

Prosopography of the Spanish Kingdoms of Leyn and Castile.

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The study of the aristocracy of the Spanish kingdoms of Leyn and Castile in the Central Middle Ages remains in its infancy. Although the *eruditos* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of whom the most eminent was perhaps Luis de Salazar y Castro, compiled numerous genealogical works whose purpose was to celebrate the illustrious past of some of the greatest noble lineages of the Iberian peninsula, the example set by such admirable scholarly enterprise was not to be followed by succeeding generations, and studies devoted to the nobility of Leyn and Castile became few and far between.¹ During the past twenty-five years, however, Spanish historians have tentatively begun a reappraisal of the aristocracy and its role in Leonese-Castilian society prior to the fourteenth century. Proof of this is the clutch of significant studies that have appeared. While some scholars, following firmly in the steps of the *eruditos*, have been particularly concerned to reconstruct the genealogical ramifications of certain important families, others have begun to probe the character and concerns of the aristocracy as an elite social group. Thus, such diverse topics as kinship structure, landholding custom and ecclesiastical patronage have already been the subject of illuminating analysis.² Yet, so much more still remains to be done.

In recent years, my own research has focussed upon the leading aristocratic families of Leyn and Castile during the period *c.* 900-1300. Some of the fruits of this research can be seen in a forthcoming monograph *The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Leyn and Castile* (C.U.P., 1997). The book highlights the unrivalled wealth, status and power that many members of the aristocracy enjoyed, and it also explores the multifarious roles that lay magnates were expected to fulfil: as family protectors, landlords, judges and administrators; as political leaders, courtiers and military commanders; and, not least, as patrons of the church. The book's appendices include a detailed study of the careers of forty-eight magnates who held comital rank in Leyn and Castile in the twelfth century. Although the constraints upon space have meant that they are far from being comprehensive biographies, it is my hope that the appendix will prove a useful source of information for those who wish to find out more about some of the most illustrious members of twelfth-century lay society. The list includes not only those grandees who were indigenous to Leyn and Castile, but also those outsiders who successfully integrated themselves into the Leonese-Castilian power-structure: the Catalans Armengol VI and Armengol VII of Urgel, Ponce de Cabrera and Ponce de Minerva, and the Portuguese Valesco Sanchez. Where such information is known, each resume gives details of the family background and, where applicable, the spouse(s) and offspring of each count; date by which they are known to have assumed comital rank; the offices that they held in the royal household; the *tenancias* (fiefs) that they were awarded by the crown, including the length of time they retained them and even, in some cases, the periods that they were deemed to be *sine terra*; and the religious institutions that they endowed.

Future research will examine the origins and family ties of the magnates who came to hold comital rank in Leyn and Castile during the course of the tenth-century, the monarch's role in the use and assumption of titles during the period, and the disappearance of the comital title during the thirteenth century. It is my hope that this work will make a significant contribution

to prosopographical research on the nobility of the western peninsula and shed new light on the relationship between crown and aristocracy during the Central Middle Ages.

NOTES

¹ Typical of the genre is L. de Salazar, *Historia genealogica de la Casa de Lara*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1696-97).

² For a summary of recent research, see P. Martínez Sopena, 'La nobleza de Leyn y Castilla en los siglos XI y XII: un estado de la cuestión', *Hispania*, 53 (1993), pp. 801-22.

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