Mapping Scale Change: Hierarchization and Fission in Castilian Rural Communities during the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

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Rural communities, their social life and relationships are prominent in Castile north of the River Duero, where surviving written sources from the period before 1100 begin earlier and are more abundant than those from south of the river. This material makes a suitable point from which to observe medieval communities, and one that bears interesting comparisons with other areas in the Iberian northern fringes, such as Catalonia or Galicia, and elsewhere in Europe, as other essays in this volume make clear. However, the peculiarities of medieval Iberia’s historiography loom high over any attempt to compare Castilian communities with their European counterparts. This is true of many other areas — witness, again, most of the essays in this book — but a strong caveat is nevertheless necessary for early medieval Castile, because of the present crisis of a whole historiographical model based upon the repopulation of deserted — or very thinly populated — areas. Since the 1990s new views have emerged, but they are only just beginning to be credited as anything more than marginal in the most general state-of-the-art reviews, and are clearly under-represented in the available Spanish, let alone English, literature. It seems appropriate, therefore, to start with a brief presentation of recent views of Castilian space and communities to help contextualize the material I will discuss later on.

The Historical/Historiographical Setting

The Historical Process

Following the Visigothic collapse in 711, effective Arab control came, by 770, to be restricted to the lands south of the Spanish Central mountains and the
Pyrenean piedmont. Of the northernmost reaches, the east soon became involved in Carolingian expansion. Much less so the west, where a kingship of obscure origin developed in the eighth century in the Asturian uplands, managed to gain a certain stability during the first half of the ninth century, and in the late ninth to early tenth century expanded over the northern half of the Duero basin to become the largest Christian polity in Iberia. Meanwhile the territories between the Duero and the Cantabrian mountains lay beyond the control either of the Cordoban emirs\(^*\) or the kings of Oviedo (Fig. 7.1). Late ninth-century chroniclers seeking to legitimize the Asturian takeover argued that these lands had remained depopulated after 711. This idea was to influence interpretations of medieval Spain up to the mid-twentieth century.\(^1\)

The eastern side of the kingdom of Oviedo-León was the county of Castile. Originally a small territory just south of the Cantabrian mountains, Castile retained its name through a process of expansion southwards that repeated, a generation later, that which had taken place on the western side of the plateau. By 930, Castile comprised the lands from the Cantabrian sea to the River Duero, between the River Pisuerga and the Iberian Mountains that divide the plateau

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from the central Ebro valley (Fig. 7.1). This is the territory to which I will refer as Castile in this text. From 931 to 1027, it was ruled by the Castilian comital dynasty under the sway of the Leonese kings, and in certain periods it enjoyed a remarkable degree of autonomy.

**Historiography: From Vacuum to Continuity**

Faced with the difficulty of accounting for the Duero basin’s ill-documented history between 711 and the Asturian-Leonese takeover, modern historians have relied on explanations largely cast in the mould of the ninth-century royal chronicles. This was taken to its most sophisticated form by Sánchez-Albornoz, establishing a dominant orthodoxy for most of the twentieth century. According to him, the Duero plateau had been deliberately devastated in the eighth century by King Alfonso I to create a defensive no-man’s-land between his kingdom and Al-Andalus, and was gradually occupied by the Asturian repopulation in the following centuries. On this allegedly empirical basis Sánchez-Albornoz defined the Asturian kingship’s ultimate historical mission: to preserve the Visigothic institutional inheritance and pass it on to a social body and territory whose links with the Roman and late antique past had been abruptly cut out and replaced with a new society of freemen; the influence of Turner’s *American Frontier* on Sánchez-Albornoz has long been recognized. The thin archaeological evidence and the fact that the region’s post-Visigothic texts start with its new Asturian masters — mainly great monasteries — helped the depopulationist theory become almost untouchable. All fresh evidence thereafter was used in circular arguments, interpreted in the light of this uncontested orthodoxy, and then used to reinforce it.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the great theoretical importance attached to it, settlement itself was little investigated until the 1960s. Historians were more concerned with legal history and the Visigothic origins of the Asturian institutions; post-Visigothic medieval archaeology was practically non-existent. Then in the 1960s a new breed of studies tried to map the milestones of Christian ‘repopulation’

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southwards, mostly dots on maps of the struggles between Christian and Muslim. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that settlement patterns became the subject of high-quality research, mainly based on written and place-name evidence. By 1990, most scholars would agree upon a threefold scheme of Castilian-Leonese settlement: 1) In the northern mountainous lands — neither controlled by the Arabs nor depopulated by the Asturian kings — the dominant pattern was that of ‘valley communities’. Those were substantial upland territories occupied by scatters of farm-type dispersed settlements, with churches as territorial foci, and a network of social ties across the valley, mostly based upon common management of, and access to, uncultivated land and other resources (pasture, wood, pasture, woodland, etc.).

5 S. de Moxó, Repoblación y Sociedad en la España cristiana medieval (Madrid, 1979).

water and so on). During the central Middle Ages, individual villages — nucleated or not — were defined within most of those valley units, but the larger territories stayed the main framework for much of social life.  

2. On the plateau north of the Duero — the limit of tenth-century Christian expansion — the settlement pattern was dominated by a spread of ‘village communities’ of local scale and peer rank, with neither hierarchies nor any higher articulation amongst them. In the 1980s these were mostly seen as the result of spontaneous peasant colonization of deserted spaces. Yet it is the process by which local communities were controlled thereafter by a landed, mainly ecclesiastical aristocracy that is most clearly evidenced in tenth- to eleventh-century charters. Subsequently, in the second half of the eleventh century, the articulation of the parish* network confirmed those village communities as the dominant element in the central Castilian lands.  

3. Finally, in the lands between the river Duero and the Central mountains, which were added to the Leonese kingdom in the second half of the eleventh century, the pattern was based on central places of varying rank — from cities with an episcopal see to very small towns — each with a hinterland containing a number of dependent settlements (aldeas).  

As a result, north and south territoriality was conceived in two levels: local settlements embedded in larger territories, whether ‘valley communities’ or townships (with central places in the south, without them in the north), but in central Castile lay a ‘flat’ mass of peer local settlements, which certainly has a bearing on the degree of social complexity that can be postulated for it. Moreover, links with the late antique regional past remained hazy: in the north, there was continuity, but from a number of allegedly ill-Romanized, largely indigenous societies (‘tribal structures’ was a fashion of the time). In both the middle and the south, due to a more or less prolonged period of desertion, traces of earlier settlement were either lost or negligible, and overlaid with the new ones. Finally, the bulk of peer rural settlements in the plateau north of the Duero were seen as resulting from spontaneous peasant colonization, followed by the establishing of a network of administrative districts by higher political powers, and the emergence of towns and large seigneurial dominions. South of the river, and much later, the kings were

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supposed to have created from scratch an articulate network of townships and their hinterlands to which the basic rural settlements were ascribed.\textsuperscript{8}

**New Perspectives**

Although still favoured by many, the threefold pattern of the 1980s nowadays arouses much less vigorous enthusiasm. Since the mid-1990s, new research has called for the consideration of long-term dynamic continuity, as well as greater social complexity.\textsuperscript{9} The new views owe much to the growing wave of criticism, from the late 1970s, of the textual evidence upon which the depopulation-repopulation model was based and the dangers of taking its discourse at face value.\textsuperscript{10} Closer investigation of the earliest recorded territorial districts (the so-called \textit{alfoces}*) has also played an important role.\textsuperscript{11} Much less so archaeology — admittedly the main potential source of fresh evidence — through a lack of tightly-focussed large-scale excavations, although it should take the lead in the near future.\textsuperscript{12}

Thin as it is, the available evidence can be used to produce an image of early medieval settlement patterns in central Castile that is rather different from the standard model of the 1980s. My aim will be to suggest that early Castilian local communities were not just scattered peer settlements, but belonged to a more complex territorial pattern, with settlements of different rank and a network of supralocal territories which largely influenced the formation of the earliest-recorded administrative districts. Moreover, in the period I will consider (the tenth and

\textsuperscript{8} Compare Astill, this volume.


\textsuperscript{10} A. Barbero and M. Vigil, \textit{La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica} (Barcelona, 1978).


\textsuperscript{12} The dominant picture of the 1980s, considerably more complex and nuanced than its predecessors, contained very little input from medieval archaeology, which, despite its rapid development early in the decade, hardly entered historians’ discourse — nor academic posts.
eleventh centuries) the whole pattern was subject to dramatic changes, of which the most remarkable was the fission of village territories, fully comparable to Steven Bassett’s discussion, in this volume, of the evidence of Anglo-Saxon parishes.

I will revisit here some cases I have discussed elsewhere together with other freshly assessed material, combining charters with place-names, topography, architecture and, when available, archaeological survey data.\(^\text{13}\)

**Village Fission: A Topographical Exploration**

The Castilian medieval parish network crystallized in the late eleventh century, and most of it has survived up to the present. In south-eastern Castile one parish normally corresponds to one village, many of which can be traced back to the tenth century. At first sight this would suggest that medieval parishes drew directly on a settlement pattern in which village territories were the principal building blocks. However, closer inspection reveals that the late eleventh-century pattern results from the fission of larger, supralocal units* into their component settlements. This process was already on its way when our first charters were written down,\(^\text{14}\) so, instead of revealing a starting point, what the textual evidence shows is in fact glimpses of ongoing changes. Moreover, fission worked unevenly, at different paces and in varying intensity in different areas. The territories of Ausín and Orbaneja serve to illustrate this variability.

**Village Fission in the District of Ausín**

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Ausín was a small alfoz some 15 km south-east of Burgos, formed by a stretch of river with other secondary valleys (Fig. 7.2). Charter evidence is available from the 940s. This must be combined with the study of place-names, topography and the extant architecture. Despite the potentially rich archaeological remains, no excavation has been undertaken hitherto, only non-systematic field surveys, focussed on the pre-Roman and Roman

\(^{13}\) Vésteinsson’s and Bassett’s opening discussions in this volume are generally pertinent here, especially regarding handling of place-name evidence.

\(^{14}\) Charter writing was itself a chief factor of the process. See J. Escalona, ‘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 *Comunidades locales y poderes feudales en la Edad Media*, coord. I. Álvarez Borge (Logroño, 2001), pp.117–55.
For a discussion of the evidence for medieval Ausín, see Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.94–110.

Around the central place, Ausín, there lay four smaller territories, largely defined by the drainage network: Modúbar, Hontoria, Revilla and Cubillo. By the
end of the eleventh century, all four had split into two or more village territories. This process can be investigated through place-names and landholding patterns.

Place-name evidence is quite consistent. In all four units, the individual settlements had twofold names. The first element was the same for each area, and villages were singled out by adding a second term connected by the preposition ‘de’.

Thus, in the small valley of Modúbar, north of Ausín, there lay Modúbar de San Cebrián, Modúbar de Zahalanes, Modúbar de la Cuesta and Modúbar de la Emparedada. Likewise, in the south-western side of the district, the settlements along the watercourse were Cubillo del Campo, Cubillo del César, and Cubillejo de Lara. Just east of Ausín the same phenomenon reappears: Revilla del Campo and Revilla de la Fuente. And, again, south-west of Ausín, there were Hontoria de Suso and Hontoria de Yuso.

Charter references suggest that the larger areas were originally the basic territorial framework within which village territories defined themselves. In the tenth century most charter references to the Modúbar area merely cite ‘in Motua’. A church of San Cebrián is mentioned in 944, 963 and 964, but it is not until 1060 that we first see the village called ‘Mutuba de Sancti Cipriani’. This does not mean that village territories did not exist before; a more eloquent text of 978 reads: ‘in loco que dicitur Motua in villa de Zafalanes territorio fundate concedimus terras, vineas, mulinos’, meaning that we are giving arable, vineyards and mills in the deserted village of Modúbar de Zahalanes, near Modúbar de San Cebrián. It rather seems that there were two territorial layers, and more often than not the supralocal one was seen as fit for mention in charters. The process of individualization, though, was uneven. Revilla del Campo is recorded in 1011 with its present name. So are Modúbar de San Cebrián in 1060, and Modúbar de Zahalanes in 1077. By contrast, in the Cubillo valley, villages are first singled out by a personal name (‘Cubillo de Sesnando’ and ‘Cubillo de Don Cipriano’) before they reach their final form, sometime before the late twelfth century.

The analysis of land transfers allows for a more dynamic approach. Landholdings in tenth-century Castile were typically fragmented. Large, unitary estates were extremely rare; more normally an individual owned a set of small, dispersed units. If those pieces were scattered across a supralocal territory, it is conceivable that individual estates would extend over village boundaries. This is shown quite

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16 Compare Bassett, this volume.

17 Burgos, no. 34 (1077): ‘in Cupiello de Sesnando, illa uestra portione; et in Cupiello Domini Cipriani, illa uestra portione’. In 1053 another text cites ‘Cupiello de Nofar’ which may or may not be one of the aforesaid (Burgos, no. 17).
consistently in land transactions. While the aforementioned 978 charter mentions land in the village territory of Zalahanes within the locus called Modúbar, the properties exchanged are more often located by mere reference to the larger territory (1011: ‘in Mutua nostram porcionem’, and likewise in 1029, 1039 and 1044; also Hontoria in 1029). Alternatively, the existence of more than one homonymous settlement begins to appear in texts from 1011, sometimes with formulae* like ‘in Fontearea nostram porciones et in alia Fontearea nostram porcionem’ (our share in Fontearea and our share in the other Fontearea) (1029) or ‘in Cupiello et in aio Cupiello’ (in Cupiello and in the other Cupiello); others with generic mentions in the plural: ‘in duos Cupiellos’ (in the two Cupiellos), ‘in ambas Font Aureas’ (in both Fonte Aureas), ‘in ambos Cupiellos’ (in both Cupiellos). From the mid-eleventh century, it is increasingly common to see settlements mentioned individually (1060: ‘in Mutuba de Sancti Cipriani, meas kasas’), but references in the plural persist (1194: ‘quantum habemus in Ribiella de Campo et in ambas Fontorias’; 1225: ‘en las Fontorias [. . .] en las Muduvas’; 1246: ‘quanto nos perteneçe en ambas las Fontorias’) suggesting that landholdings formed a continuum throughout the old supralocal units, regardless of village boundaries.

The topography confirms this impression. In all four units, the basic layout of watersheds and drainage provide self-evident boundaries that correspond to those of the supralocal territories. The dominating axial streams favour a land-use sequence in bands (wet riversides, arable in the valley flatlands, pasture and vineyards in the slopes) flowing continuously along the valley. Village boundaries cut across this landscape, defining valley segments whose territoriality is much less obvious than that of the larger units. Moreover, in at least two cases (Modúbar and Cubillo) the supralocal unit and its main watercourse were homonymous.

18 Cartulario de San Juan de la Peña, ed. A. Ubieto Arteta (Valencia, 1962), no. 49 (1029): ‘in Fontearea de Agusyn meam portionem’. This being a substantial bequest of property over a very wide area, the added term ‘de Ausín’ is meant here to differentiate Ausín’s Hontoria area from other Hontorias in the southern Castilian region (the name is not that unusual).
20 As late as 1352 both Hontorias are recorded as separate villages, but they have exactly the same seigneurial structure, and a rather complex one, with many noble persons sharing rights in them. The same pattern seems to have applied to the Revilla area, but in this case one of the settlements was transferred to ecclesiastical lordship, and this originated diverging seigneurial models for both of them (Libro Becerro de las Behterías, ed. G. Martínez Díez (León, 1981), XI, 61, 62, 107, 108).
The paucity of archaeological evidence makes it hard to explore the chronological depth of this model for all units, except Hontoria. This corresponds to the gentle little valley of the River Saelices. Here valley and territory do not have the same name. Hontoria derives from the Latin *Fons Aurea*, admittedly denoting a water-related sacred place, while Saelices comes from San Félix (see below). As we have seen, some charters sometimes merely mention ‘Hontoria’ and others ‘the Hontorias’ or ‘both Hontorias’, but finally they come to distinguish two settlements: Hontoria de Suso and Hontoria de Yuso (meaning Upper and Lower Hontoria, respectively), although joint mentions of both villages keep appearing eventually.

This picture can be combined with other evidence, such as religious architecture. In Hontoria de Yuso a charter of 1056²¹ mentions a lost church, which is consistent with its typically early dedication to Santa Eugenia. Further up the

²¹ *Cartulario de San Pedro de Arlanza (antiguo monasterio benedictino)*, ed. L. Serrano (Madrid, 1925), no. 56 (1056). The early date surely makes the case for a building in the pre-Romanesque tradition.
valley Hontoria de la Cantera’s church is placed on a mound overlooking the modern village and the whole valley. Again, it bears a typically early medieval dedication (St Michael), but the church was rebuilt in the Renaissance, leaving no trace of earlier structures.

However, there is yet a third church in the area, on a discrete elevation amidst the valley lowlands between both Hontorias, closer to the upper settlement. Only a mid- or late twelfth-century Romanesque apse remains of a building that once lay over a substantial Roman site. The nave’s walls were torn down in the first half of the twentieth century to retrieve an ensemble of first-century funerary slabs of great size, after which the nave virtually disappeared. While the slabs bear witness to a substantial early Roman settlement, pottery finds from all around the area clearly indicate occupation in the late empire. The evidence is not enough to reveal what type of site there was there — a villa-building and a nucleated village are equally plausible — or to date its final occupation more accurately. But in the absence of a more defined archaeological context, we can sort the available evidence into a rough stratigraphic order.

The Hontoria area seems to have contained a substantial settlement in Roman times, then developed into a single territory. The name Fons Aurea may well date back to that period, and eventually have come to designate the whole valley. In the post-Roman period this site, whatever its character, remained the main local focus and was eventually marked with a church dedicated to St Felix, which gave its name to the River Saelices but not to the individual settlements ([ecclesia] Sancti Felicis > San Felices > Saelices). At an unspecified period, secondary settlements developed up and down the valley, both with churches with potentially early medieval dedications. Moreover, San Miguel’s topographical setting and the reference in a Santa Eugenia charter of 1056 both suggest pre-Romanesque buildings, although we cannot be precise about how old they were in the eleventh century, when the fission process begins to be expressed in our documents.

The Hontoria case sheds some light on the rest of the Ausín area. Supralocal units seem to have preceded individual villages and were more relevant than the latter to the pattern of territorial organization. Fons Aurea may well have been the name of the Roman site (and perhaps of the whole valley); the name lived on long enough to be passed on to the medieval villages; the axial stream may well have

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shared that name, but this was later replaced by that of the church which gave continuity to the erstwhile dominant focus in the valley. The Roman site in Hontoria de la Cantera/San Félix, together with the less significant Roman finds in Revilla del Campo could also indicate that sometimes — but not always — one village may have been central to the area before fission took place. (There are hints that Modúbar de San Cebrián dominated the whole Modúbar unit, but the Cubillo valley looks like an undifferentiated linear arrangement.)

However that may be, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the supraregional units in the Ausín area were giving way to village territories. As in some of the Icelandic farms discussed by Orri Vésteinsson and Birna Lárusdóttir in their respective essays, traces of the larger unit survive in the form of a place-name that is shared among several settlements. These traces can also be found in the landscape, in land use and in landholding and seigneurial patterns. But people lived in villages, which ultimately became the basic units for secular and ecclesiastical administration. As far as government was concerned, people belonged to two territorial layers: the alfoz (district) of Ausín and their respective villages. The mechanisms of social and political integration beyond these levels remain a matter for future research. As for the smaller territories, perhaps the supraregional units faded out very quickly and silently, or perhaps we just lack the evidence to assess their persistence. In this respect, the case of Orbaneja provides an interesting counterpart to Ausín.

Orbaneja: The Villas and the Valley

From 942, the cartulary of San Pedro de Cardeña — an important monastery about 9 km south-east of Burgos — shows the house gaining property in a nearby area called Orbaneja. This corresponds to the upper half of the valley of the River Picos up to the ridge known as Sierra de Atapuerca (Fig. 7.3). Just as Modúbar or Hontoria were parts of the district of Ausín, Orbaneja belonged to the district of Burgos, which, being a much more important unit, was much more likely to embed smaller territories within its own (see below).

Place-names here clearly do not fit the Ausín model. The name Orbanielia > Orbaneja could just as well derive from a personal name *Urbanus as from an

24 Escalona, Sociedad y territorio, pp.96–97.
25 Gregory of Tours (Historiae, X.31) mentions a church in Orbaniacum > Orbigny, the kind of -iacum place-name that Halsall discusses in this volume.
In medieval Castile, cf. Orbaneja del Castillo, a deserted Orbaneja, in the alfoz of Muñó (G. Martínez Díez, Pueblos y alfoz burgaleses de la repoblación (Valladolid, 1987), p.309), as well as the monastery of San Juan de Orbañanos (Orbananos).

Figure 7.3. The Orbaneja valley in the tenth to eleventh centuries.
‘Orbaneja’ proper, as the main settlement of a homonymous area in which other settlements (villae) existed. Unfortunately, we lack the necessary archaeological evidence here to take the argument further.27

In tenth-century land transfers, properties are referred to the supralocal unit: land ‘in the place called Orbaneja’ (in locum quod vocant Orbanelia) (942); a vineyard and a piece of land ‘in the Orbaneja valley’ (in Valle de Orbanelia) (964 and 969); properties ‘in the surroundings of Orbaneja’ (in aditos de Orbanelia) (953 and 984).28 The only extant eleventh-century transaction introduces the village level: land ‘in the Orbaneja valley, in the place called Cardeñuela’ (in Valle de Orbanelia, in locum quom vocitant Cardeniola).29 This is consistent with the Ausín pattern, although here the supralocal level is better illustrated in earlier texts, while the later evidence is scanty.

Grazing rights in the Orbaneja area yield a richer picture of supralocal territoriality. In 963 Cardeña was granted the full villa of Orbaneja de Picos,30 in the suburbium of Burgos;31 the charter then goes on to award the monastery grazing rights in a substantial area, limited by the River Arlanzón and the neighbouring villages of Castañares, Villafría, and Rubena, up to the Atapuerca ridge (Fig. 7.3). This means not only the whole Orbaneja area — as defined by topography — but also part or all of the territory of other villages, such as Arlanzón or Ibeas, which clearly did not belong to it. It seems that the grazing rights of the inhabitants of Orbaneja reached beyond its boundaries — probably neighbouring units had reciprocal rights in Orbaneja — and this can be seen as an attribute of community membership, as eleventh-century texts make clear.

In 1039 King Fernando I donated to Cardeña the smaller monastery of San Vicente ‘in the Orbaneja valley, in the urban territory of Burgos’ (in Valle Orbanelie, in suburbio Vurgos),32 which lay right on top of the Atapuerca ridge. Attached to it were rights in pasture and water ‘down to the River Arlanzón’ (usque in flumine Aslanzon), totally overlapping with the southern side of those assigned in 963 to

27 Compare Modúbar and Hontoria, above.
29 Cardeña, no. 267 (1050).
30 Donations of whole villages in Castile are a very different affair from mere land transactions, as they involved seigneurial rights over the whole community as such. They are also much less frequent, and tend to be issued by rulers or people from their immediate entourage.
31 Cardeña, no. 109 (963).
32 Cardeña, no. 233 (1039).
Orbaneja de Picos. The rest of the circuit is omitted, but it presumably coincided with the boundaries of the Orbaneja valley itself, since San Vicente did not belong to any particular village, but to the whole valley of Orbaneja.\footnote{This kind of ‘supralocal’ monastery is not infrequent, but nothing suggests that they could exercise a pastoral role over the area. Cf. Bassett, this volume.} That very year, King Fernando I also conferred upon Cardeña special exemptions in three villae including Orbaneja de Picos,\footnote{\textit{Cardéña}, no. 234 (1039).} including those of a military nature — castle repair, military expedition with the king or his delegates, providing men for reconnaissance missions — and subjection to inspection by royal judicial officials, and several others. As a result, the men of Orbaneja de Picos — Cardeña’s dependants — were set apart from the ordinary network of public obligations and placed exclusively under the abbot’s lordship. Yet, they retained their rights as members of the wider community of Orbaneja. This situation triggered a dispute in 1073 over whether the men of Orbaneja de Picos were entitled to share the valley’s pastures. In the lawsuit, thirteen local knights (\textit{infanzones}) spoke ‘for the whole valley of Orbaneja’ — that is, four villas: Villa de Plano, Villa de Valle, Cardeñuela and Villa de Domna Eilo\footnote{\textit{Cardéña}, no. 340 (1073).} — and were ultimately defeated by the monks.

Now, the 1073 lawsuit provided precisely the main factor lacking in the Ausín material, namely, collective political action at a supralocal level. Between the tenth and the eleventh centuries, ownership of agricultural land presumably became increasingly confined to the component villages in the valley. However, uncultivated land was managed jointly and shared by the people of the member settlements. It was a part of a network of rights and obligations that can only be defined as political. The men of Orbaneja de Picos had their grazing rights denied because they had strayed beyond the common obligations. Their victory — actually Cardeña’s — in court was a lethal blow to the very roots of the valley community, and in fact supralocal articulation in Orbaneja fades out thereafter, at least in our written evidence.

A brief review of the Ausín and Orbaneja areas yields a picture of territorial change from larger, topographically consistent supralocal units to smaller village-territories. It also reveals that this process was extremely uneven: in some areas it took place earlier than in others. In some it went nearly totally unrecorded. Orbaneja is remarkable for presenting us with supralocal community links in action at a time when village territories were clearly the dominant pattern; in fact by then...
they were being used as the building blocks of the new parish system. We must now turn our attention to the next territorial level: the administrative districts. This will bring in the issues of spatial hierarchy and relationships with the overall political system, which are crucial to a proper understanding of territoriality.

**Hierarchy: Central Settlements and Administrative Districts**

The other chief factor in Castile’s spatial complexity is the existence of central settlements. I am not concerned here with the many different kinds of spatial focus one can detect on the ground, but more specifically with higher-rank settlements that played a role as a sort of capital of supralocal units and/or districts.

The study of early Castilian central settlements has been much neglected. Administrative districts and their centres were long recognized, but it was their military role that aroused the greatest attention. Most centres had some kind of fortress to which the district’s free population owed military obligations. This led many to think that defence was the only reason they were created, so the main component of spatial hierarchization was seen as generated top-down by the Castilian rulers in their ongoing struggle with the Muslims. Local society hardly played any role other than accepting the imposition and fulfilling their obligations.

Since the mid-1980s a more complex vision has been gaining favour, starting with a seminal paper by Carlos Estepa in which he defined the alfoces as resulting from the interaction between existing territories and the emerging overall political system. Since the late ninth century, not only governance, justice and defence, but also the management of the counts’ patrimonial estates were based upon a network of districts which was to endure until the late twelfth-century creation of new, larger divisions: the so-called merindades menores. Neither the alfoces nor their centres were, however, created from scratch. Their raw material was a

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36 Compare Davies’s conclusion to this volume.
37 Cf. Martínez Díez, Pueblos y alfoces, pp.10–12.
38 Estepa Díez, ‘El alfoz castellano’.
39 Álvarez Borge, Monarquía feudal. On the difficulties of separating which aspects derived from the counts’ ruling functions, and which were due to their ‘private’ behaviour as estate owners, landlords and patrons of clientèles, see J. Escalona, ‘Comunidades, territorios y poder condal en la Castilla del Duero en el siglo X’, *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 18–19 (2000–01), 85–120.
web of small territories, deeply rooted in their local contexts, as further studies suggest for Castile and other areas of the northern plateau.40

In what follows I explore two possible strategies by which this argument can be pursued. The first consists of looking at district centres and considering their relationship to previous territorial structures; the second consists of checking whether district boundaries conform with the local and supralocal units discussed above. In dealing with both aspects, a general distinction must be kept between the larger districts, whose centres were the main nodes of the articulation of the Castilian county, and the many smaller units that lay among them.

Central Settlements, Large and Small

The largest district in tenth-century Castile was Clunia. It is also a good example of how long-term continuity combines with extreme changes. A pre-Roman town (*oppidum*) turned into Roman city, Clunia was the capital of a huge *conventus iuridicus* (administrative/judicial district) comprising all the eastern half of the Duero basin and the corresponding northern lands down to the sea.41 The town flourished until the third century, but its late Roman phase is characteristically elusive.42 Being strongly dependent on the overall political system, it seems to have declined in the fifth century to the point that the region’s episcopal see in the Visigothic period was established in nearby Uxama (Burgo de Osma).43 Clunia arguably retained some sort of regional focal role during the earlier Middle Ages, although its character must have changed considerably, depending especially on the scale of the overall political system. Tellingly, it reappears in early tenth-century sources as a major stronghold in the upper Duero region and rises to become the capital of the whole south of the Castilian county in the turbulent second half of

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42 Cepas, this volume.

the century. In this later phase the boundaries of its huge district demonstrably engulfed a number of smaller units, arguably formerly independent alfoces.

Clunia may look unique because of its unparalleled importance in the Roman period and in the late tenth to early eleventh century, but the centres of southern Castile’s larger alfoces (Lara, Lerma, Muñó, Roa, Osma and others) can also often be traced back to Roman towns, even to pre-Roman oppida. The mere fact that many of them made it into the high medieval network speaks strongly for overall continuity but it must be stressed that we can hardly reconstruct any part of their evolution between the late Roman or Visigothic periods and the tenth century. Moreover, if these centres date back to earlier times, we have almost no way of knowing what their boundaries were before the evidence of the tenth-century charters, and these often respond to demonstrably recent alterations, as is the case of Clunia or Lara.

Burgos — Castile’s tenth-century political capital if it had one — can be contrasted with Clunia. Despite its prominent position overlooking the River Arlanzón and the presence there of a substantial prehistoric hillfort, finds of Roman archaeological material are scanty and it has not been possible to relate it to any node in the Roman itineraries. Instead it lay halfway between other sites, such as Tritium (Monasterio de Rodilla) or Deobrigula (Tardajos). We cannot ascertain why it succeeded in becoming Castile’s chief town in the absence of more intense archaeological research, but its takeover in 882 by Count Diego Rodríguez is a major landmark in the Castilian annals, and in the tenth century it was clearly as close to a city as one could get in the county.

Before alfoz became the standard term for district in the kingdom, the word suburbium was commonly used both for large districts like Burgos as for smaller

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44 Escalona, ‘Comunidades, territorios’. The medieval stronghold did not lie on the site of the Roman city — itself built on an outstandingly impressive elevation — but on another hill nearby, where the ruins of the medieval castle are still visible.

45 See further Escalona, ‘Comunidades, territorios’.


ones like Ausín, whose centre’s ‘urban’ character was more than dubious. This suggests that former urban nodes and hinterlands may have played a role in defining the new categories of territorial division, if not their actual nodes and boundaries.

Secondary central settlements have attracted much less attention, and have an even more incomplete archaeological record. Yet cases such as Ausín provide interesting hints. Ausín’s fortress lay on a prominent hilltop overlooking the valley (see Photo 7.2). Ramparts and enclosures are clearly recognizable, and the site typically yields pottery from all of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, and from the late Roman period. While, in the early Roman period, the clearest settlement evidence comes from neighbouring lowland sites such as Hontoria de la Cantera and Revilla del Campo, the old hill-fort surely remained a strong symbolic presence in the local landscape, although we cannot now be sure of the nature of

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its late Roman phase.\textsuperscript{49} In the absence of excavations, everything suggests that the early medieval settlement did not occupy the hilltop, but was dispersed in a linear pattern along the river, eventually to become nucleated around three foci, each with its own church (another pointer to a higher-ranking settlement). By the tenth century — although we do not know from how long before — a castle had been built on the hilltop, which was probably redundant by the early thirteenth century when a church was built, which preserved the site’s symbolic relevance down to the present day.\textsuperscript{50}

Ausín’s case is typical of small *alfoz* centres. Most had a recognizable fortress, very often placed upon an earlier *hilltop site*. Surely there is an argument for long-term continuity there but this should be qualified by other facts: a) while ancient sites demonstrably lie under or close to most tenth-century central settlements, others of comparable or greater size did not make it into the Middle Ages; b) the most common pattern is that of a site with late prehistoric material, then a gap for the early Roman period (sometimes starting already in the so-called Celtiberic-phase), then a late Roman reoccupation whose end is typically hard to determine, then an early medieval fortress. Overall, it seems that those sites repeatedly rose as dominant in the neighbouring landscape, but the process is far from simple.\textsuperscript{51}

Up to this point, it seems clear that the central fortresses of *alfoces* were commonly placed on sites that often had a local relevance and a long-running history. Yet, were those castles erected or renewed because they were chosen by the Castilian rulers as *alfoz* centres or were they chosen to be so because they were already higher-ranking sites in the local landscape, whether they had a fortress or not? We can hardly answer that question at all, at least not by considering the sites alone. At this point, looking at district boundaries will certainly not solve the problem, but it can provide valuable data.

While the boundaries of large districts like Clunia extend beyond and across topographical limits, smaller territories are potentially more likely to keep to the constraints of watercourses, watersheds and other physical landmarks (which of

\textsuperscript{49} Martín Viso, this volume, on hilltop site reoccupation; and Halsall and Cepas, this volume, on community redefinition following the ending of the Roman patterns of socio-territorial domination.


\textsuperscript{51} Discussion in Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.48–55, and Martín Viso, this volume.
course entails a clear risk of determinism). This does not mean, though, that they always did; indeed many alterations are demonstrated.

Take the small valley of the River Mataviejas (whose medieval name was Ura). This is a narrow east–west corridor interrupted in its middle sector by steep, curving slopes, a major obstacle to communication along the valley. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the valley was divided into two alfoces: up-river, Tabladillo — whose centre lay on what was arguably a first-century nucleated settlement (vicus*) — and, down-river, Ura, a district homonymous with the river and with its centre, below a hilltop site where late Roman material has been collected. The two alfoces are clearly defined by the topography on both sides, but, while their northern boundaries closely match watersheds, their southern limits extend beyond the watershed and eat into other neighbouring hydrographic units. Most of the component villages of the alfoz of Tabladillo, as deduced from a list in an 1125 charter, kept to the valley limits, yet a land tract protruded southwards to include the village of Doña Santos, clearly alien to the valley. This arrangement was much earlier than 1125: Talamanquilla — further south from Doña Santos — belonged to Tabladillo until it was granted to Covarrubias Abbey in 978. Therefore, Tabladillo’s southern expansion dated back at least to the military difficulties of the tenth century that triggered the reorganization of the frontier sector dominated by Clunia. This may also shed some light on the origins of similar features in neighbouring Ura, whose district also shows a south/south-west expansion beyond watersheds in the Nebreda-Cebrecos sector, which we cannot explore further through written sources.

Phenomena of this kind are better recorded in the Ausín district (Fig. 7.2). In the tenth century it comprised several units which eventually split into two or more villages each (Hontoria, Revilla, the Modúbares, the Cubillos). Yet, before that situation came about, their internal consistency was also affected by changes in district boundaries. Take the Modúbar valley. While place-names show it as a unit, its western half was captured by the all-important alfoz of Burgos, as was the case with other neighbouring territories. Much later, the now deserted village

53 Cartulario del Infantado de Covarrubias, ed. L. Serrano (Valladolid, 1907), nos 7–8.
54 Escalona, ‘Comunidades, territorios’.
of Tabladillo — not the same as the aforementioned alfoz of Tabladillo — belonged to Ausín in 1011, but was captured thereafter by neighbouring Lara, its name changing to Tabladillo de Lara. A third occurrence — Lara’s absorption of the uppermost settlement in the Cubillo valley, whose name changed to Cubillejo de Lara — has left little more than traces in the place-names.

The fact that, over a long time-span, alfoz boundaries cut across smaller territorial units regardless of topographic and/or toponymic unity not only shows that there was a degree of autonomy between local and higher political levels. It also suggests that there was a pre-existing territorial structure which was partially preserved and reused, and partially modified in the course of time.

**Scale Change and Territories: Where Is the Community?**

The latter part of this chapter has dealt with administrative districts, which, like ecclesiastical divisions, belonged to large-scale networks of power. This raises the major issue: the relationship between the top-down territorial units portrayed in our sources and the webs of community relationships that we want to investigate. We are as yet far from having fully satisfactory answers to this question. Suffice it to say that it is complex enough to rule out any simple explanation.

In the cases I have discussed, and despite the increasing stress upon the village-community, community bonds seem to be better defined as a complex set of overlapping, multifaceted relationships, running from the very local to the supralocal. Residence is the first obvious sphere, but we still need much more archaeological research if we are to understand when and how the dominant pattern of discrete nucleated settlements came into being. Also, the evidence discussed suggests that property patterns and economic activities may well have worked at a supralocal scale (Orbaneja, Modúbar, the Cubillos) before they became more and more confined to the individual villages within them. Patterns of access to uncultivated land and other resources such as water, woodland or mining seem to have worked at a similar middle-scale. The larger, top-down designed districts were not suitable for that. For all we know, neither Burgos nor Clunia were grazing-rights units, and Lara only laid that claim at a very late date. Orbaneja was clearly this sort of territory as late as 1073, and there are hints that in other small territories such as

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56 Cartulario de San Pedro de Arlanza, ed. Serrano, no. 111.
57 Bassett, this volume.
Tabladillo or Valdelaguna, grazing rights worked at an alfoz scale and were relevant to community membership.58

I hope to have shown that southern Castilian tenth- and eleventh-century territorial structures were more complex and dynamic than the established views would have us think. Individual settlements belonged to several layers of overlapping territoriality: villages, larger valley-like settlement units, a centre’s hinterland, the county, and the kingdom. Moreover, the whole system was changing at a rapid pace, determined by the inclusion of a large number of pre-existing building-blocks into Castile’s increasingly integrated political framework. Whether absorbed into larger districts or turned into districts themselves, the early units gave way to a system whose greater emphasis was on the local articulation of central power,59 that is, of the main mechanisms by which the local population interacted with an ever more distant political system: justice, tribute-collecting, labour-services, military obligations, and so on. In the long run, this favoured a threefold pattern.60 Households were arranged in local communities of village/parish size, in turn grouped into larger units that were more the administrative tools of top-down government and less a territorial expression of the complexity of local society. Households and villages were suitable as units for the extraction of both taxes and lordly revenues, which ultimately depended upon domination over peasant households and ownership of agricultural land. The twelfth-century formation of the new division in merindades menores, only relatively dependent on the earlier alfoces, was a major landmark in this separation between the village and the district. The earlier supralocal territories seem to have largely faded out, but left traces in the form of grazing rights shared between groups of villages, or supralocal patterns of military obligations or tribute payments, into the late medieval and early modern periods.

