Chapter 1

At the Dawn of a New Century

The Spains around 1300

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The dawn of a new century in 1300 was marked in Rome, and elsewhere throughout the medieval West, with lavish celebrations. The Great Jubilee drew thousands of pilgrims to the capital of Western Christianity, and Dante, writing the first lines of his *Divine Comedy* two years later, chose Good Friday 1300 as the date for his fictional encounter with Virgil and the date for the wrenching journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and to his final vision of the Godhead. On November 15, 1300, Ferdinand (Fernando) IV, king of Castile, León, Asturias, Galicia, Toledo, and of the wide collection of other kingdoms and territories that constituted the realm of Castile in the Middle Ages, exempted Don Estebán and his wife, Doña Inés, both citizens of Burgos, from all taxes, except for *moneda forera* (a tax paid to the Crown for maintaining the stability of the coinage), as a reward for Estebán's efforts as a surgeon.[1] That same year, under the authority of the regents, Ferdinand's mother, María de Molina, and his uncle, the Infante Don Henry (Enrique) – for the king was still a minor – the young king granted similar privileges and exemptions to men and women throughout the realm, issued charters to municipalities, made donations to monasteries, and other such examples of royal largesse and power.

In 1300 other extant documents in Castile, the Crown of Aragon, Navarre, and even the Muslim kingdom of Granada reveal mostly the normal and mundane affairs of everyday life. Property transactions, donations, wills, monastic protests against noble encroachment and abuses, and royal attempts – more often than not failed attempts or ignored by a restless nobility – to restore order are similar in many respects to those of preceding and succeeding decades. In the Iberian peninsula, 1300 was not the dramatic watershed that the arrival of the new century marked for other parts of Europe. Yet, though not charged with the symbolic weight that it had in other realms throughout the medieval West, many Castilians, Aragonese, Catalans, and other people living in Spain had a keen awareness of events transpiring elsewhere. Spaniards, as did many other western Europeans, flocked to Rome in search of indulgences or of the many pleasures (and pains) of medieval tourism in 1300.

For those living in what we know today as Spain, the excitement about the new century must have been a bit disconcerting and a further reminder, despite the great strides made to integrate the peninsula into European affairs from the late eleventh century onwards, of a disconnect with the rest of the medieval West. Throughout medieval Spain the year was identified in the documentation as *era de* (the era of) 1338. The Spanish 1300 had, in fact, occurred in what, for most of the rest of Europe, was still 1262. The real 1300, if we can call calendrical conventions real, thus passed without too many momentous events or without many of those signal watersheds around which traditional historiography has been built. Nonetheless, dramatic transformations were already in the making, and the diverse Spanish realms faced harder and more troubling times in the decades ahead. For one, Castilians, Aragonese, Catalans, and Valencians, though still dating their documents by the old formula that placed the beginning of the Christian era 38 years before Jesus' birth, were increasingly aware of being chronologically out of step with the rest of Europe. Some documents after 1300 noted both the ancient traditional forms of dating and the dating norms in use in other European kingdoms. By the late fourteenth century, all the Spanish realms had abandoned the old style of dating and embraced the rest of Europe, choosing Christ's birth as the appropriate chronological marker.

Regardless of the confusing chronological situation and the absence of dramatic events to mark the year, the Spanish realms, as they faced the dawning of a new century in 1300, did so with the accumulated experiences, institutional developments, and social strife of centuries of political evolution. Before focusing on Spain's historical development in the late Middle Ages, it may be useful to probe the context in which the Spanish realms evolved in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

A Plurality of Spains

Defining what Spain was in the Middle Ages, beyond a geographical concept, is as difficult as it may be today in the age of autonomous regions and recent calls for regional secession or wider autonomy. In 1300 the Iberian peninsula was fragmented into a diversity of realms and political entities. They contrasted with each other in terms of political organization, language, social and economic structures, topography, and history. The peninsula's political fragmentation reflected the historical developments of an earlier period and the slow emergence of distinct kingdoms after the Muslim invasion. What, then, were the different political entities comprising medieval Spain in 1300?

Castile

The largest in terms of territory and population was the kingdom of Castile. It extended over most of the central and northwestern areas of the peninsula, with borders on the Bay of Biscay in the north, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean in its southern frontier, Portugal in the west, and Aragon, Navarre, and Granada in the east, north, and south respectively. The kingdom of Castile was itself a composite of numerous other kingdoms and territories added either by conquests or familial alliances over the course of the Reconquest, that is, over a period running effectively from the early tenth century to the fourteenth. Its rulers were never described simply as kings of Castile, but their long and often repeated titles articulated the sense of an amalgam of what had once been independent realms, now brought together under the power of one king (or queen). Asturias, León, Galicia, Castile, Toledo, Córdoba, Seville, Murcia, the lordship of Molina, and the Basque homeland were among some of the most important holdings constituting the late medieval kingdom of Castile-León. And the diversity of these realms was great indeed. From their geographical and climatic differences to their peculiar historical developments, patterns of cultivation and rural life, rights of the peasantry, and the role of regional nobilities in the running of the realm, the kingdoms and territories that formed Castile were, in many respects, as distinct from each other as Castile was from other Iberian realms. And matters could become even more complicated when we consider religious plurality and antagonisms that flourished in Castile, as they did elsewhere in the peninsula, during the late Middle Ages.

The Crown of Aragon

If Castile was a complicated polity, the Crown of Aragon was infinitely more so. At least most of the Castilian realm enjoyed some linguistic unity – with the exception of parts of the Basque country and Galicia, where significant parts of the population remained faithful to their original regional languages. The Crown of Aragon was also a collection of realms, but unlike its powerful Castilian neighbor, each of its main components or political units – the kingdom of Aragon, Catalonia (in its many different incarnations as the county of Barcelona or Principality, but never a kingdom), and the kingdom of Valencia (conquered by James [Jaume] I in 1238) – retained its political autonomy, representative assemblies, and distinct linguistic and cultural identity. The Crown of Aragon was, in fact, a federation of realms, and the unfortunate kings of these polities had to deal with each of them individually and, one should add, carefully. As will be seen in greater detail in later chapters, the social, economic, and political structures of Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia were quite different from each other and, often, to the chagrin of their collective master, at odds with each other. In the best of circumstances, the Crown of Aragon foreshadowed the European Union. In the worst of circumstances, it was a contentious arrangement, with each of the units jealously defending its rights and privileges. Ruling the Crown of Aragon was an art, and a very difficult art at that.

An expansive realm in spite of its political fragmentation, in 1282 the king of the Crown of Aragon gained control of Sicily. In the early fourteenth century, a dependent kingdom, that of Majorca (with its capital in Perpignan in southern France and enjoying control of the Balearic Islands), came into being. Aragonese and Catalan outposts prospered in the former lands of the Byzantine empire in the east. Thus, throughout the period under study, a great deal of the political and commercial history of the Crown of Aragon was defined by the relation of its original and permanent core (Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia) to its outlying regions and kingdoms – southern France, the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Sicily, and Naples. And by the end of the fifteenth century, these long historical ties drew Spain inexorably into Italy.

Navarre

Perched on both sides of the Pyrenees, the ancient kingdom of Navarre had been the hegemonic political power in the peninsula in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries and the progenitor of a series of Iberian realms (Aragon, Castile). Culturally and linguistically diverse (because of the large Basque presence in some regions of Navarre), the kingdom wavered uncertainly between French and Iberian ruling houses, and its identity, as either French or Spanish, was not fully defined until the early sixteenth century. Ironically, if the kings of the Spains in the eleventh century were the children or descendants of Sancho the Great (1000–35) of Navarre, Juan Carlos, the present ruler of Spain, is the descendant of Henry of Navarre (Bourbon) who became king of France in 1589 and kept his claims to his ancestral lands alive in the face of the Spanish annexation of the kingdom in the early sixteenth century.

Granada

After the great Christian conquests of most of southern Spain in the early thirteenth century, the kingdom of Granada, one of the kingdoms of *taifas* that had emerged from the demise of the Cordoban Caliphate in the 1030s, became the last outpost of Islam in the peninsula. From 1300 until its final surrender in 1492, Granada remained the touchstone defining Castile's, and to a much lesser extent other Christian realms', political actions in the peninsula. Although a tributary kingdom, paying large sums to the kings of Castile throughout most of this period, Granada was a prosperous realm and an important center for learning and the arts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Through its great maritime outlet at Málaga (southwest of the city of Granada itself), Granada and its hinterland maintained important commercial and cultural links to North Africa and to the vast commercial networks of Dar-al-Islam (the lands of Islam). Blessed with a hard-working and thrifty population, Granada exported silk cloth and other luxury items. Islamic foreign travelers, such as Ibn Batutah and Abd al-Bäsit, commented on the economic and cultural vigor of the region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Granada's Nasrid rulers could engage in great architectural projects, such as the incomparable Alhambra, even while paying heavy tribute to the Castilian kings. When the end came in the late fifteenth century, Granada withstood the Christian onslaught for more than a decade before its surrender.

Portugal

Though not part of the story told in this book, Portugal was the other peninsular realm. Emerging as an independent kingdom only in the late eleventh and early twelfth century, the Portuguese chose very different paths from those followed by their Iberian neighbors. The Portuguese advance into Muslim territory in the peninsula came to a close in the mid-thirteenth century. By 1300, the Portuguese were already poised for their great and successful gambit in the Atlantic and southward along the coast of Africa, but though they looked outward for their expansion, Portugal's history remained inextricably bound up with that of other Iberian realms, above all, Castile.[2]

Geography, Climate, and Languages

Iberian political fragmentation mirrored its geographical, climatic, and linguistic diversity. Although geography does not entirely dictate historical developments, one cannot deny the enduring impact which the rough topography and climate (in specific parts of the peninsula) had in the making of Spain. Historians, John H. Elliott and Fernand Braudel most notable among them, have long emphasized the role which poor and thin soils, scant rain, high mountains, and meager rivers have had on the evolution of Spain as a political entity and on the transportation networks necessary for the economic well-being of the peninsula.[3] Large sections of Spain provided little return for the peasants' endless toil. The land yielded its fruits only by intense and exhausting work, and late winter storms, of which there were too many for comfort, could swiftly wipe out all the year's labor.

Politically, the Spains fractured along the spines of mountain ranges crisscrossing the peninsula. After all, there are few places, with perhaps the central Castilian plain (which itself rises to a very high altitude) as an exception, in which mountains do not loom on the horizon. If topography dictated the emergence of particular political entities, climate also shaped different types of agriculture and organization of the soil. The abundant rain falling on most of northern Spain led to specific types of agriculture, village organization, and relations between villagers and their royal, ecclesiastical, or secular lords. The plains of Old and New Castile – the dominant geographical feature of the peninsula – generated other patterns of organizing rural spaces and peculiar ties between town and countryside, between free peasants and their lords. Iberia's southern region, with its different ecology, irrigation patterns, and the influence of an ancient Islamic heritage and husbandry, yielded yet another type or types of social, economic, and political organization.

One must be cautious, however, about reducing Spain to a series of neatly stacked geographical areas. The reality and impact of Spanish geography and climate on political communities were far more complex than the heuristic categories deployed in travel guides or general books such as this. Regions overlapped. Small ecological niches – where social and economic structures and development over time did not follow well-laid-out patterns – can be found in abundance. Human agency, millennia old, was always at work, transforming the topographical and climatological realities of the peninsula.

The Diverse Geographies of Spain

Green Spain

In this rough and brief sketch of Spain's geography and climate, one could easily posit a series of distinct Spains, following not the artificial boundaries resulting from historical circumstances but the unalterable dictates of topography. First, in a broad band running throughout most of northern Spain – from the Atlantic coast in the west to the Mediterranean in the east – lies Green Spain, a region of abundant rain, moderate summers and winters (except in the eastern parts close to the Pyrenees), high mountains and small villages dotted across the countryside. The economy of the region emphasized fruit trees, dairy farming, livestock raising, fishing (on the Basque, Cantabrian, and Asturian coasts), and other agricultural and maritime activities associated with mountain regions and the sea. The Pyrenees and their offshoots constituted the dominant feature of the region. Rising majestically, from the Bay of Biscay in the west to the Costa Brava (the Mediterranean shore of Catalonia) in the east, the Pyrenees served as a natural border with France, though mountain passes all along the range provided easy access for pilgrims, merchants, and armies. Liminal regions – the val de Aran, Andorra, and Navarre itself – shifted political loyalties, depending on the course of events and the relative strength of realms on either side of the mountain range. The spurs of the Pyrenees (among them the impressive Picos de Europa range in Cantabria) dug deep into the northern areas of Aragon, Catalonia, the Basque country, Cantabria, and Asturias. Traveling from Andorra to La Seo d'Urgell (in northern Catalonia) and from La Seo toward the Mediterranean shore, one is struck by the ruggedness of the territory and the difficulties in negotiating even today, with modern roads and tunnels, an easy transit from one region to another.

Green Spain did not of course constitute a single geographical unit, nor did it develop into a single political entity. In the northwest, the mountains of Galicia, though they did not rise as high as mountains did east of Villafranca del Bierzo (the natural gateway into the region), marked a natural frontier with Asturias and León. By 1300, land tenancy in Galicia had been spectacularly fragmented. It was a region of predatory and unruly lordships, and peasant grievances against lordly abuses would explode in open rebellion in the late fifteenth century in the rebellion of the Hermandiños.[4] With temperate climate and abundant rain well suited to livestock and some forms of agriculture, Galicia, with an extensive shoreline on the Atlantic and magnificent and well-protected harbors (*rías*), also developed a strong maritime tradition – fishing, trading, and seafaring. From La Coruña and other estuary (*ría*) harbors, Galician merchants and seafarers maintained steady relations with English and Flemish ports. In the countryside, its ancestral language, Galician, remained alive, as did a poetical tradition which had flourished in the twelfth century, that of the *cantigas*, though this was beginning to wane under the impact of Castilian in the fourteenth century.

Further east, the regions of Asturias, Cantabria, and the Basque coast also enjoyed a temperate climate and high rainfall. Through the Asturian ports of Gijón and Llanes, the Cantabrian coastal towns of San Vicente de la Barquera, Santander, Castro Urdiales, and Laredo, and their Basque counterparts, Bermeo, Fuenterrabía, San Sebastián, and Bilbao, the region offered many entry points for a robust traffic with England, Flanders, and southern France from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. From there, goods were carried south to the great mercantile distribution center of Burgos on the northern Castilian plains, or to Victoria and Logroño, gateways to Navarre and further east to Aragon. Green and humid, the peasants of this sub-region of northern Spain held their lands on long-term or life-lease contracts or owned them outright. Villages in the region had long gained substantial concessions from their lords and the Crown.

Tetzel, a German traveling through the region in the sixteenth century, describes it pejoratively as a land where one finds "few hens, eggs, cheese, and milk (because there are no cows) . . . people ate little meat, feeding themselves only on fruits."[5] Tetzel's account, typical of foreign travelers in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, echoes the negative assessments of the Basque and Cantabrian lands and of their people found in the famous twelfth-century pilgrimage guide to Compostela (the *Liber Sanct Jacobi*),[6] but it stands in sharp contrast to the praise of Spain and, in particular, to the idealization of the mountain region, just a few kilometers south of Cantabria and the Basque homeland, found in the *Primera crónica general* and the *Poema de Fernán González* (both dating to the mid-thirteenth century). The *Primera crónica general* engaged in a general praise of Spain (not just the mountains), drawn from the older panegyric of Spain found in St. Isidore's work. The anonymous *Poema de Fernán González* zeroed on a small region of northern Castile which ecologically and topographically resembled Green Spain far more than it did the meseta of northern Castile. In exalted tones, the mountains are seen as paradisiacal lands of abundant pasture and livestock, of mild winters and temperate summers.[7] The truth, as always, lies somewhere between Tetzel's indictment and Castilian medieval authors' effusive praise of the land. The land was rich only in some specific areas, surrounded often by waste lands (the *páramos*) and infertile ground. It was not rich enough to support a large population or to generate large surpluses.

Moving eastward, the Pyrenees mountains blocked the benign influence of the sea, rendering the contrasts in temperatures in northern Aragon and northwestern Catalonia far sharper than in Cantabria or the Basque country. The region is far more rugged, less easily open to the rest of the world. Even today, as pointed out earlier, the roads from France to Andorra (an area under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Urgell in the Middle Ages) and from La Seo d'Urgell, an ancient and important bishopric in northwestern Catalonia (Andorra is around 20 km from La Seo), to Figueras (close to the Mediterranean coast) are difficult and trying ones. Further, if the mountains toward the west were, as Fernand Braudel has argued not always correctly, places of freedom, that is, that peasants were fairly free from lordly abuse, northern Catalonia witnessed the harshest and most enduring form of serfdom in western Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[8] Westward from Catalonia into the large county of Ribagorza (in northern Aragon), the preconditions for predatory and violent lordship and for systemic civil war in the sixteenth century were already in place. Thus, although geography and climate were somewhat similar along the broad band of Green Spain, social structures, types of village organization, and relations between peasants and lords varied from west to east. Such diversity was even greater in the high plains that dominated the center of the peninsula.

The Spains of the high plains

The high plains that dominate most of the center of the peninsula constitute Spain's salient topographical feature. The origins of the expansionist kingdom of Castile lay there. It was the great reservoir of soldiers, and, after 1300, it dominated, politically and culturally, most of Spain's history. Cutting a great swath from the Portuguese border in the west – where the high plains began to slope to the ocean – to Catalonia in the east, and from Green Spain in the north to Andalusia in the south, the mesetas of Old and New Castile, as well as the arid plains around Zaragoza in the kingdom of Aragon, rose to impressive average altitudes. In Old Castile and León, the plain rose between 1,800 to 3,000 feet in 66.5 percent of the surface. 31.4 percent reached even higher average altitude, between 3,000 and 6,000 feet, while in the regions of Avila and León more than 50 percent of the territory was over 3,000 feet. Further east in the region of Soria, an area close to the Aragonese border, 70 percent of the land was over 3,000 feet in altitude. These impressive heights dictated the climate and agricultural destiny of the region.

Winters are long and harsh, summers hot and short. Rain and running water were always in short supply during the Middle Ages. The soil is often thin and poor, except for river banks and small ecological niches. In Castile and northern Aragon's stark and emotionally moving landscapes, villages rose next to small rivers, often at a great distance from each other. Foreign travelers or modern poets, Antonio Machado above all, have lyrically described a countryside often denuded of trees, of villages, and of human habitation. Its proud people – pride is a continual charge in the harsh descriptions of Spaniards in early modern travel literature – worked very hard with meager results. But these seemingly negative impressions need to be modified and corrected by the many exceptions and successes found in Castile and Aragon in spite of its geographical and economic disadvantages. Along the banks of the Ebro river on the outskirts of Zaragoza, thriving large village communities – inhabited often by Mudejars and then by Moriscos – tended the fertile floodplains. The prosperity of these villages, Gelsa, Codo, Pina, and others, stood in sharp contrast with the arid plains which one can still see from the road between Barcelona and Zaragoza, and from the rugged spurs of the Pyrenees, easily visible north of the road.

New Castile, the lower region of the high plains south of Madrid, was a land of transhumance and vineyards and different in every respect from the northern plain. The northern Rioja region, celebrated without dissent by foreign travelers, was a rich area, producing superior-quality wine and benefiting from fertile, cereal-growing lands. If the land did not always yield great profit, the transhumance did. It was mostly Old Castile taxes, paid by hard-working and suffering peasants and by the transhumance, that provided the resources for the great enterprises of Castile in the fifteenth century and the even more ambitious projects of the early modern Spanish monarchy. Complexity and diversity, and the distinct habitats found abundantly throughout the region, undermine any effort to present a monochrome picture of Spanish topography and resources.

Above all the topography and climate of the high plains of Castile and Aragon fostered the cultivation of cereals and the tending of transhumant livestock. Although in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries villagers still sought to grow as wide a variety of crops as possible – thus we find cereal growing in Green Spain and viticulture everywhere – lack of rain and poor soil conditions determined a great deal of the predominant economic activities. What was grown and how it was grown helped shape social and political life, as it did patterns of population throughout the land. Far more significant, one must always remember that the sharp contrast between Green Spain and the central plains, a contrast that is vividly evident to anyone crossing the mountain passes between northern and central Spain or between central Spain and Andalusia today, placed significant stress on Spanish men and women. Everything changed as you moved from one region to another. How one would work the land, organize the village community, use agricultural tools, or plow the land changed as one crossed geographical boundaries. The types of crops were different. Different cultures and even languages stood as continual challenges to the peripatetic Castilians, Aragonese, Catalans, and others in the peninsula. And these contrasts were even more pronounced as one crossed into southern Spain.

Southern Spain: the ancient lands of al-Andalus

Deeply imprinted by its Roman and Muslim past, southern Spain, running from the Algarve and the Atlantic coast in the west to the region of Valencia and the Mediterranean in the east, also included a diversity of habitats and a variety of ecological and climatic systems. Within southern Spain one must distinguish between mountains and flood plains, between coastal and interior regions. In western Andalusia, the Sierra Morena divides the sloping plains of New Castile and La Mancha from the fertile areas on the banks of the Guadalquivir and lower Guadiana rivers. Access to the fertile western Andalusian lands could be easily gained through the ancient Roman road, the Silver Road or *camino de la plata*, running from Salamanca through the Extremaduran towns of Cáceres, Badajoz, and finally Mérida, and then by other east–west roads that led from Mérida or Cáceres to Seville and/or Córdoba. This was the road followed by a large group of Navarrese merchants and their servants, traveling from Estella in Navarre to Seville in 1351. Their long and well-documented journey tells us a great deal about communications within the peninsula, about food and road conditions. Their experiences belie the often repeated assertion about the difficulties of traveling across Spain.[9]

Further east from the Silver Road, the mountain pass of Despeñaperros provided a well-traveled gateway from New Castile into the south. Important battles, Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 and Bailén during the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century, were fought in the region. Control of the region was crucial because Despeñaperros and the road going to Jaén and, further southeast, to Granada were in many respects important geographic keys to Andalusia. South of the Sierra Morena in western Andalusia lay a land of irrigation. Its agricultural patterns were distinct from those of the north, with olive trees, vineyards, and produce balancing cereal production. Toward Extremadura and throughout western Andalusia abundant pasture lands became the final destination of ever larger flocks of sheep and other livestock engaged in the great transhumance or Mesta (the seasonal movement of livestock from summer to winter grazing lands) from the mid-thirteenth century onwards.

A land dominated by latifundia, western Andalusia was a region of landless peasants, large villages, and a growing exporter of its staples: wine to England and elsewhere in the peninsula and eventually to the New World, olive oil to the northern parts of the Spanish realms and to trans-Pyrenean markets, leather goods, fruit, and other regional commodities. Whitewashed villages, distinct patterns of agriculture, and the ever-increasing lure of the Atlantic defined, and still define, western Andalusia as distinct from the rest of the Spains. By the late fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth, Andalusian seafarers sailed into the Atlantic from the coastal towns of Puerto de Santa María, San Lucas de Barrameda, Palos de Moguer, and the great bay of Cádiz. These sites, long associated with the enterprise of the Indies, were already, more than a century before the encounter with the New World, the launching point for Castile's conquest and settlement of the Canary Islands and the establishment of a significant Spanish outpost on the Atlantic Ocean.

Moving eastward, Andalusia changes dramatically. As we approach the city of Granada or its great maritime outlet to the south, Málaga, the terrain grows more abrupt and hard to negotiate. Fabled Granada, Islam's last outpost in the peninsula, is girded by a circle of mountains, the Sierra Nevada, the Sierra Morena, and the Alpujarras mountain range. Colder at high altitudes than western Andalusia – snow can be seen from the Alhambra gardens into the spring – central Andalusia yielded, nonetheless, some of the same products: olive groves in the Jaén area and on the hills sloping to the Mediterranean, the ubiquitous vineyards, some cereal production, but also, in the valleys of the Alpujarras and elsewhere, mulberry trees and silkworms, feeding into a very profitable silk-weaving trade.

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Granada and Málaga were prosperous cities, benefiting immensely from their trade with North Africa and its Muslim Mediterranean connections, and as mediator between Christian consumers and the goods produced in Dar-al-Islam. Throughout Granada and its vast hinterland, Arabic was spoken. Granada's successes, in spite of its military inferiority and political dependence on Castile, compare quite positively with Christian Murcia, its neighbor to the east, where agriculture had collapsed after the Christian conquests of the mid-thirteenth century, and almost matched the prosperity of Valencia in the mid-fifteenth century. Both Murcia and Valencia, the first part of the Castilian realms and the second a separate kingdom within the federation of the Crown of Aragon, were fully Mediterranean lands, sharing with other regions in the Mediterranean basin topographical and climatic characteristics. With hot summers and temperate winters (though it can get really cold in winter months), these were also lands of irrigation (above all Valencia), though, as noted, the Christian occupation of Murcia had ruined the irrigation works there in the second half of the thirteenth century. Valencia enjoyed vast areas of fertile soils which made it one of the most productive agricultural regions in the peninsula. Worked mostly by Arabic-speaking Mudejars

(Muslims living under Christian rule), people who had a long history of careful and enlightened husbandry, the *huerta* (garden) of Valencia served as the engine for the growing prosperity of the city and served as the foundation for Valencia's successful rivalry with Barcelona for a share of the western Mediterranean trade.[10]

Geographical, Topographical, Climatic, and Linguistic Diversity Revisited

This rough and impressionistic sketch of Spain's geographical and cultural pluralism glosses only superficially over transitional areas. Although political borders, when borders began to emerge slowly in the late Middle Ages, more or less followed the contours of mountains and rivers, throughout Spain small regions straddled different realms. Small ecological variants make any attempt at imposing a unified vision of Spain's geography and climate a misguided enterprise. The Rioja, as pointed out earlier, was such a region. It stood in the liminal space between Castile and Navarre. Its trade moved as much northward to the Basque ports as it did westward to the great commercial distribution centers on the plain, Burgos above all, along the always busy Road to Compostela, or eastward to Estella and Pamplona, the quintessential Navarrese cities.

Spain has an abundance of such regions. Extremadura, lying between Portugal and western Andalusia; the Bierzo, serving as a gateway to Galicia; Ribagorza or Urgell in northern Aragon and Catalonia respectively, both of them very different in many respects from Mediterranean Catalonia. If I emphasize this, it is to highlight the perils of easy generalizations. Plurality, diversity, and exceptionalism are the abiding terms when dealing with Spanish history, and they applied equally to religious filiation, political organization, or linguistic communities.

Toward 1300

The history of Spain does not begin *in medias res*, in 1300, as Dante's personal journey did. As we have seen above, 1300 did not signal a sea-change in either the social, economic, political, or cultural structures of the Spanish realms. No "great event," no *grande journée* in the style of traditional French historiography is identifiable. For Spaniards, as we have seen, it was not even 1300 but 1338. The story that is to be told in the following chapters, that is, that of Spain from 1300 to the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand in 1469 and the consolidation of their rule in 1474, was shaped by a series of events taking place in the preceding centuries. Clearly, it is not my purpose here to summarize the entire history of Spain from Roman times to 1300 as a prelude to this volume. Earlier books in this series already do so superbly. Nonetheless, it may prove useful to lay out some of the most salient patterns of development without which the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and their legacy of enduring crises would be incomprehensible.

It is a traditional paradigm in Spanish medieval history that the interplay and overlapping of three distinct themes – reconquest (crusade), pilgrimage, and repopulation – lie at the heart of medieval Spanish history. It may be useful to spell out what each of these three developments meant for contemporaries and what they mean for historians today.

Reconquest

Broadly defined, the Reconquest was both the physical act of conquering lands held by the Muslims and its ideological concomitant: the argument by clerics and other learned supporters of conquest that there was a historic link between Visigothic Spain and the Christian kingdoms of the late Middle Ages. One can think of three crucial stages in this process: (a) from the Arab conquest in 711 to the demise of the Caliphate in the 1030s; (b) from the emergence of the fragmented Muslim kingdoms of *taifas* (the different small kingdoms emerging from the wreckage of the Caliphate in the 1030s) to the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 and the crushing defeat inflicted on the Almohads by an international Christian coalition; (c) from 1212 to the fall of Granada in 1492.

During the first stage, it is hardly possible to speak of a Reconquest ideology. Although there were serious attempts to link the Asturian–Leonese monarchy with the Visigothic heritage – the so-called Visigothic or neo-Gothic revival under Alfonso III and his descendants – the small Christian kingdoms were too weak or divided to mount any serious military challenge to Córdoba's power. As late as the end of the tenth century, Muslim armies could strike deep into Christian territory – as al Mansur did in 999 when he raided Compostela – with total impunity. Christians allied with Muslims against other Christians. Christian kings came to Córdoba to pay obeisance to their Muslim masters, to be granted the boon of marrying some lesser member of the Caliph's court, or to receive the benefits of the Muslims' superior medical knowledge. There was a slow reoccupation of the soil, that is, the settlement of Christians in empty or semi-empty areas in the north (see below) but no fully formulated ideology of Reconquest, even though there was a growing sense among the clerical elite and royal courts of the antagonism and differences between Christians and Muslims.[11]

After the demise of the Caliphate, Christian and Muslims entered an uneasy period in which signal Christian victories such as Alfonso VI's conquest of Toledo in 1085 or Ruy Díaz de Vivar's (the Cid) short-lived conquest of Valencia in 1094 were met by Muslim counter-offensives that either checked or reversed Christian advances. Pressed hard by the Christians in the north, Muslim Spain remained free from Christian conquest because waves of invaders from North Africa – first the Almoravids in the eleventh century and then the Almohads in the mid-twelfth century – effectively checked Christian advances. They brought with them, besides their military prowess, a more strict observance of Islam and a more aggressive attitude toward Christians and Christianity. These shifts to a harsher attitude had their counterpart and precedent in Christian society. From the early eleventh century onwards and originating north of the Pyrenees, a religious reform movement swept western Christendom. By the last decades of the century, Cluniac houses had risen throughout Spain, and Cluniac monks became important advisers to Spanish kings or began to monopolize some of the most important ecclesiastical offices in the land. Bernard, a Cluniac monk, became the first archbishop of reconquered Toledo and adviser to King Alfonso VI (1065–1109). The Roman ritual was imposed on the Castilian Church, replacing – not without some stiff opposition – the ancient Mozarabic rite in 1080. In Aragon, the kings became papal vassals and accepted their crowns from the Pope. With Cluny and French clergymen also came the idea of the crusade (even though crusading ideals were also in the making in Iberia before the First Crusade) and the conflation of territorial struggles with sectarian warfare. The Reconquest had now completed its development as a form of religious ideology.[12]

After the crushing Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, the Christians gained the upper hand once and for all. In a series of swift campaigns between the 1230s and 1260s, the realms of Castile and the Crown of Aragon conquered most of southern Spain (Córdoba 1236, Valencia 1238, Seville 1248). Granada alone remained unconquered and the last Muslim outpost in the peninsula. Why did it take almost 300 more years, between 1212 and 1492, to reap fully the gains of Las Navas de Tolosa? The answer is found in the years following the Christian victory of 1212, above all, in the critical span of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. A period of intense crises, these upheavals partially forced the Christian realms to turn their attention inward and to face other critical and far more pressing issues festering in their midst. The nature of these crises and the manner in which the different realms coped with them is the actual topic of this book and will be described in greater detail in later chapters.

Pilgrimage

One of the crucial components in the making of Spain (above all Castile) was the popularity of the pilgrimage to Compostela and its social, cultural, and economic impact on Spanish society. Beginning in the early tenth century and reaching its highest point in the twelfth, pilgrims poured, though a series of well-defined routes, across the Pyrenees to the tomb of St. James at Compostela. With the pilgrims came Cluniac monks and new monasteries – we have just seen what a significant role they played in fostering crusading ideals and grafting them on to the secular struggles against Islam. With pilgrims also came settlers, new towns, commercial links to northern Europe, the development of the bourgeoisie in the towns along the pilgrimage route, and the insertion of the peninsula into wider European mercantile and cultural networks. These, the rise of the bourgeoisie and of a monetary economy, are complex processes to be explored in greater detail below, but they transformed Spanish medieval society, propelling significant changes in mentality.

Repopulation

If the pilgrimage to Compostela transformed large regions of Spain (parts of northern Aragon, northern Castile, León, and Galicia) and had enduring consequences for the religious and cultural life of Christian Iberia, the royal, lordly, and ecclesiastical efforts to populate newly conquered lands with Christians led to a dramatic shift in population from north to south, with concomitant social and economic consequences. Attracted by liberal new *fueros* (charters) and by the distribution of newly conquered territories, Christian settlers poured into the south, sometimes altering, as the case of Murcia shows, ancient patterns of cultivation, or driving the Muslims into exile, as was the case in western Andalusia in the 1260s, or turning them into a semi-servile labor force, as happened in the region of Valencia in the late 1230s. Conquest and redistribution of population brought advantages and profits, but they also had an extremely negative impact on every aspect of Spanish society. In many ways, these overlapping themes, Reconquest, pilgrimage, and repopulation, came to dramatic resolutions in the first half of the thirteenth century, laying the groundwork – not always for the better – for later historical developments.

A Sense of the New Around 1200

In a recent book, *From Heaven to Earth: The Reordering of Castilian Society, 1150–1350*, I have glossed extensively Julio González' (a noted Spanish medievalist) formulation of the early thirteenth century as a period with a "taste for novelty." New young kings, Ferdinand III (1217–52) in Castile, James (Jaume) I (1213–76) in the Crown of Aragon, and Afonso II (1211–23) in Portugal, led their respective realms in bold new directions. More than that, they ushered into the peninsula the sea-change transformations sweeping Europe at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. In the first half of the thirteenth century, new forms of spirituality came into being in the wake of the broad reforms undertaken at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). New liturgical forms and stricter enforcement of religious practices entered Spain shortly after 1215. With them also came restrictive measures against lepers, Jews, and Muslims and willful attempts to segregate them from Christian society. Deeper and more enduring changes, however, had been in the making throughout Spain since the last decades of the twelfth century.

Structural Changes

The period running roughly from the death of Alfonso VII, the last Castilian king to claim the title of emperor in 1156, to the starting point of our inquiry in 1300 witnessed dramatic transformations in the social, economic, cultural, and institutional structures of the Iberian realms. It is time now to spell out what these changes were, for they shaped Spanish history in the late Middle Ages. These transformations, most of them very visible to contemporaries and reflected poignantly in chronicles and literary works, led to the emergence of new values and new ways of thinking and dealing with the material world, the afterlife, and religious difference. By 1300 Spain had been transformed in ways which differed radically from the world of the mid-twelfth century. These changes took place within specific contexts, that is, social and economic developments underpinned the broad transformation of values and the dramatic increase in cultural production and education.

Trade, money, and urban life

These developments were not evenly distributed throughout the peninsula. Around 1200 Barcelona was already, and had been for a while, an important mercantile hub and urban center. As such, Barcelona presided over an extensive commercial network extending into the western Mediterranean and its productive hinterland. Seville, still under its Muslim king of *taifas*, had already gained the commercial importance that catapulted the city to prominence in the peninsula in later centuries. Drawing agricultural goods from its rich surrounding countryside, the Aljarafe, and keeping important trade connections with North Africa and eastern Mediterranean markets, Seville was a prosperous commercial entity, attracting northern Christian merchants into its wide commercial networks. Other parts of medieval Spain, however, were waking up to the complexities of mercantile affairs, to the lure of a true money economy and urban life.

In late twelfth-century Iberia, trade flowed mostly in two directions. One was the already mentioned flow of goods in and around Barcelona. It was trade with southern France and the western Mediterranean. The other pattern of trade was that linking the Christian north with the Muslim south. It was a trade dominated by Muslim luxury goods, spices, silk, iron works, leather, and other products, and resulting from Muslim mastery of some of these trades. The Christian north, the kingdoms of Castile and León, sent agricultural goods, livestock, and raw materials south, while it continued the long process of extracting surpluses from al Andalus through raids and tribute. By the late twelfth century, Castilian trade had begun its century long reorientation toward northern markets. Textiles (mostly from Flanders) and other finished goods began to flood the Castilian and Leonese markets. From the recently resettled or newly founded maritime towns on the Bay of Biscay, hides, tallow, and iron were exported to England, Flanders, and France. After 1300, large quantities of high-quality wool also began to make their way by sea to the great textile-manufacturing centers in the Low Countries. Trade with northern Europe served also as a conduit for new ideas and for the importation of northern European social structures and values.

Together with the new commercial patterns and material exchanges, the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries witnessed the heyday of the pilgrimage route to Compostela. The throng of pilgrims making their way along the Milky Way, as the road was also called, was one of the most significant reasons for the development of urban centers in northern Castile. While Barcelona and Valencia (after 1238) had already developed an aggressive bourgeois society, in northern Castile, the period after 1150 witnessed the birth of mercantile elites and the flourishing of craft activities in many of the towns on the pilgrimage road. Some of these towns, as was the case with Burgos, became important distribution centers for foreign trade and presided over impressive mercantile networks, its merchants traveling to England and Flanders from the thirteenth century onwards. Thus, together with new patterns of trade in the peninsula, a monetary economy also developed as coins began to circulate in greater quantities throughout the Spanish realms. As a result a new bourgeois culture came into being in many parts of Spain with distinct new values.

Among some of these new values were, besides a different perception of property as spatial, new ways of thinking about salvation and the afterlife. Partly because of the spread among Christians in western Europe of the belief in Purgatory – which Jacques Le Goff, a noted French medieval historian, traces to the late twelfth century – or partly because of the new sensibilities of the rising mercantile groups and their fear that their activities may lead to eternal damnation, new ways of relating to the sacred came into being. What do I mean by that? In Christian society, the accumulation of wealth, the lending of money at interest, and other such activities that demanded a close involvement with the material world had always raised deep suspicion and fear of eternal damnation. The injunction of the Gospels rang with alarming clarity: A camel will go through the eye of a needle before a rich man enters the Kingdom of Heaven. By the late twelfth century, such ideals came into direct conflict with the growing accumulation of capital and with a society – in Spain and elsewhere – where mercantile and artisanal groups were mostly concerned with making money. Christianity offered two options: a life of goodness and the selfless renunciation of one's wealth will be rewarded in heaven; a life of wickedness and greed will be punished eternally in hell. By the twelfth century, this harsh choice was no longer tenable, and the Church bent to the new spiritual needs of the bourgeoisie. Purgatory came into being (as a spatial place in the same sense in which property was also now thought of as spatial) as an alternative. It allowed those with wealth and dubious occupations to enter into a bargain for salvation. Through their wills and through donations, merchants and other members of the urban elites entered into frantic business transactions to secure their salvation.

By purchasing masses and candles, building chapels, and other pious activities, those who lived outside the feudal structures sought to reduce their time in Purgatory and to gain eternal salvation. These new attitudes toward the sacred allowed merchants to deploy their wealth in the pursuit of grace. They allowed them to effectively put their material gains to the service of a program of salvation. This was most obvious in their acts of charity, which now became highly ritualized and symbolic and which came to fulfill a dual purpose. On the one hand, charity to a specific few, a hand-picked and symbolic number of the poor, was one of the deeds aimed at reducing time in Purgatory; on the other hand, charity to the poor served to reiterate the social standing of the donor and served as a constant reminder of the distance between those who had and those who did not within Spanish urban society. This included such highly symbolic acts as having bread given to 12 or 24 poor men and women over one's grave on the day of burial, or handpicking the poor from those in one's neighborhood, dressing them in burlap or sackcloth, and requiring them to march behind the body of the donor in the funeral procession.

At the same time, measures against the poor in the form of legislation restricting their mobility, or pejorative literary representations of them, began to circulate throughout Spain. The poor were thrown out of Barcelona in the late thirteenth century. Beggars were forced to require royal licenses to beg in early fourteenth-century Castile. The *Siete partidas*, the great law code composed in the 1250s and 1260s, created categories of the poor, indicating who should be helped (the very old, children, women, and the infirm) and who should be forced to work (the able-bodied, young men, those capable of work) and denied charity. What all these measures pointed to was the rapid rise in the number of poor people. New towns were centers for mercantile exchanges and new values; they were also breeding grounds for a new type of poverty in the Spanish realms and elsewhere in western medieval Europe.

Money and Land

Other changes began in the late twelfth century but their impact was cumulative over the centuries that followed. The rise of urban elites throughout the peninsula and their newly found economic power found an outlet in investment in the land market. Merchants and well-to-do artisans began, from the 1200s onwards, to purchase lands in villages around the city. These were the territories which lay under the jurisdiction of the city (lands and small villages which belonged to the territory of the city, *alfoz* in Castilian). Some of these urban hinterlands were expansive indeed, challenging the jurisdiction and authority of lords and monasteries. By the thirteenth century, urban dwellers had obtained a firm grip on the countryside surrounding Spain's urban centers. Merchants, craftsmen, and other members of the urban elites bought land from peasants. In turn, some of these peasants became journeymen, that is, they remained on the land as daily workers, landless peasants. Outside buyers and some well-to-do peasants were at the vanguard of the movement to consolidate property in the village, and this also signaled a very early erosion of the commons. What I mean by this is that, as peasants sold their property and a few men began to monopolize or control entire villages, they also gained control of the common lands – pasture lands and other property held in common by all the citizens of the village. By the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, property transactions show the buying and selling of rights to the commons.[13]

In parts of Old Catalonia, the region north and west of Barcelona, lords were successful in imposing harsher conditions on their servile peasants. This is a development which, as noted earlier, has been carefully studied by Paul Freedman in his book, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia*. It is a remarkable story indeed. As serfdom began to wane throughout most of the medieval West, lords in some areas of northeastern Spain were able to reimpose restrictive controls over their peasants. The story of the *remenças* (the peasants who had to pay a fee to purchase their freedom) is a remarkable one and will be told in some detail in a later chapter. For more than a century and a half, they struggled to gain their freedom and finally achieved it in 1486, the only successful peasant uprising in the medieval West.

Language

Another development during this period before 1300 was the extraordinary growth of the vernacular. This phenomenon occurred in two distinct ways. In Castile, the vernacular (the Castilian language) began to make serious inroads into the local documentation by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. This coincided with the birth of new vernacular literature, most notably the *Poem of the Cid* (ca. 1206), and the poetry of Gonzalo de Berceo around the middle of the thirteenth century. From the preferred language of material transactions at the turn of the century, Castilian became the official language of royal business by the late 1240s and 1250s. This shift from Latin to the vernacular took place in under 50 years and preceded such linguistic shifts throughout western Europe by more than two centuries. It was clear that by the late twelfth century, Latin documents already included vernacular words or syntax closer to the vernacular than to formal Latin. By the 1220s many areas of Old Castile (northern Castile) had already shifted completely to the vernacular, and by the 1240s and 1250s royal scribes were changing from Latin to Castilian within the same year and, in some cases, within the same day.

This spectacular transformation had a great impact on Castilian life and values. It meant that all the business of government was to be transacted in Castilian. The ordinances of the Cortes or representative parliaments, the legal system, royal charters, and correspondence were all written in the vernacular. At one level, this meant the partial removal of ecclesiastics, who had long enjoyed a monopoly of Latin, from royal government and bureaucracy. At another level, wills and donations composed until them in a formulaic Latin came to be under the direct control of lay donors and testators. It is not surprising that, after the 1220s, coinciding with the slow acceptance of the idea of Purgatory, most pious donations in wills consisted of assignments of rents but not of the actual property. From thenceforth, property was to be kept within the family and whatever was given to the Church was to be carefully monitored by the will's lay executors. This meant the slow economic collapse of the Castilian Church and the growing laicization (secularization) of the royal and municipal bureaucracies and of everyday practices. Far more significant, chronicles and histories, written in Latin by ecclesiastics until the beginning of the thirteenth century, were, by the 1250s, composed exclusively in Castilian. The royal chronicles, written in the vernacular by laymen under the king's patronage, began to advance the interest of the monarchy and served as a form of ideological propaganda tool for the new and growing sense of a Castilian identity distinct from that of other Iberian realms or from that of religious minorities in their midst.

The reasons for this linguistic change were complex indeed, but one obvious reason was that, in contrast to the Crown of Aragon, there was no full formal notarial culture in Castile. Notaries, who had gained a monopoly of a formulaic Latin for material transactions, wills, and other such legal instruments in Mediterranean medieval Europe, did not make inroads into Castile's daily life, with some exceptions such as Seville, until much later. By then, the vernacular had already triumphed and there was no moving back to the old linguistic patterns. What is most peculiar is that while Castile was undergoing such extensive changes, the Crown of Aragon, in spite of a vigorous vernacular literature, retained Latin, at least partially, as the language of royal affairs until much later.[14]

This swift linguistic shift was an exclusive Castilian phenomenon. In the Crown of Aragon, above all in Catalonia, while there was, as noted above, a significant literary movement in the vernacular, there was no official change of language. The northern regions of the Crown of Aragon, above all Old Catalonia, were part of an older civilization, that of Occitania. From the late eleventh century, troubadour poetry, romances, and historiography had been produced in Provençal, the language of southern France. The cultural ties binding Catalonia with the area around Toulouse, Perpignan, Carcassonne, and other southern urban centers made for a very dynamic and original cultural production. Catalan was the language of the people, of chronicles and histories, such as those written by Muntaner, and for pious works and romances, such as those written by Ramón Llull, so that in many respects the Catalan language was far more widespread as a language of culture than Castilian was in the early thirteenth century. Yet, for material transactions and the affairs of everyday life, the power of notaries and their formulaic Latin was still too great to be overthrown.

The Conquest of the South and Structural Transformations: Castile and the Crown of Aragon

During the first half of the thirteenth century, Castile, Portugal, the kingdom of Asturias–León, and the Crown of Aragon (Aragon and Catalonia) made impressive gains in al-Andalus. Ferdinand III's conquest of Córdoba in 1236 and of Seville in 1248 transformed the structure of Castilian society. With the settlement of Christians in the region of the Guadalquivir, there were no immediate technological gains in the exploitation of the land, nor was there an increase in the production of food. On the contrary, the conquest and the rebellion of the Mudejars in the early 1260s, and their subsequent expulsion from the land, disrupted the normal pattern of irrigation, cultivation, and harvest. Galloping inflation and unsuccessful efforts by Alfonso X in 1252, 1258, and 1268 to deal with inflation through price controls and sumptuary laws were clear signs of the deteriorating Castilian economy. In addition, petitions for remission of taxes by impoverished municipalities, demographic dislocations, the rise of anti-Semitic legislation (most of it economic in nature), localized famines, lawlessness in the countryside, civil war, and debasement of the coinage were clear manifestations or examples of some of the evils plaguing Castilian society after the mid-thirteenth century. In fact, Castile knew little stability in the 200 years that followed what seemed to contemporaries the greatest victories and territorial gains in the realm's history.

Inflation, resulting from the sudden availability of new wealth from the conquest, and food scarcity, due to the collapse of agriculture in north and south, were major problems until the mid-fourteenth century and the onslaught of the Black Death. Although other parts of western Europe suffered only a mild inflationary rise until the late thirteenth century, in Castile prices began to rise rapidly as early as the 1250s. The fourteenth century did not bring any improvements.

Economic underdevelopment

As early as the twelfth century the kingdoms of Castile and León exported raw materials and imported finished goods, and this helped shape Spain's economic structure in the following centuries. Fine cloth from Flanders accounted for a staggering cash outflow, and imports were not limited to luxury items but included a whole range of basic manufactured goods. Castile's main exports were iron, wool, hides, and livestock (especially horses, when not banned by royal decree), grain, cordovan, wine, cumin, and almonds. These changes in trade patterns should be placed within the peculiar demographic and territorial transformations of the mid-thirteenth century. By 1250, Castile had almost doubled its territory as a result of the conquest of Seville without any significant increase in its population, above all after the expulsion of the Muslims (or Mudejars) from the land after 1264. What took place was a redistribution of the population of Castile. Attracted by the new lands and by the houses, lands, and servants that Ferdinand III and Alfonso X distributed to the conquering armies, a considerable number of people migrated from the northern plains to Andalusia.

Although the migration included people from all levels of society, after a failed royal attempt to replicate the social and economic patterns of northern Castile by settling small and independent farmers on the land, the magnates, the military orders, and the Church received the lion's share of the land and income of the newly gained territories. With these great lords came many field hands attracted by the higher wages, the climate, and the expansion of the system of transhumance to the grazing lands of the south. The cereal-producing areas of the north were affected by outward migration, and production decreased, causing food shortages and even local famines. The south was not oriented toward cereal production, but toward a wine, olive, and livestock economy. Together with the worsening climatic conditions of the early fourteenth century and the growth of wool exports and the Mesta (the guild of sheep herders granted royal protection in 1276), the decline of northern agriculture dealt a severe blow to the traditional economy of Castile.

An additional problem was changes in land tenure. Although large estates had been formed in northern Castile long before 1248, a good number of free peasants with smallholdings retained ownership of their lands. The conquest of Seville marked the end of this way of life for many of them. After the late 1250s, land in Andalusia was concentrated in the hands of a few *ricos hombres* (rich men or magnates), the military orders, and religious corporations. As a result of the acquisition of these rich new lands, there was a dramatic increase in the wealth of these sectors of society without a parallel increase in the Crown's income. This brought about a political and economic shift in the relationship between king and nobility.

Moreover, as a result of the conquests of Córdoba and Seville, the tribute money paid to Castile by the kings of Andalusia (the *parias*) was drastically reduced. Alfonso X's income from the tribute decreased by around 58 percent from that of his father, Ferdinand III, with most of the lost income finding its way to the coffers of the *ricos hombres.* The magnates' new wealth was not used solely to the detriment of the Crown, but increased wealth augmented their political power. The history of the century after the conquest of Seville turns, therefore, around this conflict between the Crown and the high nobility, with the non-noble urban knights (*caballeros villanos*) as the third side of the political triangle. Pressed by the magnates' new political influence, Alfonso took two key actions: sumptuary laws against the high nobility's unrestricted displays and the granting of tax exemption to the non-noble knights.

In 1255 and 1256 Alfonso X granted new privileges to the non-noble knights of most of the Castilian and Leonese cities, exempting from most taxes those citizens who owned houses within the city walls and who also had horses and arms fit for warfare. As a social category, the non-noble urban knights (there were also rural non-urban knights, that is, well-to-do farmers who maintained horse and weapons, were liable for military service, and received some forms of tax exemption for their services) began to play a leading role in the affairs of the kingdom. Although the non-noble knights dated from earlier centuries and had played significant roles in the military affairs of the Reconquest, the royal privileges of the mid-thirteenth century marked a turning point in the social, political, and economic history of Castile. In less than 50 years the non-noble knights monopolized municipal offices in most Castilian cities, bought most of the land around the cities, and gained control, as they did in Burgos and Avila, of the most important ecclesiastical benefices. In return the king hoped for, and often received, their military support against the magnates and access to the cities' fiscal resources. Moreover, as the non-noble knights gained control of their respective cities, they came into conflict with those below them. Pressured from below by the disfranchised petite bourgeoisie, the non-noble knights welcomed royal interference in the affairs of the cities and, by the 1340s, the takeover of municipal administration by royal officials (the *regimiento*) became a political reality. For a brief period, royal control of the urban centers became one of the most significant gains of the Castilian monarchy, but then the disorders of the late fourteenth century weakened royal control anew.[15]

Territorial expansion in the east took on a different face and yielded a very different outcome. The kings of Aragon and counts of Barcelona had participated actively in the work of the Reconquest. Peter (Pere) II fought with great distinction at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, and the Aragonese–Catalan realm was guaranteed a sphere of influence and expansion in eastern Mediterranean Iberia. In 1238 James I conquered the very rich and prosperous Muslim kingdom of Valencia. In contrast to the pattern followed by the Castilian kings, James allowed Valencia to emerge as an independent kingdom and to be federated with the other two older realms: Aragon and Catalonia. After 1238 the Crown of Aragon was composed of the three entities, and James became the king of Valencia, a distinctive realm with its own parliament, laws, and, eventually, language (a form of Catalan).

Moreover, the conquered Muslim population was not expelled from either the cities of the Valencian kingdom or from its countryside. Most of the Mudejar population remained on the land, carrying on the same jobs as they had done before. The Crown of Aragon thus avoided the deep structural and economic crises affecting Castile. The agricultural productivity of the Valencian hinterland did not diminish radically, nor were the patterns of cultivation and basic fiscal models of exploitation altered. Unlike in the western parts of the peninsula, agricultural production remained at a high level, and the Mudejars preserved a profitable culture of irrigation and husbandry until the final expulsion of the Moriscos (nominally Muslims converted to Christianity) in the early seventeenth century. This does not mean at all that Aragonese and Catalans (who provided the bulk of he Christian settlers) were more understanding and tolerant than Castilians. It means simply that they chose different, and often more efficacious, ways of dealing with conquered people.

The conquest of Valencia, however, marked the end of Aragonese–Catalan expansion in the peninsula. The kings of the Crown of Aragon relinquished their rights to expansion into Murcia, and for all practical purposes looked elsewhere for territorial gains. Aragonese and Catalan expansion to the Balearic Islands, into Sicily (by the early 1280s), and even into the eastern Mediterranean can only be understood in the context of a closing of the Crown of Aragon's frontier with Islam. Indeed, there were Aragonese and Catalan raids upon Granada and frontier conflicts with Castile in the region of Murcia, but these activities paled when compared to the vigor with which the Crown of Aragon moved into other Mediterranean lands.

Valencia's autonomy and prosperity also had unintended consequences. One must trace to this period the slow and inexorable decline of Barcelona. This ancient city remained a populous and important center for Mediterranean trade, but its fortunes began to be slowly eclipsed by Valencia's rising star. In many respects, the Crown of Aragon's conquest of the south had a number of consequences that were diametrically different from those affecting Castile. They can be summarized in a few words. First and foremost, by partially withdrawing from peninsular affairs and seeking areas for expansion in the Mediterranean and Italy, the Crown of Aragon projected itself into the wider European scene and gained access to the impressive cultural revival under way in Italy. But in doing so it ceded to Castile's hegemony in the peninsula. Castile was the stronger of the two realms in terms of population and resources, but in the thirteenth century it was not altogether clear that it could eventually become the core of a developing Spanish nation.

Second, by turning Valencia into an independent realm within the federation of kingdoms comprising the Crown of Aragon, the kings of the Crown of Aragon strengthened the autonomy of the individual realms and probably made impossible any centralization of power in the future. Castile became supreme in the peninsula because it could, as the Catholic Monarchs did, centralize its administration; the Crown of Aragon could not and did not wish to do so. Again and again, the rulers of Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia gave way to local and regional interests to the detriment of royal power. Finally, the vitality of Valencia, its vast agricultural region, its strategic geographical location, and its easy access to North African markets and Mediterranean ports led to its growing importance within the economy of the Crown of Aragon. This meant the slow decline of Barcelona, growing political strife in that city, and growing resistance to royal authority. Barcelona could no longer serve as the economic engine for the entire region. A whole series of other important social and political developments followed from that decline: from the growing enserfment of peasants and the rise of political factions to growing mistrust of royal authority. All of these factors deeply affected the subsequent history of the Spanish eastern kingdoms and played an important role in the story that must be told in the following chapters.