is very explicitly stated in Cel20 (923): 'ut facerem vobis iam supra nominatis kartam venditionis', and, 'de ipsa vinea clausa vendimus vobis...'. See, Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 135–138.

⁴⁹¹ This much I think we can at least suggest given that they receive so little in remuneration.

land transactions to have held symbolic as well as practical considerations, then this small-scale deal may actually have been undertaken so as to concede patronage upon Trasuario and his wife; indeed, we cannot discount that small-scale landowning peasants would have wanted to engineer small transactions in order to enter the patronage networks of prominent aristocrats.

Similarly, shortly after the events related in Cel20, we see Gutier and Ilduara involved in another operation which surprises only because of the small-scale nature of the transaction. In Cel21, from 923, Recesindo made a donation of his half of a copse that he had bought ‘in monte Baron, inter Bubale et Caldelas’.⁴⁹² It can be surmised that the donor in this instance was also of relatively low social status, since the few clues we possess point this way. His donation, for example, was very modest, and we can say nothing about him as an individual since he does not appear again in our documentation. In sum, we would do well to consider this another example of the formation of ties of patronage between aristocrats and those seeking the protection and support of the powerful. In a very similar vein is Cel25 (927), in which Burrane, together with his relatives Senta, Elperico, Sisiverto and Sendino, gave to Gutier and Ilduara half of their belongings in the *villa* ‘Parata’, located somewhere along the banks of the river Arnoya. Gutier and Ilduara received ‘VIII colmenas cum apibus suis’, as part of this deal, a sure sign that we are once again most probably not dealing with the very wealthy, but rather with the peasant stratum.

These three documents, Cel20 (923), Cel21 (923), and Cel25 (927), seem to show Gutier and Ilduara involved in land transactions with much smaller dealers than we have hitherto seen in the Celanova documentation. One way to explain this might be to imagine that Gutier and Ilduara exercised coercive force over the peasants of these charters, forcing them to relinquish their property. However, it is equally possible that the wealth of Gutier and Ilduara was so vast, and the patronage they could offer so unique, that some peasants thought it beneficial to give up part of their possessions just to be associated with them. Interestingly, all of these transactions date to the 920s, a time when charter production was on the increase, as I have commented, and they may therefore reflect a cultural change concerned with the recording of these land deals rather than the beginnings of peasant

⁴⁹² Probably Búbal and modern day Castro de Caldelas.

involvement. Whatever the case may be, peasant involvement in meaningful numbers is still only a *visible* aspect of documentary, if not social, practice, from the middle third of the tenth century in southern Galicia, when the emphasis of Rosendo and his family turned more directly towards the peasant stratum, as we shall see.

The geographical spread of the landed interest of Gutier and Ilduara was made clear by the very first document in which they appeared together, Cel12 (916), in which we have seen how these interests took in land in Coimbra, Galicia (unspecified, but as we have seen, in numerous places), and Asturias. In the preceding paragraphs, I have examined three documents which show how Gutier and Ilduara also gained a grip on lands closer to their base in southern Galicia throughout the 920s by actively engaging with local peasants who appear to have been free, small-scale owners, selling or giving out of their own volition, and not because of sustained vertical pressure; but there is evidence that transactions of a relatively small scale, perhaps involving peasants seeking patronage or protection, continued into the 930s and included land from much further afield. Cel35 (931), in actual fact the last document in which Gutier appeared before his death sometime shortly afterwards, shows Gutier and Ilduara receiving a donation from Sendino and his wife Egilo in the area of Ribadeo, in the farthestmost north-easterly corner of Galicia.⁴⁹³ Ribadeo is some two hundred kilometres north of Celanova, and for Gutier and Ilduara to have attracted donations from people so far away is indicative of their influence; it is instructive to recall that in the Liébana aristocratic client networks barely extended beyond one of the smaller valleys, but here we can see that their reach was so wide that it must have necessitated the involvement of intermediaries.

These considerations notwithstanding, it remains the case that Gutier and Ilduara's most noteworthy characteristic was their consistent connection to the aristocratic sphere, and it was the political, as well as socio-economic, consolidation of their inherited wealth which explains their force of influence throughout Galicia and beyond its borders throughout the first third of the tenth century. This did not merely manifest itself by making Gutier and Ilduara attractive and likely recipients of

⁴⁹³ We must suspect that Gutier died sometime between 931 and 934, for this former is the last time in which Gutier is an active member of a property deal, whereas Cel40 (934) shows his children dividing up his possessions amongst themselves.

donation, but also in the conferral of more senior and formal interventions in community life and political events. Interesting in this regard is Cel23, from 925, since it presents us with a different perspective to that which we have hitherto seen in the charters involving Gutier and Ilduara. This is because Cel23 shows Gutier and Ilduara fulfilling the role of executors of the estate of a certain Gundulfo, dividing his estate amongst four beneficiaries, which are, the church of San Salvador and Santa Cruz de 'Portum Marini' (Portomarín); Guntina, the wife of Gundulfo; Odrocia, the niece or granddaughter of Gundulfo; and Abbot Rosendo, their son. The most interesting aspect of this document is not the rambling description given of the division of the estate, but rather that the signatories of the charter include not only Gutier and Ilduara, but also Rosendo, one of the principal beneficiaries.⁴⁹⁴ Clearly, this episode demonstrates that the wealthy were considered to have been suitable characters to entrust with legal procedure in tenth-century Galicia, and this is further evidence of their consolidated standing in the community.

The clearest possible demonstration of royal favour which kings could grant in our period was that of royal donation, or else the bestowal of title and responsibility for the governance of a said locality. Both of these honours befell Gutier and his family in the tenth century. In 927, Sancho Ordoñez, king of Galicia, made a donation of a royal property to Gutier and his family. The property was the *villa* of Villare, located near the aldea of Vilanova, today some three kilometres outside of Celanova.⁴⁹⁵ This was a significant donation in its own right; but Gutier's favour with King Sancho would be confirmed once again later in the same year. In Cel29, mentioned briefly on page 150, we are told of an extraordinary event whereby the king called an assembly of his magnates, abbots and bishops, who gathered in order to decide on how best to restore the monastery of Santa María de Loio, in the suburbs of the city of Lugo. Gutier was entrusted with the supreme power to decide on how best to realize this undertaking ('censitum est a nostro concilio ut ydem domnus Guttier sit tutor ab

⁴⁹⁴ A full decade before Rosendo became associated with the monastery of Celanova, he is therefore already seen receiving a very generous donation; one cannot help but feel that Gutier's and Ilduara's agreement to act as executors might have depended upon this condition being met.

⁴⁹⁵ 'Ego Santius, diuinu illius nutu princeps vobis domno Guttierrri et uxori uestre filiisque ac filiabus....Nunc quoque placuit, spontanee serenitati nostre, ut ex eis aliquit uobis concederemus, quemadmodum et concedimus parti uestre per huius scripture seriem, uillam quam dicunt Uillarem, qui est uicina domui uestre Uillenoue'. This is interesting also because it identifies this area as one in which Gutier resides. The document is Cel26.

hoc monasterio'). This would seem to be another example of the public reward of the continued loyalty of Gutier and his family. Alfonso IV (925–931) was also present, and the document was at later dates signed by Ramiro II (931–951) and Vermudo II (984–999). It is hard to know why such an operation would have been undertaken for the restoration of one monastery, should one of its central purposes not have been that of lauding and rewarding Gutier.⁴⁹⁶

Should further proof be needed of Gutier's influence, it can be found in Cel32 (929), which reveals the full extent of the responsibilities with which he was entrusted by his nephew, King Alfonso IV.⁴⁹⁷ Cel32 is a very short document, characterized by a matter-of-fact tone, and it paints a picture of Gutier's impressive influence at court, reflected in his nephew's decision to place him in direct control of several territories throughout south-central Galicia. The document is very explicit in the size of the undertaking, employing formal, conventional terms to express the transfer of the king's *iussionem*; 'Per huius nostre preceptionis serenissimam iussionem ordinamus uobis ad imperandum conmisso de Carioca, Cartelion, Laure medio, Sauiniano et Loseiro et Orticaria'. The range of territory placed under Gutier's governance, whatever this might have meant on the ground, cannot fail to impress.⁴⁹⁸ It also serves to underline that from the time of their first appearance together in Cel12, Gutier and Ilduara built upon the stable aristocratic foundations of their influence and wealth to cement their place as one of the most important landowning families in the first third of tenth-century northern Spain. After Gutier's death, his son Rosendo, at first in league with his mother, Ilduara,

⁴⁹⁶ It is significant that Gutier is referred to as count in this text: 'Guttier Menendiz comes'. Let us not forget too, that he was also the uncle of Sancho and Alfonso IV, by way of his sister (their mother), Elvira, queen of Ordoño II. Rosendo is named in this document 'Sancti Martini Dumiensis monasterii episcopus', which is a most unusual title. However, the document does not seem to be a forgery, and is otherwise essentially sound; the document, and Rosendo's title, may simply have undergone later embellishment at the hands of the monks of Celanova.

⁴⁹⁷ This relationship is made explicit by King Alfonso IV in Cel32: 'Adefonsus rex, tio nostro domno Guttier'.

⁴⁹⁸ These places consigned to the jurisdiction of Gutier were mostly located close to the area of middle and southern Lugo which formed the heartland of his familial base. This is true of 'Carioca', which now lends its name to both the *municipio* and *comarca* of Quiroga, some thirty kilometres east of Monforte de Lemos; 'Cartelion', now Castillón de Santiago, a *parroquia* of the *municipio* of Pantón, in the *comarca* of Terra de Lemos, some twelve kilometres west of Monforte de Lemos; 'Sauiniano', now Saviñao, a *municipio* of the *comarca* of Terra de Lemos, some fifteen kilometres west of Monforte de Lemos; and Loseiro, still named thus, a *parroquia* of Sarria, in the *comarca* of Sarria, only forty kilometres to the north of Monforte de Lemos. 'Orticaria' on the other hand is a reference to current-day Ortigueira, a *municipio* of the *comarca* of Ortegal, on the northern coast of Galicia in the province of A Coruña, some one hundred and sixty kilometres north of Monforte de Lemos.

would go on to create an even more extensive network of patronage, attracting donation from a newly visible peasant stratum, to an extent which his father had not achieved.

The best way to appreciate the significance of these developments is look at them, by way of conclusion, through a comparative prism; this will allow us to appreciate the subregional difference that existed at the level of aristocratic ownership and political influence in tenth-century northern Spain. The first documented appearance of Gutier and Ilduara occurs in a Celanova charter dated to 18 August 916.⁴⁹⁹ Just two years before this, Bagaudano made the first of a series of acquisitions in the Liébana, and he would go on to make many more throughout the first third of the tenth century, many of these made in conjunction with his wife Faquilona. On the face of it, this suggests a similar scenario in both locations, where the leading local lay couple engaged in recurrent dealing in landed assets, recorded for the sake of legal integrity in charters drawn up by local scribes. Yet this direct parallel is misleading. This is because the scale of operations undertaken in these regions differed greatly from one to the other, necessarily affecting the speed and process of social change which the documents record in both regions throughout the tenth century. In southern Galicia, we have examined a couple from the very highest echelons of tenth-century political society; in the Liébana, by contrast, we have analysed a local elite couple whose wealth and political influence were miniscule in comparison, and, moreover, achieved by means of a necessarily more proactive and acquisitorial approach to land transaction. This means that whilst the process in which both couples were engaged may in essence *seem* the same, their respective scales of socio-economic and political influence meant that the social changes that their actions brought about had different causes and different consequences. It was the political influence of Gutier and Ilduara which assured their economic hegemony and its recorded growth in the early tenth century, but it was the economic possibilities of significant landed acquisition in the Liébana rather than similar political prominence which allowed Bagaudano and Faquilona a platform from which to solidify their economic gains. Significantly, therefore, the documents seem to show local societies dominated by socio-economic leaders of a very

⁴⁹⁹ Cel12.

different scale, and their political influence reflects their origins; in Galicia, old, blue-blooded, aristocracy, and in the Liébana, what we might be tempted to call *nouveaux riches*.

But there is also another factor to consider. The late ninth and early tenth centuries were an age in which the governmental structures of the kingdom of the Asturias were rudimentary and underdeveloped. It was absolutely essential to kings that they control the peripheral regions of their kingdoms with the help of loyal regional factions of considerable standing; in fact, it was the only way to achieve this desired end, since kings had no choice but to delegate power. Hermenegildo Gutiérrez's consistent shows of loyalty to Alfonso III in the late ninth century were vital to the king's ability to overcome challenges to his authority; so were those of his son Gutier. But this loyalty came at a price, and this price was the bestowal of significant honours and landed wealth; it was this wealth and influence, emanating directly from Oviedo, that afforded Rosendo's family the most extraordinary prestige. In this way, royal power in ninth-century Galicia directly impinged upon the fortunes of Rosendo's family over many generations, since it was the key circumstance that allowed the accruelement of an enormous portfolio of landed wealth in the late ninth and tenth centuries. The scale of landed aristocrats therefore depended in large measure on their implication in the public structures of the kingdom; the private sphere alone could not, as of 930 at least, offer quite the same rewards.

Rosendo and Celanova: Royal-Magnate Politics

The influence that Gutier and Ilduara attained and consolidated in the period before c.930 was built upon political and economic power, the one simultaneously buttressing and providing a platform for the extension of the other, but its exercise was consistently most striking in the sphere of high politics. This much is apparent from the handful of royal dispensations and directives conferred upon this magnate family which we have seen attested in the documentary record of Celanova. The very considerable landed wealth enjoyed by this family was also unambiguously expressed in the *colmellum divisionis* of 934, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in which Rosendo and his siblings divided between themselves the widely dispersed landed holdings of their parents and grandparents.⁵⁰⁰ It is therefore significant that in the middle third of the tenth century, we see this power take on a different attribute, thanks to the foundation of the monastery of San Salvador de Celanova in 936.⁵⁰¹ This new attribute enshrined the political and economic power of Rosendo's family in the well-established framework of family-led monasticism, which had profound roots in Galician society.⁵⁰² But whereas we have seen in our earlier case study that the alignment of a rich landowning family with the monastery of San Martín de Turieno seems to have made little visible impact upon peasant society before 1000 in the Liébana—the monastery quickly becoming a beacon for aristocratic donation before losing considerable momentum—the dynamic that characterized Celanova's tenth-century growth was very different, and its effects on rural society were correspondingly dissimilar; that this was in part due to the scale of Rosendo's family as political operators, active amongst the first rank of regional magnates, makes an analysis of the political dimension of relations between the royal centre and Rosendo's family crucial to our understanding of the social forces that underpinned change more generally, and it is this which forms the central focus of this subsection.

⁵⁰⁰ Cel40.

⁵⁰¹ For more on the monastery, see Chapter 2.

⁵⁰² Wood, *Proprietary Church*, pp. 147–152; Bishko, 'Gallegan Pactual Monasticism', *passim*.

From its very beginnings Celanova was a family monastery which operated on a scale that was far from typical. The founding family of Celanova were recognized supporters of the king and had been cultivating connections with the royal house over at least two generations of marriage, as we have seen. Rosendo's abbacy was built upon these firm foundations and he seems to have retained the support of a succession of kings and to have overseen multiple royal donations to Celanova. The retention of this support was dependent upon Rosendo's ability to manipulate political relationships with kings in ways amenable to both parties, a skill at which he seems to have become expert, as we shall see, but it is important to emphasize that the influence of Celanova was also felt outside of the political channels which allowed its founding family to consolidate their ties with the royal centre. Indeed, the association of Celanova with the region's most important aristocratic family seems to have drawn together two hitherto relatively separated social worlds—the aristocratic, and the peasant. Although we have seen these worlds occasionally come into contact before the 930s, more striking has been the relative absence of the non-aristocratic stratum against a backdrop of grand aristocratic wealth—a fact overlooked by the historiography. Celanova made aristocratic power in the region a much more tangible reality, thereby altering the scope of aristocratic social reach, and presenting peasants with a beacon of power which would come to form the focus of their donation and sale, a process amply documented in the charters, and investigated in detail in the last subsection of this chapter. Underpinning this change was the monastery's landed wealth, which was largely the result of the extraordinary first wave of donations that it received from the founding family and their royal allies, and which meant that Celanova was effectively the most significant landowner in central and southern Galicia almost immediately after its foundation.⁵⁰³ Accordingly, it is important to acknowledge that large-scale aristocratic landowning, itself not new before Celanova's foundation, nonetheless found a new corporate identity in this region with Celanova, which managed to attract peasant alienation in ways hitherto beyond the reach of purely lay aristocrats. Put another way, the monastery thus accomplished what lay aristocrats had in large measure been unable to achieve—it attracted the interest of all elements of the social formation. As we have seen, Gutier and Ilduara mostly dealt in official business with other rich or aristocratic persons, but Celanova had a much

⁵⁰³ These donations are discussed in what follows.

wider appeal, and the middle third of the tenth century saw many peasant transactions from which Celanova was the direct beneficiary.⁵⁰⁴

The increase in the number of documents recording transactions and donation between the agents of Celanova and the non-aristocratic stratum throughout the second half of the tenth century has been easily absorbed into a very broad and highly schematic interpretative framework which I wish to nuance in this thesis.⁵⁰⁵ The price of peasant interaction with Celanova was not simply the imposition of seigneurial rights; social change in southern Galicia seems to have been a much more organic affair, and it is misleading to frame human interaction in this period solely within the parameters of conflict. Indeed, what Celanova (like San Martín de Turieno, but on a much larger scale) seems to have brought about was not the immediate diminution of peasant freedom, but rather the steady erosion of peasant choice, achieved by means of the accumulation of hitherto peasant-owned land, thus reducing the dimensions of the very resource which had continued to ensure some measure of economic autonomy for peasants; this need not, however, have brought short term disruption to the social aspect of relationships between peasants and lords. It is important to recognize that the increased recording of transaction in tenth-century Galician charter material was not a symptom of seigneurialization, but of changing patterns of domanial landholding.⁵⁰⁶ This distinction is of critical importance, because without it we risk mischaracterizing the speed and nature of social change in this region; domanial lordship, that is, a landlordly power consistent with the rights that accompanied the the ownership of land, was not the same thing as the power to enforce one's arbitrary will over men regardless of whether one held title rights to the land they worked or not. This kind of private action is something which it is simply impossible to associate with Rosendo's family in the tenth-century charter material.

⁵⁰⁴ This appeal was both economic—its enormous resources ensured that it could handsomely reimburse peasants for the sale of their land—and spiritual—offering at least the possibility of spiritual relief or regulation.

⁵⁰⁵ To take one example of many, J. M. Andrade Cernadas, *El monacato benedictino y la sociedad de la Galicia medieval (siglos X al XIII)* (A Coruña, 1997), at p. 77: (Celanova) 'es, en otras palabras, una gran institución señorial que va a funcionar como el primer agente de feudalización en su ámbito regional más inmediato, que tiene como primeras víctimas a los campesinos pequeños propietarios de las tierras de esta comarca'. See also, Carzolio de Rossi, 'La constitución y organización', *passim*. On the increase in charter production throughout this period, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 210–213.

⁵⁰⁶ Estepa Díez, 'Formación y consolidación del feudalismo en Castilla y León', pp. 161–163 discusses landlordly (domanial) power and distinguish it from seigneurial power.

Rosendo's centrality to the course of tenth-century Spanish history has been exalted by many historians, who between them have been able to reconstruct certain aspects of his life from a range of sources.⁵⁰⁷ The *VR* and the *HC* provide late and highly partial accounts, both of which, as one would expect, place considerable emphasis on Rosendo's devotion to his Christian calling; in what follows I have adopted a more critical line vis-à-vis these sources, since the object of their writing was to celebrate the subject's life and the see of Santiago de Compostela respectively, and had little concern for the provision of reliable information concerning the abbot's life.⁵⁰⁸ The *VR*, in particular, is a very limited text insofar as its ability to shed light on Rosendo as a political operator is concerned. It simply follows a broad chronological progression through Rosendo's life, stating that Rosendo was born in 907, carried out numerous great deeds, and died some seventy years later, at Celanova; protracted political business, needless to say, is not a central motif.⁵⁰⁹ The *VR* does at least claim that Rosendo was groomed from a young age for high office, telling us that at the age of just eighteen, Rosendo became bishop of Dumio, a see based in Mondoñedo which had been administered by his uncle Sabarico until c.924/5.⁵¹⁰ Such a position was of course commensurate with the status of the

⁵⁰⁷ On Rosendo and his activity: M. I. Carzolio de Rossi, 'Participación monástica en el control de la repoblación: el monasterio de San Salvador de Celanova en el siglo X', *CHE*, 70 (1988), pp. 5–60; C. Ríos Camacho, 'La singularidad de San Rosendo en el contexto del monasterio de Celanova y su área geográfica: Influencias culturales andalusíes en territorios gallegos', *Estudios Mindonienses: Anuario de estudios histórico-teológicos de la diócesis de Mondoñedo-Ferrol*, 23 (2007), pp. 49–87. Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 80–84.

⁵⁰⁸ The *VR* is a hagiographical text in which a highly stylized version of Rosendo's life, replete with many *topoi* common to the genre, is recounted. Interesting in its own right, it provides little in the way of information for a study of this sort. The *HC* is a history of the see of Santiago de Compostela which concentrates on the period from 1095–1139, but which also provides a brief summary of the early history of the church and city, which was founded, according to legend, in c. 830 after the *inventio* of the body of the apostle St James near to modern Santiago de Compostela. The work tells the story of the remarkable twelfth-century bishop (1100–1120) and archbishop (1120–1140) of Santiago de Compostela, Diego Gelmírez (c.1065–c.1140), and is considered a carefully tailored record of his devoted efforts towards the aggrandizement of the see. It was compiled by at least four authors, all canons of the Cathedral chapter in the twelfth century. For comment, B. F. Reilly, 'The *Historia Compostelana*: The Genesis and Composition of a Twelfth-Century Spanish *Gesta*', *Speculum*, 44 (1969), pp. 78–85. For Diego Gelmírez, Fletcher, *Saint James's Catapult*, is vital, especially ch. 5. The *CI* is a very short Latin chronicle dating from the late tenth century; it narrates a skeletal tale of the early history of the diocese of Iria-Compostela until 982, but provides no biographical information on Rosendo.

⁵⁰⁹ *VR*, pp. 158/9: 'Nam cum era nungenos quadragenos et quinos annos protraheret, idem sanctus uir VI. Kalendas decembris die V.^a feria natiuitatis exordium sumpsit'. The date here is given in the Spanish Era as 945, which is 907 in our dating system.

⁵¹⁰ *VR*, pp. 126/7. Dumio was an unusual episcopal seat, as it was identified with the small town of Mondoñedo in the modern province of Lugo from the ninth century. Its origins are thought to derive from the Visigothic monastery of Dumio, close to the city of Braga, nominally directed by an abbot-bishop who undertook the range of tasks pertaining more usually to one or the other of these offices. It was probably Alfonso III who transferred the 'seat' to Mondoñedo at some stage in the late ninth century, but it seems unlikely that Rosendo was based there for any serious length of time, given that his activity in and around Celanova was so extensive; Mondoñedo and Celanova are separated by a distance of 180 kms, meaning that rapid transfer between the two

son of one of the kingdom's most senior magnates, but it is frustrating that neither the *VR* nor the *HC* provide us with any further detailed information about these events, which are simply the narrative framework upon which the respective authors' of these texts were able to hang their more pressing rhetorical concerns.

The problems inherent in these sources therefore oblige us to base our efforts on an analysis of the charter material, and in this subsection I will make use of a range of material from across the major charter collections of the north-west in order to proceed with as wide a range of information as possible.⁵¹¹ It is of course true that the majority of documents which pertain to Rosendo and his family form part of the Celanova cartulary, but both he and his family appear frequently in documents from other collections, which is itself illustrative of their status, and the insights non-Celanova documents provide are often very significant. Taken together, the charters provide insights which suggest that Rosendo's familial lineage and the direct effect that this latter had on his ability to court royal support and intercede in high politics, much as his ancestors had done before him, meant that he was in many ways an atypical bishop; indeed, a lay background of such power allowed him to exercise authority of an order more commonly associated with the most senior lay magnates. This much is clear from the sorts of concessions and dispensations he received from kings, of which the most notable was Ordoño III's grant of 955, which saw Rosendo entrusted with the *mandatio* of 'Georres' (Valdeorras) to 'Riuo Calido' (Riocaldo), which his father and brother-in-law had governed before him ('mandationem genitoris uestri, diue memorie, Guttiherri Menendiz... tam quod obtinuit de ipsa mandatione tius noster, cognatus uester, Scemenus Didaci'), but which Rosendo's nephews, Gonzalo and Vermudo, had lost on account of their perfidy to the king ('pro eorum facinus et execrabili infidelitate caruerunt').⁵¹² This probably charged Rosendo with the upkeep of order, and

was impractical. See Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 72–89 on bishops in north western Iberia, and pp. 80–84 on Rosendo and his episcopate. References in the documents to Rosendo and Dumio are very rare; the earliest dates to 927 (Cel29), in which Rosendo is named 'Rudesindus Sancti Martini Dumiensis monasterii episcopus', which is a slightly unusual formulation. Nonetheless, should this be a twelfth-century interpolation, when examined in conjunction with the *VR* it at least suggests that a tradition linking Rosendo to Dumio existed in the twelfth century.

⁵¹¹ I have found the following collections most useful within the context of this thesis: the 'Portuguese' documents (PMH), the documents from the monastery of Sobrado (Sob), and the documents from the Tumbo A of Santiago de Compostela (SdeC).

⁵¹² Cel110.

possibly the maintenance of a system of public courts; such support must have been crucial, given that political stability more widely was a problem for the king. *Sampiro* informs us that Ordoño III (951–956), although ‘uir satis prudens’, faced stirrings of revolt across his kingdom in his short reign.⁵¹³

It is nonetheless hard to understand exactly what these concessions entailed, as we have seen, but the indications are that this duty supposed the practical transfer of royal authority to Rosendo; the most significant indicator of this is the fact that the responsibilities afforded him were awarded ‘for the purpose of governing’ (‘damus atque concedimus uobis ad imperandum’). I have already argued in this thesis that we need to be wary of anachronism when discussing government in the tenth century, but this document provides clear evidence at least that kings attempted to circumscribe the activity of their senior magnates in Galicia, and were able to count upon the symbolic support of other senior magnates, whose presence presumably added legitimacy to proceedings.⁵¹⁴ It should not be understated that there was quite clearly an expectation of royal government and at least a theoretical acceptance of its precepts in mid-tenth-century Galicia; to put this in context, this much cannot be said without significant reservations for certain parts of the Frankish lands at this time.⁵¹⁵ Earlier than this, in 935, Ramiro II had made a gift to Rosendo of a significant number of Galician churches; these were perhaps the sorts of institutions which played a role in the collection of tribute awarded to Rosendo in 955.⁵¹⁶ Although Rosendo was *stricto sensu* a man of the Church, it is clear that he wielded worldly power of a quality that far outstripped any of his tenth-century Liébana analogues.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ *Sampiro*, pp. 332–334. Ordoño III faced down a revolt led by Fernán González, count of Castile, King García Sánchez I of Pamplona (931–970), and his half-brother Sancho (later Sancho the Fat [956–966]). In the aftermath of this rebellion, the king repudiated his wife, Urraca Fernández, the daughter of Fernán González, and married Elvira, a Galician with whom he would father Vermudo II (982–999), thus solidifying the links that the Ordoño III and Vermudo II line had in Galicia. The conferral of the *mandationes* set out above came shortly after the king had taken an army to Galicia as part of a calculated show of strength designed to reestablish royal control there, for which *Sampiro*, p.333: ‘Ipse quidem rex Ordonius magno exercitu agregato Galleciam edomuit’. On the system of public courts, and the endurance of this ideal, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 143–149; and Bonnassie, ‘From the Rhône to Galicia’, pp. 110–113. For Rosendo holding courts, see p. 179, n. 527.

⁵¹⁴ Fernando Ansúrez, a senior Leonese magnate, and Sisnando Menéndez, were amongst the witness of Cel110.

⁵¹⁵ Poly and Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation*, ch. 1.

⁵¹⁶ Cel47 for the donation; Cel55: ‘adicimus, quam et que per nostros comissorios uos dudum obtinuistis, cuncta sit uobis a nobis regenda, et nostris utilitatibus de omnia regali debita persoluenda’.

⁵¹⁷ Ermelindo Portela Silva has shown that bishops clearly wielded great influence in Galicia; but it is just as telling that kings relied on lay officers drawn from aristocratic backgrounds in order to govern this region from at least the early ninth century. Indeed, there are indications that these latter played an equally important role; one need only consider Count Aloito, seen resolving a dispute sometime before 818 (Sob 43), clearly invested with royal authority (‘per ordinationem domni Adefonsi principis’), and the actions of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez

It was, however, the foundation of Celanova in 936, which best exemplified the continuing proximity of Rosendo's family to the royal line of León. Although often overlooked, the fact that the site chosen for the construction of the monastery of Celanova was a *villa* that the royal family had presented to Rosendo's family as a royal gift is very significant. It demonstrates that land with links to the king was being used by Rosendo to build what was in effect a family monastery; the monastery thus received what we might call quasi-formal royal patronage, and the indications are that the political resonance of this act was not lost on either party. In 935, Jimena, the daughter of Ordoño II and Elvira, this latter the sister of Rosendo's father, Gutier Menéndez, confirmed a donation to her cousin, Fruela, brother of Rosendo, of the *villa* of Villare, which she (Jimena) had inherited from her parents, and from her brother, Sancho Ordóñez, king of Galicia.⁵¹⁸ This was, however, the second time in eight years that the two families had drawn up a document to honour the transfer of the *villa* of Villare from one group to the other; a document from 927 shows how Sancho Ordóñez had donated this very same property to Gutier Menéndez ('uobis concederemus quemadmodum et concedimus parti uestre per huius scripture seriem, uillam quam dicunt Uillarem') just a few years previously.⁵¹⁹ This double donation may not be as confusing as it first appears; after all, Sancho Ordóñez had effectively based much of his legitimacy upon the support of Gutier and his faction, and this gift may well have reflected Jimena's desire to restate the closeness of the ties her family held with Fruela Gutiérrez and his siblings.⁵²⁰

from the later ninth century, described above. For Portela Silva's comments, see Portela Silva, 'El rey y los obispos', *passim*.

⁵¹⁸ Cel44. The VR confirms that the royal land on which Celanova was constructed found its way into Rosendo's hands via those of his brother, Fruela. VR, pp. 138/9.

⁵¹⁹ Cel26.

⁵²⁰ For which, see Cel26 (927) and Cel29 (927). Also, a twenty-year-old Rosendo is also amongst those confirming one of two documents drawn up during Sancho Ordóñez's reign which show the king lending support to Santiago de Compostela; see, SdeC51 (927), in which the king confirmed to the church all of the donations of his ancestors. Fruela may well have been by this stage the senior lay representative of his family group after his father's death, as a series of documents from northern Portugal demonstrates. In PMH45 (937), Fruela confirmed a donation made by his mother Ilduara to a certain Gondemiro of a mill in the *villa* of Ancan, stipulating that the mill be transferred to the monastery of Lorvão on Gondemiro's death; northern Portugal, and the Coimbra district in particular, was very much a part of the aristocratic orbit of the grandest Galician families of the period, and kings correspondingly could not afford to ignore what seems to have been an area in which the very rich owned on an extensive scale. Ramiro II made a donation to the monastery of Lorvão in 943 which emphasized his awareness of the need to cultivate political relationships with the aristocracy of this geographically peripheral region; the failure of some of his successors to do so would prove a considerable thorn in their side, as we shall see; for Ramiro's donation to Lorvão see PMH50.

On 12 September 936, Fruela and his wife Sarracina donated the *villa* of Villare to Rosendo, with the instruction that the bishop of Dumio-Mondoñedo oversee the building of a monastery there, to be known as Celanova.⁵²¹ It is very significant that the transfer of Villare to Rosendo was witnessed by a group of the greater magnates of the north-west, and that it was confirmed by King Ramiro II ('Ranimirus princeps conf.').⁵²² Ramiro II undoubtedly looked favourably on his alliance with Rosendo and Celanova and his confirmation of the transfer of Villare to Rosendo would have sent a clear signal of his intention to foster political stability in Galicia by consolidating ties with a magnate faction who already enjoyed close links with his own family. These grand donations, and dispensations of 'government', reflect the practical implications of *realpolitik* in this period; kings had to delegate power to the localities in order 'to govern', but they would only achieve this latter by proxy. By bestowing comital title, donating landed assets, and forging marriage ties with Rosendo's extended family, kings presumably hoped to draw it into the narrow pool of *potentates* whose vested interests lay in the preservation of the kingdom. This does not, however, necessarily imply that the ties that bound kings to their frontier magnates were inherently insubstantial; in the case of Rosendo's family they were clearly very durable, suggesting that they were amenable to both parties.

Shortly after Celanova was founded, a deliberate policy of donation was seemingly put in train by aristocratic and royal supporters of Rosendo, which saw the monastery receive some exceptionally grand gifts. In a very short period of time, the monastery soon became a focal point of aristocratic and royal power. Rosendo's mother gave handsomely to her son's new monastery in 938; Rosendo himself committed to a substantial donation of his personal landed wealth in 942; and in 951 his sister, Adosinda, gave with Jimeno Díaz, her husband, lands from as far afield as Coimbra to the modern province of Lugo.⁵²³ Each of these donations can be said to belong to the foundational phase of Celanova, as they all date to within a decade of Fruela's donation to his brother in 936. Each, too,

⁵²¹ Cel53.

⁵²² These included Gutier Osórez, Rosendo's uncle, married to Ildoncia Menéndez, the sister of Gutier Menéndez; Munio Gutiérrez, the brother of Froila and Rosendo; and Jimeno Díaz, the powerful Portuguese magnate who married Adosinda, the sister of Froila and Rosendo. Still just as useful as anything in Spanish, see Mattoso, *A nobreza medieval portuguesa*, pp. 101–158.

⁵²³ Cel57; Cel72; Cel 91. Jimeno Díaz and Adosinda Menéndez had already made another large donation to Celanova in 949 (Cel84).

was an impressive donation; the *villa* of Villare alone already comprised three separate units, each called *villa* in their own right in Cel 53, and Ilduara added substantially to this in 938.⁵²⁴

Rosendo nonetheless managed to exceed the donation of his mother in quantity and quality, giving more than thirty *villae* in 942 (Cel 72). These *villae* come from all over Galicia and indeed from beyond its current borders.⁵²⁵ The foundation of Celanova, and the dramatic aristocratic and royal support it enjoyed in the first five to ten years of its existence, were crucial happenings, because the corporate ownership that the monastery boasted by 950 meant that local communities were presented with a centre of spiritual and economic patronage the likes of which the region had not previously seen. Within the political ambit, it represented another ace up the sleeve for Rosendo's family—a monastery of such scale could hardly fail to attract the patronage of kings, which its founding family already enjoyed—and it would confirm them, and Rosendo in particular, as the key point of contact for kings in Galicia. Celanova would henceforth become the centre of Rosendo's spiritual, material, and political activity.

The years 935, 941, 944, and 949 all saw Ramiro II make donations to either Rosendo or Celanova, or, more ambiguously, to both.⁵²⁶ This does not include the documents in which Ramiro II confirmed arrangements or transactions related to Celanova or members of Rosendo's family which are recorded in other Celanova documents.⁵²⁷ But these four donations, whilst bringing very real benefits to Rosendo and his monastery, should also be seen as gestures of royal approval; in 941 (Cel69), Ramiro II demonstrated his willingness to conciliate Rosendo's faction by making a grand

⁵²⁴ 'Id est, offero glorie et honori nominis tui pro remedio animarum genitorum meorum Guttiherris et Ylduare uillam in terminos Gallecie, territorio Bubalo, subtus monte Leporario, ripam riuusculi Sorice, quam inquit Uillare, cum alios suos uillares dudum ibi seruientes uocati Moraria, Sampiri et Poleiares.'

⁵²⁵ Some of these *villae* we can relate directly to *villae* noted in the *colmellum divisionis* of 934.

⁵²⁶ These are, in the order listed above, in Cel47, Cel69, Cel77 and Cel85.

⁵²⁷ Listed chronologically, these are: Cel53 (936) records Ramiro's confirmation of Celanova's foundation; Cel57 (938) records Ramiro's confirmation of Ilduara's donation to her son's monastery; Cel65 (941) records Ramiro's confirmation of a donation to Celanova made by Gutier Osórez and Ildoncia Menéndez; Cel72 (942) records Ramiro's confirmation of Rosendo's donation to Celanova; Cel73 (942) records Ramiro's concession of large-scale powers on Fruela Gutiérrez; Cel86 (950) records a court-case between Rosendo and villagers representing three villages in Galicia at which Ramiro was present ('Ranemirus nutu diuino rex hanc preuisionem clementie nostre delatam atque confirmatam'); Cel88 (950) describes a delimitation of boundaries between four Galician villages at which Ramiro was again present ('Ranemirus princeps conf.'). As one would expect, Ramiro also conceded privileges to Santiago de Compostela, see SdeC39 (932), SdeC40 (934), and SdeC41 (949).

donation of *villae* and churches to Celanova. Such acts are indicative of the influence that Rosendo must have enjoyed with the king—influence of an order which allowed him to petition the king directly in order that sizeable amounts of the king’s landed interest be handed over to his control. The churches in question had been constructed under the instruction of the powerful ninth-century abbot Senior, discussed above; it is with a certain symmetry that his properties found their way into the hands of his tenth-century analogue.⁵²⁸ Aristocratic ownership of the ninth century, at that stage more clearly the business of ecclesiastical aristocrats like Senior, had by the tenth century seen a lay family intertwine itself with a network of religious institutions to the same end. Ordoño III was the son of Adosinda, the first wife of Ramiro II, and Rosendo’s cousin; we have, in fact, already seen him make an important delegation of power to Rosendo on page 175.⁵²⁹ He seems to have inherited a fairly stable kingdom in 951, but his five year reign was beset by problems, as the Chronicle of Sampiro, our best source for these troubled years, seems to show.⁵³⁰ He nonetheless tried, as Cel90 shows, to establish his rule by means of direct appeal to Rosendo, who had been a close ally of his father. In February 951, at the very beginning of his reign, Cel90 shows us the new king in Galicia accompanied by a large retinue of magnates gathered from across the northern peninsula. Interestingly, the list of magnates confirming the document included Fernán González, count of Castile, who was the father of the king’s wife Urraca (‘Fredenandus Gundesaluiz comes’) but who had nonetheless, according to Sampiro, challenged Ordoño’s father Ramiro II some years previously.⁵³¹ The document records the donation of a water mill in the Duero valley, close to Zamora, which the king made to Rosendo and the monastery of Celanova; the politics of such a gesture, so soon into the king’s reign, were clear for all to see. It is possible too, that Fernán González’s place in Ordoño’s retinue at this time was part of a calculated show of strength by the king; should this have been the case, then the symbolism of his being made to confirm a royal donation to Rosendo would not have gone unnoticed.

⁵²⁸ For abbot Senior, see Cel1, p. 154, n. 469.

⁵²⁹ Adosinda Gutiérrez was the daughter of count Gutier Osóriz and Aldonza Menéndez. The former was the son of Osorio Gutiérrez, brother of Hermenegild Gutiérrez, Rosendo’s grandfather. Aldonza Menéndez was the sister of Rosendo’s father Gutier Menéndez, and thus Rosendo’s aunt.

⁵³⁰ *Sampiro*, pp. 332–334.

⁵³¹ *Sampiro*, pp. 328–329.

Amongst those who confirmed Cel110 (955), discussed above, was Sisnando Menéndez, bishop of Iria-Compostela ('Sub Christi nomine Sisnando episcopus conf.'). As a senior representative of the rival family set out on page 143, it may seem odd that Sisnando should be called upon to confirm a document of this sort involving Rosendo, but this may demonstrate that kings felt that they needed bishops to confirm their documents in order to lend them formal authority, which was common across western Europe. Moreover, Sisnando, as bishop of Iria-Compostela, held an ecclesiastical post of great importance which kings since Alfonso II (791–842) had attempted to consolidate as a bulwark of royal power in Galicia. The king may too have considered public support and alliance with Sisnando to have been a way of reining in the overwhelming authority of Rosendo without compromising this crucial alliance; what is more, to ratify this alliance with the support of a powerful rival would be doubly useful in that it would demonstrate Ordoño III's power over Sisnando too. This context would help explain Ordoño III's donation to Sisnando and Santiago de Compostela of the 'comitatus' of Ventosa, made in 952, which would represent another attempt by the king to strike the delicate balance between his magnate allies in Galicia.⁵³²

It is not possible, or desirable here, to write an extended political history of the tenth century; however, it is clear that kings and magnate factions played the game of the 'politics of land' and still, in the tenth century, actively sought to forge bonds which would enable kings to rule, and their most trusted factions to reap the rewards of their largesse. The rivalry between Rosendo and Sisnando would eventually lead to the imprisonment of Sisnando at the hands of Sancho the Fat for his part in the deposition of this latter. This came about in the wake of a rebellion launched by Ordoño IV, of whom Sisnando was an ally, but it is telling that once order had been restored, Sancho would look to stabilize his authority in Galicia, as many kings had done before him, with the assistance of Rosendo's family.⁵³³ Rosendo was in fact raised to be bishop of Iria-Compostela by Sancho.⁵³⁴ This is very interesting, since Sancho had hitherto enjoyed rather ephemeral support in Galicia; nonetheless, Rosendo and his family clearly represented at least one pole of power in tenth-century

⁵³² SdeC44.

⁵³³ SdeC47, SdeC48 and Sob106 (all dated to 958) are rewards that the usurper Ordoño IV gave to Sisnando.

⁵³⁴ VR, pp. 128–130.

Spain that was unwilling to challenge the authority of kings it considered legitimate—Rosendo may too have wanted to reassert his authority over his rival Sisnando.⁵³⁵

This episode marks the beginning of a period in which factional politicking and infighting, contested between kings and aristocratic groups, and the increasing pressure of a newly resurgent al-Andalus, led to a situation of general instability, but as argued in the Introduction, I do not believe that it is possible to equate this with the same centrifugal forces that undermined the Frankish kingdoms in the late ninth and tenth centuries. Galician groups, and, until Rosendo's death, particularly his family, had become central to the outcome of wider political struggles in the northern Spanish peninsula. Their importance, indeed, may be signalled by the fact that Ramiro III (966–982), whose closest factional support groups were based in León, seemingly went out of his way to drag the focus of political activity away from Galicia. Even near contemporary sources were aware of these factional prejudices: the *CI* commented drily of Ramiro III's relationship with the dominant Galician magnate group that 'he was not their friend'.⁵³⁶ But kings were, on the whole, able to corral their interest groups into supporting them; sometimes, however, these groups lost out to more powerful groups. This was exemplified when Vermudo II, the son of Ordoño III, who gave handsomely to Celanova in the late tenth century, was crowned in the presence of his Galician aristocratic allies in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in 982.⁵³⁷ Kings certainly still mattered, and dispute between them and magnate factions does not prove otherwise; it was merely the consequence of such rudimentary and unevenly implemented structures of government. The conceptual coherence was just as strong in 1000 as it had been in 900.

⁵³⁵ Cel123 (959), a donation of a mine to Celanova is Sancho's only concession to the monastery.

⁵³⁶ *CI*, 12: 'Sec cum Comites et potestates Gallaeciae patrem non bene rectum, nec filium flore juventutis adultum erga se amicos non senserunt'.

⁵³⁷ Cel218 (993); Cel219 (993); Cel221 (994); Cel229 (996), for the donations to Celanova by Vermudo II of various landed assets.

Rosendo and Celanova: Rabal and the Village Community

When, on 7 February 962, Ermegoto and his sons sold their share of a vineyard in the village of Rabal to Rosendo and the monks of Celanova, receiving in turn four ‘modios’ in grain and unspecified goods, they probably knew full well that they were dealing, directly or indirectly, with one of the most important political fixers of their locality.⁵³⁸ Their motivations, all the same, must have had much to do with simple necessity or reasoned calculation; this being the case, it would have made sense for them to look to Celanova to assist them to make a sale. After all, Ermegoto and his sons could hardly have failed to notice Celanova, nor to register its presence in the region. The monastery was a mere ten kilometres south of Rabal, and many of their co-villagers had already sold to Celanova in the previous two years.⁵³⁹ In fact, it is thanks to the relatively large number of surviving charters which record transactions between Celanova, Rosendo, and the inhabitants of Rabal, that this village offers us such an interesting insight into the local society of tenth-century Galicia. Thirty-two charters from the years 956 to 997 allow us to examine village life in southern Galicia to an extent which is simply not possible for earlier periods; it is therefore instructive to piece together what we can from this group of documents, which I shall henceforth refer to as the ‘Rabal charters’.

⁵³⁸ Cel145. The document is addressed to Rosendo and his monks: ‘uobis domno Rudesindo episcopo et fratribus uestris’. Although on occasion we see slightly different formulations, such as those made to ‘Rudesindo episcopo et fratribus uestris monasterio Cellenoue’, on very few occasions during the lifetime of Rosendo is he not explicitly mentioned in transactions involving land passing into the ownership of Celanova. The bare statistics are such that Rosendo must be seen as the director of operations at Celanova, which is hardly surprising given the sort of political prominence he enjoyed throughout the middle of the tenth-century, examined above. From the foundation of Celanova in 936 until Rosendo’s death in 977, Rosendo is explicitly named either as the sole or joint recipient of donation, or one party of a ‘compra-venta’, in approximately 70 documents. A ‘modius’ was a common Roman unit of dry measure, approximately equal to the Imperial unit of one peck.

⁵³⁹ Since 960, the dealings of the inhabitants of Rabal with Rosendo and Celanova had been extremely frequent. Fourteen charters record sales made to Rosendo and Celanova after 960 and before Ermegoto and his sons made their sale on 7 February 962; of these documents, all are peasant sales bar three, which are sales made by priests to Rosendo’s institution. These are: Cel128 (960); Cel129 (961); Cel130 (961); Cel131 (961); Cel132 (961); Cel133 (961); Cel134 (961); Cel135 (961); Cel136 (961); Cel137 (961); Cel138 (961); Cel139 (961); Cel140 (961); Cel143 (961). The sales made by priests are Cel130 (961); Cel135 (961); Cel143 (961). Two peasant sales by Rabal villagers pre-date this period of concerted Celanova purchase; Cel117 (956) and Cel118 (956). A peasant sale here is taken to mean the expressed sale of peasant-owned land to another party in exchange for a fixed price; the precise delimitations of the land are almost always unknowable. Both the sale and the fixing of the price are made explicit in the documents, with sales signalled in the documentation by means of the use of the verb ‘vendere’, hence ‘vendimus’ or ‘venderemus’. Price is normally expressed as ‘precio’ and was very variable. For more on this, see Davies, ‘Sale, price and valuation’.

Rabal was merely one of many rural settlements which dotted the tenth-century landscape of what is now the province of Ourense, in southern Galicia.⁵⁴⁰ But we can assume from the similarities that the Rabal charters share with the sorts of details recorded in transactions from other, less well documented villages, that it can be used as a good approximate guide to village life in southern Galicia in our period.⁵⁴¹ I discussed the terminology of the village above (pp. 75–77), when dealing with the Liébana; all the same, the use of the word ‘village’ when discussing places given the designation of *villa* in the Galician charters requires some comment here as well. A *villa*, it seems, could be many things in tenth-century Galicia: a territorial designation (a clearly defined settlement space of variable size and nucleation), a proprietorial designation (an individual estate), or a more global term encompassing a village community and the plots and houses of its various inhabitants, spatially organized in less or more dispersed fashion. Debate rather than consensus has characterized its usage and discussion of the meanings of this term have been abundant.⁵⁴² The vast majority of scholars accept that the late Roman *villa*, the often lavish rural retreats of the aristocratic class set within a *fundus*, that is to say, a residential and productive complex of buildings and lands, has little or no relevance to the term *villa* as and when it crops up in tenth-century documents, as we saw in the Liébana.⁵⁴³ Those giving or selling in any given *villa* are too numerous, and the divergence amongst

⁵⁴⁰ These settlements are often called *aldeas* by Spanish historians and archaeologists.

⁵⁴¹ These shared details include, for example, the preponderance of mixed farming and viticulture realized pretty much everywhere that we have documented peasant transaction in tenth-century Galicia.

⁵⁴² Particularly relevant here are: E. Portela Silva and M. C. Pallares Méndez, ‘La *Villa* por dentro. Testimonios Galaicos de los siglos X y XI’, *SHHM*, 16 (1998), pp. 13–43; Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara*, pp. 36–50; Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 193–202. A good overview of the metanarratives underpinning various definitions of the village can be found in C. Wickham, ‘La cristalización de la aldea en la Europa Occidental (800–1100)’, in *Movimientos migratorios, asentamientos y expansión (siglos VIII–XI). Actas de la XXXIV Semana de Estudios Medievales* (Pamplona, 2007), pp. 33–51. There has been a great deal of archaeological work on early medieval Spanish villages in the past ten years; the following introduction to some of the literature I have found most helpful is not, however, exhaustive: J. A. Quirós Castillo and A. Azkarate Garai-Olaun, ‘Arquitectura doméstica altomedieval en la península ibérica. Reflexiones a partir de la excavaciones arqueológicas de la catedral de Santa María de Vitoria-Gasteiz, País Vasco’, *AM*, 28 (2001), pp. 25–60; Quirós Castillo and A. Vigil-Escalera Guirado, ‘Networks of peasant villages between Toledo and Velegia Alabense, Northwestern Spain, (V–X Centuries)’, *AM*, 33 (2006), pp. 79–130; Quirós Castillo, ‘Arqueología de los espacios agrarios medievales en el País Vasco’, *Hispania*, 233 (2009), pp. 619–652; Vigil-Escalera Guirado, ‘Granjas y aldeas tardoantiguas y altomedievales de la meseta. Configuración espacial, socioeconómica y política de un territorio rural al norte de Toledo (ss. V–X D. C.)’, *AEA*, 80 (2007), pp. 239–284. For Galicia, where early medieval rural archaeology is not yet as extensive, see P. Ballesteros Arias and R. Blanco Rotea, ‘Aldeas y espacios agrarios altomedievales en Galicia’, in Quirós Castillo (ed.), *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Villages in Europe* (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2009), pp. 115–135.

⁵⁴³ The significance of this question should not be underestimated, although it cannot be developed in detail here. This is because it is now the accepted orthodox line that the genesis of *aldeas* came about in the wake of the abandonment and progressive degeneration of the late Roman *villa* system. However, since both

what is being given or sold too great, to accept that the *villa* of tenth-century documentation was not by this stage a very different entity.⁵⁴⁴ Indeed, Pallares and Portela have shown how the Galician *villa* of the early Middle Ages was subject to a degree of internal organization, relative to the productive and habitation needs of the community, which presupposes a population of variable resources and economic status; the majority of the inhabitants worked the land, other inhabitants did not, and in some cases, there must too have been *villae* which contained the residences of the aristocratic groups investigated above.⁵⁴⁵

However, the best way to try to understand what *villa* might have meant in tenth-century Galicia, is to examine the context of its appearance in the documents. Here we see that land—fields, meadows, vineyards—and the buildings on or near this land—houses, granaries, mills—appear repeatedly in the charters as components of settlements commonly described as *villae*. The *villa* is then often contextualized in the documents in relation to a larger territorial-administrative designation. Thus we find the following descriptions of settlements: ‘...faciorem uobis scriptura donationis, sicuti et facio, de uillas meas proprias (probably ‘my estates’) quod habeo in territorio Asturiense’; ‘Placuit nobis ut uenderem uobis uineas meas quas habeo in uilla que dicunt Rauanale (probably ‘my vineyards in the village of Rabal’), territorio Arnogie’.⁵⁴⁶ Very often, the description goes into greater detail still, as the following documents show: ‘Dominorum meorum Sancti Saluatoris, Sancte Marie et

archaeology and written sources have hitherto furnished very few of these latter in Galicia, it suggests that we need to think again about the origins of the village networks in the north-west, which may in fact lie in a change in settlement patterns which saw a large proportion of the castro-dwelling populations begin to inhabit the lowland and valleys of Galicia during the high and later Imperial periods in settlements known as *vici* or *villae*. The literature on castros is vast and cannot be cited in detail here; however, the best study of this hypothesized change, supported by both archaeological data and charter references, is M. C. Pallares Méndez and J. A. Puente Míguez, ‘*Villa Bidualdi*. Un despoblado del siglo X. Aproximación arqueológica’, *CEG*, 32 (1981), pp. 475–485. Very few people now question that Galicia, as part of the province of Gallaecia, underwent significant, albeit micro-regionally variable, socio-economic and cultural change under Roman rule. It is equally uncontested that al-Andalus left a minimal imprint on Galicia and that the region was never systematically absorbed into the structures of any of the ruling polities based in Córdoba. Continuities of settlement patterns therefore make great sense when applied to Galicia. For the continuity of settlement patterns see E. Portela Silva and Pallares Méndez, ‘Galicia, á marxe do Islam. Continuidade das estruturas organizativas no tránsito á idade media’, in Pereira Menaut (ed.), *Galicia fai dous mil anos*, pp. 435–457. For the late Roman *villa* system in Spain and its collapse, see Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las villae en Hispania, passim*.

⁵⁴⁴ When we come to look in detail at the village of Rabal, we shall see too that there were lots of private proprietors within this one village.

⁵⁴⁵ See Portela Silva and Pallares Méndez, ‘La Villa por dentro’, in which the authors have shown via detailed analysis of the descriptions given in the Rabal charters, used in conjunction with aerial photography and map-work, that the territorial boundaries of the village of Rabal in its tenth-century form substantially coincide with those of the modern day *feligresía* of San Salvador de Rabal.

⁵⁴⁶ Cel28 (927); Cel143 (961).

Sancti Petri et Pauli, cuius basilica scita esse dignoscitur in territorio Arnogie, inter saltus Balesari et Saltubati, iuxta fluuiio Eyres'; '...ipsa uilla in locum predictum ubi dicunt Couas et Lamas Ziniti, inter monte Toro et monte Barosi, discurrente riuulo Humane minore, et inde eclesiam uocabulo Sancti Iohannis usque in calzata'.⁵⁴⁷ As these examples show, the apparent flexibility of the term means that on occasion it is only context which allows us to distinguish between single estates and entire villages.

There is nonetheless significant reason to believe that the *villa* as a village, sometimes composed of estates also often called *villae*, was one of the most basic units of territorial and social organization in the Galicia of Rosendo's period; just as importantly, charters demonstrate that the dimensions and boundaries of a *villa* mattered to its inhabitants.⁵⁴⁸ That *villae* could have, and in many documented cases indeed did have, clearly defined limits, even if the functioning and significance of these was better understood by their tenth-century inhabitants than they are by us, is also made clear on occasion when community members of different *villae* looked to solve boundary disputes, most of which must have emanated from transgression or trespass.⁵⁴⁹ These disputes make sense in the context of competition between villagers or whole communities for communal resources of one sort or another, such as fishing rights or the use of woodland. There was, therefore, clearly some sense of communal identification with or within the accepted and known boundaries of a *villa*, which was, in most cases, equally clearly a place of both work and habitation in a rural setting; some of these *villae*, furthermore, were home to churches and monasteries.⁵⁵⁰ I am therefore happy to

⁵⁴⁷ Cel7 (889); Cel182 (976). The identification of *villae* in relation to local geographical or territorial markers is very interesting. It may be bound up with what Wickham identifies as a marker of a profound set of changes which affected social organization in the wake of the dissolution of the Roman state in the west. Its significance would be in signifying that 'geographical territories (rather than landowning patterns, as in the western Roman Empire) came to be the marker of local collective identity, and the whole landscape became divided up between *villae*, (or *vici*, or *loci*), settlements and the agricultural space their inhabitants depended upon', *FEMA*, p. 514–518.

⁵⁴⁸ There is nothing to suggest however that this term connoted the same sort of civil association between its inhabitants that Wendy Davies has described for the term 'plebs' and its function in ninth-century Brittany. Davies, *Small worlds*, pp. 63–67. For disputes more generally and the insights of an approach sensitive to anthropology, see Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes*, *passim*.

⁵⁴⁹ The villagers of Santa María de Verín, Abedes, Regaulfus, and Saquetina, appealed to Suarío Gutiérrez and Rodrigo Gutiérrez, to settle such a dispute in 950 (Cel88).

⁵⁵⁰ This 'communal identification' is not evidence in itself for extensive communal social action, and merely alludes to the members of a community looking to acknowledge and retain the boundaries of their community. Communal rights and private property are by no means mutually exclusive, and it does not follow that communal rights have to derive from communal ownership. In other words, although communal rights, for example, in wooded areas, seem to have persisted in parts of Spain, it must still be acknowledged that private property ownership seems to have been the dominant form of landholding and use in tenth-century Galicia. A

accept that ‘village’ is the most sensible English term for the majority of places called *villae* in the tenth-century documents, as I was in the Liébana, for the *villa* was, in the words of Portela and Pallares ‘el marco básico del hábitat rural’.⁵⁵¹

Regardless of whether one is happy to call Rabal a village (described as ‘villa que dicunt Rauanal’, and variants, in the texts), as I do here, it is beyond doubt that these sorts of places are our best starting point for an investigation into peasant social action.⁵⁵² However, where this sort of analysis fits in with the broader historiographical context of the transition from a late antique to a medieval world, is far from simple.⁵⁵³ This becomes clear when reflecting on a point made earlier in the Introduction, which is that much recent analysis of peasant communities in many areas of northern Spain, including Galicia, has been predicated upon the *a priori* assumption that the tenth century actually explains the supposedly transformed social order of the eleventh century and beyond, defended by many Spanish historians; that is to say, that if we look to the tenth century we can see aspects of the eleventh in rudimentary form.⁵⁵⁴ This transformation in non-Catalan Christian Spain is mostly taken for granted, and its rougher edges are rendered less controversial by stressing that change was long-term and gradual, rather than abrupt and clear, as Bonnassie argued for Catalonia, and proposed too for all of northern Spain, albeit dependent on chronological specificities.⁵⁵⁵

What this has meant, as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, is that peasant social action in tenth-century Galicia has been subsumed by the wider debate of ‘Feudal Revolution’, taken here, very broadly, to mean growing elite power at the expense of an increasingly subject peasantry and the

good starting point for dispute and communal rights in the rural world of medieval Spain is R. Pastor de Togneri, ‘Consensus y violencia en el campesinado feudal’, *ELEM*, 9 (1986), pp. 731–742.

⁵⁵¹ E. Portela Silva and M. C. Pallares Méndez, ‘De la *villa* del siglo IX a la aldea del siglo XIII. Espacio agrario y feudalización en Galicia’, *AMED*, 8 (1995–96), pp. 47–70, at p. 52.

⁵⁵² Cel128 (960)

⁵⁵³ Until more archeological work is undertaken in Galicia, the ‘transition’ will remain unclear.

⁵⁵⁴ Portela Silva and Pallares Méndez, ‘La *Villa* por dentro’. The authors here characterize this change too schematically: ‘la progresiva intrusión del monasterio de Celanova en estas tierras...da como resultado no tanto una reordenación del área de las *villae* como una reorientación del sistema de explotación, a partir de ahora cada vez más apoyado en campesinos dependientes—designados, en ocasiones, como *homines de Celanova*—y, aunque seguramente en menor medida y en progresión decreciente, en la introducción en el lugar de hombres de condición no libre’. Textual ambiguity may well be a factor here, but actual evidence of tied dependence is very thin and restricted to particular circumstances, as we shall see. Furthermore, documents show often surprising levels of peasant autonomy in late tenth-century Galicia, and we should resist the temptation to characterize the local society of this area at this time as anything other than highly mixed and fluid.

⁵⁵⁵ See n. 44 for relevant bibliographical references.

concurrent creation of private political institutions at the expense of public ones. In other words, the study of peasants in tenth-century Spain has been carried out so as to demonstrate that peasant subjection was already beginning to restrict the scope of peasant social action—an approach which seems to me to restrict the possibilities of debate *ab initio*. This schematic outline has led to generalizations which, I believe, peasant activity as documented in tenth-century Galician charters makes very hard to sustain. The implications of stepping outside of this established methodological and ideological framework are significant, for they oblige us to imagine a wider range of peasant social action; this, in turn, is how we arrive at a more accurate overall picture of peasant experience in tenth-century southern Galicia.

We have seen that local society in tenth-century Galicia was based around the building block of the *villa*, shaped in accordance with the economic and social organizational requirements of its inhabitants.⁵⁵⁶ These would have varied in relation to the social make-up of each community, but it is crucial to note that from the middle third of the tenth century we begin to see the appearance of small peasants in the documentary record in meaningful numbers. Here I would modify Wickham's definition of a peasant as a 'settled cultivator (or, more rarely, pastoralist), cultivating largely for subsistence, who does at least some agricultural work personally, and who controls his or her labour on the land'.⁵⁵⁷ This modification seems necessary because subsistence level existence must have been characteristic of only some peasants, with others, perhaps those who owned several plots within a village but who nonetheless continued to take an active part in the labour process, still best described as peasants, albeit richer ones. Implicit in my modification of Wickham's definition is my view that it seems to me wise to envisage the peasant stratum as a large and diverse body of individuals, characterized by significant differences of economic resources, examined in more detail below. For now, it remains important to be wary of subscribing to any more rigid a definition than that offered above, particularly as the documents support Richard Fletcher's assertion that 'there existed an intermediate and very sizeable class of free property-owners', which we see in Celanova

⁵⁵⁶ Here I do not plan to discuss the *villa* in greater detail. This has been done, perfectly well, by Pallares Méndez and Portela Silva in a Galician context.

⁵⁵⁷ *FEMA*, p. 386.

documentation throughout the whole of the tenth century, and with particular clarity in the second half of the century.⁵⁵⁸

Peasants could have been relatively wealthy at the village level, as was perhaps Framila, who was given a quarter of a house by Gondesondo in 924 in payment for support that the former had lent the latter in times of straitened circumstances ('pane et uino qui guuernasti me in anno malo').⁵⁵⁹ They could also be very poor, as was, most probably, Sisulfu, receiving an unspecified quantity of wine and food ('uino et cibaria') from the 'confessa' Gonso, in return for some small fragments of land in 943.⁵⁶⁰ These examples, seemingly anecdotal, actually hold a greater value, for they highlight the ways in which communities of free peasants of unequal means looked to each other—to the social logic of the village-level world—to solve their problems. Whatever the tenth century brought to Galician society, it was not social hierarchy, for this clearly existed before ecclesiastical institutions in league with aristocratic families began to gain direct control over greater extensions of land, and it is logical to suppose that the unequal distribution of resources at the village level led to social inequalities within this social ambit; social hierarchy is in fact likely to have been a recognizable feature of Galician rural society since at least the Roman period. It is to do a disservice to peasant communities of this period to frame the debate in terms that precondition us to suppose that we only glimpse peasants when they are making the rich richer in tenth-century Galicia, although this they do often enough. Nonetheless, the few documents which survive in which peasants are seen helping each other, such as Cel22, are rare glimpses of social action at the village level not contingent upon the presence of lay or ecclesiastical aristocrats. It is crucial to recognize that peasants did and could act independently and that their interests were not always dependent on the whims of aristocrats, and that it is the very nature of the documentary record itself which conditions us to imagine that peasant transactions within the peasant stratum were so comparatively infrequent.

⁵⁵⁸ Fletcher, *St. James's Catapult*, p. 14. This book focuses on the twelfth century, by which time, according to Fletcher, there were still significant numbers of free peasant proprietors.

⁵⁵⁹ Cel22.

⁵⁶⁰ Cel74.

The free peasant proprietor, the ‘pequeño propietario’ of Spanish historiography, has traditionally been afforded secondary status in much of what has been written about Galicia, certainly in comparison with that which it has enjoyed in studies centred on other areas of the northern peninsula.⁵⁶¹ Having never been subject to prolonged and significant political domination at the hands of al-Andalus, Galicia has managed to escape the more extreme characterizations of the depopulation thesis, argued by Sánchez-Albornoz to have taken place in the eighth century, and to have led to the new settlement of repopulating small-scale proprietors in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁵⁶² Problematically, this means that historians have found it harder to know how to characterize Galicia. One answer has been to emphasize the slave as the characteristic and perhaps defining element of the socio-economic formation of early medieval Galicia—a view, ironically, in many ways in accord with the presentation of the region as a fossilized relic of the ancient world, also common to a very different group of historians.⁵⁶³ It nonetheless seems to me hard to accept that in the wake of the abandonment of the depopulation paradigm, and the concomitant social disruption that this would have brought with it, we should look to characterize Galicia as essentially unchanged from the fifth to the tenth centuries. Change needs to be set against this broader tapestry of continuity, for both phenomena in some measure characterize every historical period. Furthermore, the pace of change is not uniform for all elements of a given social formation, meaning that the coexistence of social patterns which seem to us variously antique or medieval should not necessarily surprise us.

Servile dependence in the early Middle Ages is one issue which has elicited very different responses from historians identified primarily as Romanists or medievalists, but it is highly questionable whether it remains helpful to see it in its medieval manifestation as merely a remnant of the ancient world. At the very least, the forms it took and the ways these were conceived of and

⁵⁶¹ Its resonance within conservative historiography of a Castilianizing bent is very great indeed; see C. Sánchez-Albornoz, ‘Pequeños propietarios libres en el reino asturleonés’, *Settimane*, XIII (1966), pp. 183–222.

⁵⁶² Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación*, pp. 253–291.

⁵⁶³ This view is implicit or else stated clearly in much of Sánchez-Albornoz’s work. See, for example, C. Sánchez-Albornoz, ‘Rebeliones en Galicia’. For the debate on slavery, see Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism*, chapters 1, 2 and 3; M. I. Loring García and P. Fuentes Hinojo, ‘Esclavitud y servidumbre en el tránsito del mundo antiguo al medieval’, in Hidalgo de la Vega, Pérez Sánchez and Rodríguez Gervás, *“Romanización” y “Reconquista” en la península ibérica*, pp. 247–256; and Mínguez Fernández, ‘Sociedad esclavista’.

described by medieval people require flexible thinking from modern historians. The importance of the slave debate has profound roots in Galician historiography, not least in the way in which it has been absorbed by those scholars interested in discussing the complex of socio-economic and political changes that they see as bound up with 'Feudal Revolution'. Central to these arguments has been Bonnassie's contention that tenth-century north-western Spain did not offer ripe conditions for feudal society (within his framework).⁵⁶⁴ Such a view concords with the continued echo and expectation of royal government and public power which I have highlighted above as an interesting element of many ninth- and tenth-century Galician documents and which Bonnassie, in my view, was right to emphasize as an unusually powerful construct by the standards of much of tenth-century western Europe.⁵⁶⁵ The upshot is that neither the institutional order nor the village world of tenth-century Galicia can be best characterized as feudal, if this latter is defined as a world in which the arbitrary imposition of private justice and violence by lords operating outside of notional 'public' structures, and the existence of formal bonds of sworn dependence between peasants and lords, was commonplace. Indeed, the sorts of informal bonds we have seen between lords and peasants in some of the documents examined previously speak of relationships which appealed to the informal loyalty which characterized hierarchical social relationships of the early Middle Ages everywhere, rather than those of a recognizably feudal sort in its classic formulation.⁵⁶⁶

Nonetheless, the role of the slave has assumed great significance to many scholars of 'Feudal Revolution' precisely because the disappearance of the former is credited with playing a catalysing role in the social and economic changes which characterized the genesis of the Middle Ages, so where one chooses to locate this moment is therefore central to many historians' views on the period as a whole.⁵⁶⁷ Were slaves replaced by serfs or was a new social class generated in the wake of the demise of slaves and free small proprietors? Some light can be shed by first acknowledging that slavery in

⁵⁶⁴ Bonnassie, 'From the Rhône to Galicia', pp. 110–118.

⁵⁶⁵ That a public construct of such ambition, marshalled by local lords operating within a quasi-public framework, could exist alongside what in many places seems a largely free peasantry is a formulation of some of the more interesting questions of tenth-century Spanish history which has been under-explored. For a recent overview, see Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, ch. 21.

⁵⁶⁶ M. Keen, *A History of Medieval Europe* (London, 1968), pp. 49–50.

⁵⁶⁷ For more on this in its specifically Spanish context, see: Isla Frez, *Alta edad media*, pp. 282–292; Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, *passim*. More general in its focus is Mínguez Fernández, *La España de los siglos VI al XIII*.

medieval charters is not just hard to quantify; it is often hard to distinguish.⁵⁶⁸ That having been said, there a number of terms which crop up in the charters which seem to suggest servile dependence of some sort, amongst the most common of which are *homines* (although it is often forgotten that this need not mean slave), *mancipia*, and *servi*. Unfortunately, it is often very difficult to go much further than this statement and to describe the economic or legal reality behind the terms employed. The work of Isla Frez has shown how the term *servus* had come to mean ‘una diversidad de realidades’ by the tenth century, ranging from the domestic servants of an aristocratic household—such as Muzalha, awarded ‘*ciuium romanorum*’ by Rosendo in 943—to a description of ‘aquél que, hereditariamente, se encuentra “ad deseruiendum”, es decir, realiza cualquier tipo de servicio’.⁵⁶⁹ Wendy Davies has also shown that the lived social experiences encompassed by servile status in the early medieval age were probably wide-ranging and remain far from clear to us.⁵⁷⁰ It would be rash to discuss the proportion of *servi* as a section of the social formation, partly because the terminology is so slippery, and partly because the sources simply do not allow for this sort of work. Nonetheless, that they were by the tenth century a minority is probable; the evidence from Celanova is certainly patchy to say the least—half a dozen tenth-century documents from Celanova specify the presence or inclusion of ‘*servos*’ and only a handful describe people undertaking ‘*servitia*’ (and ‘doing service’ was not solely the preserve of a *servus* by any means). Of the appearance of *servi* in these documents, it is important to note that the contexts in which they appear are invariably linked to the grand aristocratic families of the region. Cel6 (886), as we have seen, describes a donation to the king of *villae* and includes the transfer of ownership of some ‘*servos*’; Cel12 (916) shows Gutier Menéndez (father of Rosendo) making a donation to his wife Ilduara of ‘*servos vel origine maurorum*’, almost certainly war captives. Cel24 (926) tells of Gunterigo’s donation to his wife, as part of his wedding gift, of ten ‘*pueros*’ and ten ‘*puellas*’ but we have no way of knowing what sort of status those described as *pueri* and *puellae*

⁵⁶⁸ The bibliography related to this question is vast. See J.-P. Devroey, ‘Men and Women in Early Medieval Serfdom: The Ninth-Century North Frankish Evidence’, *P&P*, 166 (2000), pp. 3–30; A. Verhulst, ‘The Decline of Slavery and the Economic Expansion of the Early Middle Ages’, *P&P*, 133 (1991), pp. 195–203; P. Bonnassie, ‘The Survival and Extinction of the Slave System in the Early Medieval West (Fourth to Eleventh Centuries)’, in Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism*, ch. 1; *FEMA*, pp. 259–263.

⁵⁶⁹ For Muzalha, Cel 76. For Isla Frez, *Sociedad gallega*, pp. 203–14. The award of Roman citizenship is interesting for what it says about conceptions of personal and legalistic identity.

⁵⁷⁰ Davies, ‘On servile status in the early Middle Ages’, in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Serfdom and Slavery* (London, 1996), pp. 225–46.

enjoyed, although the context has nothing to do with agrarian ‘contractual’ obligation and probably refers to domestic servants of some sort. The same impression is derived from Cel144 (961), in which Zenserigo donated to Menendo Gutiérrez (Rosendo’s brother), ‘quarta porcione de mancipias vel mancipios’. It is interesting that in a large donation to Celanova from Adosinda Gutiérrez (Rosendo’s sister) and her husband Jimeno Díaz, we see provisions being made for the liberation of their ‘servos’ (‘si nobis evenerit mors ut non obiemus servos nostros ingenuare, maneat vobis licitum ad vicem persone nostre ingenuandi illos’).⁵⁷¹ Furthermore, the instructions given assign property to the ‘servos’ (‘et dandi eis in peculiare...’); that is to say that people described in the tenth-century documentation as ‘servos’ could, like at least some ancient slaves, enjoy the *de facto* possession of certain assets. This the slaves of the ancient world could do too, but apart from this they possessed few or no legal rights.⁵⁷² However, legal freedom and unfreedom do not neatly correspond to economic realities; and the only economic relationships we see in tenth-century Celanova charters which approximate to slavery are within the context of domestic servile labour—perhaps better described as servants on an estate or in a household. It may in fact have been the case that the continued usage of Roman juridical terminology in tenth-century documents tells us more about the prestige and robustness of Roman-style documentary practice than it does about social reality, as is often the case with sources which emanate from a ‘central’ power. What we face then, is a terminological problem, because the word *servus* as and when it appeared in documents belonging to the early Middle Ages does not seem to have had the same, wholly less ambiguous, meaning that it did in the age of Augustus.

It is true that there exist inventories from the archive of Celanova in which lists of servile dependents of various sorts are given. Indeed, it makes sense to imagine that workers tied to the monastery’s estates who undertook arduous menial tasks shared some aspects of the social experience of slaves from previous times. These were the ‘pistores’, ‘porqueros’ and female kitchen staff (‘mulieres de quoquina’), for example.⁵⁷³ At any rate, where slaves, or at least those designated

⁵⁷¹ Cel91 (951).

⁵⁷² *FEMA*, p. 260.

⁵⁷³ Cel183 (977).

‘servos’ existed (for it is clear there existed some), it is not surprising that they are attached to either Celanova itself of estates linked to the region’s most powerful family or the king.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed, for aristocracies of the scale of Rosendo’s family to exist, a dependent class of domestic servants and rural cultivators must have existed, grinding corn, tending to animals, and working the lands of their lords—an inventory drawn up in 974 which divided *villae* and ‘homines’ between Rodrigo Velázquez, Celanova, the king, and other smaller monasteries may perhaps be a list of people destined to perform these sorts of tasks.⁵⁷⁵ If, however, where we do see ‘homines’ described in the sources, these are invariably tied to the hugely wealthy, like Celanova or the king, it is legitimate to ask whether we should expect this to be typical. This becomes clearer still when we compare these ambiguous references to ‘servos’ and ‘homines’ in the tenth-century documents to the evidence for free peasant proprietors; for example, there is not a single *servus* in the tenth-century Rabal charters, and more than forty named peasant proprietors exercising the right to sell parts of their land for profit.⁵⁷⁶ There are thus insufficient grounds to claim that slave labour (or the more plausible ‘servile’ labour) best characterized the socio-economic structure of tenth-century Galicia (on the basis of the evidence currently at our disposal), where the small peasant proprietor clearly owned and farmed his own lands throughout the tenth century. Servile and non-servile dependence must therefore have coexisted with free peasant proprietorship with nuances of degree found everywhere. Whilst we should not dismiss out of hand the possibility that peasants and medium landowners had their own tenants or slaves too, it is clear that these latter were a more prominent fixture of aristocratic environs.

⁵⁷⁴ Vermudo II, a favoured ally of the Galician aristocracy, without doubt gave some people to Celanova who would be put to work by the monastery (‘testamus ipsos homines in omni integriate ad serviendum’); once again, however, this description is not without ambiguity. The document is Cel197 (985). Cel198 (986) describes the confirmation of the ‘mandatio’ of Ablutinos cum Barra, made by Vermudo II to Celanova. It is a document in which dependents of the monastery are confirmed as such after the death of Rosendo (‘homines quos ipse pontifex obtinuit in Caldelas et Tiberos siue et in Limia’). These men and women were effectively the property of the monastery and their labour met the needs of the monastic community, such as the ‘mellarios’ of Manzaneto, Laureto cun Raucis, Monte Rotundo et Sallare, ‘qui ad prefatum monasterium deseruierunt’.

⁵⁷⁵ More broadly, and for where we have better evidence, I share Wickham’s position that the *servi* of charters from across early medieval Europe are most usefully understood with regard to the economic relationship they held with their lords, this relationship being ‘effectively identical’ to that of free tenants.

⁵⁷⁶ Precise figures are hard to arrive at because sometimes the same name appears in more than one document in contexts which do not make it clear whether the same person or two separate people who share the name are appearing in the documents in question.

Although I have argued against the portrayal of Galicia as an area which underwent significant ‘colonization’ by repopulating free peasant proprietors, the presence of these latter in the region is well attested.⁵⁷⁷ Some new settlers there may have been, but mostly one is struck by the frequent recurrence of references to land or property which is said to have been passed down from parents and grandparents, and indeed, on occasion, added to by its current owners. It is therefore sensible to see Kendulfo’s sale in 956 of an ‘hereditatem que habemus de mater nostra Itilo et de auios nostros’, plus a portion of vineyards and orchards he had planted himself (‘ubi plantaui vineam et puma’), in the context of a well-established family property later extended by the same family at its own discretion.⁵⁷⁸ The apparent freedom which many peasants enjoyed to do what they wished with their own private property is striking on occasions such as this. Indeed, private property and a recognition of its place in the social fabric was important to villagers and the documents are unequivocal in this regard. Furthermore, not only was small-scale private peasant ownership commonplace in the tenth century, but peasants seem, on occasion, to have dealt both with lay aristocrats, as did Trasuario in 923, making a sale to Gutier and Ilduara of a quarter of a vineyard, and with monastic institutions, as did Donon in 999, selling half a vineyard to Celanova.⁵⁷⁹

Peasant dealing within the large non-aristocratic stratum is also visible in the documents, although fewer of these documents survive. This is not surprising, since only those peasant documents which involved land that would eventually find its way into the property portfolio of the monastery would have retained their interest to Celanova and its agents. Nonetheless, there are other clues in the charters which allow us to see that peasants were able to retain a measure of control over their property by acting in league with other peasants. This they did by utilizing clever strategies which enabled them to retain rights to their property even in awkward circumstances. The strategy of

⁵⁷⁷It is interesting that the emergence of a peasant stratum selling land coincides with the decades after the foundation of Celanova; it seems reasonable to propose that peasant sales or donations to Rosendo and his family had simply not taken place in great numbers before this period, because there is no reason why the family would not have simply added these to the archive of Celanova in due course. Rather, it is much more likely that the peasant stratum simply had little opportunity to engage in transactions with aristocratic elements of the social formation before 936; these worlds existed on the fringes of one another, and it would have made little sense for peasants to donate to an already rich family only to receive nothing in return. Celanova was in many ways the instrument which drew these previously isolated elements of Galician society closer together, and this is made clear from the instant impact that the monastery had around its southern Galician enclave.

⁵⁷⁸ Cel117.

⁵⁷⁹ Cel20; Cel237.

sharing, known as *incommuniatio* in the documents, allowed peasants to bring others into the fold, perhaps extending loose ties of patronage or preserving family interest in property. One late and notable example of *incommuniatio* dates to the year 1000 and shows not only peasants sharing property—in this case with the agent of the monastery of Celanova but also the horizontal ties within communities which shaped the social logic of peasant communities in this period.⁵⁸⁰ In this example, Fernando and his wife shared with Cresconio half of a plot of land they had inherited from their ancestors as the due payment decided upon in a judicial enquiry. It is interesting too that Fernando and his wife act as the guarantors of another peasant (Gonterico) who could not meet his payment ('pro iudicato quod vobis abui a dare de parte de Gonderico'). One of the Rabal charters furnishes a similar example; in 961, Justino acted with his wife Onosinda on behalf of his sister María, selling 'terras et pumares' to Rosendo and Celanova ('Ego Iustono et uxori mee, ad vice de iermana nostra Maria, uobis patri nostri domni Rudesindi episcopi et fratribus monasterii Cellenoue').⁵⁸¹ Similarly, Menegundia and Aaulfo represented absent family members when making a sale to abbot Fafila and monastery 'in locum Sancti Vincenti', ('Menegundia a mea persona et de mea sobrina nomine Godina') and ('Aaulfiz a persona de meos neptos duos').⁵⁸² These examples suggest that inter-communal horizontal links between peasants existed and that options were open to peasants in at least some moments. We should be wary of characterizations which cast peasants as the compliant stooges of aristocrats in tenth-century Galicia, simply because the evidence does not allow for such an interpretation.

Indeed, many of the phenomena traditionally defended as examples of growing lordly imposition are not as clear cut as some of the historiography suggests.⁵⁸³ In 989, Aaulfo and Goto reached an agreement with Celanova that they would surrender their rights to a small vineyard because of their inability to meet an already established agreement of payment in wine—but this was not a rent as such, but rather a borrowed sum called a *renovo* in the sources—presumably lent in

⁵⁸⁰ Cel 241.

⁵⁸¹ Cel136.

⁵⁸² Cel119 (957).

⁵⁸³ See, in particular, Carzolio de Rossi, 'La constitución y organización', *passim*. This piece furnishes much excellent information and analysis, although it adhered too closely to the schematic analysis of the tenth-century curtailment of peasant freedoms which I am attempting to move away from in this thesis.

difficult circumstances.⁵⁸⁴ The *renovo* represents one of many charges, rents, or compensations which are said by some historians to represent lordly incursion onto peasant freeholding.⁵⁸⁵ Within a model which regards human social relations as inherently conflictual, the *renovo* would therefore be a mechanism by which lords gained economic superiority over allodialists, from whom they received great material reward when this latter group proved unable to meet the conditions of the *renovo*. Nonetheless, some sort of economic differentiation must be assumed *a priori* for the recipient of the original loan to have sought material help anyway. Besides, the content and wording of this charter suggest that as late as 989, the policy of *renovo* was not offered to peasants for the sole purpose of ruthlessly and quickly stripping them of their assets. In fact, the document of Adaulfo and Goto implies that the patience of the monastery had been pushed to the very limit; endless rural credit without regulation it could not be expected to offer, and Adaulfo admits to paying the monastery ‘uino de renouo que non compleui per annos’. The *renovo* loan, at least in the tenth century, might be more accurately characterized as another strategem open to members of tenth-century society, offering help to some (albeit with significant future risk), and the possibility of profit to others.⁵⁸⁶ There clearly existed a sense of the need to adhere to correct procedure too. In 999, we witness the spectacle of the monastery taking a local monk to task for unduly collecting and thus abusing the *renovo* in a way which was deemed unacceptable; in this document, the monk Gaudinas gave to Celanova ‘omne mea hereditate’; he then went on to explain that ‘illa alia que desursum resonat do vobis pro uestris renouo

⁵⁸⁴ L. García de Valdeavellano, ‘El *renovo*. Notas y documentos sobre los préstamos usuarios en el reino asturleonés’, *CHE*, 57–58 (1973), pp. 408–448. The document is Cel211.

⁵⁸⁵ Carzolio de Rossi, ‘La constitución y organización’, at p. 23. For her, the *renovo*, like the phenomenon of *incommuniatio*, is an example of what she collectively terms ‘donaciones y ventas forzadas y condicionadas’. The period in which she primarily locates this change is the first half of the eleventh century, although she explicitly claims it to be of tenth-century origin (‘...es notoria su incidencia entre fines del siglo X y primeras décadas del XI’), (p. 23). It is true that the incidence of those things she considers signs of forced or conditioned sale (within her model) increase after the year 1000, but this is to some degree irrelevant if one takes issue with the definition she uses to make this claim. If the *renovo* and *incommuniatio*, for example, are interpreted differently, as they have been here, then it becomes clear that the forced and conditioned sale loses some of its utility as a category in a tenth-century context. It is significant too, that other phenomena recorded in the charters and classified by this author as forced or conditioned sales, such as *iudicatio* and ‘devolución de favores recibidos’, do not very easily or usefully belong to this analytical category.

⁵⁸⁶ In the Celanova charters the incidence of the *renovo* only increases towards the beginning of the eleventh century; I have found the following examples from the tenth-century Celanova documents: Cel211 (989); Cel213 (990); Cel238 (999). Sometimes, the inability of the peasant to meet the repayments is made explicit; for example, in Cel213 (990), Ferronio stated that his transfer of land and other commodities to the monks of Celanova was made ‘pro quod non habui unde ipso debito complere’. This was the risk of the *renovo*, but rural credit must also have been a lifeline, as I explain above.

que ego obtinui in uestra deganea de Sancta Eolalia, et desperiauit illo de manus meas'. Celanova protected its rights to collect profits—of this there can be no doubt; but this was not some sort of free-for-all, with the monastery imposing its will in arbitrary fashion. Rather, we might think that the *renovo* was an attempt to lend order to the relationships between the monastery and the world of rural cultivators, many of whose inhabitants may have relied on the material assistance of the monastery.

This is not to deny that charters which describe the *renovo* in use demonstrate economic inequality, but rather to stress that models which focus solely on exploitation risk missing the complexity and richness of the range of social action open to all members of society. This, like the case outlined above, was light touch patronage, representing the beginnings of economic incursion on peasants in these regions, but these villagers were not bound in exclusive fashion to a lord and retained considerable autonomy. Interestingly, in Galician documents, peasant objections to new impositions are not found in the tenth-century documents. Furthermore, commendation, an expression of the exclusive commitment to lords, although afforded considerable importance in certain areas of historiography, is simply not a feature of the tenth century documents in Galicia either.⁵⁸⁷

It is worthwhile spelling out what I mean by 'light touch patronage', and in this way think about the relationship between wealth and authority. In the tenth century, some members of the village community clearly enjoyed more wealth than others, and peasants seem to have appealed to wealthier members of their community for support on occasion; the examples of peasants lending each other a hand and acting as guarantors for each other show this. But it is unlikely that there existed any mechanism for the formal recognition of authority at the village level; what this seems to show is that although, as is well known, one could not enjoy political authority without significant landed resources in the tenth century, simply having more land than one's neighbour was not an automatic passport to enjoying formal authority over him in the village world; more land did not necessarily mean more power in non-elite contexts. Patronage between peasants was therefore 'light touch' by definition, in that it involved no burdensome contractual agreement, reinforced by

⁵⁸⁷ See, for an emphasis on commendation, Loring García, *Cantabria, passim*.

conditioned bondage, that would trap peasants in the later medieval world; by this definition, peasant relationships with lay or ecclesiastical aristocrats were very often ‘light touch’ too. The lack of formal power structures at the village level in tenth-century southern Galicia is necessarily to some extent an argument from silence as we cannot know if these former simply went undocumented, however unlikely this may be. Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that even the wealthiest had political authority of any sort amongst their peers, with very few references in the documents even to ‘good men’.⁵⁸⁸ Popular assemblies do not seem to have been frequent; there are, nonetheless, enough references which imply that some must have taken place. For example, in 955, Iermias and Gaudiosa sold to Rosendo and Celanova half of a *villa* in Quiroga, an area over which Rosendo’s family held nominal political control, and the closing clause of the document tells us, in a slight variation of a standard formula, that ‘si aliquis homo ad irrumpendum uenerit uel uenerimus tunc infra uel infra parte nostra, que in concilio non potuerimus uindicare, pariemus uobis ipsam uillam duplatam uel quantum fuerit meliorata’.⁵⁸⁹ In reality, this sort of reference to a ‘concilium’ may have had less to do with the sorts of village councils which we see in Castilian documents, and more to do with a judicial setting. The institutions of rural cultivators within the village milieu are therefore hard to pin down; indeed, the two most striking concerns of peasants in tenth-century Galicia seem to have had to do with private property owning—that is, what to do with land, strategies for its preservation, strategies of sale, and, in the Celanova documents, the occasional ‘act of giving’.⁵⁹⁰

It might seem more logical to assume that where peasants actively sought out the help of the powerful, they made the running. In fact, some examples of what we might consider a pro-active

⁵⁸⁸ On these occasions, the contextual situations in which ‘good men’ are described are often far from clear. ‘Good men’, classically ‘boni homines’, we might expect to be drawn from village elites, but it is interesting that they appear alongside nobles or court officials. For example, Cel86 (950), a court case between Rosendo and the inhabitants of four villages, explicitly states that palace officials have been entrusted with the case (‘Venerunt ibidem ex ducibus uel proceres palatii...uel aliorum bonorum hominum non modica multitudo’). Cel88 (950), a charter documenting the delimitation of village boundaries, mentions ‘good men’ in a context which makes it hard for us to believe that these were actually local village men (‘Pro ipsa contempione inprimis perduxerunt ibidem Nepotianus Menendiz, Gaidus Astruariz et cum eis alii pluri filii bonorum hominum, ipsi qui ordinati sunt a principe antiquo comprobare’).

⁵⁸⁹ Cel109. Many examples are ambiguous and the word ‘*concilium*’ seems to me to be too readily accepted as an assembly without enough consideration of the context in which it appears in the document. Occasionally, we see less problematic references which allow us to imagine that village inhabitants were present at a popular assembly of some sort, such as that found in Cel88 (950) (‘et cum eis omni concilio multitudo plurima’).

⁵⁹⁰ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, is by far the best introduction to peasant donation in tenth-century Spain; see, in particular, chapters 4 and 5.

stance on the part of peasants can be offered. In 998, Meduma and his wife Lita chose to share with Manilan of Celanova a fifth of their property at Bande; in so doing, these peasants chose to enter the patronage networks of powerful neighbours or institutions. In this case, Meduma and Lita sought Manilan's protection; 'ut habeamus de vos moderationem et defensionem'.⁵⁹¹ It is very hard to say what sort of authority the abbots of Celanova had over this peasant couple, but a relationship had here been formed which saw the couple receive their desired return of protection and guidance in exchange for their concession of a fifth of their harvest ('et demus ad area et ad lagare quinta integra de quantum nobis Dominus dederit').⁵⁹² In Cel172 (969) Viliulfo gave to Celanova the fifth part of several estates he owned; he also gave himself over to the monastery, with the expressed condition that the monastery defend and support his wife and family ('et in presenti coniuge mea uel filiis meis de domino uel pontifico nostro, in cuius manu me trado una cum fratribus suis, abeant defensionem et moderationem'). These people owned on a scale large enough to suppose that they may have been medium landowners.⁵⁹³ But it is important to note that their motivation seems to have been primarily pious, not economic. This is one of relatively few Celanova documents from this period in which the desired outcome of the deal is expressed as the salvation of souls ('pro remedio anime nostre'); the relative scarcity of this formulation in tenth-century Celanova documents, particularly in charters involving the non-aristocratic stratum (for aristocrats made more frequent invocation to piety), means that its appearance in Cel172 is unlikely to be a mere formulaic convention.⁵⁹⁴ Whether it was protection on earth, or salvation in the heavenly realm, non-aristocratic parties could and did engage in deals with Celanova designed to bring about these very different objectives. Yet what these examples show when taken together is that the truly significant change of the tenth century in southern Galicia was that the village world no longer operated solely within its own confines, but that

⁵⁹¹ Understood here to mean protection and guidance or support.

⁵⁹² Cel235.

⁵⁹³ The 'quinta integra' of the *villae* of 'Froylanes', 'Sancta Marta', 'Azeveto', 'Trasmiri' and 'Domenci' are included in the deal, together with their 'terras, uineas, pomiferis, saltis, perales, ficares uel omnes arbores fructuosas uel infructuosas, aquas cursiles uel incursiles, petras mobiles uel immobiles, pratis, pascuis uel omnibus eductibus suis...'.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁴ Davies has also commented on this situation in *Acts of Giving*, 'Celanova and San Millán collections—in very different regions—are notable for their high proportions of records that have no or minimal expressions of pieties, even though grants to the church are being recorded'; and on 'pro anima' and variants, Davies adds that 'although many Celanova records lack pious expressions, it is the 980s before the formula becomes common', at p. 119.

rather it had a new partner in the vicinity with whom it could do business. To some extent, these options had always been open to medium landowners, as I have argued previously, but the middle third of the tenth century shows peasants entering the orbit of monastic institutions in a meaningful way.

By far the best example we have of Celanova's attempts to enlarge its property interest comes from the Rabal charters, mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this section. Rabal is today a *parroquia* of the *concello* of Celanova, in the *comarca* of Terra de Celanova, situated on the western fringe of the province of Ourense.⁵⁹⁵ It lies some ten kilometres to the north of the town of Celanova, and is situated in the basin of the river Arnoya, a major tributary of the Miño which runs west to east throughout the *comarca*. This whole area forms part of a large depression, the Maceda, which is the only large expanse of non-mountainous terrain in the province of Ourense. The climate is mostly benevolent, with little annual rainfall and warm summers.⁵⁹⁶ The gently sloping hills and chalky soil, well watered by the Arnoya, ensure that the land throughout the *parroquia* is well suited to the cultivation of fruit crops and cereals, evidenced today by the abundance of chestnuts, apple trees and vines—the sorts of staple items listed in charter transactions from this village. It is generally held that the rural landscape of southern Galicia of the tenth century was not significantly different to that which we see today, meaning that we can readily imagine the appearance of the landscape, and from here attempt, in necessarily cautious fashion, to reconstruct the 'small world' of Rabal.⁵⁹⁷ In keeping with the line advanced in the Introduction, it is here argued that the landscapes in which early medieval communities (and perhaps all pre-industrial societies) were embedded, to a large degree

⁵⁹⁵ There are today six nuclei of population within the *parroquia*, perhaps best described as hamlets in English. These are: A Abelleira, A Armada, Ponte Fechas, Rabal de Eirexa, Rabal de Arriba and San Paio. The *parroquia* as a whole has a population of about 100 people.

⁵⁹⁶ I. Santa María Otero and N. Massó Lago, *Atlas Xeográfico e Histórico de Galicia e do mundo*, (Pontevedra, 2009).

⁵⁹⁷ Ballesteros Arias and Blanco Rotea, 'Aldeas y Espacios Agrarios Altomedievales en Galicia'. These authors remind us that 'Afortunadamente, y tras años de experiencia, podemos afirmar que los elementos y las formas agrarias que hasta el momento hemos estudiado y que se conservan en la actualidad, siguen formando parte de la dinámica activa agroeconómica del paisaje, habiendo dado gran cantidad de información al respecto, de índole tanto morfológica como también estratigráfica y, sobre todo, cronológica, encontrándonos así con que los inicios formativos de este paisaje se remontan a los siglos altomedievales.', at p. 120.

shaped the economic possibilities of those communities.⁵⁹⁸ What this meant on the ground in tenth-century Rabal is that the majority of the inhabitants of the village made their living from growing what they could with the rudimentary technology at their disposal.⁵⁹⁹ This fundamental fact is useful as a starting point, and indeed unanimously accepted by the scholarly community, but it does not follow that social experience was therefore everywhere the same for those who formed a part of the village world.

In fact, the idea that the village community of tenth-century southern Galicia should best be characterized as a homogenous block can be easily refuted after studying the Rabal charters, in which we appear to see persons of very variable economic resources living side by side.⁶⁰⁰ In these charters we often see peasants operating with considerable individual autonomy, occasionally on behalf of family or co-villagers, but very often, it seems, with their own interests at heart.⁶⁰¹ A complicating factor in a study of this sort is that the motivation behind peasant sales is mostly not made explicit in the texts themselves. It is true that, to some extent, peasants were at the mercy of the elements, and that a poor harvest may very well have moved some of them to sell some or all of their assets to Celanova, but although on occasions such as these sale must have been agreed with considerable reluctance, we should not assume that this was always the case wherever we see peasant sale. The monastery must also have been something of a magnet to peasants, readily available to assist with the circulation of property and goods as and when peasants themselves thought it necessary, in which case peasants may well have been relieved to have had a socio-economic entity in their immediate locality of sufficient weight so as to have been able to offer help, albeit perhaps of a conditional sort. In short, peasants must have often sold land because they believed it to have been in their strategic

⁵⁹⁸ We have already seen that the excellent conditions for cultivation offered by the Liébana cannot be ignored when trying to understand that region's trajectory throughout the early middle ages. Again, I stress that a willingness to understand the significance of geography is not a sop to determinism, but rather an appreciation that the convergence of many factors affects historical development. See, for example, Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*.

⁵⁹⁹ For more on which, see J. Valdeón Baroque, 'Los Campesinos Medievales', in *Cuadernos de Historia*, 128, (Madrid, 1985).

⁶⁰⁰ In the context of Rabal, it seems that Sonimiro and his wife Vindemiola must have been richer than many of their neighbours, selling to Celanova on three occasions in three months in early 962 (Cel146; Cel151; Cel152), for very significant material payment.

⁶⁰¹ 'Very often' because it is clear that a peasant paying a fine did not decide on such a course of action because he or she desired to do so.

interest; after all, it seems that they were often able to negotiate what they must have considered good deals for themselves, receiving not inconsiderable payment in return for the sale of part of their land to Celanova.⁶⁰²

Furthermore, it is noticeable that by and large the Rabal peasants did not donate to Celanova, but rather sold for profit. This is significant because the social logic of gift is very different from that of sale. Much work on gift-giving has shown how the gift had a significant gestural resonance for both those giving and receiving, and that, furthermore, it in very many cases carried with it the implied expectation of the counter-gift, which could be material or spiritual (when gifts were made to churches).⁶⁰³ Sales, on the other hand, were governed by a different set of expectations in that they did not merely transfer property but instead represented a more business-like exchange of assets. The exchange of useful items, such as rye and apples, for example, must have been part and parcel of village life long before we first see it documented. However, Celanova nonetheless must have altered peasant focus when it came to sale—the monastery was simply so rich from its foundation that it must have enjoyed the resources necessary to enter into *compra-venta* agreements with peasants at will. Peasant attitudes too must have changed: why should a free peasant have alienated part of his goods or land to receive nothing tangible in return when he or she could have gained food, drink and clothes by means of sale which could have seen them through after a difficult winter? This brief sketch of Rabal, explored in more detail in what follows, is important because it helps us to reframe the questions commonly asked of social relations in tenth-century Spain. That is to say, that if we accept that family or individual actions to retain, share, or cede rights to land was very plausibly often the result of strategic thinking on the part of peasants, then we need not evaluate the impact of Celanova on local society within a teleological framework which looks to explain how ‘feudal society’ grew out of the tenth-century destruction of peasant freedom in Galicia, itself by no means a clear consequence of changing social practice in our period.

⁶⁰² In 961 (Cel138) Fatoy and his wife Animia sold to Rosendo and Celanova an eighth of an orchard and received in return ‘precio boue et uacca cum sua agnicula, preciados in XX et IIII modios, et linteo in duos modios et duos quaterios’.

⁶⁰³ S. D. White, *Custom, Kinship and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150*, (Chapel Hill, 1988); Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbor of Saint Peter*.

These initial forewarnings should not distract from the fact that the Rabal cycle of documents remains difficult to decipher; between 956 and Rosendo's death in 977, Celanova, Rosendo personally, or one of the monastery's agents, bought from Rabal peasants on twenty-five occasions. Two sales by the priest Miro, and one exchange of goods by a peasant with the agents of Celanova, bring this figure up to a total of twenty-eight documents which record transactions of various sorts between the inhabitants of Rabal and the monastery of Celanova in the same period.⁶⁰⁴ The majority of these documents share many similarities with regard to form and content, but it is interesting that the amounts received in return from Celanova for land sold to the monastery vary from one document to the next. This implies that very different quantities of land were sold by individual transactors; it seems likely that there may too have existed an appreciation of the variable quality of land. We can say little more about this because it is impossible to know that we are comparing like for like, but it is likely that the village's inhabitants took this into account when making sales. Proceeding with necessary caution, an indication of this awareness may come from a direct comparison of the price received in return by peasants in different deals. In 960, Ganoy and his children sold half of a vineyard that they owned in common with Ermigio for 'cibaria modios V, bibere modios IIII, res et pannos modios VIIII, su unos solidos II'; the following year, Rodrigo sold an entire vineyard for rye, wine, and millet, valued in total at nine modios. In 964, Egilo and his niece, sold to Rosendo and Celanova 'terras nostras...et sunt ipsas terras seminata quartarios VII', receiving in price five modios; just two months later, Itila and his sons made an almost identical sale of 'terras nostras...serente semente III quartarios'.⁶⁰⁵ Itila and his family receive three modios in return. Now, given that the measurement of land here is given in relation to productive capacity, not size, and that this capacity differed from one case to another by a value of four 'quartarios', it seems hard to understand why the difference in price paid in return was only one modius unless the quality of the land was taken into account. At any rate, here either the quantity or the quality (or both) of the land

⁶⁰⁴ The full list of the Rabal charters from Rosendo's lifetime runs as follows: Cel117 (956); Cel118 (956); Cel128 (960); Cel129 (961); Cel130 (961); Cel131 (961); Cel132 (961); Cel133 (961); Cel134 (961); Cel135 (961); Cel136 (961); Cel137 (961); Cel138 (961); Cel139 (961); Cel140 (961); Cel143 (961); Cel145 (962); Cel146 (962); Cel147 (962); Cel148 (962); Cel149 (962); Cel150 (962); Cel151 (962); Cel152 (962); Cel162 (964); Cel163 (64); Cel173 (970); Cel178 (974). The priest sale documents are Cel135 (961) and Cel143 (961). The exchange ('contramutaremus...') is Cel178 (974).

⁶⁰⁵ Cel162 and Cel163 respectively.

was clearly different, but that there was a conception of value is more significant still and lends weight to the notion that peasants would have thought very carefully about what they could sell and what they might get for their sale.⁶⁰⁶ Simultaneously, it would also appear to support the argument elaborated here that peasant ownership varied significantly from one peasant to the next.

Correspondingly, the size of plots also varied, and division may well have been made into parcels which best facilitated deals; hence the description of peasants selling an eighth, a half, or a third of a plot. On occasion, it is striking that in the 960s some villagers were selling very small plots indeed. As we have seen, the sale made by Itila with her children to Rosendo and the monks of Celanova in 964, for example, was of land worth ‘III quartarios seminataura’.⁶⁰⁷ Here it is not clear that hardship drove these peasants to engage in these deals; on the contrary, it seems that Celanova was exceptionally keen to add to its property portfolio even by means of the aggregation of what seem to have been small landholdings. In fact, one aspect that comes through very clearly from these documents is the piecemeal way in which Celanova dealt with Rabal throughout Rosendo’s lifetime, with the monastery’s agents a regular presence in the village.

How these deals took place has not been discussed in the scholarly literature on Rabal thus far, and it is hard to say anything concrete about the deal-making process, with these deals later described in charters in forms which must have often been mere precis of the negotiations themselves. Nonetheless, it is likely that Celanova’s agents visited Rabal frequently throughout this period, soliciting business from the inhabitants, and willing to barter price (*precium*).⁶⁰⁸ Often, as has been noted above, they seem to have been prepared to pay quite a high price for what appear to be relatively small portions or fractions of landholdings. For example, in 961, Fatoy and his wife Animia

⁶⁰⁶ For more on the concept of price in these documents, see Davies, ‘Sale, price and valuation’.

⁶⁰⁷ Cel164. Interestingly, small sales took place in other areas (not Rabal) which nevertheless lay in the farmland around Celanova, indicating that Rabal was not exceptional with regard to general patterns, even if better documented. In 962 (Cel156), Rando and his wife Accedonia sold three ‘lareas’ (literally ‘plots’ or ‘parcels’ of land, a word still used in Galician as ‘leira’); these lands were very close to the monastery (‘et iacent ipsas lareas iuxta uestras terras’).

⁶⁰⁸ For example, in 961, thirteen sales were made to Celanova by Rabal inhabitants, all of which were documented separately. Four of these were made on the same day, which implies that the monastery went in search of transaction in a business-like manner; these were, Cel130, Cel131, Cel132, and Cel134 (all made on 14 March 961). Cel135, Cel136, and Cel137 were all made on 3 April 961. Certain days of the year were clearly given over to ‘doing business in Rabal’.

sold an eighth of an orchard to Rosendo for ‘precio boue et uacca cum sua agnicula, preciatos in XX et IIII modios, et linteo in duos modios et duos quartarios’.⁶⁰⁹ If an eighth of their orchard was worth this much, we might do well to think that they were amongst the wealthier peasants of the village; in keeping with the line developed throughout this section, perhaps what we are also witnessing here is a new willingness on behalf of the peasants of this village to establish links with Celanova—thus, although no doubt useful in practical terms, the sale of an eighth of a landholding may have held gestural symbolism too. Others sold what might have been more significant amounts of land; in 962, Baltario and his wife Leouilli sold an unspecified number of vineyards (‘uineas nostras proprias que habemus in uilla que dicunt Rauanal’), plus ten apple trees (‘X manzanarias’), whilst others sold very large amounts indeed. Where this is clear, we are probably dealing with the medium landowning stratum, or perhaps the very richest of the peasants in the village; Sonimiro and Vindemiola made three separate sales in Rabal worth almost forty modios.⁶¹⁰ The range with regard to the quantities of land sold and the prices received in these examples indicate that Celanova was willing to do business when and where it could; once again, we need to consider too that the protection and patronage of the powerful were seemingly sought on occasions such as this. In other words, these deals appear to have offered advantages to both parties, or this at least was how both parties would probably have conceived of them when they were made.

In the majority of these documents those selling are individuals or couples. It is instructive that the seller and their immediate family (normally children) are expressly mentioned (and often named), indicating that the family household unit seems to have been the basic building block of Rabal society; hence, ‘Ermoigio et uxori mee Sendina, una cum filia mea Guntina’, or ‘Ego Raian, una cum uxore et filiis meis’.⁶¹¹ In 961, Sonna, Palatino and Tenildi stressed the longevity of their family’s roots in Rabal, selling to Celanova ‘hereditate que fuit de auio nostro Fofino et postea de pater nostro Palatinus’.⁶¹² Indeed, the indications are that this was a long-standing, deeply-rooted, community; in 956, Kendulfo and her children sold a ‘hereditatem que habemus de mater nostra Itila

⁶⁰⁹ Cel138.

⁶¹⁰ Cel146 (962); Cel151 (962); Cel152 (962).

⁶¹¹ Cel149 (962).

⁶¹² Cel140.

et de auios nostros Sendon et Emilo'.⁶¹³ The *presura*, by which new land was claimed, mostly, it is thought, by newcomers, is conspicuous only by its absence in the Rabal charters and there is no evidence to suggest that new settlement was a frequent phenomenon.

The families who lived in Rabal in the middle decades of the tenth century were in the vast majority of cases made up of people best described as rural cultivators, but there must too have been a much smaller section of the community who performed artisanal tasks.⁶¹⁴ Women as well as men, as Wendy Davies has shown for a wider area of northern Spain, could and did appear as the executors of property deals, although women did so alone less frequently in the Rabal charters, the only group of documents before the year 1000 which allows us to look at a single community in depth.⁶¹⁵ Little can be added with any confidence with regard to the physical characteristics of the village, although it is surely fair to claim that Ballesteros Arias and Blanco Rotea's work in the similar landscape of Cabanelas, O Carballiño, in Ourense, offer a useful starting point.⁶¹⁶ It is questionable whether their model of a *paisaje cóncava* can be applied to Rabal without more extensive analysis, but it makes sense to imagine that some basic characteristics delineated by these authors with regard to the utilization of the landscape were not totally dissimilar in Rabal. Certainly, the documents suggest that densely packed arable of greatly variable dimensions sat around the fringes of the inhabited area of the village; hence, Gontemiro's and Egilo's description of their land 'in agro que dicunt Brunieto, inter larea Gundesindi et circa larea de Todesinda', or 'et inde per capud de uinea usque in casa de Sendon'.⁶¹⁷ New cultivation was taking place too, in and around land already put to use as the parcels

⁶¹³ Cel117.

⁶¹⁴ The odd clue here and there confirms this. For example, a certain Summiro, witness to Cel136 (961), appears at the end of the charter as 'Summiro, ferrario, ts.'.

⁶¹⁵ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, ch. 7. From the Rabal charters, see Cel139 (961), where Vendemiola made a sale to Rosendo. It is very hard to say much more about non-aristocratic women in tenth-century Galicia, but some work has been done on aristocratic women, notably Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara*.

⁶¹⁶ Ballesteros Arias and Blanco Rotea, 'Aldeas y Espacios Agrarios Altomedievales en Galicia'. It is worth emphasizing that the excavations of Ballesteros and her team at a number of sites in Galicia (Santa Lucía, Monte Gaiás in Santiago de Compostela, Carballeira do Espírito Santo) show early medieval modification of the landscape and in particular the creation of terraces on sites which have yet to unearth the aldeas in which the people who left their imprint on this landscape actually lived. The authors offer the following explanation: 'La postura más compartida es que muchos de los emplazamientos de las actuales aldeas han tenido un poblamiento continuado hasta la actualidad...y los niveles antiguos no han podido ser estudiados por el momento, con la única excepción de A Pousada', at p. 133.

⁶¹⁷ Cel133 (961) and Cel117 (956).

of the villagers; hence, ‘ipsa uinea circa vestra uinea que frater Nepotianus plantauit’.⁶¹⁸ The documents add to this impressionistic view, suggesting that fences and roads helped to articulate the spatial organization of the village (‘Et iacet ipsa terra super illa fonte, circa carrale de vereda’); likewise, we can look to the sale of Kendulfo and sons to Celanova of an orchard ‘qui est iuxta carral maior’.⁶¹⁹

These roads would have been used by the monks of Celanova as they completed their journeys to and from Rabal in the tenth century. The increasing frequency of these journeys in the 960s brings into focus another element of the social processes here taking place; the apparent increase in aristocratic associations with the inhabitants of the village, or, the coming together of different social worlds. I have earlier commented on the sparsity of references in the Rabal charters to any sort of evidence for the articulation of village-level political structures, but although the general picture of political fragmentation has featured prominently in Spanish historiography of the last few years, we should be cautious before inferring that the references made in the charters to castros reflect the continued role of these latter in political organization since they appear only as geographical points of reference in the documents; (‘subtus castro que dicunt Pelosino’ is a common formula).⁶²⁰ This was, it seems, a region in which the hierarchical society which we can clearly identify owed its origins to divergence of wealth; in fact, considering the scale of the wealth we witness in documents, and the very clear differentiations, the weakness of the structures that bound peasants to aristocrats is striking in the tenth century.

So far, I have discussed the village of Rabal and tried to give an idea of the range of social experience which characterized life therein; it now pays to begin to draw some of these observations together by trying to understand what actually happened to the individuals involved when one of Rabal’s many *compra-ventas* took place. It has often been assumed that the sale of land by tenth-century peasants to ecclesiastical institutions such as Celanova necessarily predicated the entry into

⁶¹⁸ Cel128 (960).

⁶¹⁹ Cel147 (962); Cel117 (956). Portela Silva and Pallares Méndez have concentrated on this aspect of the village. Portela Silva and Pallares Méndez, ‘La Villa por dentro.’ Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara*, pp. 36–50.

⁶²⁰ Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales*, *passim*.

tenancy of the selling party. This was not always the case. It does not follow that free peasants selling part of their land to Celanova—like Arias and Ermegodo in 961 (Cel134), for example—could not remain economically free, even if they had less land to farm henceforth. It is clear, nonetheless, that peasants, having sold, did then have less to give away or sell or farm for themselves; this seems to me best characterized as the erosion of the economic options open to peasants, but it did not imply the immediate restriction of social autonomy.

How then, do we explain this extensive programme of *compra-venta*? One way of doing this is to propose that the cycle of giving and receiving at the peasant level was probably a prominent part of village life before the intrusion of outside influence of a corporate sort, embodied by the purchasing campaign of Celanova, with this latter only so well documented thanks to the assiduous collection of charters undertaken by Celanova's agents, ever eager to preserve written testimony of their acquisitions. In contrast, we know very little about dealing between peasant parties because transactions between peasants which did not involve land that later ended up in Celanova's property network can have been of little interest to those compiling the archive. We know that it went on though, due to references such as that made by Arias and his wife Ermegodo, who sold an eighth of a large plot of land, which they trace back to two previous owners (*et habemus ipsa hereditate comparata de Ermesinda, id est: de hereditate que fuit de Busiana*).⁶²¹ In 961, the priest Miro completed a sale to Rosendo and Celanova of, amongst other things, a vineyard, but not before tracing the sold vineyard back to the previous ownership of a certain Tructesinda, a neighbour who later made a sale of her own Rabal land to Celanova (*'et fuit ipsa uinea de Tructesinda'*).⁶²² Villagers clearly dealt amongst themselves and the land 'market' was thus not a creation of Celanova; Celanova merely raised the stakes. Peasant transactions with other peasants must have taken place in less formal contexts too, and therefore have escaped the written record. This hypothesis can only be offered in tentative fashion, but it seems likely given that the control that peasants seem to have enjoyed in the

⁶²¹Cel134 (961). That this was a fairly normal social practice in the region can be deduced from similar references to other villages; for example, Ygo, an inhabitant of the *villa* of San Pedro in Quiroga, made a sale to Celanova in 960 of land described as *'quantum meus pater obtinuit comparada'*.

⁶²² The 'Miro' document is Cel135; for Tructesinda's sale, see Cel173 (970).

middle third of the century to sell part or all of their land for profit is unlikely to have been new given the stability of the community and the apparent willingness to divide landed wealth.

Yet the willingness with which peasants sold for profit to Celanova in the 950s and 960s should incline us to believe that there was no shortage of interested parties in the village when Celanova's agents first became attracted to the fertile lands of Rabal. This need not be an indication of peasants living on the very edge of subsistence, desperate to preserve what they could and sell in the face of increasing pressure. There is no indication of this in the documents, and it rather makes equally sound sense to think of a peasant mentality in which to sell part of one's land within the peasant pool of individual ownership of the village world was simply a normal part of daily existence. Peasants too would have owned less or more land at different times, buying and selling within the village world, with this latter phenomenon simply a characteristic of the normal ebb and flow of village existence. What, then, was the true significance of these transactions for southern Galician society in the tenth century?

What we see in these documents is a world of owner cultivators exchanging assets with a new corporate landowning entity on the fringes of their community. In an excellent study of social relations in the Sabina district of Italy, Marios Costambeys made the point that the choice of a monastery's location had more usually been dictated by the property interests of its lay benefactors. It is exceptionally interesting therefore, that even allowing for the chronological and geographical differences between Costambeys' case-study and my own, Celanova's foundation does not seem to have worked in quite the same way, in that what we see is rather a very rich aristocratic family with very widely dispersed landholdings, decide to concentrate their efforts on the local region in which they had chosen to locate their monastery; the monastery here acted as the conduit through which village communities could be reached by an aristocratic family and their ecclesiastical institution.⁶²³ The initial impact of the foundation of the monastery was that of ever more frequent, intense, active, varied, and organized interaction between the different social groups of an already stratified society.

⁶²³ Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*, p. 5. This inverse process is representative of the need to understand the different modalities of social power across medieval Europe on a regional scale, one of the overarching methodological props of this thesis.

I have earlier mentioned that Celanova ‘raised the stakes’ in villages like Rabal which lay within its immediate sphere of influence in the decades after the monastery’s foundation. This it did by means of the aggregate effect of the accumulation of hitherto peasant-owned land. What a sale to Celanova did was to remove the land sold in each transaction from the peasant pool of private ownership; significantly, that land was unlikely to be seen again in peasant hands once it had found its way into the property portfolio of Celanova. This is the structural economic shift of the transfer of landed wealth. Nonetheless, this need not have been the consequence of avaricious lordship on the rise, but simply, from the peasant perspective, the law of unintended consequences. The act of peasants freely choosing to sell part of their land to Celanova rather than being forced into sale would, after all, have resulted in the same *economic* consequence—namely, that more and more land found its way into the portfolio of the local landed interest of Celanova. Framed in this way, we can see that Celanova could have arrived at a position of economic hegemony in relation to the villagers without recourse to significant extra-economic coercion. It is not the conclusion of previous syntheses on this process that I therefore take issue with, but rather how people have arrived at these conclusions, mostly, that is, by way of the schematic acceptance of a conflictual model of social relations as the necessary motor for historical change.

The observations made here about Rabal correspond with those which we have made above about rural society in this period more generally. Rabal was exceptional in that it seems to have attracted unusual attention from Celanova, but it was not exceptional at all with regard to the general pattern it characterizes. In total, Celanova comes to possess somewhere in the order of 60 *villae*, plus significant portions in some 20 other *villae*, and 15 churches in the period between its foundation and Rosendo’s death in 977. This must have brought about relatively significant change in some spheres, though perhaps not so much in the day to day lives of the inhabitants of the villages which Celanova came to own; they still farmed the land and most of them seem to have suffered no abuse of their legal rights at this stage. But economic realities, although only a part of the human experience, did change, because once land is given away or sold to important lay factions or monasteries, it is, in a sense,

gone. There is as a result less and less land in the locality available for peasant cultivation, less and less land which belongs to the common peasant pool.

If Chris Wickham is right that the more fragmented that landowning is, the more space there is for peasant social action, we should not be surprised that this sphere of social action was reduced when monasteries collated large blocks of territory.⁶²⁴ As aristocratic landowning became less dispersed and more concentrated on specific areas, local domination became easier, with the upshot that peasants had their economic options reduced. The irony, in the case of Rosendo and Celanova, is that the family's political prestige, reflected in the award of large-scale donations across a large area, was of very little actual help until the 950s and 960s when it came to seeing their domination develop economically in their family heartlands. For this to happen, the family needed a local base of operations—it needed the donations and sales that came the way of its newly founded local presence, the monastery of Celanova.

⁶²⁴*FEMA*, chapters 4 and 5.

5. Conclusion: Different Paths to the Year 1000

Such is the resonance that the year 1000 has exercised in the field of medieval social and political history, that in many west European historiographical traditions, the ninth and tenth centuries have been mined for clues only insofar as they can help explain the historical trajectory of the new social and political order supposedly born at the turn of the millennium.⁶²⁵ For some Spanish historians, this new order would be characterized by the incipient signs of the fracture of public authority and the increasingly arbitrary and violent imposition of the power of lords over peasantries.⁶²⁶ In this thesis, my emphasis has been directed very differently; I have tried, in fact, to demonstrate that the ninth and tenth centuries merit serious discussion in their own right, and that, although only dimly visible and imperfectly documented, both local society and the nature of politics were subject to significant regional differences which only partially correspond with the prevailing paradigms attached to the study of this period.

The eighth century saw the emergence of a new political power in Asturias. Both the Liébana and Galicia, according to the later chronicles, were constituent parts of the Asturian political framework by the late eighth and early ninth century at the very latest. Throughout this thesis however, I have emphasized that the creation of political relationships which actually reflected the more grandiose claims made by royal propaganda, or implied by the regnal dating clauses which routinely closed documents, must have been a more difficult and more ‘negotiated’ process than the Alfonsine chronicles would have us believe. Political power was a complex and fraught phenomenon in early medieval Spain, dependent in large measure on the success or otherwise with which kings

⁶²⁵ The most important of which have been Poly and Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation*, chs. 1, 2 and 4; Bois, *The Transformation of the Year 1000*, ch. 5; Bonnassie, ‘From the Rhone to Galicia’, *passim*; for an approach more similar to my own, which concentrates on the family unit of rural society and its insertion in wider frameworks, see, on Catalonia, L. To Figueras, *Família i héreu a la Catalunya Nord-oriental (segles X a XII)* (Barcelona, 1997), chs. 1–3, in which it is argued that family units operated with considerable autonomy in many respects, undertaking *aprisiones* (new settlement) and engaging in *compra-venta*.

⁶²⁶ As we have seen, Mínguez Fernández has argued for a fundamental change in the political basis of the kingdom in the tenth century; see, ‘Ruptura social’, at p. 32, ‘debilitamiento de la monarquía, sometimiento del campesinado, fortalecimiento de la aristocracia’ were the bases of this ‘nueva organización económica, social y política cuya implantación se hace perceptible desde las primeras décadas del siglo X’.

won and consolidated magnate support; kings were not, however, at any stage in the period here studied, merely the pawns of magnates. The fragmentation of the state in tenth-century Italy, for example, was not matched in Spain, where kings presided over a kingdom in which royal power, although subject to regional incidences and highly context-dependent, was never completely deserted by significant factional support; the conflict between Rosendo and Sisnando, reaching its apogee during the civil wars between Sancho I and Ordoño IV, shows that proximity to royal favour was important and actively contested.⁶²⁷ Indeed, aristocratic dispute over emblematic royal institutions, like Compostela, is hard to explain if royal authority had ceased to be important. But kings could not simply expect obedience; they also needed to cultivate their support bases in what was already, by 900, quite a large kingdom. This was no easy task, and they inevitably had to choose between factions—factions which were often geographically distant, and the direct ancestors of very different political, social and cultural inheritances.

Spain has always been hard to govern, and its geography resists easy communications between the dry tableland of the Meseta and the area to the north and north-west of the Cantabrian chain. This being the case, Galicia must have been an attractive proposition to kings looking to cement their status: it offered a fairly large expanse of relatively fertile lowland; significant concentrations of aristocratic wealth; and was less threatened by attack from al-Andalus.⁶²⁸ This explains why kings would look to consolidate support in this region, and Rosendo's family benefitted from this relationship for at least one hundred years; thus, what the story of Rosendo's family demonstrates is that magnate interest and royal interest were not always mutually antagonistic in the ninth and tenth centuries. Indeed, the creation of such strong ties gave magnates a vested interest in the upkeep of political structures from which they were direct beneficiaries. Civil war resulted not from any collective magnate challenge to *kingship*, but to particular *kings* who proved less pliant to particular magnate groups. The inability of a succession of kings to face down threats from the

⁶²⁷ For Italy, see C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400–1000* (London, 1981), especially ch. 7. For aristocratic competition between Rosendo and Sisnando, see Portela Silva, 'El rey y los obispos', *passim*.

⁶²⁸ Sánchez-Albornoz, *Espana, un enigma histórico*, ii, p. 75: 'Tras las campañas del Nahrón y de Anceo, del 824, ningún ejército saraceno entró en Galicia hasta que Almanzor llegó a Compostela en 997'.

Cordoban Caliphate must have exacerbated factional tensions; in the light of these significant problems, that the kingdom did not fragment totally is quite remarkable.

But the intensification of factional politics is only one aspect of tenth-century change. Indeed, in this thesis I have asked comparative questions about the dynamics of proprietorial expansion across southern Galicia and the Liébana valley, as well as questions as to how, and in what ways, these dynamics were affected by the social backgrounds of the respective families at the forefront of these programmes of property accumulation. In both regions, ambitious families tied their colours to the mast of a monastic institution in order to further their wealth and social influence—but these families were very different. Southern Galicia, with its long-established rich *potentates*, easily documentable from the middle of the ninth century, was home to pockets of aristocrats powerful enough to form the regional support base, or faction, of ninth- and tenth-century kings. Celanova's success throughout the tenth century would depend upon the ability of its chief custodians to combine local lordship with involvement in royal politics from afar. This involvement took the form of royally-delegated responsibilities for the upkeep of loyalty and security in southern Galicia. By contrast, elites in the Liébana arose from amidst a community largely composed of free landowning peasants, which does not appear to have been framed in the same way by an organized public sphere of political action; the only politics that elite families knew here before the mid-tenth century was local, and this matched the scale of their landowning interest, which was confined almost exclusively to the narrow Liébana valley. The sort of wealth that it was necessary to accrue in order to catalyse the sorts of links we saw between aristocracies and kings in Galicia, may not have been possible in the tenth-century Liébana. These contrasts allow us to appreciate that the stages by which local networks of power were constructed differed from region to region.

In the Liébana, Bagaudano and Faquilona bought considerable landed assets from peasants in the early tenth century, with which they would consolidate their economic status amongst the richest inhabitants of the valley in the early tenth century. But their efforts to secure their local status seems to have stalled after the initial large wave of aristocratic gifts made to San Martín de Turieno came to an end in the middle of the tenth century. Opila's abbacy at San Martín undoubtedly created

significant momentum for a short while; but it may well have made peasant communities wary of their presence in a way they perhaps were not in the 920s. At any rate, the donations and sales dried up very quickly, and the influence of the monastery, and of the leading local family associated with it, fell away precipitously in the last third of the tenth century. This is precisely the opposite development to that which we see in Galicia, where, by 930, Gutier and Ilduara were already the region's most significant political operators and amongst its wealthiest inhabitants, as I showed in Chapter 4. Peasants, however, do not seem to have flocked to them in great numbers in search of their patronage.⁶²⁹ In fact, only with the foundation of the monastery of Celanova in 936 would Rosendo's family group have a stable base from which to make significant inroads into peasant landed assets, as the Rabal cycle of documents shows. Celanova had grown so quickly, and so dramatically, that momentum remained with the monastery after Rosendo's death; Andrade Cernadas, concentrating on a later period, has shown how Celanova made sixty-nine purchases, many of them in the local village of Bobadela, from 1000 to 1025.⁶³⁰

The impetus which drove the rapid growth of Celanova was therefore qualitatively quite different from that which we have seen in the tenth-century Liébana, where a locally prominent family joined forces with an established monastery, but were unable to project their economic and political influence beyond the rather narrow confines of their mountain-valley locality. These case studies allow us to see that the socio-economic and political factors that together shaped the early tenth-century exercise of social power were variable, resulting in different historical trajectories at the regional level for different areas of Spain, according to context and circumstance. Social power was everywhere derived from the ownership of land, but political eminence, royal favour, and the holding of public office were directly responsible for shaping the scale of landed ownership and thus the scale of social power in early medieval Galicia; as these factors varied from region to region, so too did the composition of regional societies, and the social relations which bound their constituent members, across early medieval Iberia.

⁶²⁹ Admittedly, some peasant donations or sales to Gutier and Ilduara may have not been recorded, or have been lost, but this seems improbable since it was in the monastery's interests to record these deals and keep the documents, as, indeed, they did when this process seems to have really taken off c.950.

⁶³⁰ Andrade Cernadas, *El monacato benedictino*, p. 81.

The scale of aristocratic ownership clearly impacted on the small worlds of village society too. My research on the rural society of Galicia demonstrates that local societies were not simply home to peasant communities of more or less equal socio-economic status up to around the year 1000, only for a peasant golden age to be curtailed in relatively coherent fashion by the emergence of newly empowered private lords. Rather, the social formation of tenth-century southern Galicia seems to be much more variegated and riven by economic and social inequalities well before the supposed *encellulement* of the peasantry around and after 1000. Great variations of wealth and legal status already existed in Galicia in 900 amongst the peasantry, and the peasantry was by no means a homogenous mass at the turn of the year 1000. Some peasants were richer than others, some owned several plots of land, others fell into abject poverty and relied on the good will of other peasants to help them get by.

The Liébana, in this regard, was rather similar, and it is equally misleading to think of its peasantry as a single undifferentiated stratum.⁶³¹ Moreover, that the late tenth century furnishes only a handful of documents some two hundred years after surviving documents begin suggests that peasant autonomy was not significantly reduced in this period. This concords with conclusions drawn from the earlier, better documented periods before c.970, because the Santo Toribio documents from these periods suggest that the ninth- and tenth-century Liébana did not see servile dependence undergo significant extension, contrary to the line which has commonly been taken in secondary studies.⁶³² The commendation thought by Loring García to lie ‘hidden’ in documents which purport to record simple sales and ‘adoptions’ is by no means clear from the evidence. To propose such an argument is to say that the actual social practices being recorded in charters were fundamentally lost, and thus misrepresented, in the arid formulae of standard documentary language; this is a leap we should be wary of taking. Rather, in both regions, many peasants were able to, and did, engage in property dealing of their own volition; this was a world characterized by the very unequal division of social, economic, and political power, but it is hard to support the contention that village-level life was significantly more difficult in 980 than it had been one hundred years before. As Innes has

⁶³¹ Davies, *Acts of Giving*, pp. 18–19.

⁶³² Above all, Loring García, *Cantabria*, pp. 314–328.

emphasized in a Frankish context, ‘there was nothing dishonourable in a free man entering into a relationship of personal lordship; it did not diminish his personal freedom, or weaken his hold on inherited land’.⁶³³

It is necessary to underline that the tenth century, in spite of my nuancing of the feudalizing teleology, was nonetheless a century in which significant change was afoot. But change, where it did happen, was in the concentration of economic power in the hands of aristocracies, and not the ever more intensive infringement on the legal rights of peasants. This concentration of economic power did not *a priori* depend on the genesis of new mechanisms of coercion; these, when they came, would come later, and are not a feature of the tenth-century societies I have analysed in this thesis. However, peasant alienation of land, willing or unwilling, led to the concentration of landed wealth in fewer and fewer hands; the common pool of peasant land was almost certainly smaller in both southern Galicia and the Liébana as the tenth century drew to a close than it had been in 900. This would provide elites with a platform from which they could increasingly intrude as and when they chose on peasant communities as a result of their expanding monopoly of land. This was not mirrored in the period before 1000 by the development of significant seigneurial rights, but was in itself critical; for as *compra-venta* transactions began to increase, so too did the possibilities for elite domination everywhere, since the less peasants had to sell or donate, the more limited their scope of action would surely have become.

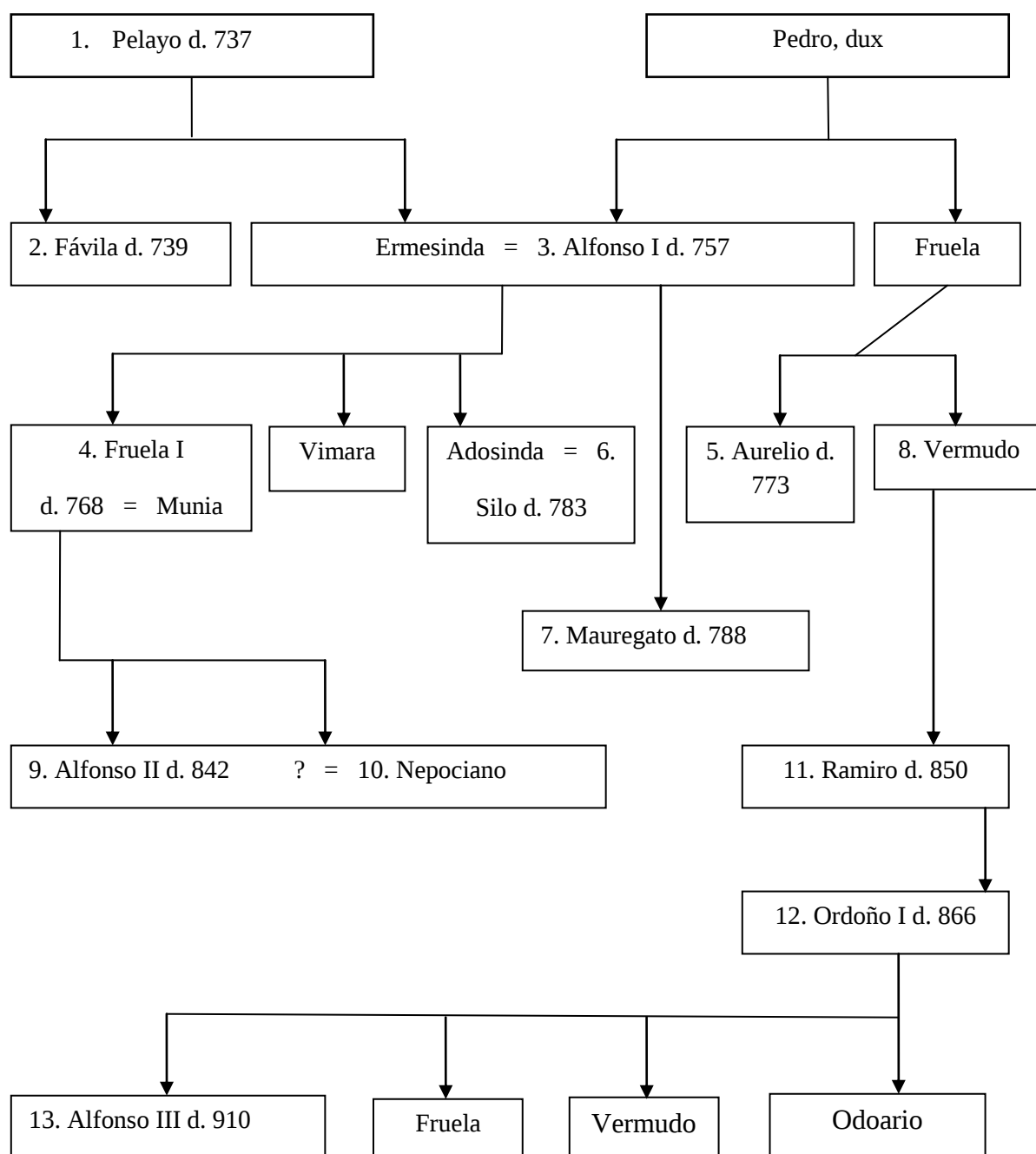
Rosendo and Opila, superficially, seem to be fairly similar figures: both were the favoured son of a major landowning family from a subregion of northern Iberia in the tenth century; both became abbot of a local monastery and oversaw a significant period of initial patrimonial growth. But this is where the similarities end, and the reason for this was the scale of the regional aristocracies to which they belonged. What being a close ally of the king did, in Rosendo’s case, was provide political structures which could cement one’s position in an elite context. What it could not do was to alter *directly* the ability to effect social change on a purely local level; here Rosendo and his family needed to engage with the local community, by means of a vehicle—the monastery of Celanova. In

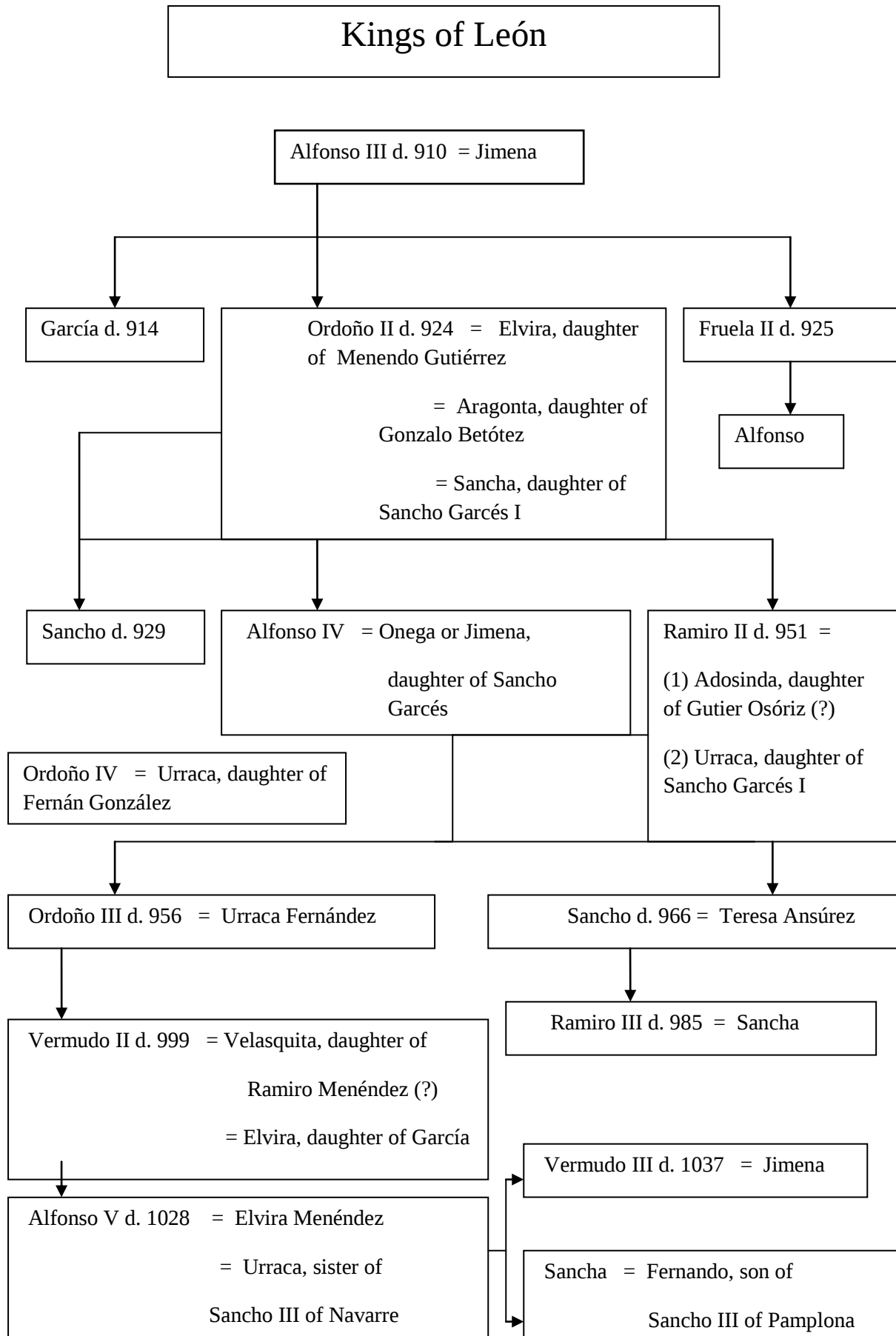
⁶³³ Innes, *State and Society*, p. 87.

the Liébana, however, given the much smaller political sphere in which Opila's family operated, it seems that even a monastery, that classic local pole of power for medieval social historians, may not have been enough to dominate the peasantry before the year 1000 with quite the force that the secondary literature would often have us believe.

Appendix 1: Genealogical Tables

Asturian Kings





Appendix 2: Maps

Modern Autonomous Regions of Spain within the Iberian Peninsula



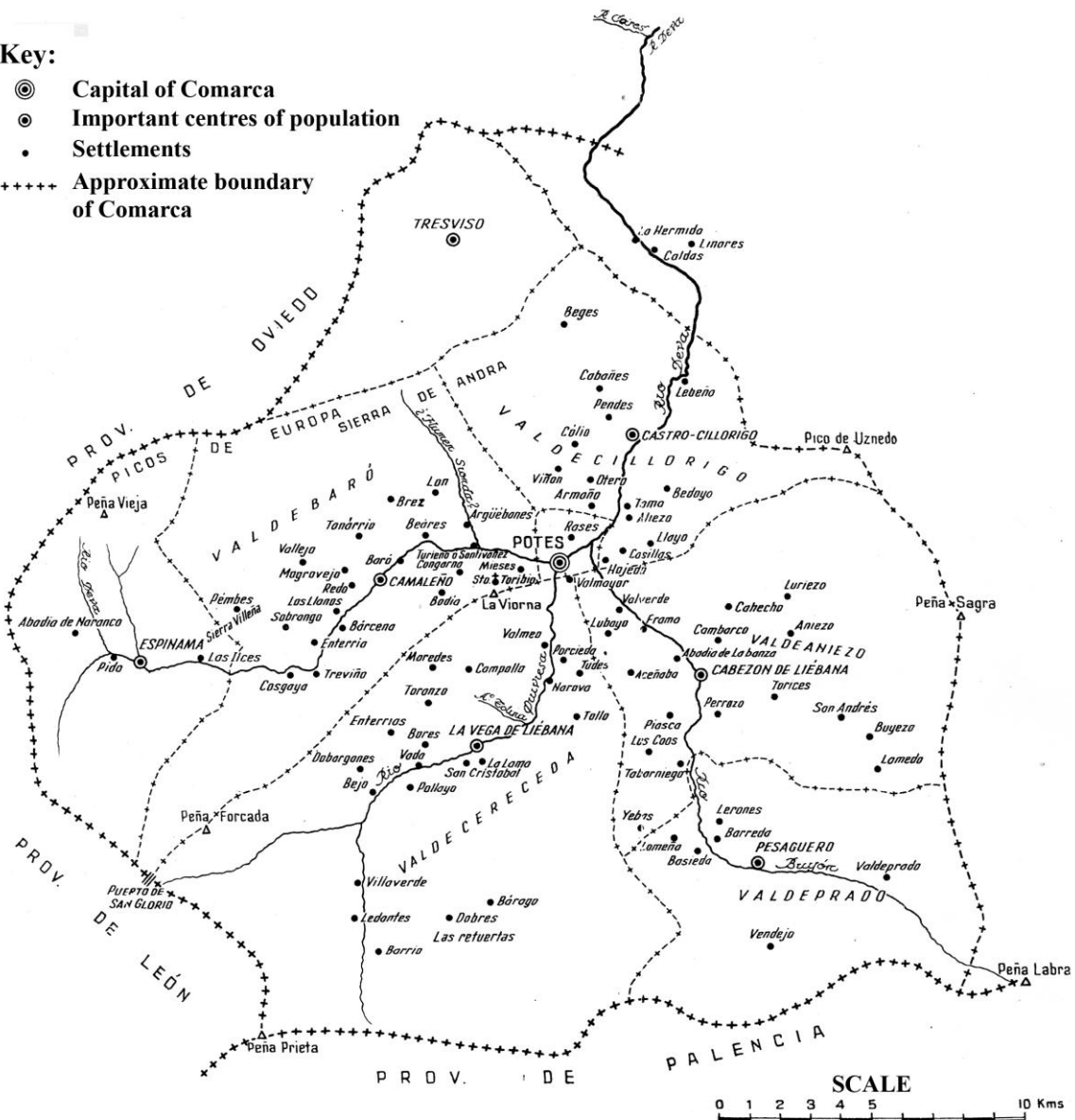
The Political Geography of Iberia c. 950



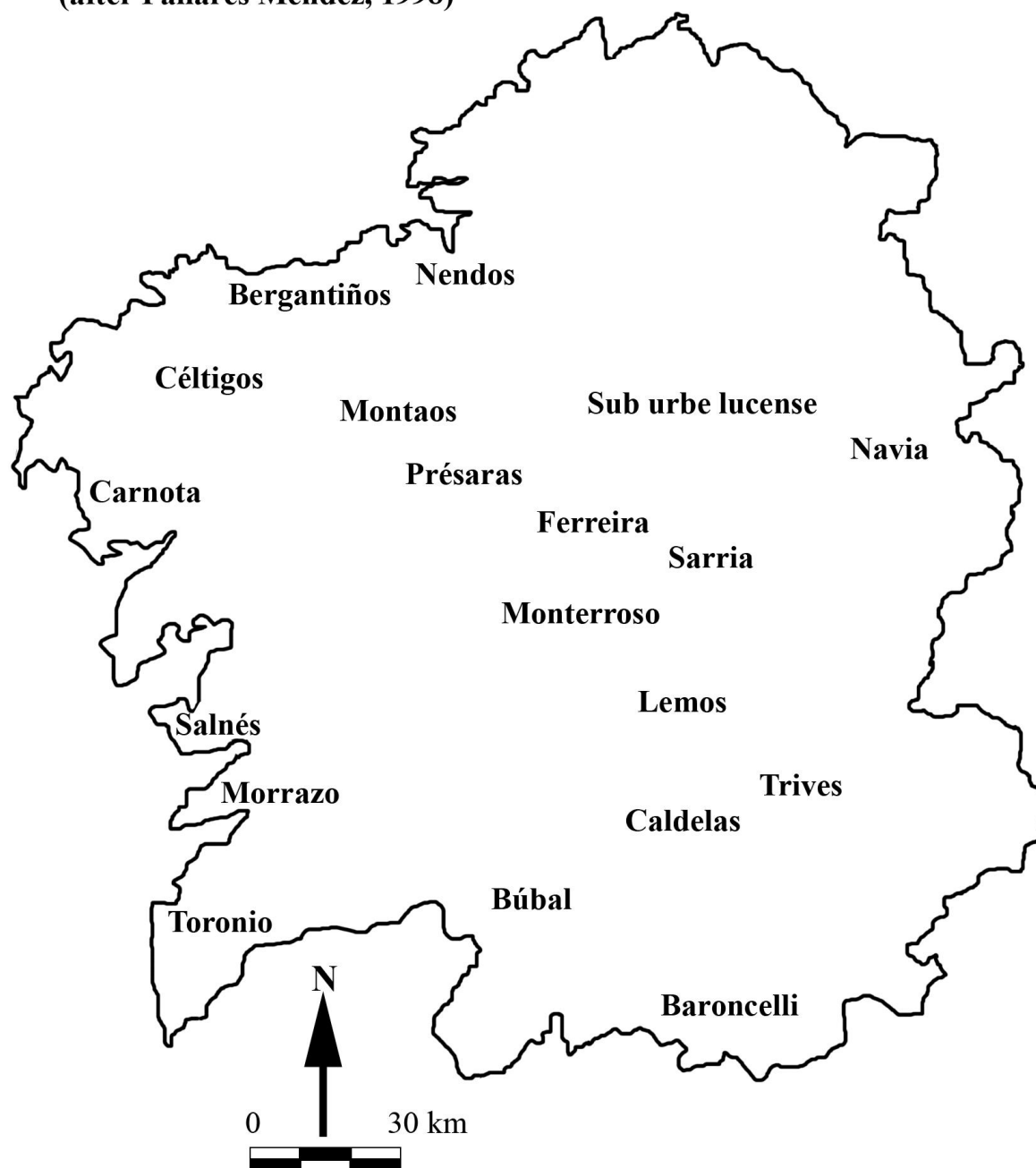
The Liébana

Key:

- ⊙ Capital of Comarca
- Important centres of population
- Settlements
- +++++ Approximate boundary of Comarca



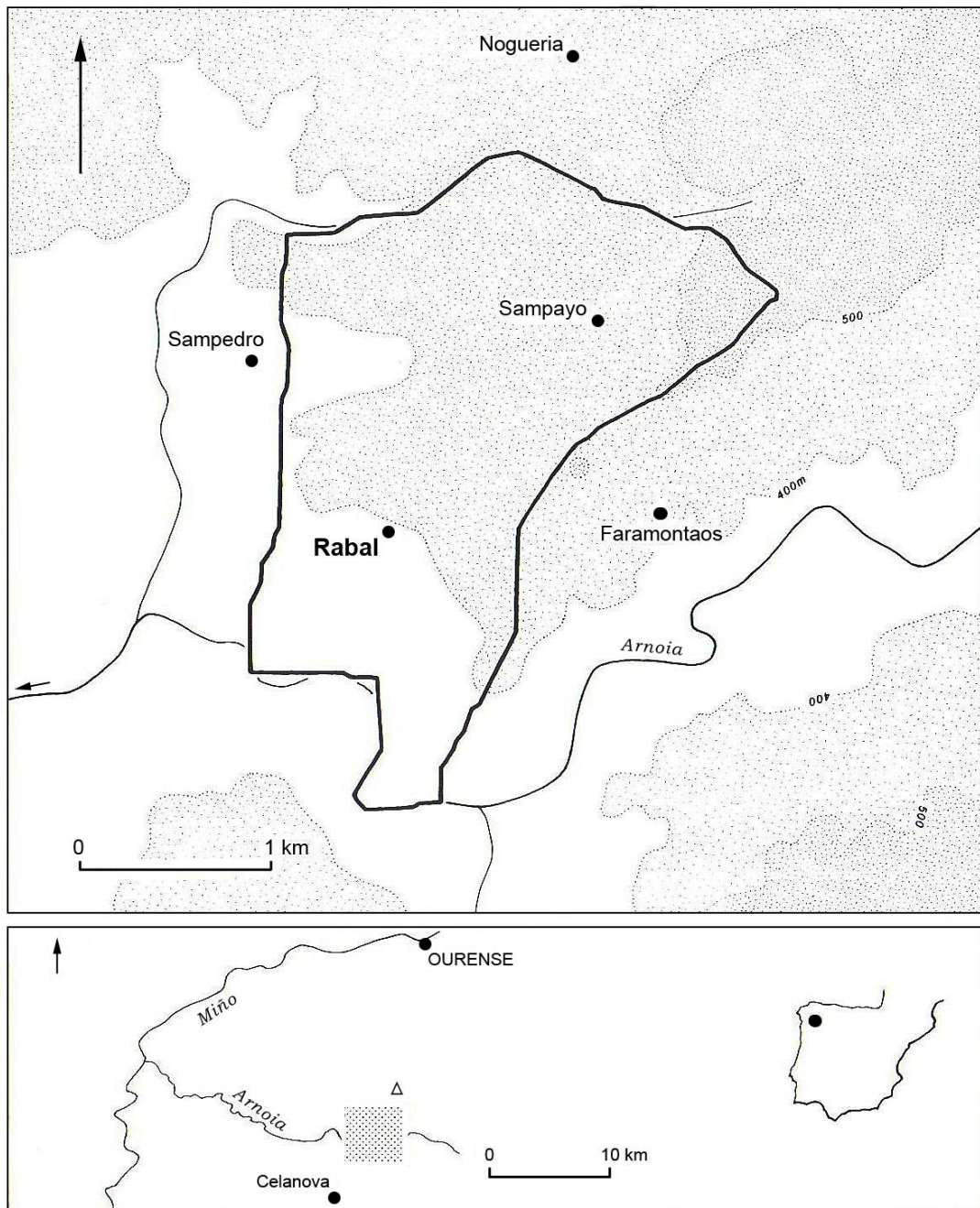
**Territories mentioned in the colmellus divisionis of 934,
located in the current autonomous region of Galicia
(after Pallares Méndez, 1998)**



**Places in which the family of Rosendo held Public Powers
in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries**



Rabal and surrounding territory (after W. Davies, 2007)



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