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Towards a trans-regional approach to early medieval Iberia

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Abstract

The past few decades have witnessed great change in the study of the early Middle Ages in the Northern Iberian Peninsula. Spanish and Portuguese historiographies have moved away from older grand narratives such as 'Reconquest and Repopulation', which traced a centuries-long process encompassing the ultimate victory of Christianity over Islam and the construction of distinct nations or national societies. The basic tenets of these and other essentialist approaches to a period traditionally seen as the cradle of Spain and Portugal have been questioned and now superseded by a clearer awareness of the territorial diversity characterising the 8th to 11th centuries. Yet the ballast of both nationalism and regionalism has obstructed meaningful comparison amongst the Iberian regions to date. Drawing on the work of the research group *EarlyMedIberia*, this

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article argues for a new trans-regional approach to Northern Iberia, looking beyond political and geographical boundaries to consider the whole in a comparative light, and stressing the commonalities between regional and local societies. It does so by providing an overview of the extant charter material from before 1100 (indicating the principal editions) and by reviewing the major historiography. The conclusion proposes a closer assessment of the differences and similarities amongst regional historiographies, based on a more nuanced understanding of how they have been moulded by the specificities of the charter corpus in each region, as the first step towards a more integrated, contextualised, and rigorously comparative approach to the early Middle Ages in Northern Iberia.

1 | INTRODUCTION

As across Europe more widely, recent research on early medieval societies in the north of the Iberian Peninsula has firmly emphasised territorial diversity as the hallmark of the period. The development of local and regional approaches in the 1980s challenged older grand narratives – most notably *Reconquista* and *Repoblación* ('Reconquest' and 'Repopulation') – and broke away from the sociocultural homogeneity in which previous legal-institutionalist approaches had cast the polities and societies of the early Middle Ages. With this change, however, the boundaries imposed by regional historiographies, as well as by national discourses, were further entrenched. To date, and notwithstanding attempts to overcome it, the political units which have traditionally framed approaches to the early medieval Iberian past – the high medieval kingdoms especially, but also some modern administrative units – continue to cast a long, determinative shadow over these centuries. Paradoxically, at a time when we are gaining a better appreciation of the place of Iberian case studies in broader European contexts, meaningful comparisons between Iberian regions are still scarce.

As a first step towards overcoming this, the research group *EarlyMedIberia* has brought together a number of scholars whose work focuses on different regions of the north of the Iberian Peninsula in the early Middle Ages: our objective is to develop comparative trans-regional research which can not only offer a better understanding of it but also further illuminate early medieval European societies generally. The various territories of Iberia in this period, however diverse, shared a common past, and this past had sufficient weight to make it meaningful to investigate how and why different elements of it endured where they did, and equally how and why social groups in different regions drifted away from them over time. At the same time, the multiple polities into which Iberia was divided were interconnected, and these connections were felt at different levels of society, such that to assess historical developments in one we must necessarily look at the others.

The empirical basis for this endeavour is the remarkable wealth of early medieval charters extant from Iberia, which constitute our principal and most substantial written source base for the period. Mainly they consist of records of land transfers and disputes, preserved either on single-sheet parchments or as manuscript copies in cartularies.¹ Over recent years, historians have become more alert to the fact that charters themselves are social products, and that they must be interrogated as such before delving any further into what they may or may not tell us about the

societies which produced them (Escalona & Sirantoine, 2013). The aim of our group is to reassess the charters in this light in order to revisit old debates from fresh perspectives and advance new lines of research.

Such a methodology has obvious limitations, and it is important that we signal them from the start. Most significantly, it leaves al-Andalus (Muslim Iberia) beyond the scope of our enquiry, and it is not, in the first place, concerned with other written and material sources. This is not to downgrade either field; indeed, archaeology has brought probably the most significant advancement to our knowledge of early medieval societies in recent decades. But a concerted effort to gain a better appreciation of the whole corpus of early medieval Iberian charters has not yet been made, without which we cannot assess the distribution and relative incidence of historical phenomena over space and time. Our contention here is that this is not just a desirable end in itself, but also a necessary preliminary for carrying out more meaningfully multidisciplinary and comparative research on the broader written and material culture of Iberia, and beyond.

2 | THE CHARTERS

Charters provide information about multiple dimensions of early medieval societies, from the very production of written records to the variety of social relationships which unfolded around the acts recorded. They illuminate all social spheres, from the doings of kings and lay and ecclesiastical elites to those of smallholders and the unfree. They are a window onto the material world of the early Middle Ages, but also onto its world of ideas. According to a recent count, there are over 10,000 extant charters from the north of the Iberian Peninsula west of Catalonia from before 1100.² In addition, for Catalonia alone, almost 5000 charters are known from the ninth and tenth centuries (Feliu i Montfort, 2021, pp. 86–87), with an estimate of more than another 10,000 from the eleventh century (Bonnassie, 1975–1976, i, p. 22 and n. 20); further documents in private hands may yet remain unidentified (Piñol Alabart, 2014).

Rough figures convey an idea of the sheer volume of the documentary record, but they need nuancing. First, records of land transactions and disputes have survived in such numbers partly because they contributed to safeguarding the proprietary interests of the ecclesiastical institutions in which they were preserved. Other types of records are also known, however, such as inventories and lists.³ Secondly, the charter, as a documentary unit, is a useful label for identifying most records, but some resist ready characterisation. These include composite units containing two or more records of transactions, whether fully or in part, as with some dispute records and inventories, while information on dispute processes comes in a range of formats (Alfonso, 2013; Collins, 1985, 1986; Davies, 2016, pp. 35–55). Finally, similarities in documentary format which can be observed across Northern Iberia should not obscure the wide diversity of scribal practices and traditions.

The chronological distribution of the charters is very irregular and varies across regions (see Figure 1). The earliest to survive are a small number of full and fragmentary charters from the Visigothic period (sixth to early eighth century) (Canellas López, 1979; Calleja Puerta et al., 2018, nos. 1–5; cf. Dorandi, 1995, nos. 1398–1402), four of which, from the Aragonese monastery of San Martín de Asán, have only recently been discovered and published (Martin & Larrea, 2021; Tomás Faci & Martín Iglesias, 2017). These are fundamental as a basis for assessing changes in diplomatic practice over time, but they do not allow for the kind of systematic analyses which can be essayed of the later corpus. While numbers are already significant in some regions from the second half of the ninth century, charters have only been preserved in large and continuous quantity from the tenth. In Galicia, León, and Castile, there are notable peaks in the mid-tenth century; across all the regions there is a generalised increase in numbers in the second half of the eleventh, and this contrast in amount of material from the tenth century versus the eleventh is most acute in Portugal, Navarre, and Aragon.

Assessing the geographical distribution of the corpus is not straightforward, partly due to the difficulty of defining the spatial units for any such analysis. For lack of an alternative, we rely on the tentative demarcation, employed by *PRJ*, of seven large regions: Galicia, Portugal, León, Castile, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia (see Figure 2). Overall,

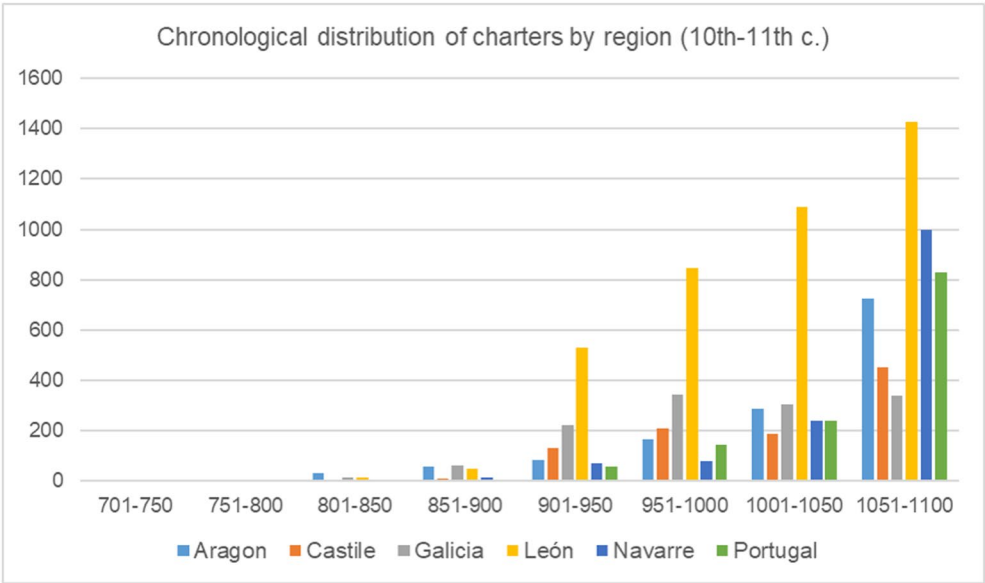


FIGURE 1 Chronological distribution of the charter corpus by region in northwest Iberia (not including Catalonia). Source: *Procesos Judiciales en las sociedades medievales del norte peninsular (siglos IX-XI)* (PRJ) (<http://prj.csic.es/>)⁴

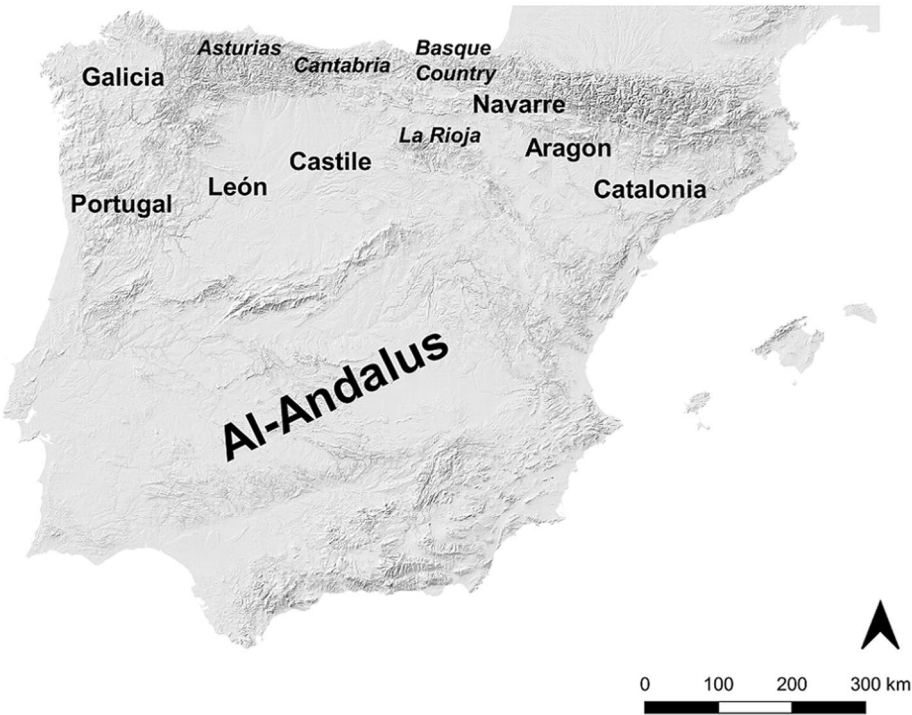


FIGURE 2 Regions (in Roman type) and sub-regions (in italic type) mentioned in the text

most of these are relatively well documented. Catalonia clearly outranks all others, while west of Catalonia the numbers for León are significantly higher than for other regions. Gross figures, nonetheless, mask some notable gaps in coverage. For example, only a handful of records survives from this period for southwest Galicia, and very few for northeast Portugal. In some regions there are also important imbalances, such as in Aragon before 1000: barely fifty charters from the lands east of River Cinca, more than 300 from the west.

Map created using QGIS. Data Source: <https://www.idee.es/>

It is crucial to note that the current distribution of the corpus does not reflect the reality of charter production and preservation in the early Middle Ages. While some collections have been preserved in the archives of the ecclesiastical institutions which generated them, a number of cathedrals and major monasteries came to control lesser monasteries and churches during the later medieval and early modern periods, absorbing some or all of their documentation in the process (García de Cortázar, 2006). For example, the monastery of Santa María de Piasca became a priory of Sahagún in the late eleventh century, and its charters have partly survived in that archive (Montenegro Valentín, 2003). Later, in the nineteenth century, the collections of many dissolved monasteries were moved to national archives such as, in Spain, the Archivo Histórico Nacional, the Biblioteca de Catalunya, and the Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, which also holds the charters of the counts of Barcelona (Udina Martorell, 1951); and, in Portugal, the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, which holds the majority of charters from monasteries located in the country.⁵ Unfortunately, the dissolution of the monasteries, like the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, also entailed the loss or destruction of archives across the Iberian Peninsula.

Notwithstanding the ecclesiastical bias of the corpus, lay charters – recording transfers and disputes between lay parties – and a number of lay archives have been preserved in the collections of cathedrals, monasteries, and churches (Kosto, 2013). In Catalonia, they probably constitute a third of most of the ecclesiastical archives (Kosto, 2005, pp. 51–55). In the archive of the counts of Barcelona, numbers are low before 993, perhaps a consequence of the sack of the city in 985, but increase significantly thereafter (Feliu i Montfort & Salrach, 1999; Udina Martorell, 1951). The Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó also holds a number of very rare and important charters which must have originally belonged to local communities. In León, there are two notable lay charter collections, of the early eleventh-century counts Pedro Flaínez and Fruela Muñoz, preserved in the holdings of the monastery of Santa María de Otero de las Dueñas (León) (García Leal, 2010), while for Castile recent research has highlighted the potential of judicial records for revealing the existence of lay archives and investigating the use of writing by local elites (Santos Salazar, forthcoming). In Aragón, two lay cartularies survive, most notably the widowed Sancha de Benasque's two parchment rolls with 97 charters (Tomás Faci, 2015).

A significant number of original charters or contemporary copies are still extant,⁶ but a high proportion of charters have been preserved in the form of later copies, either on single-sheet parchments or in manuscript cartularies. Originality and authenticity are therefore major questions to confront. Texts could be manipulated and interpolated by later copyists, whether maliciously or not, and there are outright forgeries in the corpus. The compilation of cartularies, moreover, does not straightforwardly reflect the contemporary contents of ecclesiastical archives. They respond to the specific needs of the institutions which assembled them, affecting the selection of charters and how they were organised (Agúndez San Miguel, 2019; Peterson, 2009). For some regions, we are mostly or almost totally dependent on cartularies. At a conservative estimate, 80%–90% of Castilian charters are known only through cartularies, and 98.5% of charters prior to 1038 (Escalona, 2013, p. 149). In the case of Cantabria, 70% come from the cartularies of four monasteries: Santa María de Piasca (Montenegro Valentín, 1991), Santo Toribio de Liébana (Sánchez Belda, 1948), Santillana del Mar (López Pérez-Bustamante et al., 1983), and Santa María del Puerto (Abad Barrasús, 1985).⁷ For other regions, there is a greater balance. Half of the charters from Galicia have been preserved in the Tumbos (cartularies) of the cathedrals of Santiago (Lucas Álvarez, 1997) and Lugo (López Sangil & Vidán Torreira, 2011) and monasteries of Sobrado de los Monjes (Loscerales, 1976), San Julián de Samos (Lucas Álvarez, 1986), and most notably San Salvador de Celanova (Andrade Cernadas et al., 1995).⁸

Similarly, original single-sheet documents make up approximately half of what survives from Catalonia (Kosto, 2005, p. 52), though some areas are less fortunate, in particular Girona, where the cathedral retains only

a highly selective cartulary (Sobrequ  s i Vidal et al., 2003, i, pp. 29–43). For Portugal, cartularies – the largest of which are those of the cathedrals of Braga (Costa, 1965; Costa et al., 2016) and Coimbra (Rodrigues & Costa, 1999) – account for 48% of extant charters, while single-sheets represent 40% and have particular weight in certain collections such as those of the monasteries of Moreira da Maia and Pendorada.⁹ In Aragon, the charters from monasteries including Ala  n (Corral Lafuente, 1984), Fanlo (Laliena Corbera & Knibbs, 2007), and Lavaix (Puig i Ferret  , 1984) are transmitted mainly in cartulary copies, whereas for the second half of the eleventh century the collections of San Juan de la Pe  a (Ubieto Arteta, 1962–1963), Santa Mar  a de Obarra (Mart  n Duque, 1965; cf. Ubieto Arteta, 1989a), and San Victori  n de Sobrarbe (Mart  n Duque, 2004), and the cathedrals of Huesca (Dur  n Gudiol, 1965) and Roda (Grau Quiroga, 2010), contain a higher proportion of originals. For Le  n, the cartularies of the cathedral of Le  n and the monastery of Sahag  n are key sources, but both institutional archives also preserve significant numbers of originals.

Overall, and notwithstanding the difficulties which we have outlined here in brief, the corpus of charters for Northern Iberia before 1100 has a sufficiently broad coverage, in both chronological and geographical terms, to develop trans-regional analyses of social and economic processes and political and cultural phenomena. At the same time, some localities and territories are particularly well documented at specific moments or over certain periods, allowing for more detailed study and comparison. Much further work is needed, however, on the construction of the corpus, paying close attention not only to early medieval scribal and archival practices but also to later processes of cartulary compilation and transmission, ideally with an eye to what remains to be done in editing the charters themselves.

3 | CHARTER EDITIONS

The majority of charters from Northern Iberia before 1100 have been published (Fort  n P  rez de Ciriza, 2007; Garc  a de Cort  zar et al., 1999),¹⁰ but the quality and utility of the various editions is highly uneven. Many are approaching a century old or even more, and provide inaccurate readings of the texts, little to no information on manuscript tradition and transmission, and minimal identification of persons and places. In recent decades there have been efforts to publish relatively homogeneous editions of significant charter collections, but for the most part the editions remain disparate and dispersed. An extreme case is Galicia, for which, according to a recent count, there are more than 260 published and unpublished works containing edited charters (Castro Correa, 2009; L  pez Sangil, 1999). For Portugal, in contrast, the charters published in the *Portugaliae Monumenta Historica* (PMH) (Amaral, 1999), directed by Alexandre Herculano in the 1850s and 1860s, represents a serious attempt at a comprehensive edition, though at least 5% of the corpus remains unpublished (Marques, 2012). The PMH, a notable work for its time, missed some important collections, most notably the *Liber Fidei*, the cartulary of the cathedral of Braga, and it is unsatisfactory by modern standards. Yet it is the only available edition of many Portuguese monastic collections, especially those with a higher proportion of originals and single-sheet copies; recent efforts have largely concentrated on cartularies, with a few exceptions (Lira, 2002; Ramos, 1991). Le  n south of the Cantabrian Mountains is perhaps the best served by accessible and useable published editions of the most significant charter collections, including the two largest, from the cathedral of Le  n and the monastery of Sahag  n (M  n  ez Fern  ndez et al., 1976–1991, i–iii; S  ez et al., 1987–2006, i–iv), but for the north, namely Asturias and Cantabria, updated editions of the majority of charter collections and cartularies are much needed. In Castile this work is already under way thanks to recent editions of some of the most important cartularies, from San Pedro de Carde  a (Fern  ndez Fl  rez & Serna Serna, 2017) and Valpuesta (Ruiz Asencio et al., 2010).

For Navarre, there are passable editions of some of the major ecclesiastical collections, such as Santa Mar  a de Irache (Lacarra, 1965), San Salvador de Leire (Mart  n Duque, 1983), and the cathedral of Pamplona (Go  n Gaztam  bide, 1997). Others are urgently in need of newer editions, including the cartularies of Albelda (Ubieto Arteta, 1960) and San Juan de la Pe  a (Ubieto Arteta, 1962–1963), the latter of which is all but unusable in its present state. Most charters from Aragon have also been published, though further research should be conducted in the archive of

the cathedral of Jaca, which has barely been explored. Here collections of charters have been assembled according to different criteria: some focus on one institution, such as the recent edition of the cartulary of San Andrés de Fanlo (Laliena Corbera & Knibbs, 2007); others group charters by region, such as the Ribagorza and Pallars editions published as part of the *Catalunya carolingia* corpus (Abadal i de Vinyals, 1955); and others by reign (Canelas López, 1993; Ubieto Arteta, 1951). In Catalonia, the dispersal of the material across many different collections and archives is mirrored by the diversity of editions and their differing criteria and quality. Nevertheless, the superb *Catalunya carolingia* corpus collects all pre-1000 materials,¹¹ while the *Diplomataris* of the Fundació Noguera have published the charters from more than thirty ecclesiastical and lay institutions.¹²

Over the last decade, considerable effort has gone into making early medieval charters from Iberia accessible online. Some editions have correspondingly been updated, as in the case of the parchment charters of San Salvador de Oña,¹³ and most notably of the Becerro Galicano cartulary of San Millán de la Cogolla.¹⁴ For Catalonia, the project *Cathalaunia* aims to create a unified register of all available charters and provide electronic access to the texts with indices of place- and personal names,¹⁵ while the project CATCAR is developing a digitally accessible archive of all charters from the Carolingian period with supporting and teaching materials.¹⁶ For Galicia, the website *Gallaecia Monumenta Historica* provides online access to some of the published editions of medieval charters and cartularies, though to date, of the main early medieval collections, only Celanova is accessible.¹⁷ From a thematic direction, the project PRJ has developed an online database which offers access to all edited records of dispute from Northern Iberia before 1100,¹⁸ and this initiative has a direct counterpart in Catalonia in a recent printed collection of dispute records (Salrach et al., 2018).

Overall, existing digital editions facilitate access to the charters as well as search tools and cartographic aids, and can easily be updated and modified to incorporate further material. Yet they reproduce the fragmented approach to editing the corpus of charters as a whole: what remains most desirable is the creation of a single database of all known charters, providing direct access to the texts. Failing that, at least interoperable regional or institutional databases would help elaborate a systematic list of all available sources and develop search tools to foster research within and across regions.¹⁹ Four projects in this line are presently underway: *Cathalaunia* and CATCAR, a database for Portugal led by André Marques and a database for the rest of Northern Iberia west of Catalonia led by Julio Escalona. Hopefully these will soon come to fruition and aid us in overcoming the pronounced regional fragmentation which conditions access to the sources.

4 | HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

These fragmented editorial efforts reflect a broader historiographical fragmentation.²⁰ For most of the twentieth century, the historiography on early medieval Northern Iberia has been marked by a tension between national-level and regional approaches, as well as between competing nationalist imperatives which, as elsewhere in Europe, have mined the early medieval past in a quest for origins (Geary, 2002; Wickham, 2003). In Portugal, the proclamation of Afonso Henriques as king in 1139 was often treated as an inevitable outcome rather than a new departure: the frontiers of the realm under his rule and that of his successors were read back through the centuries to account for the formation of the state – as, for example, in the works of Torquato de Sousa Soares (1962, 1970, 1989). In Spain, accounts of the Spanish nation had been challenged since the mid-nineteenth century by competing nationalist traditions in Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia. The Franco regime sought to overcome this with a national identity founded on the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon in the fifteenth century (Ortiz Pradas, 2017), and which integrated a range of events and figures from the Middle Ages as part of its founding myths (Escalona et al., 2017). Ironically, regional identities were also exalted as an integral part of Spain so defined (Clarent Miranda & Fuster Sobrepere, 2021; Geniola, 2021), which provoked tensions between regional historiographies, as well as between local historical reconstructions of identities and the discourse promoted by the state apparatus (Alares López, 2011). For example, whereas Fray Justo Pérez de Urbel, a key ideologue of the regime, presented the

tenth-century Castilian count Fernán González as a mirror for Franco, the Leonese historian Justiniano Rodríguez saw him as a rebel against the established order represented by the Leonese king Ramiro II (Pérez de Urbel, 1945; Rodríguez Fernández, 1972).

Until the 1970s these various historiographies shared two main features. First of all, they were mainly interested in political and legal history. Secondly, institutionalist approaches predominated, emphasising homogeneity within each polity, however artificially defined. Such accounts were accepted as plausible partly because of the overarching narrative of *Reconquista* and *Repoblación* framing the period (Ríos Saloma, 2011, 2013). This narrative has a long history, dating back to the period itself, and is present in all peninsular historiographies: it encapsulates the idea that the fundamental process in early medieval Iberia was the southward expansion of a number of polities into lands which were either deserted outright – as Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz portrayed the Duero valley (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1966; cf. Escalona & Martín Viso, 2020) – or scarcely populated, politically disorganised, or subject to Muslim rule. In this supposed vacuum, the social and institutional scaffolding of the developing polities could be created anew, or else imposed on the few locals. In the case of Aragon and Navarre, for most of the twentieth century the historiography was similarly dominated by political accounts in quest of the origins of the future kingdoms, treated as homogeneous socio-political units (Lacarra, 1972; Ramos Loscertales, 1961; Ubieta Arteta, 1989b); regional approaches and social and economic history were restricted to later centuries, richer in sources (Laliena Corbera, 2003). In Catalonia, while political and territorial fragmentation was acknowledged, it was nonetheless underplayed, as all the identifiable early medieval polities were subsumed historiographically into the one greater cultural and political unit (Sabaté, 2015).

The 1970s and 1980s were marked by a turn towards social and economic history: this had begun earlier, but it gained momentum thanks to the liberties brought by the new democratic regimes in Spain and Portugal, and was felt particularly in the realm of agrarian history (Amaral, 2011; Fernández Mier, 2018; García de Cortázar & Martínez Sopena, 2007). The introduction of Marxist approaches also fostered studies on the development of feudalism and feudal social relations, which mainly took shape in the study of lords – lay and ecclesiastical – and their patrimonies, less so on the forms of peasant contestation; notable exceptions are León-Castile (cf. Alfonso, 1997, 2004, 2010; Pastor, 1980) and above all Catalonia, where these were given due weight (Salrach, 1987; To Figueras, 1991). This also fed into a broader new trend of studies on monastic and to lesser extent episcopal estates across northwest Iberia (Fortún Pérez de Ciriza, 2010; García Turza, 2010; Reglero de la Fuente, 2010), though with less purchase in Catalonia (Feliu i Montfort, 1975; Freedman, 1983; To Figueras, 1991). Scholarship on lay aristocrats, however, retained a political and institutional perspective (Baliñas, 1988; Mattoso, 1999; Salrach, 1997; Torres Sevilla-Quinones, 1999), notwithstanding major publications on lay patrimonies (Carlé, 1973), as well as on kinship, the structure of aristocratic families, and stratification within the aristocracy (Mattoso, 2001 [1982], 1999).

At the same time, there was a move in both countries towards more regionalised approaches, supported by the creation of new universities. In Portugal, awareness of differences between north and south, and between coastal regions and the interior, further developed (Mattoso, 2015 [1985]), while in Spain, the governments of the autonomous communities created within the framework of the Constitution of 1978 sought a past to legitimise their existence, giving impetus to new and old regional and nationalist historiographies (García de Cortázar, 2009).²¹ The influence of the French regional theses, especially Georges Duby on the Mâconnais, began belatedly to be felt, and regional and micro-regional approaches gained traction, particularly east of Galicia and Portugal (e.g. Álvarez Borge, 1996; Aventín, 1990; Sánchez Badiola, 2002; Bonnassie, 1975–1976; Díez Herrera, 1990; Durany Castrillo, 1989; Isla Frez, 1992; Larrea, 1998; Loring García, 1987; Martínez Sopena, 1985; Pastor Díaz de Garayo, 1996; Peña Bocos, 1995; Reglero de la Fuente, 1994). Studies of some urban centres and their hinterlands can be regarded as a particular manifestation of such ‘regional approaches’, as in Santiago de Compostela (López Alsina, 2013 [1988]), León (Estepa Díez, 1977; cf.; González González, 2017), and the many townships in Catalonia covered in the *L'Entorn* series (e.g. Ollich i Castanyer et al., 1995; Pladevall, 1990). We could say, indeed, that Spanish historiography underwent its own ‘spatial turn’, fostered by the work of J. A. García de Cortázar on the ‘social organisation of space’ (García de Cortázar, 1985a, 1988), a theoretical and methodological framework for reading social change – ultimately, feudalisation – through spatial analysis which has gained significant purchase in the literature

(García de Cortázar, 1985b; Sesma Muñoz & Laliena Corbera, 2008). In a related vein, early medieval archaeology also took off during these decades (Barceló, 1988), and with it an increasing interest in settlement patterns and landscape analysis, alongside the interdisciplinary study of written and material sources (Escalona, 2002; Fernández Mier, 1999; Gutiérrez González, 1995; Martín Viso, 2000).

The cultural and linguistic turns of the 1980s and 1990s nurtured significant contributions to the study of narrative sources (e.g. Deswarte, 2003; Isla Frez, 2019), political discourses and ideologies (Isla Frez, 1999; Sabaté i Curull, 2016), and women's history, all of which have continued to bear fruit (Martin, 2006; Pallares Méndez, 2004; Vinyoles Vidal, 2019). Regional studies remained prominent, and these ultimately fractured the homogeneity with which early medieval societies and polities had formerly been represented. By the 2000s, the question was no longer how polities had developed, but how they came to integrate different territories (Castellanos & Martín Viso, 2005). During these decades, historians also changed their perception of how the history of the Iberian Peninsula fit in the broader European context (cf. Davies, 2007b; García de Cortázar, 2007; Linehan, 1993). In Spain, Sánchez-Albornoz above all had argued for the singularity of Iberia: in his case, partly based on the alleged survival in Castile of a class of free peasant proprietors which pre-empted the later development of feudalism elsewhere (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1979). Historians in the 1980s – precisely at the time when Portugal and Spain joined the European Economic Community – argued instead that social developments in the Peninsula were akin to those beyond it, namely the 'crisis of the year 1000' and consequent 'feudal revolution' (Minguez, 1994; Salrach, 1987, building on Bonnassie, 1975–1976). From the 1990s, some began to challenge or nuance such narratives with regional case studies (Larrea, 1998; Pastor Díaz de Garayo, 1996; Sabaté i Curull, 2010), and to think more of what they could contribute to a broader European framework for interpreting the period (Bowman, 2004; Laliena Corbera, 2003, p. 35).

In this context, Chris Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Wickham, 2005) had a significant impact in Spanish academia, being received as an invitation to delve further into the histories of localities and regions, no longer as expressions of broader historical trends but as the building blocks of a more diverse early medieval Europe; and to do so from a more interdisciplinary perspective, as evidenced by the greater weight of archaeology and the material record in new accounts of the period (Escalona, 2009; Quirós Castillo, 2011). While in some cases this has furthered the existing historiographical fragmentation, it has also promoted a new discipline of setting individual case studies against a broader framework. Efforts have been made to compare different regions and explore the multiple means by which they were integrated into overarching polities (Carvajal Castro, 2017; Jarrett, 2010; Portass, 2017), while thematic approaches have begun to emerge cutting across regional boundaries (Davies, 2007a, 2016). New perspectives have been opened up on literacy and documentary cultures, the social uses of writing, and source production and preservation, building a better understanding of the written corpus (Agúndez San Miguel, 2019; Alfonso et al., forthcoming; Barrett, forthcoming; Jarrett, 2013; Peterson, 2009; Zimmermann, 2003).²² Further attention is also now being paid to landscape perception and the representation of space in the written sources (Marques, 2014). This has laid the foundations for more meaningful multidisciplinary collaboration by historians and archaeologists on subjects such as agrarian production (Fernández Mier, 2018) and local churches and monasteries (Quirós Castillo & Santos Salazar, 2015; Sánchez Pardo, 2010), as well as on broader themes such as status, social inequality, and peasant agency (Fernández Ferreiro, 2021; Quirós Castillo, 2016, 2020).

5 | TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATIVE PORTRAIT OF EARLY MEDIEVAL IBERIAN HISTORY

Today, there are several paths open to enhance communication amongst scholars who work on different regions of Northern Iberia, for those asking the same questions to learn from each other, gain a more acute awareness of the distinctiveness of the phenomena which they observe, and ultimately start on a more integrative portrait of early medieval Iberian history. The first step in this direction which could help develop comparative and trans-regional research is a keener assessment of differences and similarities between regional historiographies, based on a more

nuanced understanding of how they have been moulded by the specificities of charters and the charter corpus in each region. The second is to make the whole corpus evenly available – not only in terms of simple access, but also in the quality of editions. A unified database, or several interoperable databases, is critical in this regard, as it would enable running multivariable analyses of large data sets, comparatively between selected regions or across all regions. Thirdly and relatedly, we should better attune our source analyses to the geographical scale of the social phenomena under consideration, depending less on socio-spatial categories such as ‘locality’ and ‘region’ with preconceived definitions. Finally, more attention should be paid to the connections which existed or were built between and across regions, and their mechanisms.

Ultimately, we must look beyond the northern lands and consider the connections forged across the divide with al-Andalus, especially in frontier areas, but also more generally, as the intersection of actors on both sides could have wide-ranging economic and cultural implications (e.g. Aillet, 2010; Manzano Moreno & García Canto, 2020). And we still need to develop more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to our research: collaboration between historians and archaeologists is well established (or the notion that such collaboration is desirable is widely shared), but disciplines ranging from historical geography and environmental sciences to anthropology and toponymy offer new avenues of enriching our understanding of the early Middle Ages, for which so much has remained beyond the boundaries of the written word.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ A cartulary is a compilation in a volume, or less frequently in a roll, of copies, either transcribed in full or in extract, of the documents related to the assets, rights, history and administration of an institution, person or family. On occasions the intention is simply to ensure the conservation and facilitate the consultation of the contents, but also often to project an interested version of the commissioning entity's history
- ² Unless otherwise specified, all data regarding extant charters from the north of the Iberian Peninsula west of Catalonia – rough figures and counts for specific institutions – come from the online database of the project *Procesos Judiciales en las sociedades medievales del norte peninsular (siglos IX-XI) (PRJ)* (<http://prj.csic.es/> [accessed 13 January 2022]). Figures are tentative, as the project focusses only on edited sources; some charters remain unpublished and others could be found. Numbers for Catalonia are not yet publicly available on the PRJ website.
- ³ On inventories, our group organised as series of sessions, entitled 'Proprietary Memories: *Notitiae*—Inventories in Early Medieval Iberia', at the Leeds IMC in 2018 and 2021; we are currently working towards a collective volume showcasing different approaches to this type of record.

- ⁴ See n. 1: the data for Catalonia are not yet publicly available.
- ⁵ At various points in the nineteenth century, governments took over monasteries across Spain and Portugal and confiscated their properties: these were the *desamortizaciones* ('dissolutions'), the foremost of which are those attributed to Joaquim António de Aguiar (1834) in Portugal, and to Juan Álvarez Mendizábal (1835–1836) and Pascual Madoz (1855) in Spain.
- ⁶ There are now editions of all originals from the Kingdom of Asturias and Catalonia prior to 900 (Alturo & Alaix, 2017a, 2017b; Calleja Puerta et al., 2018; Erhart et al., 2019).
- ⁷ For Cantabria, there has recently been an effort to systematise all extant historical documents – including early medieval – in the framework of Project DOHISCAN (García de Cortázar, 2005), but the results are not publicly available.
- ⁸ There is also an edition of all charters from Celanova, including single-sheets and cartulary copies, down to 1006 (Sáez & Sáez, 1996–2006).
- ⁹ The only edition of the charters from both monasteries before 1100 remains the *Portugaliae Monumenta Historica* (1867–1873); later material is largely unpublished.
- ¹⁰ A recent compilation of edited collections can be found at <http://prj.csic.es/bibliografia.php> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹¹ For the volumes, see <https://www.iec.cat/recerca/projecte1.asp?codi=PIN2012-SO1-FELIU01> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹² For a full list, see https://www.fundacionoguera.com/publicacions/?filter_colleccio=diplomataris [accessed 13 January 2022], with PDFs of the more recent publications.
- ¹³ See <https://corhen.es/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁴ See <http://www.ehu.eus/galicano/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁵ See <http://cathalaunia.org/Documentia/Documentia> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁶ See <https://catcar.iec.cat/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁷ See <http://gmh.consellodacultura.org/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁸ See <http://prj.csic.es/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ¹⁹ Regional databases, designed specifically for research on medieval Latin lexicography, have been created by the teams developing the *Corpus Documentale Latinum Hispaniarum* (CODOLHisp): see <http://codolhisp.imf.csic.es/codolhisp/> [accessed 13 January 2022].
- ²⁰ There are good historiographical surveys available for some regions: Galicia (Pérez Rodríguez, 2010; Portela Silva & Pallares Méndez, 1988; Álvarez García, 2020), Aragón (Laliena Corbera, 2003), and Portugal (Mattoso et al., 2011).
- ²¹ Spain is divided into seventeen political and administrative units called 'Comunidades Autónomas', each with its own parliament and government.
- ²² Ainoa Castro Correa is currently leading the ERC StG Research Project 2020–2025 entitled *The Secret Life of Writing: People, Script, and Ideas in the Iberian Peninsula (c. 900–1200)* (see <https://peopleandwriting.wordpress.com/> [accessed 13 January 2022]).

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