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# *An approach to inequality and social mobility in Northern Castile (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries)*[1]

## 1. Introduction

This works aims to study in greater depth the issue of economic inequality (Carvajal and Casado, 2024; Abarca, 2024) and social mobility in the Duero Valley, based on information obtained in middle-sized towns which, due to their geographical position and socioeconomic structure, offer good examples of the situation during this period. We draw mainly on a large stock of documents housed in Spanish archives and, in particular, on the numerous personal wealth censuses preserved from the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. In addition to more general topics concerning inequality and social mobility, we examine some very enlightening cases related to the economic rise, the early signs of decline – which already began to emerge in the decades 1560-1580 – and the crisis and depopulation that affected the northern meseta in the first half of the seventeenth century. Our aim is to try to quantify and qualify, as far as possible, the growing level of social mobility vis-à-vis level of wealth, and to try to link the trends observed with the social and political tensions of fifteenth and sixteenth century Castile.

## 2. Castile and the Duero Valey

In terms of its geography, the Duero Valley is made up of a myriad of municipalities whose origins date back to the early moments of the Reconquista and repopulation. Together with many small villages – located very close to one another – in the late Middle Ages we find a complex hierarchical urban network (Vela, 1997 and 2021). As well as the principal towns formed by large municipalities (such as Burgos, Valladolid, Segovia, Medina del Campo, Soria, Ávila, Zamora, León, Toro, Salamanca, and Palencia), many of which had the right to speak and vote in the Parliament of Castile, there is also a dense network of middle-sized municipalities. These were towns that in the mid-sixteenth century boasted a population of between 500 and 1000 inhabitants,[2]

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[2] Examples include the towns of Aranda de Duero, Tordesillas, Paredes de Nava, Alaejos, Béjar, Nava del Rey, Becerril, Agreda, Dueñas, Arévalo, Peñaranda, Alba de Tormes, Olmedo, Cuellar, Fuentesaúco, Benavente, Carrión de los Condes, Ampudia, Cebreros, Madrigal de las Altas Torres, Astorga, Castrojeriz, Peñafiel, Monbeltrán, La Alberca, Cisneros, Mayorga, Almazán, Frechilla, Roa, Valderas, Torquemada, Espinosa de los Monteros, Lerma, Frómista and Villafranca del Bierzo.

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located some 20 kilometres apart from one another. Many fell into the legal category of *villas* since most were not episcopal seats. Unlike what occurred in the large towns, the history of these nuclei is not well known. However, the urban network they formed is of enormous importance in terms of understanding the social, political, and economic landscape of Spain between 1430 and 1590; hence, the key role played by the Duero Valley in the history of Spain at the time.

The one hundred and fifty years analysed herein constitute one of the most dynamic periods at the economic, social, and political level in the history of the Crown of Castile and, in particular, of the Duero Valley. Evidence of this is the vast monumental heritage to have survived to the present day in towns and villages. Together with Andalusia, this area became one of the economic pillars of the Hispanic Monarchy thanks to its demographic, fiscal, commercial, and financial contribution – amongst other aspects. Just a few details serve to bear this out. Between 1400 and 1530, Castile's population grew from 3 million inhabitants to 3.9 million, and by 1590 the population stood at around 5.6 million inhabitants (Nadal, 1984). As for the population of Old Castile and León, an area in which the Duero Valley is located, in 1530 this represented 40% of the total population and one third of Spain's population at the time. In addition, at this time the Duero Valley had an estimated population density of 14.85 inhabitants per km$^2$, higher than the Spanish national average and much higher than other peripheral regions such as Cataluña or the Basque Country, and which differs enormously to what we find today (García Sanz, 1994, 53-68). In addition to the demographic contribution, this region was one of the kingdom's principal financial mainstays, since 62.9% of the tax revenue of the Emperor Charles V in 1530 came from Castile – figures well above those of Italy or the Netherlands (Comín and Yun, 2012, 233-266; Casado 2022). Of this amount, the Duero Valley region contributed one third (Ladero Quesada, 1982). Such quantities bear testimony to the wealth and economic weight of the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Economic sectors as a whole in the Duero Valley developed more or less in line with the area's demographic growth. Agricultural development – reflected through the tithes and rent obtained from the land – progressed very similarly. After the 1430s – and indeed slightly earlier – it can be seen how the area emerged from the crisis of the lower-medieval period and how the production of crops and other products expanded. Ploughing new land, organising agricultural land, the growth in wine production, new industrial crops, and the increase in total livestock herds – both transhumant and stable – are just some examples of how this growth in production was achieved during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Ferdinand, between 1475 and 1504. Having overcome the depression that struck in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the 1530s and 1540s and the early years of the 1550s saw enormous growth in agricultural production, reaching levels that would not be seen again until the latter half of the seventeenth century and – in certain respects – even in the nineteenth century. As of the mid sixteenth century, stagnation was to set in, which after 1580/1590 would lead to a major crisis.

This agricultural expansion went hand in hand with a substantial growth in crafts. Together with the major urban textile centres of Segovia and Ávila – which influenced the rural areas around them by carrying out certain tasks through a production system based on supplying domestic orders – there were also various towns and rural centres

that specialised in weaving, and in almost every town there people who engaged in the production of cloths and fabrics. At the same time, in many towns there were other industrial activities linked to leather, metalwork, producing clothes, rope-making, construction, etc. Yet, the most notable area of the economy in the region was the strong emergence of commercial and financial activities. Any understanding of how the Castilian urban network developed must perforce take account of the expansion and growth in many minor towns and villages of small markets and fairs which – spread throughout the year – served as channels for the supply and demand of products, some of which were even sold abroad. These circuits involved a hive of small and medium merchants and even hawkers (regatones), who moved from place to place, when the craftsmen themselves did not. Some of these fairs were more important and attracted people and goods from other regions. Above all of these meeting points were the commercial centres of the towns with their permanent stalls, and which attracted a wide array of clients, and their seasonal fairs. Prominent amongst all of these after the late fifteenth century was the triangle of the General Fairs of the Kingdom; Medina del Campo, Villalón and Medina de Rioseco. Out of these exchange activities emerged an array of professionals in the service sector (scribes, barbers, graduates, doctors, transporters, tavern owners, etc. Together with these activities there were professions linked to finance in the large merchant towns and, in particular in the large market towns, when the major goods fairs became payment fairs and linked up with those in Europe. The spread of these activities shows how in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we are witness to a growth in markets in the region that had never been seen before and that was not to be seen again until the industrial era.

Parallel to this growth in domestic trade, a further example of the major economic boom that took place in the Duero Valley can be seen in the activities undertaken by Castilian merchants and merchant companies in the main European economic and financial centres. Figures from Burgos, Castrojeriz, Valladolid, Vitoria, Bilbao, Laredo, Segovia or Medina del Campo forged powerful merchant colonies in Italy, England, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Portugal, making huge profits and rising both socially and politically (in those countries as well as in Spain). After the early sixteenth century, this growth continued and embraced trade with the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

Andalusia and the Duero Valley were thus the most important and wealthiest regions in Castile and – by extension – in Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Precisely because of their importance, this work seeks to gain further insights into the economic disparities and social mobility in the Duero Valley region, based on the information obtained concerning some of these mid-size towns, since we believe that this explains to a certain extent their historical development. Our aim is to provide an initial general approach, to study and – as far as possible – to quantify social mobility, based on two areas that were representative due to their socioeconomic characteristics (Castrojeriz and Olmedo), since the vastness of the area in question and the disparity of sources prevent us from making any more fine-grained assessment for the time being.

## 3. Sources for studying inequality and social mobility in Castile

As regards the sources, analysing inequality in the preindustrial period is by no means an easy task. In the case of Castile, we do have some interesting approaches for the late seventeenth century and for the whole of the eighteenth century. One source is the tithe books, which have aided in the study of inequality based on agricultural production (Santiago-Caballero, 2011). There is also the mid eighteenth century census record (*Catastro de Ensenada*), which has enabled an in-depth analysis, albeit only for this period (Nicolini and Ramos, 2016). As for social mobility, sources are far more diverse; the sale of nobility titles and municipal posts, procedures for joining the military, conferring titles for lower nobility (*hidalguía*), etc.

In recent years we have been working on a research project, funded by the Spanish government, and which has included a systematic study of new sources for exploring economic inequality that has also enabled us to address the issue of social mobility in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. These are none other than fiscal sources, and in particular, fiscal censuses (*padrones* and *repartimientos*) (Carvajal, Casado, Tello and To, 2024), which have gradually joined the other mentioned sources, such as the tithe books and municipal sources such as record books so as to provide an insight into the groups that formed part of the government and urban oligarchies.

### 3.1 Censuses and *repartimientos*

Sources for exploring inequality and social mobility are based on the same corpus formed by censuses and *repartimientos* since, in general, they share a common basis; they estimate the contribution made by residents of a given area to settle payment of a tax or obligation. This source has been subject to analysis by historians dedicated to fiscal and demographic history, as shown by studies into Seville and its surrounding areas, together with others that look at regions such as La Rioja or the Basque Country for the lower Middle Ages. These works are determined by the availability of censuses, an availability that varies greatly depending on the location and chronology. Medieval censuses and *repartimientos* are scarce and partial, yet as we move into the late Middle Ages the results improve substantially, given municipal and royal fiscal expansion.

With regard to the sources, their diversity in terms of origin, typology and the information they contain should first be highlighted. The range of censuses and *repartimientos* as regards their origin is vast, since drawing up censuses pursued a number of differing objectives; payment of royal taxes – particularly the *servicio* (extraordinary royal tax) – *señoriales* (lay or ecclesiastical taxes) or municipal taxes such as the *sisa*, payment of extra municipal contributions to cover ordinary and extraordinary expenditure or to simply draw up a list of local residents for electoral purposes, such as for municipal posts, etc.

In general, we are speaking of lists that link subjects and quantities. As is well known, each individual who appears in a census represents a «*fuego*» or family unit or household that covers an array of different realities; whole families, widows/widowers, orphans, etc. Types of census are related to the information provided. For example, censuses of goods tend to be linked to a quantification or estimation of wealth, and

censuses of quantities are linked to an amount to be paid, which was normally proportional to the estimated wealth. The most common criticisms levelled at such sources – particularly in the case of censuses that contain financial information – focus on the lack of exemptions, possible concealment of goods, problems quantifying wealth, or on certain individuals who evaded payment. Although information may be only partial, the censuses and *repartimientos* are amongst the best available sources for this kind of study thanks to their consistency, their representativeness and the detailed information provided as well as the possibility of obtaining series in the medium and long term in certain municipalities.

Documentation comes mainly from the censuses included in the legal processes undertaken by those Castilians seeking recognition as nobles and which are housed in the Archive of the Royal Chancellery of Valladolid. Censuses emerged as evidence put forward by those seeking to become hidalgos, since the non-inclusion of the applicant or of their ascendants in a census linked to the *servicio* – from which nobles were exempt – and their inclusion in other censuses, *repartimientos*, extraordinary payments, and so on would provide proof of their status, or that of their ascendants, as residents and would therefore render them exempt as a result of being nobles.

### 3.2 Other sources: tithe books and municipal record books.

Tithe books offer an approach to exploring economic inequality from the standpoint of agricultural production in the Duero Valley region, at least in the mid-sixteenth century, and to assessing differences when acquiring access to land, capital and technology as well as in agricultural workers' ability to market their products and compete in the markets. These books list the tithes received by the Church from farmers or producers, and can be studied in the medium and long term since they were regular and consistent contributions over time. Although they are detailed records, they do evidence certain limitations such as offering an analysis of only one economic sector and one limited population group.

Finding detailed annual tithes or records of all the farmers or direct agricultural producers in sixteenth century Castile proves difficult due to the lack of surviving sources in ecclesiastical and national archives. Nevertheless, our investigation has located valuable sources such as the *Libros de cuentas formados por los mayordomos de pan y vino de la Catedral de Valladolid de los diezmos percibidos*, which are preserved in the Valladolid cathedral archive. These books contain records of the tithes received by the Collegiate, and later the cathedral of Valladolid for the whole of the modern period, although the studies currently in progress focus on the years 1547 and 1602.

The information gathered reflects the amount and type of agricultural products collected as well as the farmers who produced them and the towns and villages to which they belonged. The records of 1547 are the first preserved in this condition and provide key information on the region's agricultural production in the mid-sixteenth century and offer an insight into inequality similar to the work carried out by C. Santiago for the case of Guadalajara between 1690-1800 (Santiago-Caballero, 2011).

Municipal record books are documents which became relatively common in many Castilian towns and villages after the early sixteenth century. They provide an interesting

source which, amongst other issues, enables us to trace growing social mobility by looking at the families who joined the political and administrative elites of their respective municipalities. One such example is provided by the Valladolid municipal record books of the late fifteenth century and during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, or those of the city of Burgos from the late fourteenth century. Given the lack of other sources, such as censuses and *repartimientos*, these record books enable us to observe social advancement following the composition of the *regimiento*, which was the institution that together with the royal representative governed the Valladolid municipal council. A systematic review of these sources shows us how new families joined or how others left an institution where permanence through the transfer of posts was key. Likewise, these records offer an insight into other kinds of municipal posts, positions of power that proved pivotal when wielding influence over a town or village, such as procurators – representatives of the town before the king or queen – *mayordomos* charged with overseeing the municipal treasury, tax collectors or farmers, mayors, etc.

## 4. Economic inequality in the Duero Valley (15th-16th centuries)

Few references are available that offer a deep insight into exactly what happened in the Crown of Castile in terms of inequality in the preindustrial period. The study by C. Álvarez Nogal and L. Prados (2012) offers an initial approach to this reality through the Williamson index, taking into account GDP per worker and the wages of unskilled workers. For the years in question – from the mid-fifteenth century until the late sixteenth century – there are at least three stages in which we find a positive correlation between economic growth and inequality. The first corresponds to the expansion of the Castilian economy between the 1470s and the end of the fifteenth century and which was to coincide with a rise in inequality. The second stage took place in the early decades of the sixteenth century, spurred by the various crises which, together with that of 1503-04, was marked by a stagnation in economic growth and by inequality; and a third expansive phase, which commenced around the 1530s and lasted until the end of the century, and where inequality also grew. The seventeenth century witnessed a divergence between the two. According to the authors, inequality appeared to continue growing, while the weak economic growth that was observed in the last decades of the sixteenth century triggered a profound crisis during the first half of the seventeenth century. Having noted this, it is important to point out that new studies offer certain details that differ from what is set out here, and above all, that there are major differences at a geographical scale, since both the expansive phase as well as the crisis proved to be more intense in regions such as the Duero Valley, whereas inland regions like Madrid or the south, such as around Seville, displayed different dynamics.

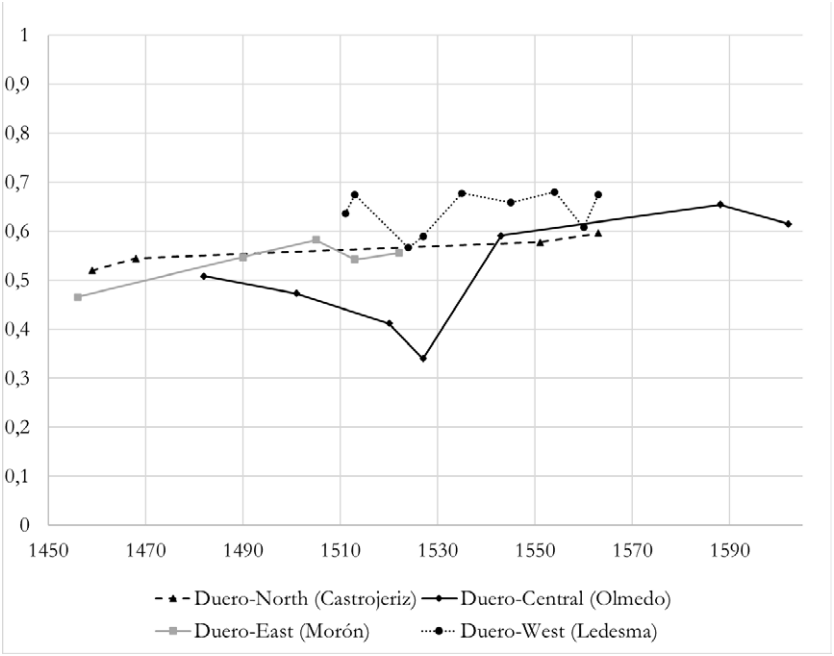
As pointed out, new studies are now beginning to complete this first picture by taking into account the regional factor. The findings to emerge from studies into areas such as La Rioja, the area around Madrid, or the Duero Valley, are helping to profile the trends and, above all, to recognise what were the causes and consequences resulting from the increase or reduction in inequality.

Broadly speaking, current data available in the studies by D. Carvajal and H. Casado (2024) on the central-eastern Duero Valley, by V. Abarca (2024) on the western Duero

Valley, by R. Lanza (2024) on New Castile, and by F. J. Goicolea (2024) on La Rioja, generally concur with what is already known about inequality, although certain particular dynamics, causes and consequences are in evidence. La Rioja shows a sharp increase in inequality over a short period of time. Data from municipalities such as Ojacastro, Arnedo, Santo Domingo de la Calzada or Nájera, whose population stood at around 400 and 500 households, shows growing inequality from the late fifteenth century until the mid-sixteenth century, with Gini indices between 0.39 in Ojacastro (1499), and 0.54 for Nájera (1539). The specific case of Nájera allows us to illustrate – according to F.J. Goicolea (2024) – how the intense mercantile development of the region and the town were linked to the rise of certain families of merchants who grew wealthy thanks to trade and by exporting local products, and also reflects a rise in inequality. As regards New Castile (Lanza, 2024), and in particular the area around Madrid, we also see substantial growth in inequality during the sixteenth century – but which was less intense in the early part of the seventeenth – in municipalities such as Getafe or Chinchón. These towns were home to 450-600 households at the start of the sixteenth century and to over 1000 by the end of the century, thanks to the strong demographic contribution resulting from Philip II's concession of Madrid as the capital of the Spanish kingdom. At the turn of the century, Gini indices stood at around 0.4, and reached around 0.6 by the end of the century. In economic terms, the first half of the seventeenth century was more benevolent in this region, in contrast to the depression that swept northern Castile. As regards inequality, the trend in the seventeenth century differed from what was reported by Álvarez Nogal and Prados de la Escosura, leading us to note a certain divergence between regions in economic terms and with regard to inequality during the seventeenth century.

Focusing on the Duero Valley region, inequality evolved following a similar pattern to the one described for the late fifteenth century and during the sixteenth century. The four regions studied within the Duero Valley (eastern, western, central, and north) witnessed a rise in inequality from Gini indices of around 0.50 during the second half of the fifteenth century to around 0.60 in the mid-sixteenth. It is quite common to see a gradual decline in inequality as the early decades of the sixteenth century advance until the end of the 1530s. This period corresponds to a period of political instability in Castile marked by the succession of Isabel I, urban movements, and conflicts such as the *Comunidades* (Pérez, 1970). After this point, the trend was for inequality to grow until the end of the century, reaching Gini indices of around 0.60-0.70. This was a period of splendour in all areas; economic, social, political, and cultural, and which was reflected in the proliferation of villages, towns with major civil and ecclesiastical buildings, large markets and fairs, etc. Few data have to date been collected on the seventeenth century, although everything would seem to indicate that the crisis which struck the region affected inequality, leading to a reduction, as demographic decline and a fall in production hit towns and villages.

Graph 1. **Gini indices-Duero Valley- (1456-1602)**[3]




At this point, our interest focuses on summing up the factors which explain how the inequality seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries evolved in northern Castile. The factors which allow us to understand the changes that took place in trends can be summed up in; the rise in demography, economic growth – which was in turn driven by increased supply (agricultural and craft production) – and increased demand (a growth in domestic consumption and improved external trade relations), institutional change, and the development of the fiscal state.

Demography was one aspect that played a key role. The population of Castile went from some 3.9 million inhabitants around the year 1530 to 5.6 million in 1600. This increase was particularly evident in Old Cadstile, a region that embraced much of the Duero Valley, and which doubled its population (Nadal, 1984, 74). The increase in population ran parallel to the ever-growing use of land, driven by rising production and which reached particularly high levels of per capita production between 1500 and 1580 (Prados de la Escosura, 2020). This can be clearly seen in the area around Ledesma, whose principal economic focus depended on agricultural activities (Abarca, 2024). Improved agricultural production and the rising population were closely linked to the growth in consumption. Ever-increasing numbers of families inhabited the towns and villages, where the proliferation of markets can be seen as reflecting the rise in demand from families and which, in addition to stimulating the supply-related activities that

[3] Including the towns of Ledesma, Castrojeriz, Olmedo and Morón de Almazán. Sources: Carvajal and Casado (2024), Abarca (2024).

enabled many of them to do business – as evidenced in the case of Olmedo – provided a major spur to craft activities such as textiles, particularly in areas like Segovia or Palencia. A further aspect to take into account is the growth in livestock activities, which was once again linked to the supply of meat as well as to the production of raw materials such as wool, which was key to the growth in Castilian exports. The growth in exporting to major European markets and towns in Flanders, Italy, France or England proved key to boosting the large international fairs and markets in the Duero Valley (Casado, 2003). One clear example of this are the fairs at Medina del Campo throughout the sixteenth century, and in which the increased flow of public and private credit – or the rise of financial activity – bear testimony to this phenomenon which was grounded on an intense process of institutional exchange (Carvajal, 2015 and 2018).

The region's economic boom during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries appears to be linked to the high levels of inequality that could already be seen in the fifteenth century in towns such as Castrojeriz, and which continued to rise in the sixteenth century. There specifically seems to be a connection between the growth in commercial activities – from active involvement in international trade (particularly in wool exports, and including trade in local products) – and rising inequality, driven in particular by the growing wealth of merchants, money-changers, storekeepers, as well as major livestock owners or landowners – many of whom were keen to invest in property in rural areas (Casado, 1987). The rise in domestic markets and the subsequent concentration of major Castilian fairs at Medina del Campo, Villalón, and Rioseco were closely linked to the dynamic observed at Olmedo. Peninsular trade with kingdoms such as Aragón accounts for what was seen at Morón de Almazán, a town located on the border between the two kingdoms. International trade was also pivotal to explaining the increased inequality seen at Castrojeriz, a town linked to long lines of merchant families in Burgos. This connection seems to have remained throughout the sixteenth century, except in the early decades, probably due to the impact of successive crises and conflicts of the *Comunidades* in 1520-1521.

As regards the issue of the fiscal state, finding a clear link to inequality during the sixteenth century proves somewhat more complex. sixteenth century Castile was marked by ever-increasing fiscal pressure, although this was more intense at certain moments. The increase in *alcabalas* and *tercias* (ordinary royal taxes) until the general *encabezamiento* (distribution) 1537 seems clear. At this point, 18 towns that had the right to vote in the Parliament, of which nine were located in the region studied (Burgos, Soria, Segovia, Ávila, Valladolid, León, Salamanca, Zamora, and Toro) managed to have this tax frozen for the following decades. The early decades of the sixteenth century began transforming the *servicio* of the Parliament from an extraordinary tax into an ordinary one. Revenue from the *alcabalas* and *tercias*, together with the *servicios*, accounted for around 35% of the Crown's income in the second half of the sixteenth century (Álvarez Nogal and Chamley, 2014). As pointed out by J.I. Fortea (1997), fiscal pressure by the late sixteenth century never ceased to grow – nor did it during much of the seventeenth (Ucendo, 2008). Added to this were other taxes, particularly those of the Church and the local council, which also grew. As mentioned, it is difficult to find a clear link between this gradual increase in fiscal pressure and inequality. Some peaks in fiscal pressure in the early decades of the sixteenth century and in the 1570s and 1580s do seem to be linked to a stagnation in levels of inequality. However, during the

sixteenth century, they do appear to be linked directly, and during the seventeenth, inversely. What is certain is that much of the tax revenue of the treasury and of the local councils was dedicated to paying off public debt interest – long-term public debt in the case of the monarch and long-term loans in the case of towns like Toro[4] – that were in the hands of those who managed to accumulate capital and who had invested it in assets during the sixteenth century.

The rise in inequality seen after the mid-fifteenth century and during the sixteenth century is related to a well-known phenomenon in later early modern Castile; the emergence of new oligarchies and local elites, particularly after the second half of the fifteenth century (Del Val, 1994 and 1996; Monsalvo, 2024). Through an array of mechanisms, members of these groups managed to rise in terms of social, economic and political recognition in their respective municipalities. Access to the urban *regimientos*, ennobling families, access to government by exercising administrative posts, the creation of primogeniture, promoting religious foundations, creating corporate institutions, etc. are some examples of this vertiginous rise. Growing inequality was also linked to external expressions of luxury and ostentatiousness, and it was these new elites who triggered the rise in the consumption of high added value goods and who enjoyed grand and imposing funerary spaces in order to «live nobly» (Álvarez-Ossorio, 1998-99). This lifestyle was soon to be emulated amongst Castilians and became cause for concern for the monarchy, a concern that was expressed through various sumptuary laws in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5]

All of this leads us to link the increase in inequality to the rise in the most forceful emerging groups in the towns and villages of Castile; merchants, financiers, tax lessors, property owners, landlords, etc. It is well known that such people formed local oligarchies who sought to boost their upward social mobility, giving rise to the appearance of groups such as the «*caballeros villanos*». Nevertheless, at the economic level, it has proved more complex to define these upward movements, beyond what are studies of specific individuals or specific families.

## 5. Social mobility in Castile (15th-16th centuries)

Social mobility in Castile in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries is an issue about which well-grounded knowledge has been available for decades. These processes of upward and downward mobility are well documented and we know that a key factor in this process was access to privileged groups, such as the nobility or military orders, and that other important forms of social advancement included those related to exercising public posts in local government or in state administration, etc. (Marcos Martin, 2022). Nevertheless – and as recognised by A. Marcos – there are other issues that demand further enquiry, particularly vis-à-vis quantifying mobility and its link to social, economic, and political circumstances. Broadly speaking, studies into mobility tend to

[4] *Libro registro de censos del común del concejo de Toro entre 1559 y 1607*. Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid (ARChV), *Protocolos y padrones*, 23, 2)

[5] For example, Charles I legislated on various occasions in an effort to impose certain rules on dress, such as in the Parliament of Madrid of 1551 – request CXXXI. In the Parliament of Valladolid of 1555, the local representatives requested that the rule be relaxed somewhat – request LXXXVIII.

be confined to these groups and to overlook the bulk of Castilian society. There is, nevertheless, agreement amongst specialists in that processes of mobility – both upwards and downwards – did not trigger any major shifts or lead to any questioning of the social system that had been established since the Middle Ages and that was in place during the early modern period.

As regards upward mobility, J.A. Maravall (1979) showed that early modern Castilian society was governed by a «closed system principle»; in other words, the privileged strove to restrict access to their status as far as possible. Given such a situation, society sought its own mechanisms for achieving the much desired social advancement through small gaps in the system, whether through their own means by accumulating wealth or through temporary permissiveness on the part of the king. Such was the case, for example, through the purchase of positions or titles, a process that increased from the time of the Catholic Monarchs up until Charles II (Álvarez Ossorio, 1998-99, 268), and which led to the «de facto ennobling» of those who achieved it.

Prominent amongst this process of ennobling through privilege was access to lower nobility (*hidalguía)*, which was key in the sixteenth century but in which interest waned in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. It is likely that the theoretical benefits of having one's nobility recognised failed to offset the cost of being granted access thereto through a series of tedious legal procedures. We believe that more in-depth research needs to be carried out on this issue in order to provide insights into how important acquiring lower nobility was – and to what extent wealth was a prerequisite for achieving said status – and that further systematic studies are required into upward social mobility mechanisms.

As pointed out, analysis of social mobility through wealth has traditionally been conducted by examining case studies of individuals, families, or groups such as merchants, money-changers, tax lessors, etc. (Carvajal, 2016). Less is known about social mobility processes in intermediate groups, amongst artisans, labourers and other types of subjects. We also aim to progress in this field and to try to quantify social mobility, linking it to the economic situation in Castile at the time. In a context of growing wealth and inequality in Castilian towns and villages, what was happening in terms of social mobility? It is important to learn about those families and groups who were involved in processes of social mobility beyond the classical rise to nobility, military orders or posts in administration.

In this section, we provide two case studies that aim to exemplify what we have thus far set out. The first deals with social advancement by rising to lower nobility in the town of Castrojeriz. The second is based on a study into the town of Olmedo, and which aims to reveal trends in social advancement based on wealth.

### 5.1 Access to privilege: lower nobility in Castrojeriz

The town of Castrojeriz – which was the chief town in the area – is located in the present-day province of Burgos on the Camino de Santiago, which endows it with a strategic importance vis-à-vis its position in the Reconquista and subsequently as a communications hub in the urban network of the Duero Valley. This led to its becoming a mid-sized population nucleus, smaller than towns located in the eastern

part of the Castilian meseta such as Burgos, Palencia, Valladolid, Medina del Campo, Segovia, etc., but with a larger population than towns situated on the Cantabrian coast. Its demographic development may be calculated indirectly through the various censuses that have been preserved, and which were presented as evidence to the *Sala de Hijosdalgo* (Supreme Judicial Court of the Kingdom of Castile) of the Royal Chancellery of Valladolid (table 1). In our case, these are original censuses and copies that – as they themselves show – were drawn up by a team of local appraisers appointed for the occasion and set up by the town scribe and four or more other persons, amongst whom there were commoners and hidalgos. They thus provide an accurate calculation of the personal wealth of each family head, since they were used to establish the amounts to be paid by commoners in royal taxes and by everybody – including lower nobility and clergy – in other municipal taxes. When discrepancies arose, they even approved changes.

Tab. 1. **Taxpayers in Castrojeriz (1448-1563)**[6]

| | Commoners | Lower nobility | Clergy and canons | Poor and unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1448** | 457 | 52 | 47 | 37 |
| **1452** | 551 | | 55 | |
| **1456** | 237* | 39 | 65 | |
| **1459** | 581 | 44 | 79 | |
| **1468** | 668 | 58 | 39* | |
| **1503** | | 54 | | |
| **1504** | | 45 | | |
| **1513** | | 34 | | |
| **1518** | | 41 | | |
| **1519** | | 43 | | |
| **1534** | | 43 | | |
| **1551** | 750 | | | |
| **1557** | 771 | 62 | | |
| **1563** | 823 | | | |
| **1624** | 584 | 15 | | |

*Incomplete

These censuses have yielded 11 *hijuelas* (lists), drawn up from 1448 to 1624, and which cite the names of each member of the lower nobility in the town. Except for those of 1448 and 1452, they also establish the wealth estimated by the municipal authorities for each family head of the lower nobility in the town although, thanks to their position of privilege, they were exempt from payment, at least as regards extraordinary taxes imposed by the king, even though this was not the case when it

6 (ARChV), *Sala de Hijosdalgo*, c. 129, 8, c. 190, 4, c. 608, 7 and c. 682, 15. The lists of 1448 and 1452 are housed in the Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), *Nobleza, Frías*, C.99, D 8-10.

came to municipal taxes.[7] This information allows us to draw certain conclusions regarding social mobility in this lower nobility and with regard to their behaviour vis-à-vis the rest of the town's inhabitants.[8]

Yet, who were these hidalgos? Originally they were the armed lower nobility, ready to serve the king in the wars of the Reconquista. In exchange they were relieved of paying the taxes established by the Castilian monarchy. Likewise, being an hidalgo meant social recognition amongst ones fellow townsfolk, particularly in public acts such as processions, royal visits and membership of certain fraternities. In some places, they also enjoyed the privilege of having certain municipal posts reserved for them, although circumstances here vary enormously and depend on each place, and there was not always a monopoly. In sum, they were the lower rural nobility (Díaz de Durana, 2018 and 2020). Yet, in contrast to what was maintained by XIX century liberals and in some references, although in theory hidalgos could not undertake everyday jobs, such as trading and craftsmanship, the case of Castrojeriz clearly shows a different reality, since there were hidalgos who were merchants, storekeepers, scribes, or artisans. Their increased numbers throughout the early modern period cannot therefore be cited as an example of the «betrayal of the bourgeoisie» or as one of the causes of Spanish decadence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that led to a contempt of productive labour as a result of having opted for a life as a rentier. The issue is more complex, since there were other factors involved that proved to be more decisive.

In the town of Castrojeriz their number varied between 44 in 1459 and 62 in 1557. These figures show how their numbers increased, although they accounted for no more than about 7-8% of the total number of family heads (commoners, poor, hidalgos, and clergy), and even fewer if we also include Jews as well as male and female convent members at the time. These figures are therefore well below those cited by M. Drelichman (2007), who speaks of hidalgos accounting for 34% of the population of Castile. The percentage in Castrojeriz is similar to that of other municipalities in the Duero Valley – the most representative geographical area in terms of population and with the most dynamic economy in the region of Castile; hence, the erroneous conclusions reached by said author.[9]

Did being an hidalgo mean enjoying a comfortable financial position? Did being wealthy mean quickly rising to become an hidalgo? Were there poor hidalgos in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries at a time of strong economic growth and wealth? Or

[7] Taxes levied «by all three states» to pay for repairs to roads, bridges and local council buildings, legal expenses incurred by the town when dealing with other institutions and persons, defence of the town as well as «other necessary things».

[8] The documentation preserved concerning the various legal cases at the Royal Chancellery of Valladolid proves confusing, mixed and is at times incomplete or lacks a date. There is information for 1456, 1458, 1459, 1468, 1503, 1504, 1513, 1518, 1519, 1528, 1534, 1544, 1545, 1551, 1554, 1557 and 1563. In Table 1, only complete records containing information on taxpayers' wealth have been quantified.

[9] The problem with the figures provided by M. Drelichman are the serious miscalculations the author gives for the town of Briones in La Rioja – the basis for the analysis. The author states the number of local residents in 1530 to be 491. This figure is utterly impossible, as it would mean it was as populated as Nájera and its surrounding districts which, according to the fiscal count of the population of Castile made by Charles V in 1527 was home to 327 inhabitants, or Santo Domingo de la Calzada, episcopal seat, with 481 residents. Briones and its surrounding area only had 199 residents, according to said research (Carretero Zamora 2008, 327, 578 and 799).

did this only come later, as reflected by Cervantes in Don Quixote? In the case of Castrojeriz, having an evaluation of the wealth of all the taxpayers enables us to quantify where hidalgos stood on the scale of economic inequality in the town for some of the years (Table 2).

Tab. 2. **Percentage of hidalgos in terms of the percentage of the population according to their wealth**[10]

| | Wealthy | | Poor | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Top 10% | Top 20% | Bott. 20% | Bott. 10% |
| 1456 | 17.60% | 17.50% | 10.20% | 2.90% |
| 1459 | 18.50% | 12.10% | 4.20% | 4.20% |
| 1468 | 18.10% | 21.30% | 3.90% | 1.30% |
| 1557 | 14.20% | 17.30% | 4.70% | 8.30% |

If we look at the concentration of wealth, we see that hidalgos accounted for approximately a sixth of the family heads that made up the wealthiest 20% of the town; in other words, the most powerful, at least in terms of the worth of their estates as estimated by the local council. Within this social group were 17% who ranked amongst the top 10% of the wealthiest residents of Castrojeriz. This confirms the fact that in many instances being an hidalgo went hand in hand with wealth. Yet it did not mean that they had a monopoly on wealth, since many other commoners and certain clergymen – as shall be seen later – were equally as wealthy, or even more so. At the other end of the spectrum there were also poor hidalgos – not necessarily only widows – and whose numbers ranged between 6% of all local residents who were amongst the poorest 20% of family heads. To sum up, being an hidalgo meant social and – albeit partially – political recognition, yet meant nothing as regards their personal wealth, given the wide array of personal situations. The poor hidalgo referred to by Cervantes in Don Quixote in the seventeenth century already existed two centuries earlier.

We now look at the characteristics and development of the social group of hidalgos in Castrojeriz over these two centuries, drawing on their anthroponomy through an analysis of how the surnames and genealogy of certain people evolved over time, thereby enabling us to gain an insight into the social mobility that took place within this privileged social group. Broadly speaking, it can be seen how this lower rural nobility was made up of three types, depending on their origin and economic activity: a) the group comprising families with a military background, some of whom held posts in the service of the Count of Castro (*alcaide del castillo*, *maestresala*, *mayordomo*, etc.); b) the group made up of lineages whose economic base and wealth was grounded on international trade and who had family branches in other commercial nucleuses in Castile, the Netherlands, England, France, and Portugal. At the same time, many of these families

[10] See note 6.

were owners of numerous rural properties and sheep; c) diverse and unknown origins, prominent amongst whom were certain scribes. This diversity did not prevent many of these families from becoming related to one another through marriage.

The 1448 and 1452 censuses are mere lists of the vassals that were drawn up when the Marquis of Villena ceased to be lord of the town (Ruy Díaz de Mendoza took up the position), noting next to the name of each of them their position as hidalgo, commoner, clergy or poor. Around this time, it is important to highlight the notable presence amongst hidalgo families of the Castro (Alonso Fernández de Castro, Fernando de Castro, and Juan de Castro) and Pedro Martínez, who are also cited as knights, and of Alfonso de Castro as *merino* (local officer). All of them were therefore members of the military nobility who served the king or the Count of Castro. These might have been joined by families such as the Sánchez Girón and the Sandoval. Together with these we find Álvaro Daza, who might have been from a different background and who was the first of a long line that wielded power in the town.

The 1456 and 1459 censuses are richer in detail, since they provide us with figures detailing the wealth of all the family heads in Castrojeriz. If we take those who formed part of the wealthiest 20%, we see that the Daza, Castro, and Sánchez Girón remain in the list, but that they are now joined by new wealthy hidalgo families: Gutiérrez, Rodríguez de Palencia, Carrillo, López de la Serna, Álvarez de Miranda, Sánchez de Ubierna, González de Herrera, Bárcena, and Estrada. Yet the most interesting point to note is the presence of Lope Ochoa de la Vega, the first member of a dynasty of local merchants from Castrojeriz with a strong representation in the international wool trade. The Vega family were thus one of the most powerful hidalgo families in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and are buried in the church of San Juan, where they had their own chapel. Theirs is therefore a case of clear social advancement achieved through trade.

Fig 1. **Chapel of the Vega (Castrojeriz)**

Similar examples are Juan de Camargo, Ferrand Gutiérrez de Camargo and the widow of Ruy Gutiérrez de Camargo, who appear as hidalgos in the mid-fifteenth century, although they never figured amongst the town residents with the greatest personal wealth. The Camargo were also a Castrojeriz family dedicated to trade, and this branch might have been related to the Camargo family in Burgos, who were merchants and local council representatives. In the sixteenth century, their descendants continued to figure amongst the hidalgos who had a medium/large fortune and who always held public posts. In contrast, the merchant Pedro de Astudillo, who in 1456 appeared amongst the wealthiest 20% in the town, had not yet managed to gain the title of hidalgo. However, since he does not appear in the following censuses, his descendants might well have moved to Burgos or abroad – lands that offered greater opportunities. The Astudillo family were very powerful throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain, Mexico, Italy, and Flanders (Casado 2021a and 2021b), and are an example of geographical mobility at the time in Castilian towns, wherein new families appeared in the urban oligarchies while others moved elsewhere. In the case of Castrojeriz, the link to the town of Burgos is key since, despite certain rivalries, after 1512 they joined the mercantile corporation (*Universidad de Mercaderes de Burgos*).

A look at the censuses of 1456, 1458 and 1459 reveals how it was not only the hidalgos who controlled the major fortunes in Castrojeriz, since there were others whose trades and positions are unknown to us. In particular, it should be noted how in 1456 a total of 22 clergy – mainly canons from Santa María del Manzano and ecclesiastics from the Church of S. Juan – figured amongst the wealthiest 20% of the town, and represented one third of this tenth, although their presence fell in 1459 (20.7%) and 1468 (8.5%). Nevertheless, judging by some of the surnames, many of these wealthy members of the clergy belonged to some of the town's well-to-do lineages. Gaining control of power in all of its many variations has been a constant throughout history.

The 1468 census displays the same trends, with one group of wealthy hidalgos made up of families dedicated to arms and to the service of the king, together with others linked to trade or unknown activities. Together with these – amongst whom were those 20% with the greatest personal wealth – also appeared four scribes, two weapon-makers, six carpenters, one bachelor and one storekeeper. There were also two local council representatives, who were not hidalgos, and other people whose activity or trade we do not know. One interesting case worth noting is the appearance of the Valle family, through the widow of Gutierre del Valle, who still held a medium-sized fortune. This wealth was increased by the descendants – who were also hidalgos – since at the start of the sixteenth century the Valle family (*Vaille* in Belgian documents) were leading merchants in Antwerp and Bruges, and did much business with the Haro, who financed Magallanes on his first voyage around the world (Casado Alonso 2019). These facts enable us to state that during the final third of the fifteenth century there was relative social mobility, since people dedicated to trade, craftsmanship and public service grew wealthy, without them becoming hidalgos. Indeed, in these years of 1459 and 1468 the wealthiest person in the town was Juan de Castro, son of Juan Martínez Cavallo, a resident of the Barcena district, and not an hidalgo. His origin is unknown, although he was most certainly linked to the powerful family of merchants of the Castros from Burgos, the Castros from Castrojeriz, the Castros from London, and who were also

present in Bruges, Lisbon, and Seville. In contrast to this rise is the disappearance in 1468 of the Daza, who had been the most powerful and wealthiest fifty years earlier; financial ruin or biological extinction?

Fig. 2. C**hapel of the Castro-Mújica (Church of S. Juan de Castrojeriz) with the tombs of Juan de Castro-Mujica I and Juan de Castro-Mújica II**

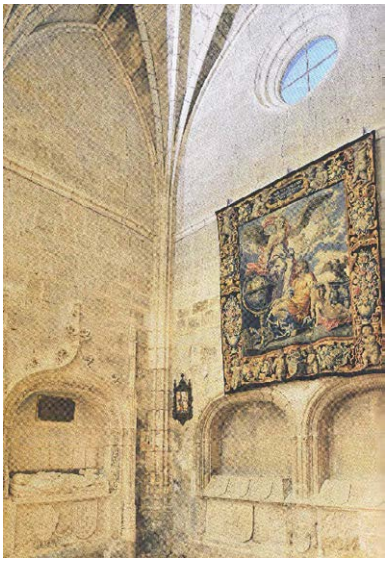
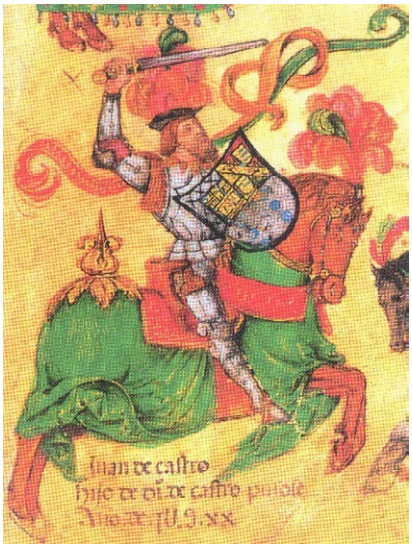


Fig. 3. **Juan de Castro- Mújica I (Libro de la Cofradía de Caballeros de Santiago, Burgos)**



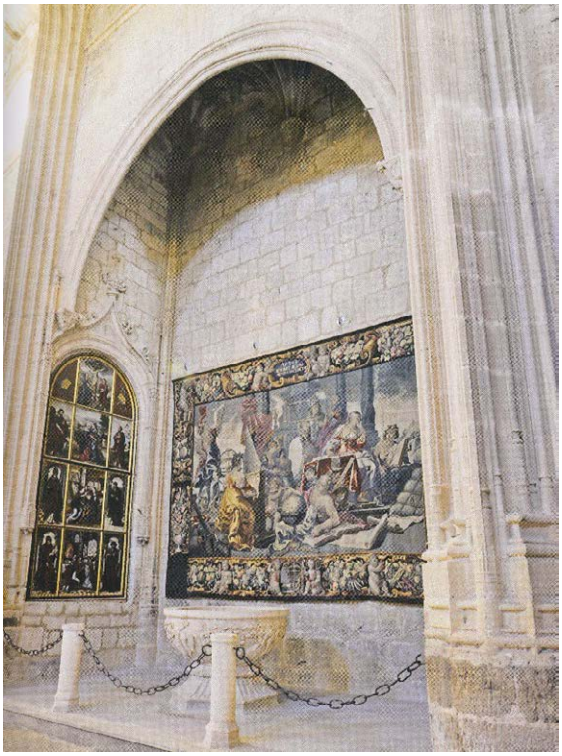
For the first half of the sixteenth century we only have data on the personal wealth of the hidalgos, and so are unable to compare data with the rest of the population from Castrojeriz. In the censuses of 1503, 1504, 1513, 1518, 1519, 1528 and 1534 we see that this privileged social group continues to display major differences in terms of its wealth, although there are notable examples of clear social advancement linked to international trade. In 1503 we see that one of the wealthiest hidalgos was the local council representative Juan de Castro Mújica II. His father – of the same name – was the first in the list of leading international merchants of the Castro Mújica. In the second half of the fifteenth century, he lived – together with his relatives of the Mújica family – in the Netherlands, in Bruges as well as in Antwerp, and was one of the foremost importers of wool and exporters of cloths, canvas, and fabrics, in addition to owning herds of sheep; but he was not yet an hidalgo. The business was continued throughout the sixteenth century by his son and by his grandson, of the same name, with the latter rising to become a Knight of the Order of Malta. In short, the second and third generation belonged to the hidalgos of Castrojeriz, at least after 1503.

Fig. 4. **Tomb of Juan de Castro-Mújica III, merchant and hidalgo of Castrojeriz**

The Castro Mújica were also related to and formed mercantile companies with the Burgos families of Castro de la Hoz, the Castros from London and the Castro Lerma, in addition to doing business with their relatives and fellow countrymen who lived in Antwerp, Bruges, and Castrojeriz (López Gallo, Frómista, Salamanca, Martínez Somero and del Valle). All of them had funeral chapels built in the parishes of the town of S. Juan and San Esteban and in the nearby municipality of S. Cebrián de la Buena Madre, whose manor was purchased by the second Juan de Castro Mújica from the abbey of Santillana del Mar (Casado 2018). Nevertheless, these cases of advancement and social success are not the only ones, as there must have been other similar cases throughout

the first half of the sixteenth century, since the wealthiest hidalgos in 1557 included the Gallo families,[11] the main importers of Castilian wool in the first half of the sixteenth century in the Netherlands. Their relatives in Bruges were amongst the wealthiest residents of Bruges, with one of them – Juan Lopez Gallo – rising to become Baron of Male in present-day Belgium.

Fig. 5. **Chapel of the Gallo, merchants and hidalgos of Castrojeriz**



[11] In the 1448 census, the Gallo are listed as commoners. In 1545 they must have lived in the Barcena district, since the census cites Juan Fernández, servant to Diego López Gallo. In 1551, Juan López Gallo and Alonso López Gallo are listed as commoners in the district of Villajos and Barlada. In these years, they were already leading international merchants and were related to the Castro-Mújica, with whom they set up a company and joined in marriage. However, in 1557 the widow of Sancho Gallo already figured amongst the town's hidalgos.

Fig 6. **Juan López Gallo, Baron of Male, a descendant of the Gallo de Castrojeriz family (P. Pourbus. Groenningenmuseum, Bruges)**

Yet these are not the only cases. The growth of Castilian international trade in the first half of the sixteenth century is reflected through social advancement and even in Castrojeriz by families such as the Barahona, Villegas and Hontaneda – who were also major traders in Spain and Flanders – becoming hidalgos (Childs 1996; Casado 2003; Fagel 1996). As were the Castro Mújica and the Vega, they were amongst the 20% who made the largest contributions in 1557. In contrast, the Camargo family, who were always present amongst the hidalgos, seem to have fallen into poverty during this period.

Likewise – and as pointed out for the previous century – there are examples of extremely wealthy figures who did not become hidalgos. In 1557 the wealthiest figure in the town according to municipal authority calculations was the widow of Bernardino de Padilla, a resident of the Bárcena district and whose profession is unknown to us. According to our censuses, the rise of this family commenced prior to 1459, as for this year we see how the wealthiest figures in Castrojeriz included Ferrand González de

Padilla and his son Ruy González de Padilla, a local council representative, both of whom were residents of the Vallejo district. In 1468 the latter was still local council representative, although he possessed a medium-sized fortune. However, in 1551 the aforementioned Bernardino de Padilla – perhaps the former's grandson – is now listed as the wealthiest, a position he would continue to occupy six years later. The same can be said of the Carrión family of merchants, where the widow of Diego de Carrión – head of the commercial company – in 1563 figured amongst those who were obliged to make the largest contribution, together with other children and relatives, all of whom resided in the Vallejo district, although the latter's contribution was smaller. Similar examples are the Villajos, Francisco, and Juan, families who lived in the Barruelo district, or Francisco Martínez Somero, resident in San Esteban – all of whom were merchants and who figured amongst the wealthiest people in the town in 1551. Yet we find no Padilla, Carrión, Villajos or Martínez Somero amongst the hidalgos of Castrojeriz: might they not have been interested in such a privilege? or was it very costly and difficult to acquire the title of hidalgo by resorting to a plea before the Royal Chancellery of Valladolid, with all that this entailed in terms of expensive legal costs, buying witnesses and inventing family trees?

To sum up, becoming an hidalgo did not go hand in hand with either wealth or social advancement, although many were indeed very wealthy – particularly those who were officers of the king, the Count of Castro or who were leading traders. Yet many others possessed medium-sized fortunes, and a small number were even poor, such as the San Vicente family, who during the second half of the fifteenth century appeared amongst the destitute hidalgos, or the Bárcena family, who were listed as wealthy in 1456, but who fifty years later figured at the lowest level, despite being hidalgos. What we do have solid evidence of in this analysis of social mobility in the town of Castrojeriz are the cases of social advancement, especially in the sixteenth century. These were Castrojeriz families dedicated to international trade, whose rise to wealth enabled them to purchase favours or affirm their origins, since many of them originated from outside the town (Negro, 2010). The economic growth which the Crown of Castile underwent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries no doubt accounts for this phenomenon. What is unfortunate is that we have not yet found censuses from the late 1500s or from the seventeenth century that allow us to ascertain how the profound economic crisis of the 1600s affected social mobility – either upwards or downwards – or whether, in contrast, the controlling groups in the town closed ranks and did not admit new families.

### 5.2. Social mobility and socioeconomic rise in Olmedo

Increasing one's wealth to a greater degree than one's peers is one of the clearest ways to achieve social and economic advancement. Being wealthier than the rest of one's fellow townsfolk meant that one was positioning oneself above the rest. Following on from this reflection, we now aim to examine upward social mobility through the turnover and renewal of the wealthiest groups in the town of Olmedo, as well as the causes and consequences thereof. For this purpose, we draw on the methodology set out by G. Clark (2014), looking at the continuance of surnames amongst local elites, and which is determined by the level of wealth of the families listed in the censuses.

The town of Olmedo is located 40 kilometres south of the city of Valladolid – the institutional and political hub of the period – and scarcely some 20 kilometres east of Medina del Campo – the venue for the main fairs during the Crown of Castile. Its population must have varied between 1,600 inhabitants towards the second half of the fifteenth century and 3,300 well into the sixteenth century. The town was divided into four parishes – Santa María, San Miguel, San Andrés, and Santo Tomé – and its economic activities were based on crop production, livestock, and on small-scale textile craft production and similar items.

Various censuses have been located from Olmedo linked to the payment of the *servicio* – an extra tax levied by the king – or the *martiniega* and the *sisa*, a tax on meat. Of the censuses mentioned, we know that the *servicio* or *martiniega* were drafted based on quantifying wealth by taking into account income and property (Carretero, 1998). Historians who are most familiar with the contribution to the *servicio* through the amounts registers tell us that wealth could be estimated by the enumerators or census-takers with some degree of freedom, and that this could include assets, income and other rights. Yet this is the best estimation available to us. Although there was no common valuation method in the various towns and although the complexity involved when making valuations should be borne in mind – as shown by J.M. Triano (2018) – this does not particularly affect our objective.

In certain instances, the source does present a problem. On some occasions, censuses were reused to register various taxes and we find two or three lists in the same document which – rather than being the same – in fact differ. Mention should also be made of J.M. Carretero's indications (1998) concerning how the social, economic and political conditions involved in drawing up the censuses exerted an influence and how these could affect the drafting of the censuses; failing to take into consideration personal wealth located outside the area where the taxes were paid or wealthy families employing conjugal strategies by marrying their daughters to hidalgos in an effort to secure exemptions.

As regards inequality, our findings for Olmedo show a downward trend for the Gini index, from 0.51 in 1482 to 0.34 in 1527, later growing substantially in the following 16 years up to 0.59 in 1543, and reaching a peak of 0.65 in 1588, and remaining stable around 0.62 in 1602. Data from the seventeenth century show a different picture, given that there is a decline in inequality, with Gini indices falling to around 0.43-0.49 in the years 1659 and 1665. This was no doubt a period of change in Olmedo which, amongst other fluctuations, suffered a substantial drop in population, from over 600 households to 369, reflecting the impact of the crisis in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Graph 2. **Development of the Gini index in Olmedo (1482-1665)**[12]


What lies behind the trends we see in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? The economic and social context that marked the progress of the Duero Valley, as discussed in the previous pages, provides some clues as to the reasons underlying the gradual decline in inequality observed until 1527. This trend coincides with a time of economic development – particularly in agriculture – which most of Olmedo's residents must have benefitted from (Cuervo, 2006). Improvements in production and in the productivity of the land through crops and vineyards coupled with a rise in local and regional trade flows must have had a positive impact on many of the town's inhabitants. Demographic growth and increased local as well as regional demand must have had a positive effect on the town. For example, we know that Olmedo supplied major urban nucleuses such as Valladolid and its butchers (Carvajal and Casado, 2014). In fact, despite the 40 kilometres that separated the two towns, Olmedo's growth led to the need to mark the boundaries between the two in 1512 (Arenzana, 2019).

At this point, the town must have undergone a difficult period that coincided with a stagnation in production and a demographic crisis that may well have triggered the decline in inequality. These hard years may have particularly affected the more prosperous groups, in which a reduction in accumulated wealth can be seen – the wealth accumulated by the richest 5% grew to 25.7% in 1501 before then falling to 18.9% in 1527. As a result, it is understandable that the crisis at this time should have particularly impacted the wealthiest townsfolk, especially bearing in mind that the period witnessed

[12] Sources: ARChV, *Protocolos y padrones*, c. 137, 9; c. 66, 9; c. 137, 16; c. 137, 17; c. 13, 4 and c. 13, 2-10.

major political and social events, such as the town's inclusion in the brief manor of Germana de Foix – which was repealed in 1520 – or the emergence of the *Comunidades* and their impact on such key centres as Medina del Campo and Valladolid (Pérez 1970; García Murillo 1985). The years between 1520 and 1521 in Castile saw the conflict between Charles V and a number of towns and villages, sparking skirmishes and small clashes. Olmedo lay at the geographical epicentre of the movement, in the Segovia-Valladolid-Medina del Campo triangle. We do not know exactly what impact the conflict had on the town, but its consequences were visible throughout the region for many years to come. These were times of social inequality in Olmedo, as reflected in Lope de Vega's famous play «El Caballero de Olmedo» (ca.1625), in which he recalled the murder of Juan de Vivero, in the midst of the struggle for positions in the local council and the struggles amongst the "«confederations of men» (Blanco 1985).

Tab. 3. **Wealth accumulated by the top 1% and the top 5% in Olmedo (1482-1665)**[13]

| | Top 1% | Top 5% |
|---|---|---|
| 1482 | 4.90 | 24.52 |
| 1501 | 5.23 | 25.70 |
| 1520 | 6.68 | 22.30 |
| 1527 | 5.04 | 18.01 |
| 1543 | 12.32 | 36.19 |
| 1588 | 12.37 | 35.14 |
| 1659 | 10.02 | 26.17 |
| 1665 | 7.93 | 21.71 |

After the late 1520s and early 1530s a sharp increase in inequality is evident, reaching levels of over 0.60 by the end of the sixteenth century. This rise clearly coincides with the enrichment of the town's most well-to-do groups, whose richest 5% went from owning 18.9% of the wealth to owning 36.19% of it in 1543 and 35.14% in 1588. This period again coincides with strong demographic and urban growth in the central Duero Valley, as pointed out in previous pages, with the subsequent rise in consumption and supply. In addition to the improvements in agricultural production, other sectors also expanded greatly. One indication of this is the increased numbers of shepherds and farmers as well as residents with a trade and – in particular – those dedicated to crafts. Added to all of these factors is the expansion in the fairs at Medina del Campo in the 1550s and 1560s, when they reached a peak. The «great disorder of the fairs», which first became apparent in these years, augured the end of a period of splendour (Ruiz Martín, 1986). This can be seen in the figures for 1543 and 1588, which are quite similar.

[13] Sources: ARChV, *Protocolos y padrones*, c. 137, 9; c. 66, 9; c. 137, 16; c. 137, 17; c. 13, 4 and c. 13, 2-10.

Tab. 4. **Number of local residents with registered trades in Olmedo (1482-1602)**

| | 1482 | 1527 | 1543 | 1588 | 1602 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TOTAL trades** | 40 | 59 | 103 | 91 | 104 |
| Weaver | 4 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 9 |
| Tailor | 1 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| Shepherd | 2 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 4 |
| Farmer | | 1 | 3 | 5 | 4 |

As regards social mobility, we can provide some preliminary data of our study into upward mobility. For this, we draw on the relative representation of surnames and their persistence rates (b), following Clark (2014) and taking as a reference group the fifth wealthiest part of the town, according to the estimation that appears in the censuses. In other words, we deem there to be upward mobility when we see new families appearing amongst the wealthiest 20% of families and with a surname known in Olmedo. A test was also carried out taking into account the reference group of the 33% wealthiest local residents.

Tab. 5. **Persistence rates in Olmedo (1482-1602)**[14]

| | b (top 20%) | b (top 33%) | Total known surnames |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1482 | | | 251 |
| 1501 | 0.29 | 0.43 | 300 |
| 1520 | 0.26 | 0.40 | 312 |
| 1527 | 0.24 | 0.35 | 287 |
| 1543 | 0.36 | 0.48 | 397 |
| 1588 | 0.27 | 0.25 | 591 |
| 1602 | 0.38 | 0.46 | 553 |

'Total known surnames' corresponds to the total number of local residents registered in the censuses with a known surname and linked to an amount of money.

The data obtained evidence the existence of a relatively high intergenerational turnover in the town. Upward social mobility towards the wealthiest 20% was particularly high until 1527 and between 1543 and 1588, when persistence ratios are lower. With regard to the first period, it should be remembered that it was a time of

[14] Sources: ARChV, *Protocolos y padrones*, c. 137, 9; c. 66, 9; c. 137, 16; c. 137, 17; c. 13, 4 and c. 13, 2-10.

change, of the creation of new local elites who took advantage of the opportunities afforded by a growing economy and a new monarchy under the *Reyes Católicos*. This culminated in the conflict of the *Comunidades* in 1520-21 and also coincided with minor economic crises, such as that of 1503-1504. All of these changes that occurred in barely four decades are sufficient to understand the changes that took place in the town's wealthiest families. The second period with a low turnover corresponds to the period between 1543 and 1588. We again see a fresh increase in social mobility, this time over a longer period – 45 years – and above all due to the town's demographic growth, which went from 449 households to 630, at a time of thriving economic and trade fair activity around the hubs of Valladolid and Medina del Campo. After this point, upward mobility appears to have again slowed down, probably reflecting a gradual stagnation of local society.

With the succession of the various generations in Olmedo, the consolidation of certain surnames amongst the economic elite can be seen. Taking the ten most prevalent surnames in the censuses as an example, we see the appearance of new families and the consolidation of others such as the Íscar, Martín, Pozo, Santander, or Carrasco.

Tab. 6. **Ten wealthiest families in Olmedo according to the censuses (1482-1602)**

| | 1482 | 1504 | 1527 | 1543 | 1588 | 1602 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bermejo | Aguasal | Martin | Velazquez | Hernandez | Iscar |
| 2 | Callejano | Bartolo | Santander | Sepulveda | Iscar | Santander |
| 3 | Castillo | Calderon | Martin | Tanago | Iscar | Pozo |
| 4 | Garcia | Coca | Carrasco | Carrasco | Prado | Carrasco |
| 5 | Garcia | Martinez | Tanago | Pozo | Santander | Prado |
| 6 | Iscar | Portillo | Iscar | Medina | *Salvador* | *Salvador* |
| 7 | Lazaro | | Velazquez | Hernandez | Martin | Carrasco |
| 8 | Martinez | Sanchez | Santander | Martin | Pozo | Hernanz |
| 9 | | Iscar | Calzaradios | | Pozo | Dominguez |
| 10 | Prieto | Casado | Rogel | Santander | | Martin |

Knowing what people's wealth was based on proves somewhat complex, although we do have information about certain townsfolk, such as Francisco de Íscar, one of the local residents who contributed most to the *servicio* of 1543 and whose position had been increasing since 1527. His business was based on supplying meat and other material of animal origin (leather, fat, etc.). The largest contribution to the 1543 census was made by another rising figure – Sebastián Velázquez – whose economic activity seems to have been grounded on the production and sale of wine, amongst other things, in addition to property that he owned in the town (Carvajal and Casado 2024). If we move forward a few years, we know that other leading figures in the town, such as Francisco Carrasco – who appears in 18th position in the 1547 census – move down the social scale. Things

cannot have gone all that well because in 1577 Francisco Carrasco – the elder – is involved in a lawsuit seeking to avoid paying interest on a long-term debt which he had as a mortgage on a house he had transferred to Diego Obrero.[15] Trying to free oneself of a mortgaged good and becoming involved in legal proceedings to avoid interest payment on a debt is not a good sign. This seems to be confirmed in the subsequent censuses of 1588 and 1602 in which his wife – now widow – appears in a middle position in the list. We do not know what then befell the family, although in 1602 we again find a certain Francisco Carrasco, possibly the son of the first in 1577 who was referred to as «the elder», and other local residents with the same surname amongst those who figure most in the census. Were this to have been the situation, we would be looking at a case of advancement, and then hardship following the death of Francisco Carrasco the elder, and then recovery in the next generation.

These examples lead us to an important reflection in the case of Castile when appraising social mobility in terms of wealth, and that is linked to inheritance. The system in Castile establishes that all the sons inherit – except in the case of primogeniture, wherein the eldest son inherited all the goods included under this institution. This is key to understanding a process of constant redistribution of wealth and that would help changes in position in terms of wealth, with most families being affected.

At this point, it is worth making one final reflection concerning the link between inequality and mobility. The case of Olmedo does not offer a clear correlation between the two phenomenon, at least if we take the indicators used. It is true that the continuity amongst economic elites seems to have followed a downward trend – greater upward mobility – when at first there is a reduction in inequality up to 1527. Until 1543, the opposite was true – the increase was linked to the consolidation of certain families. Nevertheless, after 1543 the opposite occurred, and reflected a slight rise in inequality and greater mobility – or less continuity – probably related to demographic factors. After 1588, the fall in inequality is again related to the consolidation of families occupying the uppermost echelons of the town, and reflecting the start of a certain stagnation of society at its highest levels.

What happened in the seventeenth century is still to be studied. We know that the crisis which emerged in the late sixteenth century was very deep during the first half of the seventeenth, and triggered a sharp demographic decline. The data – and what we know from Castilian historiography – allow us to assume that the elites in the late sixteenth century changed little vis-à-vis those of the mid-seventeenth century, although this theory is yet to be verified.

[15] ARChV, *Registro de Ejecutorias*, c. 1403, 20.

Graph 3. **Inequality and social mobility – persistence rate – in Olmedo (1482-1602)**[16]


## 6. Conclusions

It is difficult to establish general conclusions regarding a topic that is still the subject of ongoing research. Nevertheless, we do see the potential offered by studying inequality and mobility – both separately and together – for the case of fifteenth - sixteenth century Castile. We do have sources that can provide us with an initial insight into both issues, particularly through censuses and other complementary sources such as books of tithes, municipal records, notarial *protocolos*, etc. Preliminary approaches to the available data have shown us how both inequality and social mobility have their own connotations, dynamics, causes and consequences. A joint analysis with other phenomena – including economic growth, agricultural production, and so on – will enable us to gain a more comprehensive vision of these phenomena and their link to the economic, social and political dynamics of Castile at a time of both prosperity and crisis, of enrichment and of conflict, and of what proved to be a key period for one particular region – the Duero Valley.

[16] Sources: ARChV, *protocolos y padrones*, c. 137, 9; c. 66, 9; c. 137, 16; c. 137, 17; c. 13, 4 and c. 13, 2-10.

This reflection should be joined by others that have emerged throughout this work and which demand further enquiry through fresh analyses that is currently underway into different regions. For the moment, we can state that from the 1430s until the end of the sixteenth century, the Duero Valley experienced a period of demographic expansion and economic growth which, broadly speaking, triggered a rise in inequality. This is not surprising if we look at other sources and Castilian historiography that have traditionally painted a picture of widespread enrichment but, particularly, of a succession of economic elites – merchants, financiers, and so on. These elites triggered many instances of social advancement through a number of means, two of which stand out in this work: social advancement through wealth – seen in the town of Olmedo; and social advancement by gaining recognition as an hidalgo – a privileged situation that could be acquired by leading families of merchants in Castrojeriz.

Beyond this general trend, the lengthy period studied enables us to see certain shifting trends and the link between the two issues. Changes in Castilian urban elites were more intense after the second half of the fifteenth century and at key moments, such as the accession of Isabel I to the throne in 1474 and the power vacuum that followed her death in 1504. In these years, the social groups of the "nouveau riche" sought to form part of the decision-making bodies in Castilian towns and villages, bolstered by their wealth and by their support for an increasingly centralised monarchy, in contrast to the old lineages (Del Val 1994 and 1997). Conflicts came to a head with the *Comunidades* of 1520-1521 (Perez 1970; Sánchez-León 1998). The solution to the conflict – through the emperor Charles V's policy of attracting said local elites by involving them in collecting and administering extraordinary royal taxes (*encabezamiento*) – partly brought an end to the political conflict and would only re-emerge under Philip II through the opposition to increased taxation (Comín and Yun 2012).

Social mobility and the emergence of new elites continued throughout the sixteenth century through various means, although it appears that this "new" society began to retract in the late sixteenth century due to a major crisis that greatly shook the Duero Valley. After that point, the demographic and economic crisis, the decline in inequality and the difficulty finding new means of social advancement through wealth were to become the tonic of the following decades. However, these are issues which are still to be explored.

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