

INTRODUCTION

FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH



IN AUGUST 1230, in the Rioja town of Logroño (Castile), Sebastián, a cleric of the collegiate church of Santa María la Redonda, drew up his testament and last will. Written in a Latin already badly corrupted by Castilian words and syntax, Sebastián's will was a modest affair. Altogether his monetary bequest, just a bit more than 80 *maravedies* (*mrs.*), and gifts in kind—cloth, land, three vineyards, half a house, a silver chalice, and other items—did not exceed 200 *mrs.*¹ Part of his legacy, mostly small annual rents scattered among diverse ecclesiastical institutions and confraternities, was earmarked to feed and clothe the poor and to subsidize masses and prayers for his soul and the souls of relatives. The bulk of his lands, vineyards, and money, however, went to his immediate family and, in lesser amounts, to his friends.²

Sebastián's will is, at first glance, unremarkable. The property he left to the Church and his family was not substantial. The amounts in question suggest a well-to-do but by no means wealthy cleric. What makes his will important to us, as we read these records almost eight centuries later, is the novelty, at least for northern Castile, of its composition. Sebastián (or the lay scribe Dominicus de Ubago, drafting the will) was not only disposing of earthly possessions, he was also articulating new ideas about property, charity, and salvation, using his will as a tool to lobby for forgiveness and preserve his property within the family.

This will and similar testaments written in northern Castile from the early thirteenth century onward departed radically from the well-established formulas of donations and wills drafted in northern Castile between the ninth and the late twelfth century. In the pre-1200 documents, donors and testators bestowed their property indiscriminately to ecclesiastical establishments for the "salvation or remedy of one's soul" or for the "salvation of the souls of friends and relatives." With minor changes, the post-1200 patterns of scribal language and property distribution found in Sebastián's will became the norm for testaments in Castile and Spain until the modern period.³

Sebastian's last wishes, and those expressed in similar wills of the period, open a window onto a distant past. They allow us to capture, even

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if only partially, a moment when the way Castilians thought and wrote about property, salvation, charity, and themselves was radically transformed. Sebastián's will is, as noted, one of the earliest extant testaments that addressed these new concerns. In this respect, it serves as a useful guide and entry point to the change in northern Castilian mentality and values. Sebastián's last wishes expressed these different conceptions of the material world and the afterlife. His preoccupation with family, property, and salvation provides us with a first glance at what would eventually become a model for Castilian material and spiritual transactions, the drafting of new legislation, and other cultural and institutional practices. In order to trace these changes, we will look closely at the narrative structure of Sebastián's will, especially at its new form of scribal redaction, and examine the way it handles topics such as the fragmentation of property; property and the family; negotiating charity and salvation; language; and geographic location.

Sebastián's will differed greatly in organization, language, and structure from previously drafted documents. The scribe was different, too. No longer a clergyman who recorded donors' bequests in a highly formalized language and with the Church's interests at heart, he was often a municipal scribe, elected by fellow townsmen or named by the municipal council.

It may in fact be argued that what changed was not so much the values or attitudes toward salvation, property, and family, but the way documents were redacted. These new redaction formats allow us to perceive patterns of behavior that were obscured by ecclesiastical scribal discourse. New forms of writing and new ways of presenting texts—in this case, wills—were thus at the heart of the transformations of Castilian society. Unlike before 1200, most of the documentation written after the thirteenth century, especially in urban centers, was drafted by lay scribes. These scribes brought new secular sensibilities to the composition of wills and other recorded transactions; moreover, they conferred a smidgen of authority on those commissioning written testimonies. Sebastián's will and other documents of the period make this very clear. Testators in wills, sellers in transactions of property and rental agreements, and donors now had a hand in organizing their own documents, and they often dictated their wishes to the scribe in a confused and not too logical fashion. But these new methods of redaction were not unfounded. Following broad social and cultural shifts, they were but a manifestation of the sweeping changes taking place in Castilian society.

Sebastián's will, and almost every other will after 1230 (see appendix), showed a clear desire to divide legacies among as many clerical establishments as possible. This stood in sharp contrast to the almost universal tendency, in pre-thirteenth-century wills and donations, to bestow wealth

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on a single institution. This change did not occur gradually; it was remarkably swift. The speed with which this new practice took hold signals a watershed in the way people writing or dictating their wills thought about the distribution of their inheritances.

Legacies were not only fragmented among diverse ecclesiastical institutions; they were also divided among family members (whereby some received more than others), friends, and colleagues. Sebastián's will, like others I examine in succeeding chapters, also made sure that the family, not the Church, would be the main beneficiary of the deceased's wealth.

The dispersion of pious gifts and the requisition of masses in Sebastián's will evidences a hard-nosed bargaining for salvation. In these transactions aimed at securing a place in the life to come, charity came to play a significant role. Sebastián and his executors appropriated the act of charity and transformed it into a highly symbolic performance in which only a selected few of the poor were fed and clothed. The relationship between testators/donors and the poor—until now seen as an embodiment of Christ—became a direct one, no longer mediated by the Church.

In Sebastián's will, language also played a major role. Not only were the redactive forms new; the intrusive vernacular—the Castilian language—had supplanted the already considerably corrupted Latin of early thirteenth-century Castile. Sentence structure, word choice, idiomatic expressions—all point to new sensibilities now being articulated in a very different written form. Shortly after 1230, wills and all documents dealing with property were written in Castilian.

Sebastián's will was written in Logroño, an important stop on the pilgrimage road to Compostela and, as such, a site for commercial exchange between Castilians and foreigners from north of the Pyrenees. It is no accident that new forms of thinking about property, the family, and salvation first emerged along this route. Logroño and other cities on the road were among the first Castilian urban centers receptive to the new intellectual and cultural changes sweeping the rest of Christendom.

Between the late twelfth and the mid-fourteenth century, the mental world of most Castilians was radically transformed. This shift in *mentalités* or values constituted a reordering of mental, spiritual, and physical space; fresh ideas about sin and intercession coincided with emerging perceptions of property as tangible space and new ways of representing the self.⁴ The evidence for this transformation comes from specific social groups whose mental outlook and values became normative for large segments of late medieval society: mercantile elites, well-to-do farmers, lower nobility, clerics, and literary figures, the people who, for lack of a better term, may be described as “middling sorts.” This shift in values—which brought new attitudes toward the spiritual world and encouraged

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itemizing the physical world—was fairly rapid in northern Castile, transpiring over a period of fifty to seventy years, between the late twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century. Although precedents for many of these changes can be found in earlier centuries, the repercussions of these late medieval transformations would shape the tenor of Castilian social and cultural life into the early modern period.

A shift in values could be detected within a broad spectrum of social and cultural activity: (1) in the way Castilians (at least, at some levels of society) thought about property and family at a time when economic innovations and an emerging mercantile mentality were eroding the traditional relation between the two; (2) in the way Castilians thought about and acted on salvation and charity; (3) in the way Castilians related to their local communities and the rising notion of a unified realm; (4) in the way Castilians represented their collective and individual identities by rewriting history, refashioning themselves, and defining others, especially the religious minorities in their midst.⁵

This birth of new values, or reordering of mental and physical landscapes, formed part of what Le Goff has described as a transition “from heaven to earth”—from spiritual and religious beliefs to the quasi-secular pursuits of merchants and scholars, from “Church’s time to merchants’ time.” But in Castile this shift cannot be traced as in other parts of the medieval West. Elsewhere in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the shift in mentality can be followed in the lively intellectual debates that flourished in cathedral schools and universities, in the myriad literary works that were produced in both Latin and the vernacular, and in the rise of an urban and mercantile spirit (see chapter 1) with a distinctive perception of the self and its relation to the spiritual.

When we turn to medieval Castile in the twelfth century, we find no universities, at least not yet.⁶ Gifted Castilians often traveled abroad for their learning (as other Europeans did to Iberia to study Arabic, Jewish, and classical—i.e., Greek—sources); only stirrings of the intellectual ferment and debate that were so central to western Europe’s twelfth-century Renaissance reached the land of castles and lions.⁷ Moreover, the great vernacular monuments of the Castilian Middle Ages—*The Poem of the Cid* (which Colin Smith has dated to the early thirteenth century), the anonymous *Poema de Fernán González* (mid-thirteenth century) and the work of Gonzalo de Berceo (c. 1250)—paralleled the dramatic transformations that are the subject of this book, or appeared shortly afterward. These literary works reflect the changing moods and attitudes of Castilians, but the supply of pre-1200 written testimonies (chronicles, learned treatises, and the like) is meager. Wills, and charters, for the period be-

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tween 1150 and the early 1200s, however, provide useful entry points into the history of Castilian values.⁸



When Alfonso VII died in 1157, his lofty pretensions to be the “emperor of all the Spains” had come to little more than verbal claims. Despite his conquest of Almería in 1147, when the Castilian king led an international army to victory in southern Spain, Castile still faced the stiff opposition of the Almohads, a wave of North African invaders who had defeated the diverse Almoravid kingdoms in the south and established power there.⁹ The Almohads presented a seemingly unassailable obstacle to the Christian forces. Alfonso VII’s coronation, anointment, and assumption of the imperial title in León in 1135—an event I discuss in greater detail later—were, in many respects, empty gestures. The new political realities of the peninsula—the rise of an independent Portugal, the union of the kingdom of Aragon and the county of Barcelona under Ramón Berenguer IV (1131–62)—gave the lie to Alfonso’s hegemonic ambitions. Further complicating Castilian expansion, Alfonso VII’s will partitioned the kingdom between his two surviving sons, as was traditional among Castilian and Leonese rulers. Sancho III (1157–58) received the kingdoms of Castile and Toledo, realms at the vanguard of the Reconquest and recipients of fabulous *parias* (tributes paid by the Muslim kingdoms of *taifas* to Christian rulers).¹⁰ Ferdinand II (1157–88) inherited the far less attractive ancestral kingdoms of León and Galicia.

Alfonso VII’s demise and the division of the realms signaled an important watershed in peninsular history. The years after his death ushered in profound social, economic, and political changes. Constant civil wars, a restless nobility seeking to gain control of the throne, a rising mercantile society, and a growing monetary economy served as context and cause for the emergence of new mental attitudes in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Castile. At present, a brief outline of political events in the one hundred years or so following Sancho III’s ascent to the Castilian throne and his untimely death will suffice. But what was Castile in the twelfth century?

Although this study makes incursions into the Leonese realm and touches on the newly conquered regions in Andalusia after the 1240s, the core of my sources deal with Old Castile—in this case, a political rather than a geographical unit, extending roughly from the Bay of Biscay in the north to the Central Sierras (north of Madrid) in the south. In the west, it reached the contested borders of the kingdom of Asturias-

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León; and in the east, the political borders with Aragon. Geographically diverse (green mountains in the north, with abundant rain; high cereal lands on the plain, with little rain), this vast area was, already in the twelfth century, the heartland of Iberia; in time, it would become the center of Spain's imperial glory. Port cities, such as Santander, Castro-Urdiales, Laredo, Bilbao (after 1300), and Fuenterrabía on the northern coast; towns on the plain, such as Burgos, Logroño, Nájera (all three flanking the road to Compostela), and Soria; and military outposts on the forefront of the Reconquest—Avila, Segovia, Sepúlveda, and others—were islands of nascent urban life in a predominantly rural world.¹¹ It was hard land with thin soil, a harsh climate, and a proud, warlike population. A world of free peasants but increasingly large lordships, Old Castile stood poised, in the mid-twelfth century, between two contending axes.

Castile's short history—its origins dated only to the early ninth century—had in fact long flowed in two directions. One axis ran east-west along the road to Compostela, a site of great pilgrimages. The Milky Way, as the road was called by countless French pilgrims, traversed the northern part of Iberia, linking regions north of the Pyrenees (after the 930s) to the rising cities of northern Castile and, farther to the west, to the ancient kingdoms of León, Asturias, and Galicia (political life in these western regions dating back to the early eighth century). The road, and its innumerable secondary shrines and urban centers, reached a high point (in number of pilgrims, impact on the economy and social life of Castile) in the mid-twelfth century.¹² Religious devotion and commercial opportunities drew thousands of pilgrims and merchants to Iberia in this period. Some made their way to Compostela, fulfilled their vows, said their prayers, and went back to Frankland. Others stayed in Castile and, throughout the next century, were integrated into Castilian life. In 1157, this road, which collected traffic from other feeder roads north of the Pyrenees, was the central axis of Castilian society and culture. Along the road to Compostela and beyond, to Braga, Toledo, and other destinations, foreign and native scholars traveled to and from, as Adeline Rucquoi has shown, the intellectual centers of Europe.¹³ Some went north in search of the new knowledge that was being offered at Bologna, Paris, Orleans, and Salerno in the fields of law, theology, and medicine; others came south, seeking, in Spain, the wisdom of Aristotle, Galen, other classical authors, and their incisive Arab and Jewish commentators.

By the second half of the twelfth century, the north-south axis began to overtake the pilgrimage route's central role. This new route, which led south to al-Andalus, produced increased commerce between Christians and Muslims, laying the foundation for the profitable extortion of Moorish kingdoms (the *parias*) later on. These were the roads of the so-called

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Reconquest, though, in fact, Castile's history had run along this direction from its very inception. Castile, as both county and realm, had always defined itself—geographically, culturally, politically, and religiously—through its contest with al-Andalus. By the second half of the thirteenth century, the road to Compostela, although still attracting numerous pilgrims, started its slow decline and began to play a secondary part in Castilian and Spanish history. By then, Iberian history was firmly oriented in a north-south direction. The great Christian victories in the south from 1212 onward and the final conquests of Andalusia by Castile in the mid-thirteenth century sealed the fate and destiny of the realm.

In 1157, however, all that was still in the future. The new king of Castile, Sancho III, came to the throne with heightened expectations. He was a bold and promising young monarch, but his sudden death in 1158 left the kingdom in dire straits. His son and heir, Alfonso VIII (1158–1214), was just three years old. In Castile, as in most medieval realms, royal minorities were particularly wicked periods. This one was no exception. The young king became a focal point of contention between the two great Castilian noble houses, the Castro and the Lara. They fought for control of the young sovereign and royal revenues and sought to advance the influence, power, and territorial holdings of their respective families to the detriment of the realm. The endless civil wars that ensued allowed Sancho VI, king of Navarre, to usurp substantial territories in Castile's eastern borders. Ferdinand II of León, the young king's uncle, not only interfered often in the conflicts over the regency, but grasped Castilian territories on its western frontier as well. Ferdinand eventually held the regency for his nephew, maneuvering to consolidate León's gains, and his own.

When Alfonso VIII came of age and assumed the rule of Castile in 1170, he found a kingdom deeply divided by noble antagonism and diminished by foreign occupation. He was, perhaps, one of the best kings who ever ruled Castile. A pious, earnest man, the grandfather of two saintly kings, Louis IX of France and Ferdinand III of Castile-León, Alfonso VIII slowly recovered the territories that had been alienated during his minority and curtailed, by a combination of threats, military actions, and bribes, the ambitions of the high nobility. Once order was restored, Alfonso VIII cast his eyes on the south and on its rich financial and territorial rewards.

In 1179, the Treaty of Cazola between the Crown of Aragon and Castile established various spheres of influence in the south. Castile received the choice share, but its newly gained ascendancy was not without shortcomings. Its growing power prompted all the other peninsular kingdoms, including the Almohads, to band together against Alfonso VIII.

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The 1190s were an uncertain decade, punctuated by conflicts and shifting alliances between the different Iberian kingdoms, and by the growing menace of the Almohads. The latter's strength triggered new actions. Alfonso VIII's most significant achievement was his ability to forge a broad international alliance of peninsular and northern rulers (the Crown of Aragon, France, and England) against the Almohad threat—an alliance that his English connection through marriage to Eleanor, Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine's daughter, helped consolidate. After extended negotiations and bickering among the allies, a mighty Iberian and northern European army (except for León, which refused to join the alliance because of its conflict with Castile) delivered a crushing defeat to the Almohad army at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212.¹⁴

After 1212, who held the upper hand in the peninsula was no longer in dispute. The Christians did. The battle of Las Navas changed the status of Christian-Muslim relations forever, leading ultimately to the mistreatment of the Moors and their banishment from al-Andalus. It opened the way for Christian expansion and secured Castile's hegemony within the peninsula. After a short unstable period following the death of Alfonso VIII in 1214 and the minority—and then untimely death (1217)—of his son, Henry I, Ferdinand III, Alfonso VIII's grandson, claimed the Castilian throne. He did so as heir to his mother, Berenguela, queen of Castile, who relinquished the throne on his behalf; when his father, Alfonso IX of Asturias-León, died thirteen years later, Ferdinand assumed rule of both realms. The two kingdoms, Castile and León, finally united in 1230, were never to be divided again.¹⁵ The great conquests of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248) were just around the corner. Victory brought new patterns of occupation to Muslim lands and surges of repopulation to the newly conquered territories; more tragically, it introduced the defeated Muslims to an unprecedented era of punitive treatment. Commanding the historical spotlight, these dramatic changes have often obscured other, more structural but equally enduring transformations of Castilian society.¹⁶



Contrary to the trajectory suggested by my title, “From Heaven to Earth,” I have chosen to address the material world first. In attempting to explain how and why changes took place, chapter 1 suggests a connection between the transformation in values and the linguistic shift from Latin to the vernacular. It also provides a social and cultural context for the interrelated topics of property, family, and perceptions of the material world explored in succeeding chapters. Chapter 2 investigates the formu-

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laic nature of pre-1220s wills and demonstrates how wills evolved, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, from unrestricted donations to structured, restrictive testaments in tandem with shifting values. The evidence presented in this chapter is deployed throughout the book to trace similar shifts in northern Castile. Chapter 3 expands on this discussion by examining the legal codes of inheritance rights and property transfers. Chapter 4 deals with shifts in the perception and representation of property. From the late twelfth century, a significant change occurred in the way northern Castilians conceived of property. Rather than perceiving it as a matter of rights and jurisdiction, Castilians began to think of property as physical space and set out to map and itemize by installing landmarks, initiating litigation over boundaries, and commissioning carefully drawn inventories. This new awareness of the physical (as opposed to the jurisdictional) attributes of property transformed the mental landscape of Castilians in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Continuing to explicate the interests linking power, family, and property, chapter 5 focuses on the emergence of bourgeois and noble lineages and the eventual triumph of primogeniture among the upper classes.

In the next two chapters, the narrative takes us from concerns with the here and now to more cultural and politically bound affairs. Chapter 6 reexamines wills as strategic devotional devices. Charitable donations were carefully scripted and designed to enhance the social and spiritual status of donors and their families. Chapter 7 expands on some of my earlier research and revisits the rapidly changing political culture of Castile. The establishment of a nonsacral kingship articulated new concepts of royal power. The use of the vernacular, the implementation of a new, Roman-based law, and the advent of institutional reforms led to the laicization of the bureaucracy, which proved an additional incentive in changing the way Castilians thought of power. A conclusion summarizes the book's salient arguments, threading these different strands into what I hope is a clear and comprehensive picture.

My presentation contains gaps, conscious choices I have made about what to include and what to omit. For example, I treat political developments or transitions only as context for the cultural shifts I wish to examine in this book. We already have excellent summaries (in English, French, and Spanish) of Castile's emergence as a kingdom and of its subsequent political life.¹⁷ Similarly, I abstain from any prolonged discussion of the Church or of the way these mental changes affected Castile's religious life; instead, I take on ecclesiastical questions as they intersect with the changes my research has uncovered. Partial omission, however, does not mean a lack of understanding of the Church's, or of religion's, central role in constructing a new mentality. Several first-rate works allow us to

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trace the general outline of Castile's religious culture in the period.¹⁸ The absence of a thorough examination of the ecclesiastical order does not, therefore, constitute a significant lacuna. The main thrust of this book is, after all, that in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century northern Castile, a shift took place "from heaven to earth," from a society in which values were to a large extent formulated and guided by a spiritual authority to a society in which, without abandoning religion or a religious vocabulary, new values emerged from the earthly concerns of the middling sorts (including churchmen).

It may be argued, however, that even these material transactions were guided by an ecclesiastical agenda, one that steered bequests to ecclesiastical establishments and placed the business of salvation at the core of Castilian life. Ecclesiastics drafted and recorded most property exchanges before 1200 and couched those exchanges in a formulaic language of piety. The move from ecclesiastical concerns to those grounded in the material world—signaled by the appearance of lay scribes and new patterns of will-writing—marked a radical shift in culture and values. This shift may be called secularization (though religion continued to play a signal role in the production of new values), or it may be viewed as an early manifestation of secular attitudes in the medieval West. I contend that in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Castile, we gaze on the barest beginnings of a process that would eventually sweep across western Europe—without fully overthrowing Christian culture—and lead to the emergence of the "rational" state in the early modern period.¹⁹ Another term that may help shed light on this transformation was used long ago by my late and much missed master, Joseph R. Strayer: *laicization*. Strayer and others employed this more ambiguous term to explain shifts in the political and institutional structures of France and England.²⁰ But laicization, of course, went far beyond political or administrative changes. The new laic spirit affected, as has already been noted, the language of material transactions and narrative strategies. It affected political organization and privileged new forms of ritual and symbolic political language. It transformed the relationship between Church and Crown, and the role of royal agents in running the realm. One can also posit, as I do here, that broad changes in values preceded shifts in the political realm and led to more formal and visible transformations of Castile and other medieval societies. In many respects, the new attitudes toward property, salvation, and power discussed in the next seven chapters represented novel ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

This book serves as a corrective and companion volume to my previous work, above all, *Crisis and Continuity*, in which I sought to account for various kinds of economic and social change. Using those findings as a

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backdrop, I seek to tell a very different story here. Though still focused on social history, I am interested in another kind of social history this time. My aim is not so much to describe and explain social relations, antagonisms, and power struggles. The story I am about to embark on concerns the construction of new values and the impact of these new outlooks on the status and relations of different groups within a society of orders. With these caveats, let us travel back more than eight centuries to a world that still lives, albeit hazily and in half-shadows, in the written records of late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Castilians.