

# **Economic inequalities and transformations of the rural world in the Iberian Peninsula before and after the Black Death**

by Antoni Furió

Il saggio studia la disuguaglianza economica nella penisola iberica nel tardo Medioevo, dalla metà del XIII secolo alla fine del XV secolo, basandosi su tre casi di studio – Olite, Oriola e Vera – situati nel nord e nel sud-est della penisola. A tal fine sono state utilizzate fonti fiscali, le più comuni in questo tipo di ricerche, ma anche una fonte meno conosciuta e finora non utilizzata per lo studio della disuguaglianza, come i cosiddetti *libros de repartimiento* (libri di ripartizione), che registrano le donazioni ai coloni cristiani durante il processo di colonizzazione che seguì le grandi conquiste del Duecento e, di nuovo, alla fine del Quattrocento. I risultati ottenuti utilizzando diversi indici di misura sono contestualizzati e confrontati con quelli disponibili per altre località della penisola allo scopo di offrire una visione d'insieme.

This article studies economic inequality in late medieval Iberia, from the mid-thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century, based on three observatories – Olite, Oriola and Vera – located in the north and southeast of the peninsula. To this end, we have used fiscal sources, the most common in this type of research, as well as a lesser-known source that has not previously been used to study inequality: the so-called *libros de repartimiento* (distribution books), which record the allocations made to Christian settlers during the colonization process that followed the great conquests of the thirteenth century and again at the end of the fifteenth century. The results obtained from the various measurement indexes are contextualised and compared with those available for other sites in the peninsula in order to provide an overall view.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XV, penisola iberica, registri fiscali, *repartimientos*, disuguaglianze economiche.

Middle Ages, 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Iberian Peninsula, fiscal sources, distribution books, economic inequality.

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## 1. Introduction

The economic and social inequalities in the European countryside around 1300 were a very visible reality, not only in the relations between lords and peasants or between town and country, but also in the internal differences between the peasants themselves.<sup>1</sup> Referring to England, Rodney Hilton argued that the division within the peasantry between “a wealthy minority, a solid middle peasantry and a significant proportion of smallholders” is already readily apparent in the Domesday Book of 1086.<sup>2</sup> The Iberian sources also testify to these internal differences from the moment there are sources that allow us a glimpse inside the peasant world.<sup>3</sup> And this has been the case since the early Middle Ages, when in the peasant communities of the north of the peninsula, in both the east, Catalonia, and the west, the kingdom of León,

<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been carried out in the framework of the research projects PID2021-120838NB-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by “ERDF A way of making Europe”, by the European Union, and CIPROM/2022/46, funded by the Generalitat Valenciana.

<sup>2</sup> Hilton, “Inequality among medieval peasants,” 272. In his opinion, the stratification of the medieval peasantry could not only be attributed to commercialisation, to the markets in land and agricultural products. Long before that, a great dividing line of the medieval peasantry was that which separated the free from the unfree, which did not always coincide with that between the rich and the poor. But many other elements and in particular the complex interplay between land availability, technical progress, inheritance and endowment customs, demands for rent and tax, and the peasants’ capacity to resist must also be examined. For the British Marxist historian, “the relative strength of these various factors changed considerably during the medieval period, especially between 1300 and 1500 circa, when the land/labour ratio shifted dramatically”, with two main consequences for the peasantry: more good land became available and the rent burden on holdings diminished. All this in turn had important effects for the internal stratification of the peasantry, with the considerable reduction in the number of smallholders, the strengthening of the middle stratum, and with the rich peasants’ improvement of their position – although not as consistently as the middle peasants.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to written sources, in recent years historians have increasingly turned to archaeology to address the question of social inequality within early medieval peasant societies through the study of materiality and in particular household goods within the context of the village. An ‘archaeology of the peasantry’ has thus developed, in particular for the central part of Iberia between the seventh and the tenth centuries, which has made it possible to reveal the hidden inequalities in the presence of significant burials and funerary rituals, consumption patterns, settlement hierarchies, types of diet, craft production (the discovery of prestigious objects – e.g., rings and brooches – in households or in burial grounds is regarded as “an indicator of elites and territorial aristocracies, establishing an identity between portable wealth and social status”), forms of exclusion and participation (the presence of domestic slaves and of subservient groups) within the peasant communities. The material record allows us to detect the existence of important internal social hierarchies of a high class of peasants, of local leaders who play a leading role in the relationships and the conflicts with regional monasteries and other external agents. See in this respect Tejerizo *et al.*, “Social inequality and household,” and the two books edited by Quirós, *Social Complexity* and *Social Inequality*. In his conclusion to the latter volume, Chris Wickham insists not only that villages were far from homogeneous – they were internally differentiated – but also on the complementarity of both types of sources: “the archaeology and the documentary record in this context tell us quite analogous things, and if both are tackled with sufficient subtlety, there does not have to be (as there often is) an imbalance in the sorts of information each can give us – for inequality has a very material element in almost all cases, and is thus visible archaeologically. We can use both sets of data in similar ways, that is to say, in dialogue”: Wickham, ‘Conclusion.’

and even in Navarre, one finds several mentions of *boni homines* or *probi homines*, a small group of men who, in addition to personal fortune or wealth, exercised a kind of authority and influence over the rest of the inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> If these *probi homines*, these local elites,<sup>5</sup> occupied the vertex of the social pyramid, the base consisted of a majority of free peasants, and below that, a significant percentage of slaves. Indeed, the first major demarcation line in the peasant world around the year 1000 was that separating the free from the unfree.

Beyond legal differentiation, which persisted until the end of the Middle Ages, e.g., in Catalonia with the serfs called *de remença*,<sup>6</sup> economic inequalities widened between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries with economic growth, the commercialisation of the economy, a partible and egalitarian inheritance system and the dynamism of the land market.<sup>7</sup> The more the economy grew, the wider the gap between rich and poor in the rural world became, even among the peasants themselves. The rich got richer, and the poor poorer, as attested by the documentary sources of the time, both fiscal and notarial, which show the concentration of wealth in a few hands. For the earliest periods, particularly the early Middle Ages, historians relied mainly, as we have seen, on archaeological and material sources for the study of inequality. But

<sup>4</sup> The first expression is already documented in the tenth century, to be progressively replaced by the second in the twelfth century. Both terms initially alluded to persons of acknowledged rectitude and moral authority, with an important role as local arbitrators and in the internal systems of conflict resolution, to become advisors to the *veguer/vicario* or the *batlle* (bailiff) of the village, both in the judicial and administrative spheres. Bowman, *Shifting Landmarks*; Carlé, "Boni homines;" Davies, "Boni homines;" Estepa, "Poder y propiedad;" Font, *Estudis sobre els drets, passim*; Lopetegui, "Conflictos y pleitos;" Luis, "Lugares de reunión;" Sabaté, "Ejes vertebradores;" Turull, "Nuevas hipótesis."

<sup>5</sup> It is worth reproducing the profile of the elites outlined by Wickham by synthesising the different contributions on North-Western Iberia gathered in the book cited above: they "could have – and they normally had – more land [...], and thus more wealth, which they could and did display [...] they could have public positions, as figures in public courts such as [...] *vigarii*; they could be priests, and/or could control the local church; they could be clients of kings, powerful churchmen, aristocrats; sometimes they were actually local bailiffs for external landowners of that type. They often were all these things at once, and in that case we can assume that they really were locally dominant; that could in some cases be a way to move to the next step, in which they became small-scale lords in their own right, although that tended to be a development of the century or so after 1000, in the world of castles and signorial/señorial powers [...] Villages do not have to be rich – in anything – to be internally unequal; local élites simply have to have access to more things, and less easily-available things, than their neighbours. And they visibly did": Wickham, "Conclusion," 357-60.

<sup>6</sup> *Remença* in Catalan or *redimentia* in Latin was the ransom that peasants had to pay to their lord in order to be able to leave the land, which equated their situation to that of serfs. It was widespread mainly in the north-east of Catalonia and was not abolished until 1486. See Salrach "Orígens del problema remença;" Freedman, "Origins of peasant servitude;" Feliu, "El pes econòmic;" To Figueras, "Servitude et mobilité paysanne;" Lluch, "Els remences."

<sup>7</sup> Sesma, *Transformación social y revolución comercial*; Sesma, Laliena, *Crecimiento económico*; Laliena, "Le marché de la terre" and *Siervos medievales*; García de Cortázar, "Crecimiento económico;" Furió, "El mercado de la tierra," "Reproducción familiar" and "Producción agraria, comercialización;" García, "Sistemas familiares y práctica sucesoria" and "Igualdad hereditaria;" García-Oliver, "L'expansió (1200-1350);" To Figueras, "Una economia comercialitzada;" Pacheco, "Familia y sucesión;" Godoy, "Crecimiento agrario y explotaciones campesinas."

from the thirteenth century onwards we have written sources, both fiscal, in particular the wealth registers recording the assets of each taxpayer in order to calculate the taxable base, and notarial, namely the *post-mortem* inventories providing very detailed lists of the movable and immovable property of the testators who had just died. I must say, however, that unlike tax registers, which indicate the value of each asset, since their purpose is to know the total wealth of each taxpayer, *post-mortem* inventories do not include the value of registered assets. Only if they are accompanied by auctions can we know their price.<sup>8</sup>

In general, historians use tax sources to study differentiation and quantify inequality, particularly wealth registers, which are very similar in north-central Italy, southern France and the Iberian Peninsula, where they are known as *estimi*, *livres d'estimes*, *compoix* and *cadastres*, *llibres d'estimes*, *valies* and *manifests* or *padrones de riqueza*, respectively.<sup>9</sup> All of them, as well as the tax system that inspired them, are part of the same fiscal culture that was widespread in north-western Mediterranean countries, a fiscal system based on a direct proportional tax on each taxpayer's wealth, which required first and foremost the knowledge of assets and their fiscal assessment. The registers drawn up to ascertain the wealth of taxpayers and calculate their taxable base detail the assets of the inhabitants of each local community, both movable and immovable, while the tax censuses (*llibres de la peita* in the kingdom of Valencia) show how much they paid. This has made it possible to divide the population into deciles (usually ten), to calculate how much each decile had (in particular, the top 10% and even the top 5% and the top 1%) and to establish the Gini coefficient and other similar indexes, such as the Theil and Palma indexes.<sup>10</sup> For Iberia, these wealth registers are generally available for the late Middle Ages, from the fourteenth century onwards. Exceptionally, however, we have two registers from the second half of the thirteenth century (1244 and 1266) for the Navarrese locality of Olite, published more than forty years ago.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is possible to use other types of sources, of a non-fiscal nature, and to go further back in time. I refer mainly to the so-called *Llibres de repartiment* (in Catalan) / *Libros de repartimiento* (in Spanish), that is, 'distribution books', which record the allotted plots of land distributed to the settlers who went on to colonise the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula, taken

<sup>8</sup> Moreno, "Els inventaris *post-mortem*;" Almenar, "Los inventarios *post mortem*;" Villanueva, Navarro, "Subastas y tasaciones de bienes."

<sup>9</sup> Abbé, *Estimes, compoix et cadastres*; Furió, "Avant le cadastre;" Morelló, Turull, "Estimes-manifests;" Rigaudière, *De l'estime au cadastre*; Smurra, "Fiscal sources: the 'Estimi'."

<sup>10</sup> It is probably Guido Alfani ("Economic inequality") and his team who have best and most finely applied these tools, in particular the Gini coefficient and the Lorenz curve, to the study of inequality in medieval and early modern Europe. For the Iberian Peninsula, see Furió *et al.*, "Measuring economic inequality;" García Montero, "Wealth inequality" and Morelló *et al.*, "A study of economic inequality."

<sup>11</sup> Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

from the Muslims. To better understand the process and the documentation it generated, it is worth making a comparison. Just as the Norman Conquest marks a turning point in the medieval history of England, the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval centuries is marked by the so-called *Reconquista*, the southward expansion of the Christian kingdoms of the north. To make the conquest irreversible, the military occupation was followed by the settlement of Christian immigrants who obtained the lands confiscated from the Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

The process of population transfer from north to south, from Galicia, Portugal, León, Castile, Navarre, Aragon and Catalonia to the Alentejo, Algarve, Andalusia, Murcia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, also had important demographic and social consequences. Unlike much of Western Europe, in the thirteenth century Iberia was not an overpopulated and demographically saturated territory; the move southwards acted as a safety valve, an outlet, while affecting the land/labour ratio. Land was abundant, as much of the peninsula, especially the central plateau, was empty and sparsely populated. And in regions conquered from the Muslims, cultivation was essentially reduced to irrigation, leaving large areas of dry land virtually uncultivated, while others were mainly dedicated to livestock farming, particularly after the reduction of the labour force that followed the Black Death. It must be insisted that, contrary to the claims of Robert Fossier and other historians for the core of Western Europe, the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century was not a full world (*un monde plein*) whose population growth had peaked, and therefore the neo-Malthusian explanations about the end of growth and the consequent crisis are not applicable. Iberia is, indeed, a good observatory to disprove these theses.

## 2. *Three case-studies: Olite (13<sup>th</sup> c.), Oriola (14<sup>th</sup> c.) and Vera (15<sup>th</sup> c.)*

For the purpose of this article, three observatories have been used, from the north to the southeast of the peninsula, at three different chronological moments: Olite, located in the middle of the kingdom of Navarre, in the mid-thirteenth century; Oriuela/Oriola, first in the kingdom of Murcia, within the Crown of Castile, and later incorporated into the kingdom of Valencia, in the Crown of Aragon, at the beginning of the fourteenth century; and Vera, first in the Nasrid sultanate of Granada and conquered and incorporated into Castile at the end of the fifteenth century (Figure 1).

The first one, Olite, seems to have been a Visigothic foundation – perhaps on an ancient Roman *oppidum* – in 621, as a fortification against the

<sup>12</sup> Among an abundant bibliography, see among others Virgili, *Conquesta i feudalització*; Torró, *El naixement d'una colònia*; González, “Colonización agraria;” Jover, Soto, “Colonización feudal.” On the *repartiments* in the Crown of Aragon, Guinot, Torró, *Repartiments*.



Figure 1. *Economic Inequality in Iberian Peninsula: case-studies (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.)*  
 Source: elaboration of the author.

*Vascones* (ancestors of the present-day Basques) occupied by the Muslims for three centuries, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, and documented as a modest village (*almunia*) of the Christian kingdom of Pamplona in 1086. It became more important as the border with Islam moved southwards; it was provided with a wall and obtained municipal laws (*fuero* of 1147) granted by royal privilege which favoured the installation of Frankish settlers from the other side of the Pyrenees. Proof of its growing prominence is the construction of a fortress in the thirteenth century, converted in the following two centuries into an imposing castle and one of the favourite residences of the kings of Navarre. In the mid-thirteenth century, it had more than a thousand families and, like other towns in Navarre, it enjoyed a certain fiscal autonomy that allowed it to collect direct taxes (*tailles*), attested to in Olite (1244), Estella (1258) and Pamplona (1287), the amount of which was calculated according to the wealth of the taxpayers (*por sueldo et por libra*).<sup>13</sup>

As for Oriola, although its foundation by the Romans is debatable, there is no doubt of its existence in Visigothic times, since its *dux* Teodomir surrendered the city to the Muslim conquerors in 713. Five centuries later, in 1243, it would be conquered again, this time by the Christians, and incorporated into the kingdom of Castile. Sixty years later, in 1304, it passed into the Crown of

<sup>13</sup> Carrasco, "Fiscalidad y finanzas."

Aragon, annexed to the kingdom of Valencia, in which it would form a governorate of its own. Its population at the beginning of the fourteenth century, which is the time that interests us in our analysis, would also have been over a thousand hearths or heads of families (not inhabitants). Finally, Vera, near to which was located the ancient Punic and Roman colony of Baria, abandoned in the sixth and seventh centuries, and whose territory formed part of the Visigothic duchy of the aforementioned Teodomir of Oriola, was under Muslim domination for almost eight centuries, until it was taken by Ferdinand the Catholic in 1488. The approximately 600 residents who lived there before the Christian conquest were replaced by only 120 colonists, mostly from the neighbouring kingdom of Murcia, although some of the expelled Muslims were resettled in a nearby village, Antas, and used as labourers. Almost thirty years later, in 1516, in order to boost the numbers of the population, a new *repartimiento* was carried out, and the following year there were 152 neighbours or families. However, a powerful earthquake in 1518 killed between 140 and 150 people and destroyed all the houses (about 200), many to the foundations, forcing the city to be rebuilt.<sup>14</sup>

Fiscal sources have been used for the first case, while for the other two the respective books of *repartimiento* have been employed. For the first observatory, the town of Olite, three tax records from the mid-thirteenth century have been preserved, which are exceptional not only for the town itself but also for a large part of Western Europe, where, save for north-central Italy and Languedoc, there is no evidence of such old fiscal documents. Regardless of whether the fiscal system, royal or municipal, was based on direct or indirect taxes or a mixture of both, varying from one city to another, the former could be capitation taxes for which everyone subject to them had to pay exactly the same amount of money, or proportional to their wealth. For this it was necessary to know the assets of each taxpayer and to calculate their economic value. The assessed value of a taxpayer's total assets constituted the taxable base on which the tax was levied, or on which the tax burden imposed on a town or a village was distributed among all its inhabitants. Outside Italy, this system, known as *per solidum et libram*, is documented in the towns of Languedoc from the mid-twelfth century, in northern France from the end of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and in Catalonia from the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In Navarre, it was also at the beginning of the thirteenth century when some royal privileges (*fueros*) established that the *pecha* or lump sum – soon to be called *talla* – assigned to a town or council was to be distributed in proportion to the movable and immovable property of each inhabitant. The three fiscal documents that have been preserved for the Navarrese town of Olite, a register of estimates of assets and two tax

<sup>14</sup> Luque de Haro, Caparrós, *La Tierra de Vera*.

<sup>15</sup> Rigaudière, "Les origines médiévales;" Turull, "El impuesto directo."

registers with the amount to be paid by each taxpayer, also date from the middle of this century.

The oldest of the three, dated 1244, is entitled *Libro de cullita de toda la villa III meallas por libra*<sup>16</sup> and contains the amounts to be paid by each inhabitant – a total of 1.098, grouped by quarters and streets. The second, from 1264, has a similar structure, although the taxpayers – in this case 1.092, although it does not seem that the book is complete – are not ordered topographically. And the third, also from 1264, consists of 1.109 entries, grouped by quarters, each with the inhabitant's name, the list of assets – movable goods (including capital, credits, merchandise, livestock, draught animals, work tools, furniture, clothes, jewellery and precious objects), houses, farmyards, threshing floors and land – that he owns or declares, the estimated value of each one and the sum of all the amounts consigned.<sup>17</sup> The total value of land (irrigated land, dry land, vineyards, pastures, orchards) represents 43,26% of the declared assets (compared to 24,76% for movable goods and 31,98% for urban real estate), and constitutes the economic base of most taxpayers and practically all of them own at least one plot of land.<sup>18</sup>

Based on these two fiscal registers,<sup>19</sup> Table 1A distributes the taxpayers of Olite into ten deciles, from lowest to highest level of wealth, for the years 1244 and 1264.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The *mealla* is half of a *dinero*, so a tax of 3 *meallas* per *libra* (pound; one *libra* contained 20 *sueldos*, or 240 *dineros* or 480 *meallas*) represented a levy of 0,625%.

<sup>17</sup> The three texts were edited by Ricardo Ciérbide and studied in their economic and social aspects by José Ángel Sesma, who warned of the problems presented by the source – from the exempt population to the extent of fiscal fraud – which are general to this type of document, and which must be considered by the historians who use them. Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*, 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> In his analysis of the document, Sesma divided the taxpayers into ten wealth groups, from those who had no assets to those who had property worth more than a thousand pounds, and calculated the percentage of the total wealth that corresponded to each, basically grouped into five broad categories: the poor (those without assets or valued at less than 5 pounds): 11,26% of taxpayers with only 0,24% of total wealth; low fortunes (between 5 and 25 pounds): 26,85% of taxpayers and 6,65% of total wealth; middle fortunes (between 25 and 100 pounds): 44,14% of taxpayers and 40,2% of total wealth; high fortunes (between 100 and 500 pounds): 16,12% of taxpayers and 45,13% of total wealth; the rich (over 500 pounds): 0,54% of taxpayers and 7,65% of total wealth; to which must be added 1,08% of taxpayers whose assets were not valued. Ciérbide, Sesma, 89-97.

<sup>19</sup> In his detailed analysis of the structure of property in Olite, distinguishing between the different types of assets, Sesma uses the wealth register of 1264. On the contrary, in my study I rely on the two tax registers of 1244 and 1264, which only contain the overall amount to be paid by each taxpayer for all his assets. The difference in the use of one or the other source is because the purposes of the two approaches are also different. For the study of ownership, it is necessary to rely on wealth registers, while inequality can be analysed from tax registers.

<sup>20</sup> For ease of calculation, all amounts – which in the documents are expressed in *sueldos*, *dineros* and *meallas* – have been reduced to *dineros*.

Table 1A. *Distribution in Olite (13<sup>th</sup> c.): deciles*

Deciles	1244		1264	
	Tax burden in <i>dineros</i>	%	Tax burden in <i>dineros</i>	%
1	503,55	1	325,50	1
2	1.270,45	2	844,50	2
3	2.080,65	3	1.429,65	3
4	2.961,85	4	2.133,15	4
5	3.974,25	5	2.979,95	6
6	5.337,55	7	3.898,15	7
7	7.006,20	9	4.997,00	9
8	9.420,90	12	6.737,80	13
9	13.917,00	17	9.340,95	18
10	33.744,10	42	20.043,65	38
Top 5%		10,76		25,67
Top 1%		28,30		10,31

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

And what Table 1A shows is serious inequality: two deciles, the highest, nine and ten, own more than half of the total wealth (59% and 56%), while the lowest own just 6%, and the middle ones, four to eight, own only a little more than a third of the total. There is therefore no substantial and solid middle stratum, and the lower strata are very poor. Most of the wealth is concentrated in the top two deciles, and even the top 5% accumulate more than a quarter of the total. Next, Table 1B shows the number of taxpayers, the total tax burden, the average tax burden, the median tax burden, and different indexes both to test the proportionality of the fiscal system and of the data provided by the tax lists and to measure inequality.<sup>21</sup>

Table 1B. *Taxpayers, tax burden, indexes of inequality in Olite (13<sup>th</sup> c.)*

Year	Ta- xpayers	Total tax bur- den	Ave- rage tax bur- den	Me- dian tax bur- den	Fiscal dis- socia- tion	Top 10 %	Bot- tom 50 %	Q3/ Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1244	1.063	80.216,5	75,46	44,5	0,29	42	15	6,0	0,561	0,0849	4,9504
1264	1.067	52.730,3	49,42	32,5	0,25	38	16	6,5	0,532	0,0762	4,2351

Note: tax burden in *dineros*.

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*.

<sup>21</sup> The number of taxpayers does not coincide exactly with those recorded in both registers, because entries containing no values and entries for juridical persons have been excluded; only natural persons have been considered.

Twenty years separate the two registers, in which time the metrics do not seem to have changed much. The number of taxpayers is practically the same, 1.060, although the tax burden is different in each year, and therefore both the average and the median are different, but this does not matter for our purposes here, as it is not taxation but inequality that is being analysed. Also different, although not much, are the results of the different inequality measures used derived from the two tax lists. But before examining them, it is worth considering the accuracy of the source in precisely capturing the diversity in wealth. Remember that assets were declared by their owners and assessed by local tax officials, who, as Thijs Lambrecht and Wouter Ryckbosch point out for the southern Low Countries in the fifteenth century, might have preferred “rough statements of worth [...] and probably much more pragmatically feasible, rather than very precise measurements of wealth based on actual quantitative data”.<sup>22</sup> The tax was in principle proportional to the worth of the taxpayers’ assets, and each one had to pay a levy of 3 *meallas* per pound, i.e., a rate of 0,625%. But this does not necessarily mean that the system was entirely proportional or that the tax sources reflected differences in wealth perfectly. In the Iberian Peninsula and other European regions, taxpayers were clustered in fiscal categories (less than ten or even five in small communities and between twenty and twenty-five or even more in larger towns and villages in the southern Low Countries), in order to better reflect differences in wealth, and all taxpayers in the same category paid the same amount. Lambrecht and Ryckbosch have gone a step further by calculating an index of fiscal dissociation in order to test the extent to which late medieval fiscal data capture income diversity in a population. “This index expresses the ratio between (1) the number of fiscal categories used by the tax collectors, and (2) the number of taxpayers”. The result is always a value between 0 and 1, where 1 represents a situation of low fiscal clustering and high fiscal dissociation, and that would mean that the fiscal categories designed by the tax collectors have a strong tendency to capture income/wealth variation, while a value closer to 0 would indicate a greater degree of fiscal clustering, since more taxpayers with presumably larger variation in actual incomes would have been grouped in the same fiscal categories.<sup>23</sup> The more tax categories, the more accurate the results would be, although in general large settlements would be characterised by lower fiscal dissociation ratios (0,09 on average versus 0,15-0,36 in smaller communities, in the examples reported by both authors). In Olite the fiscal dissociation index was 0,29 in 1244 and 0,25 in 1264. These figures are close to each other and consistent with the inequality statistics shown in Table 1B.

The measurement most used in inequality studies is the Gini coefficient, which allows for both spatial and temporal comparison with other localities

<sup>22</sup> Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, “Economic inequality.” I would also like to thank David Carvajal and Pere Verdés for their helpful discussions in this respect.

<sup>23</sup> Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, 211.

and other chronological points in time so that long-term trends can be reconstructed. Unfortunately, only the two tax lists mentioned above have been preserved for Olite, which limits the comparison to a short period of 20 years during which the Gini coefficient fell slightly from 0,561 in 1244 to 0,532 in 1264. Both their value and the trend they reflect appear strongly correlated with other measures of inequality. Firstly, the share of both the top 10% and the bottom 50%, and secondly, the ratio between the third quartile (Q3) and the first quartile (Q1), which makes it possible to overcome some problems associated with the Gini coefficient, which is insensitive to changes in the internal differences in the lower-middle strata of the population. In Olite we find relatively high inequality indexes (Gini above 0,5) with relatively high shares of the top 10% (the upper stratum, which owned 42% of the wealth in 1244 and 38% in 1264) and low shares of the bottom 50% (the poorest half of taxpayers, which owned only 15% and 16% of the wealth, respectively), while the relatively high Q3/Q1 ratios (4,1 in 1244 and 4,4 in 1264) are indicative of large differences within this part of the fiscal population, mirroring the inequality pointed out by the other two indicators.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the Gini coefficient, the Theil index is not a relative measure that can easily be compared across different distributions – it does not vary within specific boundaries, like 0 and 1 in the cases of Gini – and its interpretation is not intuitive, but its usefulness lies in its ability to correct the potential bias attributable to the wide range of variation in the number of taxpayers surveyed. It assesses to what extent the distribution deviates from perfect equality – no differences between taxpayers – by measuring the ratio between each data point and the mean of the distribution, multiplied by its natural logarithm. It thus returns a figure between zero and infinity, whereby a higher number stands for more inequality and the maximum is defined by the size of the population (i.e., the natural logarithm of the total number of observations). Measured with the Theil index, inequality in Olite was 0,0849 in 1244 and 0,0762 in 1264, showing a slight decrease that follows and confirms the same trend previously shown by the Gini coefficient.

Finally, and among a wide variety of indexes developed to measure inequality by overcoming the limitations of the Gini coefficient and better capturing its complexity, the Palma ratio – which uses the same data source as the Gini coefficient, based on deciles, but with a different methodology – measures the ratio between the wealth accumulated by the richest 10%, the top ten, and that held by the poorest 40%. In Palma's view, the problem with the Gini coefficient is that it gives a flat figure, which attempts to capture the inequality of a society as a whole but is very uninformative about what happens within that society, about where inequality is most pronounced. According to him, changes in inequality levels are never due to what happens in the middle strata – deciles five to nine – which accumulate half of the wealth in

<sup>24</sup> I follow in this paragraph the reasonings and proposals in Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, 217-8.

almost all societies, rich or poor (in Olite, in fact, 50% and 53% in the two chronological cuts), but to what happens with the other half, in particular what the richest 10% concentrates. In Olite the share of wealth of the top 10% almost quintuples that of the poorest 40%: 4,9504 in 1244 and 4,2351 in 1264, with a slight decrease between both years which matches that pointed out by the other indexes.

In short, and beyond this slight downward trend in which the different indexes coincide, the figures they all give show a significant, although not very high, inequality, which corresponds to a society in growth and transformation, with both a growing population and an increasingly diversified economy, in which land was not the only source of wealth, although it was the main one: 43,26% compared to 31,98% of urban real estate and 24,75% of movable goods, including merchandise, credit and capital – and its ownership was mostly (53,54%) in the hands of the richest stratum (16,66%).<sup>25</sup>

Around the same time that the tax registers of Olite were being drawn up, the conquest and colonisation of the town of Oriola and its territory, in the southeast of the peninsula, was taking place. From 1243, for just over 20 years it was a Christian protectorate during which the local Islamic population continued to reside in the city. In 1264, after a Muslim uprising was crushed, Oriola passed into the kingdom of Castile, and immediately began expelling the indigenous inhabitants and expropriating their property, distributing the territory among the newly arrived Christian settlers. Between 1265 and 1314, six allocations were made, to which Juan Antonio Barrio has recently added a seventh, drawn up in 1330, after the composition of the so-called *Llibre dels repartiments* of Oriola, which is why it does not appear there.<sup>26</sup> The first two (1265-6 and 1268-72?) correspond to the distribution of the lands taken from the Muslims, the irrigated area – the *huerta* – closest to the city; the next two (1272-5) consist of revisions and extensions of the first two, on either side of the Segura river, while the last two (1288-96 and 1308-14) allocate the most distant and poorest-quality lands, next to swamps and marshlands, which had not been turned into plots or cultivated in the Islamic period. The first five were carried out while the city was under Castilian rule, while the sixth was made after Oriola had been incorporated into the Crown of Aragon. Since the *Libre dels repartiments* is a copy from the second or third decade of the fourteenth century, we cannot be sure that they are full transcriptions of the original registers; they could rather be summaries or partial selections, especially the older ones, while the more recent ones seem to be more complete. I will therefore rely mainly on the last one, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, for the analysis.

Such ‘distribution books’ were very common in the mid-thirteenth century, to organise the installation of Christian settlers and make the conquests

<sup>25</sup> Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII*, 75 and 94.

<sup>26</sup> Barrio, “Un repartimiento inédito.”

irreversible, and again at the end of the fifteenth century, during the seizure of the sultanate of Granada. Quite a few are preserved for both Castile (Andalusia and Murcia) and the Crown of Aragon (Mallorca and Valencia).<sup>27</sup> These are not, therefore, fiscal sources, like those seen for Olite, but registers of gifts of houses and land to newly arrived settlers so that they could set up home, put down roots and contribute to the formation and consolidation of a new Christian-feudal society. However, with due caution, these records can be used to study inequality, as has been done in England with the Domesday Book.<sup>28</sup>

According to Juan Torres Fontes, editor of the *Llibre* of Oriola and one of its most important scholars, out of the 952,8 km<sup>2</sup> that the Lower Segura currently comprises, no less than 832 km<sup>2</sup> were allotted to the colonists who came to settle in the territory in the six successive distributions. This gives us an idea of both the extent of the distribution and the quality and appropriateness of the source. In the first allotment, carried out in 1266, 2.665 *tahullas*, i.e., about 300 hectares, were distributed among 691 settlers, the first to arrive. The majority, more than half of the beneficiaries, received 2 *tahullas*; a third of them, including small knights, clerics, and townsmen, were given between 3 and 4 *tahullas*, and a meagre 7%, made up of nobles, knights, squires and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was granted between 5 and 10 *tahullas*. As shown in Table 2, the result was that the more modest settlers, with between 2 and 4 *tahullas*, received more than 80% of the distributed land, while the upper stratum, with between 5 and 10 *tahullas*, received only 16,5%.<sup>29</sup>

Table 2. *First distribution of Oriola (1266): land structure*

Distributed land		Settlers		Total land	
<i>tahullas</i>	ha.	n.	%	<i>tahullas</i>	%
2	0,22	420	60,78	840	40,61
3-4	0,33-0,44	224	32,41	887	42,89
5-10	0,56-1,118	47	6,80	341	16,48
Total		691	100	2.665 (290 ha.)	100

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, LIX-LX.

It should be remembered that the oldest partitions, such as this one, which is the first, are not recorded in full in the *Llibre de repartiments*, and that it is quite possible that they are summaries or partial transcriptions. For this reason, it is better to use the last partition, that of 1314, which seems more complete, and therefore the calculations that can be made from it will be more reliable. In this sixth partition, 30.863 *tahullas*, about 3.450 hectares, were distributed among a total of 1,292 settlers, with an average of 2,57 hectares

<sup>27</sup> González, “Repartimientos andaluces;” Guinot, Torr6, *Repartiments a la Corona d’Arag6*.

<sup>28</sup> Bekar, Reed, “Land market and inequality.”

<sup>29</sup> Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*.

per family and a median of 2,2. Less than 50 years after the first partition, the distribution is much more unequal: half of the new settlers did not even receive 25% of the total allocated land, while the top two strata account for 44% (Tables 3A, 3B).

Table 3A. Sixth distribution of Oriola (1308-14): deciles

Deciles	Land in <i>tahullas</i>	%
1	341,2	1
2	487,8	2
3	1.344	4
4	2.588	8
5	2.588	8
6	2.854	9
7	3.235	10
8	3.831	12
9	4.158	13
10	9.436	31
Top 5%		28,3
Top 1%		20,9

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27.

Table 3B. Settlers, land allocated, indexes of inequality in Oriola (1308-14)

Year	Settlers	Total Land allocated	Average family land	Median family land	Fiscal dis-sociation	Top 10 %	Bottom 50 %	Q3/Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1308-14	1.292	30.863 t. 3.450 ha.	23,85 t. 2,57 ha.	20 t. 2,2 ha.	0,02	31	23	5,3	0,4073	0,0491	1,9819

Note: t.= *tahullas*; ha.= hectares.

Source: created by the author from Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27.

Comparing these results (Tables 2, 3A, 3B) with those of Olite (Tables 1A, 1B), the Oriola partition shows a stratified society, although not as much as that of the Navarrese town, with a percentage of the top 10% lower and of the bottom 50% higher, and lower Gini and Theil indexes, but above all a Palma ratio in which the richest 10% barely doubles the poorest 40%, while in Olite it almost quintuples it.

Finally, the third case study is the town of Vera, in the kingdom of Granada, conquered by the Catholic Monarchs in 1488 and whose *Repartimiento*, compiled two years later, shows the first distribution of the lands confiscated from the Muslims among the new Christian settlers. A total of 6.339 *tahullas* (about 708 ha.) were distributed among 179 settlers. More than two-thirds of the newcomers, almost 70%, received less than one-third of the total land

allocated, while at the other extreme, just over 3% received more than 20% of the total, more than one-fifth. In between, the middle stratum (28%), with almost half of the land (47%), was far more substantial and solid than in Olite (see above the footnote 18) (Table 4A).<sup>30</sup>

Table 4A. *Distribution of Vera (1490-1): land structure*

Distributed land		Settlers		Total land	
<i>tahullas</i>	ha.	n.	%	<i>tahullas</i>	%
< 10	< 1,18	39	21,78	119,25	1,88
11-30	1,29-3,54	84	46,92	1.947	30,71
31-60	3,65-7,08	36	20,11	1.890,5	29,82
61-100	7,19-11,80	14	7,82	1.085	17,11
101-150	11,91-17,70	3	1,67	349,5	5,51
> 150	> 17,70	3	1,67	948	14,95
Total	179	100	6.339,25	100	

Source: Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 30.

These data can be further refined by dividing them into deciles and calculating the different indexes (Tables 4B, 4C). First, the average size of the gifts is respectable, over 3 hectares, but the average and median are mirages or optical illusions, because the three lowest deciles received only 5% of the distributed land, 10% if the fourth decile is added. At the other extreme, the top two deciles account for almost half the land (46%), but the intermediate deciles, from five to eight, account for a similar percentage (44%), and if the fourth decile is added, they reach half (49%). In other words, there is a well-endowed middle stratum in Vera, which we should consider and not just look at the polarisation between the richest and the poorest. Yet the richest 10% of the population accounts for 27% of the land, while the poorest 50% account for less than 20%, percentages very close to those of Oriola's sixth partition, 180 years earlier. Also very similar, although slightly lower, are Vera's Gini coefficient and Theil index in relation to those of Oriola. On the contrary, the Palma ratio shows that while in Oriola the share of wealth of the top 10% was almost double that of the poorest 40%, in Vera it was almost two and a half times higher.

Table 4B. *Distribution of Vera (1490-1): deciles*

<i>Deciles</i>	Land in <i>tahullas</i>	%
1	3,60	0,07
2	77,65	1,47
3	206,70	3,92
4	288,20	5,46

<sup>30</sup> Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 30.

5	456,35	8,65
6	502,35	9,52
7	504,4	9,56
8	803,55	15,23
9	1.005,50	19,06
10	1.426,7	27,04
Top 5%		15,16
Top 1%		3,99

Note: data have been extracted directly from the *Repartimiento*, which explains the slight difference in the number of settlers and *tahullas* with Table 4B, created by Jiménez Alcázar.

Source: created by the author from Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122.

Table 4C. *Settlers, land allocated, indexes of inequality in Vera (1490-1)*

Year	Settlers	Total Land allocated	Average family land	Median family land	Fiscal dis-sociation	Top 10 %	Bottom 50 %	Q3/Q1	Gini	Theil	Palma
1490-91	172	5.275 t.	30,67 t.	29 t.	0,23	27	19,6	7,6	0,441	0,059	2,4763
		590 ha.	3,35 ha.	3,24 ha.							

Source: created by the author from Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122.

### 3. *Inequality before and after the Black Death*

The different indexes used in the previous section show that inequality was much higher in Olite in the mid-thirteenth century than in Oriola at the beginning of the fourteenth and in Vera at the end of the fifteenth. Unfortunately, we do not have more sources for each of the three observatories with which to establish trends, only isolated points in time. Moreover, the sources are not the same in all three cases. For Olite, two tax lists (very early ones, the oldest preserved for the Iberian Peninsula) have been used, which reflect the differences in tax burdens and fortunes in a community already long established, differences created by the influence of various factors, from the family structure and the inheritance system to the land market and others. Instead, in Oriola and Vera, the distribution of land among the settlers who arrived in the newly conquered and occupied territories has been used. They were new societies in the process of formation; they replaced the previous Muslim population, who were expelled and had their land seized, and their origins lie in a radical departure from the past with the distribution of the territory. On the other hand, the allocations – and the size of them – respond above all to the monarchs’ interest in creating a stable society, not egalitarian, but stratified from the outset. In the course of time, both inheritance and the land market as well as demographic evolution would change this initial framework. But we do not have any other later reference against which to compare it.

Table 5. The three case studies compared

	Olite (1244)	Olite (1264)	Oriola (1308-14)	Vera (1490-1)
Taxpayers/settlers	1.063	1.067	1.292	172
D1	1	1	1	0,6
D2	2	2	2	1
D3	3	3	4	4
D4	4	4	8	5
D5	5	6	8	9
D6	7	7	9	10
D7	9	9	10	10
D8	12	13	12	15
D9	17	18	13	19
D10	43	38	31	27
Top 5%	28	25	28,3	15,2
Top 1%	10,7	10,3	20,9	3,99
Bottom 50%	15	16	23	19,6
Q3/Q1	6	6,5	5,3	7,6
Gini	0,561	0,532	0,407	0,441
Theil	0,849	0,762	0,491	0,591
Palma	4,9504	4,2351	1,9819	2,4763

Source: created by the author from Ciérbide, Sesma, *Olite en el siglo XIII* (Olite); Torres, *Repartimiento de Orihuela*, 103-27 (Oriola); Jiménez, *Repartimiento de Vera*, 63-122 (Vera).

Table 5 brings together the results from the four periods analysed in the three observatories. All the indexes point to inequality being much higher in Olite in the thirteenth century: the top two deciles concentrated 60% of the wealth in 1244 and 56% in 1264, while the poorest half owned only 15% and 16%. The Gini coefficient stood at 0,56 and 0,53 and the Palma ratio shows that the share of wealth accumulated by the richest 10% was five times and more than four times that owned by the poorest 40%. By contrast, in Oriola and Vera, the poorest half own a fifth or more of the total land distributed, the Gini coefficient is 0,4 or slightly more, the Palma ratio shows that the richest have twice as much or more than the poor, and the Q3/Q1 ratio is lower in Oriola than in Olite and Vera, and in the latter higher than in the other two. Notwithstanding that, the top 5% in Oriola owned the same as in Olite, but the top 1% owned twice as much, which means that, although Oriola was less stratified than Olite, logical, given that the former was a community in formation, while the latter had been established for a long time, its richest elites owned a higher share of the wealth – they had received more land in the allocation. The results for Vera on this point are less clear and conclusive.

The comparison clearly shows the differences between the three observatories at the various points in time. However, the data obtained cannot be strung together and used to establish long-term trends, as the sources and situations – demographic, economic, social, and even political – are very di-

verse. In the mid-thirteenth century, Olite was undergoing a process of demographic growth and economic and social development, and the fiscal sources show the tax burden on the wealth of the taxpayers, while in Oriola and Vera the aim was to encourage the arrival of new inhabitants to fill the vacuum caused by the expulsion of the previous ones, whether in the second half of the thirteenth century, the first half of the fourteenth century or at the end of the fifteenth century. It was about creating a new society from scratch, on the *tabula rasa* prompted by the conquest and colonisation, still with few internal differences, especially among the bulk of the population, but with clearly defined – and endowed with greater land allocations – social and economic top hierarchies.

Nor are there many localities that have fiscal sources, or of any other nature, that can be used to analyse inequality, before or after the Black Death. Even fewer have been studied. There is only one survey of Tortosa by Laura Miquel and Jordi Morelló based on tax records and published in this same volume, which shows that, although the number of taxpayers fell by more than a quarter (almost 26%) and total wealth by 14,5% between 1316 and 1353, i.e., thirty years before and five years after the Black Death, even though the Gini coefficient (from 0,72 to 0,76), the Palma ratio (from 18,86 to 24) and the share of wealth of the top 10% (from 58,08 to 63,85) rose, did so slightly.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, based also on fiscal sources (tax lists and wealth registers), Laura Miquel and Pere Verdés have been able to study in great detail the evolution of inequality in the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century in two other cities of Catalonia. In Cervera, the Gini coefficient rose from 0,56 in 1421 to 0,59 in 1430 and 1450, 0,62 in 1476, 0,63 in 1492, 0,64 in 1518 and 0,65 in 1541, while in Igualada it remained at 0,56 (with slight variations) between 1412 and 1460, falling to 0,47 in 1475, rising to 0,53 in 1484, falling to 0,44 in 1503, rising to 0,54 in 1521 and falling again to 0,33 in 1537. A less linear and less clear evolution than in Cervera, where the authors attribute the increase in inequality in the second half of the fifteenth century to the impact of the Catalan civil war (1462-72), while in Igualada, on the contrary, the war would have determined a decreasing trend. Both towns, however, would see a rise in poverty, whether measured by the reduction in the share of wealth of the lower deciles or by the Palma ratio.<sup>32</sup>

The data provided by these authors, as well as those contributed in this article and those already published in previous studies,<sup>33</sup> have been brought together in Figure 2, which summarises what we know so far about inequality in the Iberian Peninsula from the thirteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century, measured using the Gini coefficient, which allows comparisons between very different places and periods.

<sup>31</sup> See the chapter by Miquel Milian and Morelló Baget in this volume.

<sup>32</sup> Miquel, Verdés, “Contribución.”

<sup>33</sup> Furió *et al.*, “Measuring economic inequality.”

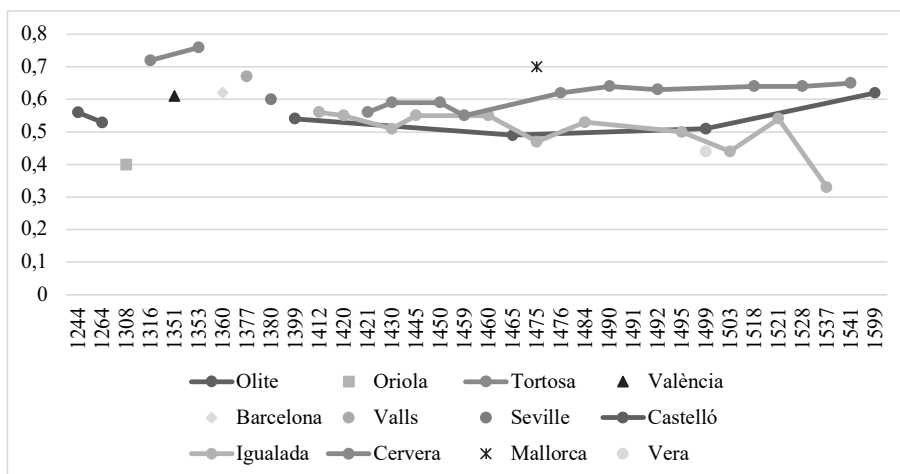


Figure 2. *Economic Inequality in Iberian Peninsula (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.)*

Source: Furió et alii, "Measuring economic inequality."

The graph first shows three levels of inequality. The lowest (0,40 and 0,44) corresponds to communities in formation (Oriola, Vera), true frontier societies, where a new Christian population has replaced the previous Muslim one, and where, despite the lower inequality, stratification is present from the beginning, in the very unevenness of the allocations. At an intermediate level (just over 0,5) are villages and towns with a population of less than 1,500 hearths (Olite, Igualada, Cervera) and where the majority of the inhabitants, two thirds of the total population (Castelló) were peasants, while in large cities inequality was higher (above 0,6 and even 0,7). The larger the city, the greater the inequality. In the graph, it can be seen that the highest points correspond to the major cities, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, and Mallorca. To these we must add Tortosa, with a population of around 2.000 hearths (some 10.000 people), which is the locality with the greatest inequality (above 0,7 before the Black Death and close to 0,8 after it) and Valls, with a high index, close to 0,7, although it is not a very large town. On the other hand, although the data are still too isolated and relate to a specific location at a precise point in time, when put together in a graph some trends can be perceived, such as the increase in inequality before the Black Death and in the years immediately following, when its effects have not yet been deeply felt; the decrease in it from the last quarter of the fourteenth century until the mid-fifteenth century, and again the increase with the demographic upturn (with some exceptions, such as Igualada, where the rise started earlier, in the third decade of the fifteenth century, and a rare and possibly mistakenly based fall in the sixteenth century, at a time when all indexes point to a sharp increase in inequality). However, the trends are not automatic and do not correspond exactly to the movement of population and wages. Population numbers fall and wages

rise immediately after 1348, but the economic recession and the reduction in inequality only occur several decades later, at the end of the fourteenth century, while the resumption of the increase in inequality does seem to be more in line with the demographic and economic recovery in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

#### 4. *A few final remarks*

In the Iberian Peninsula, the study of inequality in the late Middle Ages cannot be dissociated from the great territorial expansion of the Christian kingdoms over Muslim al-Andalus in the thirteenth century, the misnamed 'Reconquest', and the consequent divergence between the more populated north and the south, where a frontier society – made up of settlers from the north and more dynamic – was maintained for a longer period, until the beginning of the fourteenth century. After the Black Death, however, whose effects were felt as severely as in the rest of Western Europe, Iberia experienced the same demographic, economic and social evolution as the rest of the continent, with the sole exception of the kingdom of Granada, conquered at the end of the fifteenth century and where a new process of colonisation took place, represented in this study by the case of Vera. Population was undoubtedly a very important factor – the more people there were, the smaller the peasant holdings – but not the only one, as at the same time a process of land accumulation and concentration took place that deepened the internal differences among peasants, and between them and urban landowners. By this I mean that, on the one hand, population decline due to the plague and crises reduced inequality by wiping out smaller farms and benefiting the survivors by raising agricultural profits. On the other hand, land was concentrated in large farms and wages were not the main component of peasants' incomes. No peasant worked every day for a wage. Moreover, alongside the rate of population growth or decline other factors such as the technical level of agricultural production (irrigation, crop rotation, fertilisers, fallow land), the family structure, the inheritance system, the customs and practices of peasant communities, the commercialisation of the economy and the land market, as well as the demands (rents, taxes) made on the peasant economy by non-producers (kings, lords, the Church, city councils and other public authorities) were equally decisive. The cases examined in this study are just a few examples that will have to be supplemented with many more in further research to provide a far more complete picture of economic inequality and its evolution in Iberia in the late Middle Ages.

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