Work and Mobility in their Local Dimensions in Early Medieval Iberia

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This article begins and ends by arguing that social historians of the early Middle Ages interested in the relatively neglected themes of work and mobility would do well to refocus their energies on the »small worlds« unearthed by charter-based reconstructions of local societies – the latter a methodology associated above all with the pioneering studies of Wendy Davies since the 1980s. It argues that this approach – that is, what we might call a »reversion to the local« – remains relevant because most people's social experience – indeed, their entire referential system – took root and developed within a limited geographical compass, so if we want to understand the structures that gave shape and meaning to non-elite life, it is imperative that we consider work and mobility – the principal themes of this article – in the specific local contexts in which they operated. Such an approach is of course constrained by the patchy survival of evidence from across early medieval Europe. But the mundane affairs of the village society of tenth-century north-western Spain can be tracked in some detail, especially in certain unusually well-documented villages, such as Rabal, analysed herein, thanks to significant numbers of surviving charters, allowing us to see something of the potential richness of »the local« as a frame of analysis. This article proposes that by focusing on the small-scale and the quotidian, we address the lives of rural cultivators, as far as possible, on their own terms, enabling us, to the degree that it is indeed possible, to set those lives within carefully historicised contextual horizons.

Keywords: work, mobility, local society, the peasantry, communal management of resources

If mobility across time and space has tended to be seen by historians as the preserve of elites, it has been just as damagingly mischaracterised, particularly in narratives designed to emphasise the impact of »modernity«, as a phenomenon largely unknown in the pre-modern world.[1] Enough scholarship now exists to undermine both these postulates, such that we can now declare with certainty that people moved around, even in the early Middle Ages, more than we once thought they did, sometimes traversing great distances and varied geographies. Consider the invaluable accounts of the diplomatic missions of Liudprand of Cremona to

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1 Cresswell, *On the Move*; Cresswell, Towards a politics; Canzler, Kaufmann and Kesselring, *Tracing Mobilities*; Baumgarten and Franchi, Modernity and Mobility.

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Constantinople, or of John of Gorze to Córdoba, or – for that matter – the writings of any of the Arab geographers of the Abbasid period, all of which reveal detailed information about routes and itineraries, modes of transit, and the myriad challenges faced by travellers before the year 1000.[2] Furthermore, such movement was not restricted wholly to elites: soldiers, merchants and pilgrims make sporadic appearances in our sources – fighting, flogging their wares, and praying, or some combination of all three – on distant shores, far from home.[3]

To acknowledge as much remains a useful starting point for any investigation of mobility in the early Middle Ages.[4] But it must only be a starting point, because the risks inherent in exaggerating the scale and frequency of travel in the pre-modern world *tout court* but especially in the early medieval centuries, and even more especially in contexts in which small-scale agrarian cultivation was the principal economic activity, are not difficult to discern. Put simply: in most parts of early medieval Europe the majority of people were settled cultivators of diverse social, economic, and legal status, and these people (or at least most of them), invariably did *not* journey great distances at any stage in their lives. This does not mean that they were immobile, nor that their lives were static, unchanging affairs; journeys between the home and the field were not the only physical and psychosocial geographies that rural cultivators (that is, peasants) traversed, and no such claim is being made here.[5] But »the local« was nonetheless the sphere in which most people, in most places, moved.[6] It was also the sphere in which they worked.[7] If we forget these basic facts, we risk – in the course of our own scholarly peregrinations – replacing one misleading narrative about the early Middle Ages with another. We risk, that is, rightly rejecting the idea that early medieval societies were »static, ossified, and self-contained«, only to fasten on an equally misguided notion which holds that most people inhabited »a heterogenous contact zone of cultures, ideas and products«, an experience that would hardly have been recognisable to most people in early medieval Europe.[8]

Framing the subject in this way, it becomes clear that to approach early medieval mobility by focusing primarily on maritime commerce, diplomatic entanglements, or travel as a cultural marker of elite groups is in one rather obvious sense actively misleading, for it is to privilege activities in which the vast majority of people played no role at all, at least directly.[9]

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2 Liudprand, *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, ed. Squatriti; *Vita Iohannis Abbatis Gorziensis*, ed. Pertz; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*.

3 Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*; O'Doherty and Schmieder (eds.), *Travels and Mobilities*.

4 »Mobility« is of course a hard concept to define, but for present purposes I work within the guidelines and explore some of the possibilities provided by the guest editors in their Introduction. I have focused in particular on the question of how one's labour overlapped and interacted with other social identities and roles in the community, discussed in more detail in Pazienza and Bavuso, Moving jobs, 6-7.

5 The best summary of attempts to rebut this view is found in Schofield, *Peasants and Historians*.

6 As one of the editors of this journal has indeed reminded us in Pazienza, Mobility, displacements and identity.

7 Two recent studies that have foregrounded the need to consider where work took place and what it meant for mobility are: D'Aguanno Ito, Work and workplaces; Zeller, West, Tinti, *et al.*, *Neighbours and Strangers*.

8 Heath, Gantner and Manarini, Movement and mobility, 3.

9 This observation reflects my concern that global history has not yet found a persuasive methodology with respect to how it might encompass peasants in global narratives. Nelles and Salzberg (eds.), *Connected*

It is likewise important not to exaggerate the distances that most people typically roamed in their everyday lives; not because medium- to long-distance travel – that is, travel beyond the locality – is inherently less important or less interesting than travel within the locality, but simply because there was much less of it.[10]

»Local mobility«, for want of a more elegant locution, was preponderant in the sense that it simply *was* mobility for most people, the majority of whom moved in and across relatively small physical spaces – the village, its surrounding fields, neighbouring settlements; at a stretch, the valley, or the nearest town. Local mobility thus structured the working lives of rural cultivators and artisans, delimiting the agential capacity of the vast majority of non-elite people. Accordingly, local mobility engendered and consolidated most social relationships in early medieval contexts, and those relationships in turn fashioned self-perception and constructed social identity.[11] The contours of life for the majority in early medieval western Europe, although subtly different from one peasant community to another, nonetheless had a familiar shape, a discernible weather-beaten arc. »Unremitting toil from dawn to dusk«, Werner Rösener told us in his classic study, »set its stamp on the daily round of peasant work in the home, in the farmyard, in the fields or meadows.«[12]

Without wishing to push this idea too far lest we fall into romantic cliché, a certain homogeneity of experience, of socialisation achieved by means of routine and familiarity, is indeed a recognisable characteristic of peasant life as reflected in charters and estate surveys, with their repeated refrains and consistent focus on farming and its attendant tasks.[13] Admittedly, documentary evidence of this kind has limitations, requires careful interpretation, and does not provide a transparent window on local society. All the same, while we must make allowances for the conventions of genre, and acknowledge the myriad other difficulties posed by working with documents of practice, what charters involving non-elite actors seem to indicate is clear enough, namely, that many of the small worlds of medieval Europe before 1000 were in some measure self-contained and inward-looking, and that neighbours and family constituted one's support system, while strangers were relatively rarely encountered.[14] Indeed, far from being omnipresent, connections in rural settings across putative frontiers of language and socio-cultural practice – although fascinating where we do find them – are empirically very hard to identify in much of early medieval western Europe – even in regions of demonstrable ethnic and religious plurality, such as Spain.[15] Connections of this kind are

Mobilities; Casado Alonso, Los flujos de información; Ehmer, Quantifying mobility; Fraser (ed.), *The Mobility of People and Things*.

10 Here I follow the convention established in Zeller, West, Tinti, Stoffella, *et al.*, *Neighbours and Strangers*, xiv, which considers a »locality« to be »an area of the order of 10kms diameter«.

11 Colleoni and Caiello, Mobility and multilocal identity; Belanche, Casaló and Rubio, Local place identity; Iles, Ma and Erwin, Identifying.

12 Rösener, *Peasants*, 6.

13 On the perils of romanticising the timeless, unchanging village, see Schofield, *Peasants and Historians*.

14 Zeller, West, Tinti, *et al.*, *Neighbours and Strangers*.

15 Still influential on this question is Castro, *España*, although see Soifer's excellent characterisation in Soifer, Beyond *convivencia*, 20: »Castro's *Convivencia* was an idealist construct that aspired to describe mental processes taking place in the collective consciousness of the three cultures but was never meant to be tested

almost entirely confined to elite and, of course, urban contexts; but were they, one wonders, the exception that proves the rule – the rule being that the lives of *most* people were rooted in small rural communities, their horizons only extending across the valley or down from the mountains to the edge of the plain, each village a world unto itself?

In light of the foregoing, the journey this article proposes to embark upon is appropriately modest in its objectives. It begins by restating an unfashionable fact, namely, that local concerns structured the day-to-day lives of most people in early medieval northern Spain, and – one suspects – many other parts of agrarian Europe, not travel, nor cross-cultural encounter, and that we should not mislead ourselves by pretending otherwise. Most people's social experience – indeed, their entire referential system – took root and developed within a limited geographical compass, so if we want to understand the structures that gave shape and meaning to non-elite life, it is imperative that we consider work and mobility – the principal themes of this article – in the specific local contexts in which they operated. The village society of tenth-century Spain, analysed hereafter, allows us to see something of the potential richness of »the local« as a frame of analysis, and by focusing on the small-scale and the quotidian, we address the lives of rural cultivators, as far as possible, on their own terms, enabling us, to the degree that it is indeed possible, to set those lives within carefully historicised contextual horizons.

Micro-geographies of Mobility: Rabal

Typical of the expedient and purposeful trips made by most people in Western Eurasian contexts in the early medieval centuries, were those made across relatively short distances within the same locality on a daily or near-daily basis, such as those made by the peasant proprietors of northern Iberia – the focus of this article – who made their way from field to orchard and from meadow to granary. Many of these people seem to have owned scattered plots, often of modest dimensions, their holdings taking them from one end of their village to the other, in accordance with the demands and patterns imposed by the many tasks involved in crop production and the raising of livestock.[16] What we know about village life – largely thanks to charters, estate surveys, inventories, and archaeology – suggests that cultivators moved busily and frequently hither and thither, digging, weeding, planting, and sowing.[17] Activities such as these, as well as many more, certainly took place in plots that lay adjacent to the home, but peasant holdings were not always contiguous within the same settlement, which must have given rise to short journeys on a near-daily basis; even gardens sometimes »lay separate from their owner's other properties«, the need to tend them ensuring a

against the social and political realities of Jewish–Christian–Muslim interaction. Paradoxically, the quotidian experience of living was missing from the concept usually translated into English as ›living together‹.«

16 Davies, *Acts of Giving*; Portass, *Village World*.

17 The richest evocation of peasant life in the early Middle Ages, in my view, remains Eileen Power's account of the life of the peasant Bodo, in Power, *Medieval People*, ch 1. For an insight into northern Iberian early medieval archaeology of village society, see Quirós Castillo, Arqueología del campesinado altomedieval; and Escalona, Early Castilian peasantry. It is becoming increasingly clear that it is to archaeology and bioarchaeology that we should look to further our understanding of early medieval farming, for a taste of which, see McKerracher, *Farming Transformed*.

certain degree of work-related movement.[18] Connecting these plots were rudimentary roads or tracks that offered access to cultivable plots and grazing lands; it was this kind of local infrastructure, maintained by the locals themselves, that facilitated the physical movement of people and animals on which most forms of work depended, and the documents make clear that peasants were fully cognisant of their significance, recognising them as defining features of the landscape.[19]

What are we to make of the constant swirl of activity – of mobility – demanded of peasant proprietors? First, it was more often than not confined to a relatively small geographical area. Let us consider the village of Rabal, in Galicia, aspects of the local society of which can be reconstructed thanks to an unusual number of surviving documents which record the transactions of its inhabitants.[20] The documents survive in the monastic cartulary (known as the *Tumbo*) of San Salvador de Celanova, a twelfth-century compilation of 198 folios.[21] Celanova was a wealthy monastery of aristocratic foundation, and the scale of the *Tumbo* – some 578 charters written between 842 and 1165 – and the nature of much of the business recorded therein, reflect the monastery's role as the principal regional powerbroker.[22] Rabal is unattested in the cartulary before 956 but thereafter seems to have been systematically targeted by the monks at Celanova, who made more than thirty separate acquisitions there in the third quarter of the tenth century; twenty-one of these acquisitions, typically small plots bought from peasants, took place in a strikingly concentrated period of expansion of just two years.[23] For example, in February 962 Foquima sold a vineyard in Rabal to Bishop Rosendo and the monks at Celanova, receiving seven *quartarios* of grain and one *sextario* of wine by way of payment.[24] A month or so later, in March, the apparently more substantial peasant couple Baltario and his wife Leovili sold multiple vineyards and ten apple trees for thirty measures of grain, wine, and cloth.[25] Consolidation was clearly Celanova's aim here: Baltario and Leovili noted, perhaps ruefully, that the vineyards they agreed to sell lay amidst vineyards owned by other proprietors which had already been acquired by the monastery.

18 Davies, *Gardens*, 72.

19 Roads are a common feature of the documentation from across Christian Iberia, as the following examples show: *inter vinea Raiane et carraria de vereda*, in 149 (962), in *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez [hereafter *Celanova, II*]; *et per illa carral per ubi andant illos carros*, in 457 (978), in *Colección documental del archivo de la catedral de León, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez [hereafter *León, II*]; *et per illa karrera qui discurrit strata maiore pro ad Oueto in directa linea*, 27 (1003), in *Colección diplomática del monasterio de San Vicente de Oviedo*, ed. Floriano Llorente

20 Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara*, 38-47; Portass, Rethinking, 96-103. On Galician rural society, see Isla Frez, *La sociedad.* On Rabal and Galician rural settlement, although with a rather different emphasis than that explored here, see Pallares Méndez and Portela Silva, La villa.

21 Portass, *Village World*, 128-132.

22 The best analysis to focus on the charters that underpin the transactions of Rabal is now found in Barrett, *Text and Textuality*, 72-76.

23 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez, 129 (961); 130 (961); 131 (961); 132 (961); 133 (961); 134 (961); 135 (961); 136 (961); 137 (961); 138 (961); 139 (961); 140 (961); 143 (961); 145 (962); 146 (962); 147 (962); 148 (962); 149 (962); 150 (962); 151 (962); 152 (962).

24 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 147 (962).

25 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 150 (962).

The same is true of the ten apple trees included in the transaction, which were apparently surrounded by, perhaps even within, orchards the monastery had purchased within living memory.[26] Landowners operating in this way may well have been selling at a considerable disadvantage; after all, they parted with long-term, relatively secure assets in exchange for modest, perishable goods, such as grain and wine.[27] This need not have always been true, however, since those selling to Celanova were sometimes demonstrably not poor, many of them indicating in the charters recording the transaction in question that they owned assets other than those they were agreeing to alienate. Why, then, did they accept such terms at all? Whilst we cannot be sure, we should not rule out that the status and prestige gained by dealing with the locally powerful, in addition to the possibilities of patronage and clientelism that such deals possibly enshrined, indicate a hinterland of motivations only partly visible in the documents.

What is perhaps most striking about these transactions is how much land Celanova acquired in so small an area. Thanks to the pioneering studies of María Pallares, we know that Rabal was approximately 3kms by 3kms in extent, so the footprint of Celanova's ownership can hardly have gone unnoticed as early as the spring of 961, by which stage Celanova had already made a dozen transactions in the village in the first few months of the year.[28] Indeed so frequent was the transfer of landed property in this small world that we must surmise that in the 960s the local geography of private ownership was dramatically reconfigured – with consequences for its social geography too, and implications for the amount and type of work undertaken by the selling parties thereafter. Celanova's campaign of acquisitions inevitably meant that expectations of what constituted »work« changed too, at least for certain members of the community, who took on new roles unrelated to farming. For when the inhabitants of Rabal had to deal with the agents of Celanova, the transacting parties relied on the willingness of other members of the community to vouchsafe proceedings. A quick glance at the charters confirms this impression, for it shows that some members of the community were »habitually present at transactions«, witnessing, legitimising, and – in some limited sense – supervising the proceedings.[29]

Gundesindo is a case in point. He witnessed some fifteen of these Rabal transactions, and the role in question – work of a public, community-facing kind – seems to have been associated with him personally, perhaps on account of his local status; after all, his authority was apparently heritable, for his son, Mito Gundesindi, was also a trusted community figure, appearing in his own right as a witness on 13 occasions.[30] Whether or not the supervisory role performed by smallholders such as Gundesindo and his son was institutionalised in

26 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 150 (962) *et iacent ipsas cum vineas de frater Gondemaro et de Asoi, de Itila, que iam comparastis…et X manzanarias, inter vestros pomares, que iam vobis comparatos habetis*.

27 Quirós Castillo, Inequality; or, for a different view, Portass, Peasant proprietors; and Feller, Gramain and Weber, *La fortune*.

28 Pallares Méndez, *Ilduara*, 38-47; *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez, 129 (961); 130 (961); 131 (961); 132 (961); 133 (961); 134 (961); 135 (961); 136 (961); 137 (961); 138 (961); 139 (961); 140 (961).

29 Barrett, *Text and Textuality*, 75.

30 Discussed by Barrett in the context of charter production and the »lateral diffusion« of literacy, in *Text and Textuality*, 76-77.

some indiscernible, quasi-formal way is impossible to say: all the same, prominent locals were, for some reason or other, charged with jobs other than farming, here in Rabal and further afield in northern Iberia too; they were, that is, »promoted«, their expertise and status recognised, as they became »guardians of memory« for the community.[31]

There are no indications in the charters that those individuals who performed these roles, superintending the petty business of friends and neighbours, possessed as a matter of course any auxiliary or technical skills that would aid them in their endeavours. They were not professionals but merely men of substance in the locality – wise heads to whom one turned to give a sheen of respectability to business dealings. In other Christian Iberian contexts from this period, we see individuals described as *boni homines* performing a similar function.[32] These »good men« helped to oil the wheels of community business, although we should be wary of overplaying their putative neutrality and perhaps not expect them to have been dispassionate about its outcome on all occasions. Still, the point remains that a certain enthusiastic if inexpert willingness to serve the local community – to coordinate the small-scale human associations, freely entered into, that structured rural life – can be detected in the actions of some individuals in tenth-century Iberia; these people balanced different tasks and performed more than one role, even if polyoccupationalism, as that term might be understood today, did not really exist.[33]

In addition to all the sowing, harvesting, buying, and selling of land that features so prominently in the charters, we must intuit other activities in the absence of more concrete evidence. Some members of the community, for example, must have made clothes, pots, and basic implements, or at least had access to them, and lists of appurtenances in charters furnish clues on this particular, but information on the division of labour, let alone specialist producers, is virtually non-existent. Very rarely, in fact, are jobs, *stricto sensu*, mentioned at all. An exception must be made for Summiro the blacksmith, who witnessed a single Rabal charter dated to April 961, appearing alongside the local lord's representative in an otherwise perfectly standard sale.[34] Examples such as this – surprisingly rare across the entire corpus, let alone just the Rabal charters – should not incline us to take an excessively narrow view of work in the broad sense of that term. Certainly, insofar as most people spent most of their time working, they did so in fields, but as we have seen, taken together, what the above suggests is that in spite of the opacity of the sources, there was clearly more than one kind of activity or role that one could undertake or perform in Rabal. There was agricultural »work« as we now more properly understand it, that is, work that involved a great deal of physical labour, the goal of which was to produce food for consumption and sale; and there was another kind of task associated not with »making a living« but with ensuring that the community continued to function.

31 Barrett, *Text and Textuality*, 75.

32 Davies, *Boni homines* in northern Iberia.

33 Hénaut, Lena and Accominotti, Polyoccupationalism. On polyoccupationalism, see the framing comments of the guest editors of this special issue, and in particular their emphasis – shared here – on »skills, knowledge and networks« in Pazienza and Bavuso, Moving jobs, 6-7.

34 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 136 (961) *Summiro, ferrario, ts*.

Rabal seems to have been no different to the other villages of the region, and – if the charters are to be believed – its land was put to the same uses we see elsewhere.[35] We can only say so much about the density of transactions that occurred there because most of them involved the monks of Celanova, who kept the records of their business in the village. But a fine-grained examination of the village of Bobadela, also located within the orbit of Celanova (hence the survival of its charters), has identified a roughly similar community in terms of size and composition.[36] There, at Bobadela, rural cultivators farmed parcels of land of varying size, and the transfer of that land by means of written contract was clearly well established. Further studies, focused on the villages of northern Spain in the hundred years or so either side of 1000, have fleshed out this impressionistic picture to present something resembling a pattern.[37] Villagers did business locally, with friends, neighbours, and – rather less frequently – strangers. In general terms, most people did not need to move far to conduct the business on which their livelihoods depended, and they would seldom have done so; what mattered was that they could draw a mental map of the micro-geographies in which their lives played out, and we see that this map functioned as a frame of reference for business affairs in thousands of charters from northern Iberia. Many of these charters locate property by carefully describing its situation in relation to widely known features of the landscape, the houses of neighbours, and past transactions.[38]

Motives for Movement: Land, Law and Lordship

Understanding local mobility is important because it illuminates aspects of the working lives of peasants, as we have seen. This is broadly true across the northern half of the Iberian Peninsula, and the findings presented heretofore, while built on the foundation of a single well-documented Galician village, can serve as a guide to the fundamental patterns of peasant society in early medieval Christian Spain. The same economic motives, for instance, can be detected in the planning that a certain Arias must have undertaken before deciding to buy land from three sets of neighbours in the same village on the plains of León in the middle of the tenth century.[39] One can indeed readily imagine the process: that is, how Arias must have visited the plots to consider their potential value and productivity; gathered information as to who owned them, whether they wanted to do business, or indeed whether they would be permitted to have much say in the matter; and eventually settled the negotiation via written contract. And given the hundreds of examples we have of similar small-scale transactions in the Iberian documents, we can state with some certainty that economic motives structured much quotidian mobility.[40]

35 Davies, *Acts of Giving*; Portass, *Village World*.

36 Fletcher, *St James's Catapult*, 8.

37 Portass, Peasants, market exchange.

38 Barrett, *Text and Textuality*, 75.

39 *León, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 372, 373 and 374.

40 Portass, Peasants, market exchange; Davies, *Acts of Giving*.

Much, but not all: for example, in Galicia, around the year 1000, two sets of peasants (one set, a mother and her son; the other, a married couple), made the short journey from the village of Moreira to the monastery of San Salvador de Celanova, a trip of no more than two kilometres or so.[41] They did so to face judgement for their deceitful involvement in the theft of a sow, so we may reasonably surmise that they made their way to the monastery with some reluctance, aware that their fate was to be decided *in iudicatio*.[42] Peasants accused of wrongdoing were sometimes summonsed to Sobrado de los Monjes, another Galician monastery of aristocratic foundation, which also occasionally served as a make-shift court. Where such evidence survives, we can trace the movements of peasants from one place in the extended locality to another: Raiola, mother of the apparently light-fingered Sentarius, cannot have relished accompanying her son to Sobrado at the behest of the local executive officer (*Perductus igitur fuit ante iudicum, hic ad Superatum* [Sobrado] *per saione nomine Leovildo*) to face whatever kind of justice awaited him.[43] Their journey, at least, was not arduous: this we know because the landed holdings that Raiola was compelled to surrender to the aristocratic couple presiding at Sobrado, on account of her son's misdemeanours, lay in the village of Sanctum Iulianis de Colimbrianis, just 3kms north of the monastery.[44] These were most definitely local journeys in that the distances covered were short; the reputational consequences of such short trips may well, however, have lasted a lifetime.[45]

Court proceedings, some rather obviously grander affairs than others, provide a great deal of information about individuals performing specialist roles akin to jobs, some of which involved training and specialist knowledge, and apparently presupposed the ability to write, or at least a certain familiarity with procedures predicated upon the use of documents. Judges, sundry legal experts not identified specifically as judges (that is, not described as *iudices* in the language of the charters), court officers, and individuals invested with the authority to preside over proceedings all »went to work« in tenth-century Spain to resolve disputes and contractual infringements.[46] It is also possible that judges may have worked their own circuits, which must have involved a certain amount of mobility beyond the immediate locality.[47] It would perhaps be naïve to imagine that peasants took on these specialist roles themselves, but that the challenges of life were mediated in part by acquaintance with documentation, even if at one remove, is now beyond doubt.[48]

Facing a particularly thorny kind of challenge were local communities engaged in the collective or group-led management of resources, who – the sources suggest – sometimes

41 *Celanova, III*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 248 and 249.

42 The accused were, after all, described variously as a *iudicatore falso* and *iudicatores mentiosos*.

43 »He was then led before the judges, here at Sobrado, by the saio, named Leovildo«: Charter number 31 (951) in Loscertales de García de Valdeavellano, *Tumbos del monasterio de Sobrado de los Monjes*.

44 Now the parish of San Xiao de Cumbrao, in the *concello* of Sobrado.

45 Exile also caused members of the local community to leave the village, and therefore in some sense played a role in determining mobility, for more on which, see Lorenzo Rodríguez, Out of the village.

46 Davies, *Windows*, ch. 6.

47 Davies, *Windows*, 160-164.

48 Barrett, *Text and Textuality*.

mobilised in order to defend their rights in the locality, normally in an attempt to repel encroaching powers.[49] Relatively informal decision-making bodies, often denoted by the word *collatio* in the charters, saw leading groups or individuals from several different villages meet to coordinate local affairs; the individuals involved, about whom we can say very little, presumably performed a range of jobs on behalf of their communities, from consultation to dispute resolution.[50] The management and protection of rights to water was a particularly pressing concern, as Wendy Davies, as well as Álvaro Carvajal Castro and Julio Escalona, have shown in recent years.[51] Other extremely interesting examples of what we might call the collective at work involve groups of villagers acting in unison to defend the boundaries of their settlement. Most of these disputes seem to have been brought to court by major landowners, most often monasteries, seeking to reassert their rights to estates, but local involvement in the unfolding of judicial process is clear in all such examples, and these »boundary dispute« charters allow us to say something about local mobility and the variety of roles and tasks performed by elites and non-elites.[52]

To illustrate this point, witness the following complicated account from 987 of a dispute involving Galician villagers who had seemingly found themselves at odds with their lord. The charter consists of two principal parts, the first of which sees the inhabitants of Zacoys, led by a peasant named Hordonio, recognise that their claim to land in San Felix had been overruled by a named panel of judges, after investigation *in situ* had taken place. The second part, not produced here (because its content is less relevant to the thematic concerns of this article), comprises a *manifestum* by Hordonio, followed by detailed statements on how the judicial proceedings in part one should take place, with various tasks and responsibilities assigned to the procurator (*mandator*) and executive officer of the court (*saio*), whom we first encounter in part one, produced here.[53]

> We, the men who inhabit the village (*nos homines qui sumus habitantes*) of Zacoys, that is, those named Hordonio, Vermudo, Habze, Abdella, and Tunimi, to you our lord Manillano, abbot, and our lord Didaco, and your brothers of the monastery of Celanova. It is known by many that we obtained the rights to a part of the village of San Felix due to the generosity of our lord Rosendo, bishop, of happy memory, which part was given to us in usufruct for our own sustenance. And, humiliated by sin, we entered into dispute over that part with your brother Oduario, who had come to possess that same part of San Felix, for which reason we went to that very village in the presence of the judges (*pro quo peruenimus in ipsam uillam in presentia iudicum*) Froila Nuniz, the abbot Abraham, Pelayo Spasandis, Oduario Tetoniz, Gemondo Froylaz, Alfidio Guderiz, Pelayo Tructesindiz, Fagildo the confessor, Oduario the confessor, Vimara Froilaz, and many others of good birth; all of whom examined the boundaries, as is written in your charter, and concluded that truth is on your side

49 Examples: charter numbers 128 (938) and 184 (944), both in *Colección documental del archivo de la catedral de León, I*, ed. Sáez and Sáez [hereafter *León, I*].

50 Carvajal Castro, Escalona, Martín Viso *et al.*, Collective action, 153; Davies, *Windows*, 219-230.

51 Davies, *Windows*, 186-190; Carvajal Castro and Escalona, Mills.

52 Davies, *Windows*, 221-226.

53 By far the best guide to this document is Collins, Visigothic Law, 88-90. Cf. López Sabatel, Apuntes, 226.

> (*dixerunt quia uestra est ueritas*). Therefore, your procurator (*mandator*), named Salvador, provided reasonable cause that we abide by the law and comply with what has been ordered (*ut fuissemus ad legem et quod nobis ordinasset adimplessemus*). Thus, we recognise that you are in possession of the truth, and we have assigned to you that village by means of a charter and via the mediation of the executive officer, Godesteo (*agnouimus uos in ueritate et adsignauimus uobis in uestra uilla per textum scripture placiti et per saionem nomine Godesteo*).[54]

What are we to make of this story and what does it tell us about mobility, work, and the relationship between the two? At first glance, it would seem to demonstrate that lordly oversight was alive and well in tenth-century Galicia and to confirm that certain procedural measures, based on Visigothic law, could be implemented to settle boundary disputes.[55] Specialist jobs, tasks requiring skill and authority, are described in matter-of-fact terms and associated with named individuals: the monastery could call upon a procurator well-versed in the law to remind the men of Zacoys that its claim to the disputed land was unimpeachable, and the *saio*, a sort of factotum court officer, handled the paperwork and appears to have been an intermediary between the disputing parties.

But once we have absorbed the predictably contrite and regretful tones of the men of Zacoys, we notice that local mobility – that is, movement here and there in the extended locality – looms large in the account of how events unfolded. The men of Zacoys made the journey to the village of San Felix, the ownership of which was the source of contention; once there – they intimate – they observed, perhaps participated in, the perambulation of the contested boundaries; they also assembled in court, apparently held in San Felix, as instructed. There are good reasons to believe that this business dragged on for some time too, occasioning more than one local trip for Hordonio: the second part of this document, not translated here, stipulates that Salvador the procurator and Hordonio, acting as the representative of the inhabitants of Zacoys, agree to appear before a named judge on two further occasions.[56]

How far these men travelled is not entirely clear, because it is nigh-on impossible to be exactly sure of where Zacoys was located, but if we assemble and interrogate the few clues we possess, something of the micro-geography in which these events played out can be adumbrated. The wording of the charter tells us no more than that the men of Zacoys claimed a right to land in San Felix, implying but not stating that the two settlements are close to each other. To know for certain that they were, and to locate them more precisely in Galicia, we

54 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 200 (11 May 987). Translation my own.

55 *Leges Visigothorum*, 10, 3, ed. Zeumer, 396-399.

56 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 200 (11 May 987): *Salvator et Hordonio tibi saioni nostro Gudesteo per hunc nostrum placitum tibi compromittimus ut presentemus nostras personas ista IIII[a] feria in presentia iudicis Abrahame abba proad lege pro quinta de ipsa villa, et quod nobis lex iusserit adimpleamus. Et qui unus ex nobis hunc placitum excesserit pariet de quo agitur in duplum. Salvator et Ordonio in hoc placitum manus nostras (signum). Salvator qui voce intendit de fratribus Cellenove et Ordonio qui voce intendit sua et de suos heredes tibi saioni nostro Gudesteo per hunc nostrum placitum tibi compromittimus ut presentemus nostras personas et testimonias in presentia iudicis Froyla Nunnizi die ista* V[a] feria hic in ad Sanctum *Christophalum ad Malage, et firme ego Salvator quia ipsas quattuor rationes de ipsa villa Sancto Felice per ubi eam designavimus iste Ordonio et suos heredes tollerunt ad ipsos fratres de eas iure, et abent illas contra se*.

need to examine the only other reference to Zacoys in the Celanova cartulary, which can be traced to another boundary dispute, recorded in a charter dated to 950.[57] In this earlier document, Bishop Rosendo, then at the height of his influence, litigated with the inhabitants of the villages of Villaza, Albarellos, and Santa María *pro terminis et limitibus de villa Santa Felice*. That this *Santa Felice* is our San Felix from 987 is demonstrated by the description of the route taken by the inspectors appointed to walk the contested boundaries, which tells us that having encountered engraved boundary markers delimiting the territory of San Felix, they proceeded *directly* to Zacoys.[58] These places, the charter makes plain, were in the vicinity of Baroncelli, now Monterrei, near Verín, close to what is now the border with northern Portugal. They lie something in the order of 60kms from Celanova; but, crucially, Villaza, Albarellos, and Santa María survive to this day as extant parishes of Monterrei, and they are each within 3kms of each other, the sort of distances that would have been no impediment to the forming of sworn associations of locals in the face of encroaching lords. And what of San Felix, the crux of the entire dispute? A local tradition, traceable to the seventeenth century, holds that the San Felix contested in 950 and 987 is now the settlement of Pazos (still, officially, *San Fiz* de Pazos), which sits three kilometres to the east of Villaza and Albarellos.[59]

In sum, the micro-region that encompassed San Felix and its neighbouring settlements was, as Davies would have it, a »small world«, a landscape that required dense local knowledge to navigate.[60] But there is also a broader point to be made: these charters evince a clear demonstration of »local mobility« in action, and they demonstrate that tasks other than agricultural work were sometimes required of villagers. What, then, can we say at this juncture by way of summary? At the very least, that people travelled to and from their workplaces on a daily or near-daily basis, and that they also journeyed to hold meetings with friends, neighbours, and the representatives of local communities; and yet, on other occasions, it was the long arm of the law, or at least of the local lord, that prompted people to move beyond the household.

Postscript: The Local Contours of Movement

The foregoing has shown that if we are prepared to think capaciously about what work entailed in early medieval northern Iberia, we see that in addition to labouring on the land, some non-elite individuals performed other roles, some of which involved representation, disputation, and negotiation. These tasks, it would seem, were not remunerated. But they constituted »work« in the fundamental sense that what they demanded of those charged with them required the purposeful and directed exertion of mental and physical resources to a specific end.

57 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 86 (13 June 950).

58 *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 86: *et inde gradientes per duos aggeres terre invenimus contra Alvarelios mulionem in carraria fictum et contra partem sancti Felicis duas columnas ex quibus una incisa videtur ob signum terminationis, deinde pergentes provius per aggeres terre in directo per Zaccoys*.

59 Taboada, A Alta Idade Media, 82.

60 Davies, *Small Worlds*; Escalona, Dense local knowledge.

And what of farming itself, which took up most of the time and energy of the vast majority of ordinary people? Difficult as it is to enter the thought-world of the tenth-century Iberian peasant, the answer to this question must surely be that agricultural labour was considered »work«, and there are indeed indications in the charters that work shaped the identity of the *laboratores* who did that work, marking out, say, the *homines de Zacoys* from their social superiors. In contexts in which rural cultivators were heavily enserfed, we would do well to ask where work ended and service began, as Nicolas Schroeder has recently done with characteristic acuity, but in landscapes peopled by considerable numbers of free proprietors, such as northern Iberia, the question loses some of its potency.[61] It must be conceded, however, that in Spain we do occasionally encounter explicit references to the work that dependents were expected to do, even if it is rather vaguely described: when, for example, Ramiro III donated the *villa de Sancti Victori* to the abbot Juan in 978, it was made clear that the men of that village were expected to busy themselves with *opera in quacumque fuerit necessarium*.[62] Admittedly, the terms *opus/opera* are not particularly prevalent in the corpus, but it is clear nonetheless that when it was used, it was understood to denote physical labour.[63] It may even have given rise to related terms used to describe workers with technical expertise, such as those *operariis* who, in 905, patently understood something about hydraulic technology, however rudimentary their knowledge.[64]

Other terms denoting work of the kind on which village life depended – the *orriario* in charge of the granary; the *fornarius* who worked (and owned?) the oven; the *pellicularius*, that is, the tanner or the peltmonger – appear in our charters, although not in sufficiently large numbers to make generalisation possible.[65] All the same, these people, the tasks they performed, and – where we can say something about it – the distances they moved evoke a world in which the local contours of life gave all work and work-related tasks contextual meaning. These small worlds, inhabited by modest folks, were no less complicated, no less conflict-riven, and no less rich than those peopled by their social superiors; but recognising something of their scale induces a healthy scepticism with respect to the utility of diachronic studies of connection across vast distances in a period as fragmented and technologically-constrained as the early Middle Ages. Simply stated, the study of how most people in most places in pre-modern Europe experienced mobility and were themselves in some sense mobile, promises to tell us little about the interregional networks, flows and connections

61 Schroeder, *Servitium et opus*. Note that hereditary obligations best described as »domestic service« are clear enough in the Celanova inventories, but the individuals in question all worked at Celanova; for more on the bakers (*pistores*), swineherds (*porqueros*), and female kitchen staff (*mulieres de quoquina*) that toiled there, see *Celanova, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 183 (977).

62 *León, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 461 (978).

63 Charter 400 (1013) in *Colección diplomática*, ed. Herrero de la Fuente: *et de opera manuum nostrarum*.

64 *León, I*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 19 (905): *et rivum quam ipse Nabaz cum suis operariis aperuit*.

65 For an *orriario,* see *Colección documental*, ed. Ruiz Asencio, charter 786 (1022); for a *fornarius*, see *Colección diplómatica*, ed. Mínguez Fernández, charter 59 (936); for the *pellicularius*, see *León, II*, ed. Sáez and Sáez: 230 (950). With respect to the »professions« in urban contexts, see Pilsworth, Could you just sign this for me John?

that dominate most global history, and early medievalists should feel no shame in recognising as much.

Accordingly, this article hopes to remind us that to discuss early medieval mobility at a meaningful and appropriately historicised scale demands, above all, that we begin by recognising the significance of »the local«. Having said that, as always when dealing with the early Middle Ages, we must recognise that there are grounds for caution. This article has focused on predominantly agrarian societies, practising mixed farming in hill country, lowland, and plain; we might consider, however, that things were somewhat different in other early medieval settings and contexts. For example, the almost certainly greater mobility demanded by the lifestyles of highland pastoral communities, plains cattle herders, and coastal fishing communities largely escapes the charters, so we must not imagine for a moment that an analysis based on settled rural cultivators in early medieval north-western Iberia encompasses the entirety of the topic.[66] It must also be conceded that to defetishise »connection« over large distances, and to return to the routine and the everyday – building outwards from the general to the particular, from the rule to the exception – will not provide us with all the answers we seek; nonetheless, given the preponderance of small-scale rural cultivation in much of Europe before the year 1000, it may well represent the best place to start.

66 I am indebted to the wise words of one of the peer reviewers of this article, who pushed me to expand upon the very particular view of society that charters provide. To see something of the breadth of types of labour in the feudal centuries, see Arnoux, European workers.

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