

I

“A CONSTELLATION OF AUTHORITY”

Using Episcopal Sources to Recover Castilian
History in the Time of Alfonso VIII

These bishops are almost inarticulate. They do not tell us what ideals they held, nor how they tried to put them into practice. We have no collections of their letters . . . no treatises on the office of a bishop, no penitentials, no codes of ecclesiastical custom. . . . What we can perceive about episcopal thoughts and aspirations must be apprehended by the flickering light.

—Richard Fletcher, *The Episcopate in the Kingdom of León
in the Twelfth Century* (1978)

Despite being called “the key institutional element” by Bernard Reilly, bishops rarely play a central role in Castilian historiography.¹ Others have noted that supporting cast members—such as Gonzalo Gutiérrez Girón of Segovia, a son of a lesser nobleman and brother of the royal *majordomo*—constituted a kind of “constellation of authority.”² In part, this tension highlights what is actually under examination here: in what institution did bishops play a key role? Conceptualizing a monarch as a singular figure may work etymologically, but medieval monarchies were inherently plural agencies. Janna Bianchini notes that “the definition of who might share in this plural monarchy was flexible and often expansive . . . it was never static. . . . The ‘reigning monarch’ was considered the only constant, the central figure in a constellation of authority.”³ Figures like Gonzalo, then, may be the key to unlocking a much broader understanding of history, especially in kingdoms like Castile, where the records might be less than desirable. There were forty

or so other bishops who were “lunch-pail” workaday prelates, who showed up and did their work, and yet (thanks to the poor preservation of records) scholars cannot flesh out that work with the kind of rich historical treatment that some of the bishops’ more famous contemporaries receive. Thus their histories are mostly still unwritten. This study reframes how we conceive of the extant material on bishops like Gonzalo to provide microhistories of important individuals, even those too often overlooked, during the reign of one of Iberia’s longest-serving kings, restoring lost details of the period.

For most of those better-recorded bishops, the data are rich enough to track the most important balancing act that shaped medieval prelates: the tripolar relationship of their diocesan work, their political sovereign, and the bishop of Rome. The relationships bishops cultivated with the Castilian royal family always existed in tension with their relationships with the reigning popes. This book argues that that complex negotiation of relationships was a kind of zigzag—first toward Rome, then toward Castile—that gradually drew king and pope closer together. As a result, this monograph will provide both a revised narrative foundation and an important corrective for historiography that still overlooks the importance of Castilian historical evidence. Historians of the episcopacy have demonstrated that ecclesiastical history could fill important gaps in the records of secular institutions, and as Melissa Julian-Jones has recently written, “Bishops as figures of authority were, throughout previous decades of the twentieth century, often overlooked as embodiments of authority and intolerance, but gradually the tide of scholarship has shifted into making explorations of the bishop as a personality and a persona far more nuanced.”⁴

In addition to their religious function and identity—a factor that was, for most medieval people, more important than it is in the twenty-first century⁵—the bishops of Latin Christendom played many other roles. Cathedrals owned huge tracts of land, had their own fortifications (manned by secular and religious figures alike), collected rents, taught lessons in Latin, copied books, and sang masses. Being a cleric in the medieval Latin West was no less complicated than being a count. (In fact, one might argue that canon law made things even more complicated than the various local legal systems.) The activities of bishops are no less historically important than those of aristocratic knights or urban patricians.

It is hard to speak of formal organs of government in most medieval kingdoms before the thirteenth century, and the origins of modern states and their precursors in the medieval world remain hotly debated. For example, some scholars might label the kingdom of England the first “constitutional

monarchy” because of the baronial party’s presumptions at Runnymede in 1215.⁶ For others, the March Pact of 1204 represents just such a precedent for the Latin empire of Constantinople.⁷ Still others would have the Cortes of Valladolid’s limits on the power of Alfonso IX of León in 1188 serve as the starting point for the story of constitutional monarchies in the Latin West.⁸ In all of these cases, we know that prelates were present and that bishops brought their own ideas into the conversations about the way that monarchies were supposed to function, and that these decisions had an impact on churches, dioceses, and clerics. Even where bishops were present, their role in this dynamic is unfortunately understudied, leaving a major gap where records could support more extensive research.

In twelfth-century Castile, Toledo was a metropolitan archbishopric that controlled a province of six suffragan dioceses and their bishops.⁹ These were the dioceses of Palencia, Osma, Segovia, Sigüenza, Cuenca (after 1179), and—outside Castile but still under Toledan jurisdiction—Albarracín-Segorbe.¹⁰ In the north of the kingdom was the diocese of Burgos, whose privileged status as an exempt diocese meant that while it might be swayed politically and economically by factors internal to Castile, it was responsible to the Roman pontiff alone.¹¹ Also within Castile but subject to a foreign metropolitan archbishop were the dioceses of Ávila and (after 1189) Plasencia, which were suffragans of Santiago de Compostela after that archdiocese had assumed the rights of Mérida in the early twelfth century.¹² Adding to the dioceses and their cathedrals, of course, were the many powerful monasteries and collegiate churches that competed for the patronage of lay lords and the pious bequests made by Christians seeking to ameliorate the conditions of their immortal souls. All of these diocesan administrations produced records, but what makes them an especially fruitful field of study is the fact that records of ecclesiastical purchases, sales, quarrels, and bequests survive more plentifully than those of other entities in medieval Castilian archives.

So who were these prelates of Castile? What world did they occupy, and how did their relationships with superiors and colleagues shape their work? What does recovering their history from the extant sources contribute to larger conversations about medieval history and its pertinent themes? To answer these important questions, the bishops under study here need to be first placed in their historical context before they can be better appreciated as historical actors in their own right. As stars in a “constellation of authority,” each prelate had his own gravity and body of orbiting figures, all of whom revolved around the great pull of the centralizing figure of the Castilian monarch.

Scena Frons: The Reign of Alfonso VIII of Castile

The long trajectory of Alfonso's reign (r. 1158–1214) saw a major shift in the fortunes of Castile—from a component in a growing Leonese empire toward becoming one of the major powers of the Iberian Peninsula. Examining the “constellation of authority” of the reigns of Alfonso VIII and Leonor provides a more complex portrait of a kingdom that normally gets short shrift.¹³ Bishops were a key part of the Alfonsine constellation, and the tripolar relationship between the local diocesan see, the Roman pontiffs, and the Castilian monarchy serves as a lens through which scholarship can better examine the work of the Castilian prelates. While other thematic elements, such as frontier construction or crusading culture, were closely connected to this tripolar nexus, the core relationships among the kings, pontiffs, and prelates remain a powerful focal point for scholarship. The history of the bishops of medieval Castile is used much too rarely, and without careful scrutiny, for the long reign of Alfonso VIII.¹⁴ That history deserves to play a part in the larger conversations of medieval historians going forward and is this book's primary task.

At Alfonso VII's death in 1157, there were many contenders for the title of “Emperor of the Spains” in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula: a powerful king reigning in a growing Portugal, two ambitious brothers on the thrones of Castile and León, a wily upstart ruling in Navarra, and a messy solution to a succession crisis that created a precarious possibility in the nascent Crown of Aragon.¹⁵ The second *taifa* period in al-Andalus was likewise a scene of competition and struggle, but Murcia swallowed up many of the smaller *taifa* kingdoms in his efforts to stave off the surging Almohads.¹⁶ Sancho III was king of Castile for only a year and ten days, and his son was left in the hands of the two most powerful families in the kingdom. What should have been a long minority was commandeered by the king of León, likely because of both legitimate security concerns for his southern and southwestern borders and his own personal ambition to be acclaimed as “king of the Spains.”¹⁷ Given these factors, the survival and expansion of Castile during the fifty-six years of Alfonso's reign appears quite remarkable in hindsight.¹⁸

Scholars of lordship and queenship have elsewhere shown that medieval kings had help from a wide array of family members, extended social networks, and hereditary and appointed potentates within their midst.¹⁹ The orphaned toddler-king was alone in his personal body, but not in the body of his kingship.²⁰ This volume will argue that prelates were integral collaborators who guided Alfonso's reign from their cathedral sees, and their careful

work to bring the papacy and the kingdom closer together was the foundational effort that supported the Castilian church's lasting success.

From the earliest days of his rule, Alfonso VIII was watched over by two bishops, both of whom figure prominently in this study: his great-uncle Ramón de Minerva of Palencia and his godfather Celebruno, first bishop of Sigüenza and later archbishop of Toledo.²¹ Scholarly consensus marks the decade of Alfonso VIII's minority (1158–69) as a time of considerable internal conflict, especially between the two families charged by Sancho III with protecting the orphaned king.²² With two noble families grappling for control and two clerics trying to keep the peace, outside intervention would seem inevitable, and the interjection of Fernando II of León, both as an uncle and as the presumptive heir of Alfonso VIII's crown, created real problems. By 1166, the fortunes of the Castilian elites—especially with respect to Toledo, where a Leonese-appointed governor held the city—had deteriorated enough that the clergy of Castile were forced to take decisive action in concert with the count of Lara and probably several other unnamed aristocrats.

At Segovia in 1166, the archbishop of Toledo convoked a synod in which the bishops included several items of prime political importance. The first item affirmed was the allegiance and homage (*hominium*) owed to Alfonso by “anyone who might hold an honor within the kingdom of Alfonso and who was his vassal.”²³ Because the young king was threatened, this was a critical guarantee of his nascent political legitimacy. The second item made anyone who invaded Alfonso's kingdom a military target and granted a full crusade indulgence to those who repulsed invading forces.²⁴ This may be the first instance of a crusade indulgence issued against other Christians, given the fact that León and Navarra had recently swallowed up parts of Castile.²⁵ Even if it was not the first instance of crusade indulgences leveraged to repel fellow Christians, it was still a profound statement of ecclesiastical backing for Alfonso's kingship. The third item in the synodal canons declared that bishops should excommunicate anyone in the kingdom who dared to wage war without the royal nod.²⁶ Effectively, these canons ensured that when action was taken against a threat, it secured a directly royal interest. The occupation of much of western Castile by Leonese forces being the backdrop for such a gathering, it is safe to say that the bishops meant the king of León and his vassals most of all when they said “anyone.” Although the chronicle evidence is murky in the period, it seems unlikely that the contemporary witnesses were not better informed than much later chronicles.²⁷ The agenda of the synod—pro-papal, pro-Castilian, and anti-Leonese—makes clear that Castilian bishops were aligned with the king. Because they were not at

Toledo (then under Leonese control) but at Segovia, the importance of those common bonds was heightened. The bishops used their own gravity as prelates to pull Alfonso closer to themselves and to Rome.

Alfonso VIII's minority ended with a celebration of a gathering of the *cortes* in 1169 at Burgos, often called the "head of Castile."²⁸ While the king had knighted himself, taking his arms from the altar of San Zoilo of Carrión, he shored up major political support by announcing his betrothal to the daughter of the most powerful secular leaders in Europe: Leonor Plantagenet, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II Plantagenet.²⁹ In the same flurry of activity, Alfonso gave the monastery of San Zoilo a charter to provide for the foundation of the first Castilian fair (*feria*) at San Zoilo de Carrión in 1169.³⁰ Every scholar working on the meetings of the Castilian *cortes* (*curia regis*) has made clear the importance of this gathering for Alfonso and new bride, with some calling it a political master stroke.³¹ Some forty-six years later, Alfonso and Leonor would die within weeks of each other, surviving their numerous tragedies and expanding the fortunes of Castile many times over; the Cortes of Burgos in 1169 was an auspicious, but not unchallenged, beginning.

The early 1170s were a major turnaround for Castile. Two wars, against León and Navarra, reclaimed major territory in the kingdom of Castile's border regions that had been poached during Alfonso VIII's minority. Military campaigns against the two rival kingdoms were endorsed by and even employed bishops, and this signals how close these prelates were to the royal court because it shows them collaborating on an explicitly royal project couched in ecclesiastical idioms.³² Francisco García Fitz has shown that Castile's wars against its neighbors were one of the sources of a major recovery of its political fortunes in the period.³³ It is also clear that Castile secured these advancements, in part, with a clever arbitration between the kings of Navarra and Castile at the court of Henry II Plantagenet.³⁴ Beyond these less well known campaigns, the celebrated conquest of Cuenca in 1177 was so powerful a political motivator that Powers has suggested it was a crowning achievement, and several historians have patiently untangled the degree to which its capture was commemorated in charters for a long time thereafter.³⁵ Even the visit of Cardinal Hyacinth Bobone brought Iberia, Castile included, into closer cooperation with the papacy, a feat mirrored in the foundation bull of Cuenca and subsequent papal approval for the new diocese.³⁶ These were major political achievements and swelled the fortunes of Castilian dioceses, and some have even suggested that the archbishops of Toledo had helped finance the conquest of Cuenca in order to add another suffragan

diocese to their province.³⁷ The impact of these campaigns on Castile was enormous, as both the expansion of territory and the recovery of prestige laid the groundwork for the 1180s and brought the papacy, bishops, and crown closer together in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals.

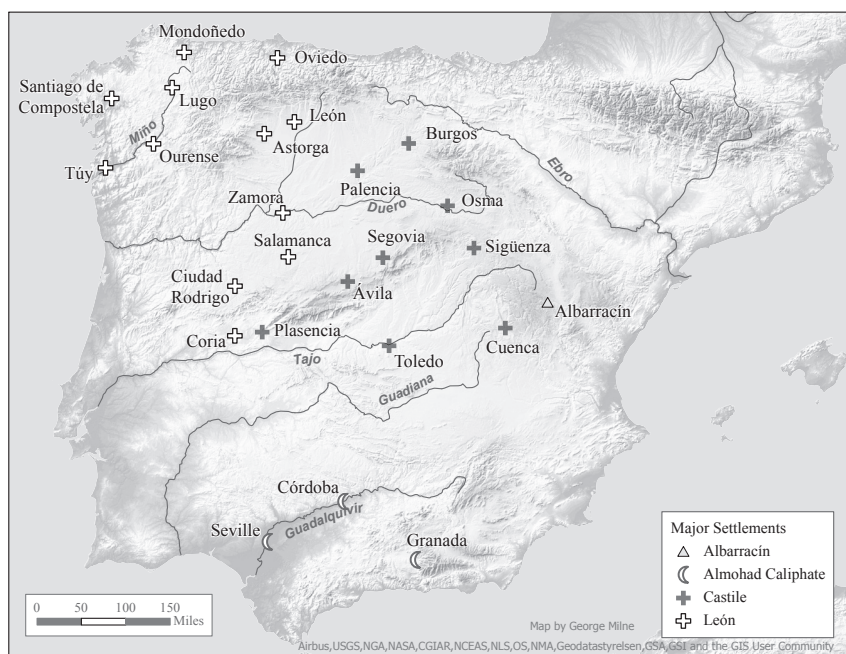
If the decade after Alfonso and Leonor's marriage was successful, then the decade after that was a mixed bag. Foundations of both the important royal monastery of Las Huelgas—perhaps the most important women's monastery in Castilian history—and a new diocese at Plasencia saw the increase of clerical fortunes.³⁸ Despite unusually high infant mortality in early pregnancies, several children—including Alfonso's eventual heir, Queen Berenguela of León and Castile, and her sisters Urraca and Blanca, who would become the queens of Portugal and France, respectively—would ensure the biological future of the dynasty.³⁹ The new diocese centered on Plasencia, carved out in part from territory from the diocese of Ávila; it continued Alfonso VIII's gradual process of checking Leonese expansion into Extremadura and provided a launching pad for further wars against the southwest.⁴⁰ The often-discussed Cortes of Carrión in 1188 saw Berenguela of Castile's betrothal to a German prince and the knighting of the new king of León by the king of Castile (who humiliated the Leonese monarch, forcing him to kiss the hand of his elder Castilian cousin).⁴¹ Having stepped onto the wider stage of European affairs, the end of the 1180s was also the start of a decade of monumental highs and lows, punctuated by the September 1189 birth of the first healthy son—Prince Fernando—and a truce with the Almohads.⁴² The connection between the papacy's geopolitical objectives, the growth of the episcopal ranks and the number of dioceses, and the royal expansionist agenda would find a great new backer from an old familiar face.

The election of Cardinal Hyacinth Bobone (whom Alfonso VIII and his court had known during his legations to the Iberian Peninsula) as Pope Celestine III brought the holy wars against the Almohads into renewed focus for the papacy.⁴³ Celestine III dispatched his nephew, Cardinal Gregory of Sant'Angelo, as a legate to the peninsula with a clear mandate to secure peace between the Iberian Christian powers and further the wars against the Almohads.⁴⁴ The high-water mark of this process was the Treaty of Tordehumos in 1194, which secured a peace between León and Castile for ten years.⁴⁵ Martín López de Pisuerga, a young archbishop of Toledo, led a major raid into al-Andalus, breaking the truce and launching a new holy war against the Almohad caliph Yaqub al-Mansur.⁴⁶ The Crusade of Alarcos in 1195 was an enormous undertaking: the bishop of Sigüenza lent the count of Molina money to pay his soldiers; the pope sent a number of letters (one of which

was suppressed) to clerics in Castile; and, after the Castilians were defeated, two bishops were even found dead on the battlefield.⁴⁷

After the defeat at Alarcos, the great reversal in fortunes brought a Leonese invasion (prompting a crusade against Alfonso IX in 1196) and a pair of raids from the Almohads, both of which would only be reversed with major assistance from the Crown of Aragon.⁴⁸ Even the military orders, legally independent but politically invested, were “pressured to take up arms against Alfonso [IX] and wanted to avoid doing so.”⁴⁹ Retaliating against those who had wronged him in the aftermath of the defeat at Alarcos meant taking revenge on both León and Navarra. Major conquests of territory in Navarra closed out the military achievements of the decade, and a number of reforms of cathedral chapters helped reshape the spiritual practice of the kingdom just as its borders were expanding.⁵⁰ The closeness of the connections between Alfonso VIII and the church in his kingdom had taken many forms, but at the close of the twelfth century they were perhaps the closest they had been since the conquest of Cuenca nearly twenty-five years earlier, even as the papacy had a lower-than-usual opinion of the king of Navarra, in part owing to his alliance with the Almohads.⁵¹

At the start of the thirteenth century, the Castilian monarchs were enjoying a phase of considerable strength. New children brought increasing survival chances to the dynasty and a great increase in the number of available diplomatic markers to play on the international scene.⁵² While Alfonso’s brother-in-law, John of England, was struggling against his own internal dissension and against a reinvigorated Capetian monarchy in France, the Castilians sought to seize Queen Leonor’s dower lands of Gascony.⁵³ Although Alfonso and Leonor’s hold over the southwestern parts of modern-day France was short-lived, the mere fact of passing over the Pyrenees to exert dominance in what was traditionally an Aragonese and Angevin zone of influence was a powerful political statement of ambition by Leonor and Alfonso.⁵⁴ The charters from this period make clear that the bishops of Castile were at Alfonso’s side, and for a short time, prelates from Gascony even appear as witnesses to charters from Castile.⁵⁵ The end of the first decade of the thirteenth century saw a huge shift in the population of the bishops of Castile: of the forty total prelates serving under Alfonso and Leonor, nine of them were appointed during this decade.⁵⁶ Replacing a quarter of the bishops—and thus a key segment of the administrative operations of Castile—should have stunted the Castilian’s progress, but not even the king’s fever, causing him to draft his will in 1204, would slow the pace of Castilian expansionism in the early thirteenth century.⁵⁷



Iberian Peninsula circa 1200 CE

The last half decade of Alfonso's life and reign was also the most successful. In 1210, Alfonso's eldest son, the Infante Fernando, joined with Aragonese forces to raid Murcia and soften up the Almohads, strengthening the Aragonese-Castilian alliance in the process.⁵⁸ By 1211, the *infante* (likely with an archiepiscopal ghostwriter) was corresponding with the pope and helping plan a major international crusade against the Almohads, prompted by the Almohads' capture of the Castilian fortress of Salvatierra.⁵⁹ When the prince died of a fever in late 1211, a heartbroken Alfonso and his allies from Navarra, Aragon, the Toulousain, and Portugal led a massive campaign against the Almohads.⁶⁰ Even the death of a bishop, Juan Mathé of Burgos, on the field could not stunt the wars.⁶¹ The Crusade of Las Navas in 1212 was a pivotal moment, and while scholars have rightly questioned how "inevitable" the collapse of Andalusí independence was in the century that followed, contemporary chroniclers made it the crowning achievement of a monarch nearing the end of his life.⁶² The impact of the crusade was enormous, but Alfonso and Leonor lived only a few years after this crowning glory.⁶³ Although the monarchs faded into memory, the prelates of their kingdom would all live

long enough that Leonor and Alfonso's grandson, Fernando III, would take the throne under the watchful eye of their daughter, Berenguela; most would stay well into the second decade of his reign as King Fernando III.⁶⁴

The Challenge of the Sources

Naturally, the question must be why no other volume has presented episcopal history if it is so relevant for filling in the historiography of the High Middle Ages. The general answer is that many medieval studies and their *comparanda* are still profoundly centered on Anglo-French historiography and the themes pertinent to its study; the specific answer is that the Castilian sources are fewer in number than for other regions, and most private archives are lost. Indeed, the sources that are preserved are primarily ecclesiastical or royal ones, so the task of writing an ecclesiastically centered history that plays out as a constellation of authority around the monarchy is less difficult than it might seem.

Take, for example, this complaint between two dioceses whose archives are coincidentally the poorest preserved in long-twelfth-century Castile. Sometime between July and December 1188, the archbishop of Compostela responded to a complaint, assigned to him by the pope, from the bishop of Ávila about the conduct of his former archpriest and now subject archdeacon of Plasencia, Pedro de Taiaborch.⁶⁵ An internal conflict of this type for a walled city like Ávila on the southern edge of Castile—only a few hundred kilometers from a major Almohad stronghold at Cáceres—could have spelled disaster if such dissension spilled over.⁶⁶ Although the letter from the archbishop of Compostela to the archdeacon of Plasencia is a short text of a little more than one hundred words, it does suggest that Rome had heard from Compostela about the problems between Ávila and Plasencia. The first letter was matched by a similar papal letter to Archdeacon Pedro de Taiaborch himself about the controversy.⁶⁷ The added wrinkle of the text is that Plasencia was in the early stages of being organized as a new royally sponsored diocese.⁶⁸ Although we even have a chronicle of the exploits of the men of Ávila in Extremadura, there are no mentions of even a single chaplain in their raiding parties, nor whether the conflict with Plasencia provoked any infraclerical violence, as had happened elsewhere.⁶⁹ The same could not be said for the conflict between Sigüenza and Osma from a few decades earlier, which occasionally broke out into the hostile occupation of border parishes.⁷⁰

What appears, at first glance, to be a squabble between a bishop and one of his archdeacons takes on a much larger role in the history of secular and

ecclesiastical politics in the late twelfth century. As Roman pontiffs wrangled to get some renegade bishops to abide by their writs, so too did bishops attempt to secure obedience from their own clergy, a feat mirrored by royal attempts to bring aristocrats to heel.⁷¹ Even the short text from the archbishop of Compostela betrays the ways in which a diocesan bishop and his archdeacon could be pulled between the royal initiative to found a new diocese and the Roman pontiff's desire to see peace maintained in the churches.

Unfortunately for historians wanting to know more about the back-and-forth of Ávila's life on the frontier and the cast of characters that must have populated the busy diocesan landscape, the Ávilan archive contains only forty-seven documents from the whole of the twelfth century.⁷² There were, by most historians' reckonings, a dozen bishops of Ávila, which suggests that a great deal of historical data has simply been lost.⁷³ In the history of the long twelfth century in Castile, the archive of that episcopal city is not alone in having a smallish collection of records. Plasencia's archives do not exist in the twelfth century, and, in fact, nothing whatsoever before 1238 is preserved in the archive—the entire first half century of the diocese archive's existence is missing.⁷⁴ The documentation for Osma—which produced no less than the founder of the Order of Preachers, Saint Dominic, from within its bounds—is as poorly preserved as the records of Ávila.⁷⁵ Sources cannot be conjured from thin air, but the history of dioceses with records that are scarcer *can* be filled in from a more oblique angle through the reconstruction of the history of their diocesan colleagues.

Although not every diocese had archives that survived as poorly as those of Osma or Ávila, there are oases amid the undeservedly deserted archives; these are flukes of fortune. At Sigüenza—where the archives were damaged by Franco's forces in the Civil War—many of the same documents still sit in their *armaria*, divided into sections of pontifical and particular texts, or in the codices on the large shelves.⁷⁶ Better still, the catalogs of the archives at Burgos, Toledo, Palencia, and Segovia contain considerable amounts of their medieval records.⁷⁷ My task here is revive the stories that historians too rarely listen to but are in fact waiting high in a cloister tower at Sigüenza, where the archives now sit.⁷⁸ Reanimating each of these dioceses fully would take more historical material than has been preserved, but there are some instances where a real contribution might be made. This book takes up that task.

Since Richard Fletcher's 1978 study of the episcopate in the kingdom of León, no English-language scholar has provided a comparable treatment for Castile despite the need to provide careful examination of the similarities between the church in Iberian kingdoms and their trans-Pyreanean

contemporaries.⁷⁹ This is in spite of the considerable contributions of Carlos de Ayala Martínez, who has shown that the sources from the Castilian church do provide a substantive base on which serious historical investigation might take place.⁸⁰ Reconstructing the history of the church of Castile will add substantial and worthwhile nuance to the history of Castile as a whole. Reilly argued that the development of many of the mechanisms of royal power were cultivated by the high clergy and that the episcopate was the “key institutional element” in León and Castile during the early twelfth century.⁸¹ Peter Linehan made clear his opinion that the church of Castile in the thirteenth century had a free hand from Fernando III because the conqueror’s success bought him papal leniency.⁸² These three factors suggest that the study of the church in the kingdom of Castile would be worthwhile, but because of the poor preservation of the sources in several archives, such a treatment has not yet appeared. This study will remedy that deficit by showing that bishops and their administrations are an underrealized opportunity to unlock the history of medieval Castile.

So bishops and their clergy present avenues to study a multitude of roles, and the sources for their careers are better preserved than other archival documents (most notably private noble archives and municipal archives) in the history of Castile.⁸³ As a result, the episcopates of Castile’s bishops present a doubly fortunate resource: there are many avenues of historical research preserved in their records, and there are many records in which to pursue these inquiries. It is for this reason that the study of the Castilian episcopate seems to be such a viable object to be undertaken here. Why, then, should such a study be limited to the reign of a single king—Alfonso VIII of Castile?

At first, Alfonso VIII and his age appear rather daunting as a subject. In his massive study of Alfonso’s reign, the twentieth-century Spanish scholar Julio González provided more than eleven hundred pages of commentary, drawing further on some two thousand pages of edited archival sources, but he devoted only sixty or so to the study of the bishops themselves and even then was only interested in prosopographical work.⁸⁴ The fifty-six years during which Alfonso VIII was king provide two advantages, then, that recommend it as a period of study. First, it creates a natural chronological boundary in the reign of one king, which allows for a bit of narrative cohesion. Second, it makes the actions of that king—themselves the subject of two major domestic chronicles and many other narrative sources, as well—into a kind of historical frame onto which a larger canvas can be stretched and a portrait of historical life in the medieval episcopate can be painted. Yet to many historians of the period, Alfonso VIII is still a lesser-known king, and his reign

needs still more explication for nonspecialists and lay readers alike.⁸⁵ As a key element of the constellation of authority around Alfonso VIII, the bishops deserve special attention and can offer real improvements for our general picture of the period.

I have endeavored to write a history of those prelates about whom substantial data—from archival and narrative sources—might be compiled and have examined the roles that certain major themes play in their respective bishoprics. For some prelates, surviving sources recommended the writing of a more legal history, so that was the history against whose historiography my findings might be tested. It seems right, then, to situate the potential of such an approach against the major scholarly contributions that have shaped this study.

The pioneering work on long-twelfth-century Castile and León in English for “church history” was done in the twentieth century by Peter Linehan and Richard Fletcher. Although his later project *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* is referenced more frequently as a kind of omnibus compendium of medieval Hispanist scholarship, Linehan’s *The Spanish Church and the Papacy in the Thirteenth Century* argued for seeing a close cooperation between the monarchy and church at the beginning of the thirteenth century that was transmogrified into royal control by the end of the same century.⁸⁶ Fletcher’s first contribution, *The Bishopric in the Kingdom of León in the Twelfth Century*, had two main goals.⁸⁷ First, his project created a series of topical narratives that demonstrated that regional ecclesiastical history could be written about the medieval Iberian kingdoms without relying, as Linehan had done, quite so heavily on papal sources. The second goal was to provide a rich reference for the key players and themes preserved in the sources. Frequently, these two goals worked together to demonstrate that the project itself was valid, as were many that Fletcher had hoped would follow. The second of Fletcher’s two major monographs on the subject was his biography of the great Compostelan archbishop Diego Gelmírez, which was more in the style of the then-in-vogue microhistories creating a kind of test case for many of the major themes of the period.⁸⁸ Carolina Carl has much more recently examined the case of a diocese and its bishop that existed on the frontiers of Navarra, Aragon, and Castile and grew in response to a variety of influences from those regions and larger social forces.⁸⁹ In many respects, this volume will connect the work done by Fletcher on the kingdom of León and Carl’s project on Calahorra in the long twelfth century with the scholarship of Linehan on the wider Iberian Peninsula’s ecclesiastical landscape in the thirteenth century and its connections to one of the major sources of its appellate authority.

Although the number of scholars cited in this volume reveals a widespread interest in the religious history of the Iberian Peninsula, *A Constellation of Authority* complements and nuances other scholarly treatments. In a handful of published articles, Ayala Martínez has begun to synthesize the available scholarship and edited sources to correct a large number of erroneous elements in extant historiography and provide a coherent, cohesive narrative on which later scholarship might be based.⁹⁰ Adeline Rucquoi, in both articles and a recent book, has explored the cultural and religious revival of the long twelfth century in Castile with special attention to the historical development of Saint Dominic of Osma.⁹¹ In his extensive project, Andreas Holndonner has chronicled the legal and political history of the metropolitan province of Toledo in order to demonstrate that Toledan clerics had to fight to achieve their distinction as “*Primas Hispaniarum*,” as the theoretical administrative suzerain of the Church in the Iberian Peninsula.⁹² There is also a considerable body of *comparanda* against which the preliminary conclusions of this study can be contrasted. Whether in David Foote’s study of Orvieto, Maureen Miller’s work on Verona, Paul Freedman’s investigations of Vic, Graham Loud’s histories of the church in Sicily, Bernard Hamilton’s scholarship on the Crusader States, or Jane Sayers’s research into Canterbury, ecclesiastical sources have been used by a wide array of scholars to show that bishops can be key windows onto historical developments, providing special perspectives not in evidence in lay sources.⁹³ Where the body of sources from the lower classes and middling aristocratic archives does not survive, scholars can use ecclesiastical sources to fill the gap. Even where important scholars have carefully unlocked alternate viewpoints, bishops’ histories build meaningful contrasts.⁹⁴ This study takes up exactly that project—using bishops to unlock a “history from the middle” and to show the manner in which the church in Castile was drawing closer to Rome in a variety of ways.⁹⁵

Taken as a whole, scholarship has already made clear the ways in which this study might provide a welcome addition to discussions of major social and cultural themes. Ecclesiastical historians, working both within and outside the Iberian Peninsula, have shown that the history of church institutions could fill important gaps in the records of secular institutions. Although chroniclers may often mention only the king or his close confidantes, studies of Castilian history have demonstrated that the figures “in the background” of traditionalist historiography are not only plausible subjects for study but also reveal a great deal about broader and deeper societal and cultural developments. Moreover, the sources for Castilian history can support and satisfy the questions posed by scholars working on the subject. A brief outline of

this book's principal questions, and their answerers, sets the stage for the rest of the volume.

The Questions Posed in This Study and Their Answerers

In this project, I have tried to recover the voices of the bishops of Castile and present them in their own context. By necessity, only the long-serving prelates appear in any detail here, simply because the records preserved from their episcopates were extensive enough suggest how they engaged with the great ideas and movements of their day. The sources do not always answer all the questions one would like to ask, of course. Each of this book's chapters focuses on single bishop to flesh out the history of an individual who might provide something of a case study to help build a new, more comprehensive narrative synthesis.

In every way possible, I have described their encounters with broader pan-European trends and themes, but the overarching theme is the complicated balancing that bishops had to achieve between the monarchy and the papacy, managing their relationships with both to suit their needs. It is my intention that this narrative synthesis will open up more conversations about the historical impact of Castile and its clergy. The biographical studies here, offered in chronological order, offer a revised narrative for the period and its players. (To that end, forty individuals appear here, though some are only mentioned as single points of data at this project's conclusion or in the prosopographical appendix.)

The seven bishops studied here interacted with their colleagues, some of whom we have very little information about, and produced a great deal of records about their activities. They show themselves to be quite like their peers in other kingdoms, a fact that will make the conclusions of this volume useful for comparative studies and will surely lay the ground for future work on the Castilian church.

In the chapter that follows, Archbishop Celebruno of Toledo invites us to see the ways in which he served in the complicated roles that his position as Primate of the Spains demanded. In chapter 3, Ramón de Minerva, a bishop of Palencia, reminds us that in an age of changing clerical norms, the old guard still stood its post (even with a handful of reprovals from the papacy), continuing to fulfill its duties as a great political force in a more rough-and-tumble era. In the fourth chapter, an Italian cleric called Alderico di Palacio demonstrates that the churches of kingdoms were not a homogenous lot; nor were

the bishops, as his encouragement of the school at Palencia tells us, purely political. Alderico's contemporary Martín de Bazán is the subject of chapter 5. He belonged to the nobility from a neighboring kingdom and changed his diocese considerably, but his greatest achievement was in carrying out the reforms that recruited Domingo de Caleruega—and thus set the Order of Preachers well on their way to shaping Latin Europe. In the sixth chapter, Martín López de Pisuerga, a scion of a noble family, forever alters the ways in which Toledan archbishops took on all comers, on all fronts, at all times. Chapter 7 details how Julián ben Tauro, a Toledan Mozarab, was elected to the new diocese of Cuenca, his body and diocese acting as living, breathing frontiers that demonstrate the inherent challenge of medieval and early modern sources presenting very different historical narratives. In the eighth chapter, the career of Rodrigo de Finojosa, bishop of Sigüenza for more than three decades, illustrates how a cleric blessed with a long tenure can expose many of the different tensions experienced by bishops in medieval Christendom.

These case studies of about one-fifth of Alfonso VIII's bishops represent a sample of those whose careers can be reconstructed. The early death in battle of a young clergyman, only a few weeks after he was elected to be bishop of Segovia, is an evocative reminder of the fragility of life in the Middle Ages, but it hardly makes for the stuff of a whole chapter, for example.⁹⁶ Nor, for that matter, do the bishops of Plasencia; one bishop may have been captured by the Almohads in 1195 or 1196, and the diocesan archives appear to have been completely erased of any material predating 1238, when the diocese itself was entering its fifth decade of existence.⁹⁷ An appendix to this volume records the names and backgrounds of all those clerics who served during the reign of Alfonso VIII, but a comprehensive study of every bishop and every act they performed would surely be as dry to read as the fields of Extremadura in August—and not even half as pleasant to write.

Focusing on singular figures preserves narrative cohesion but also gives future scholars a foundation for the study of other important themes uncovered in the building of the narrative. As a result, I have attempted to provide the most comprehensive, but not tedious, treatment of each of the prelates' careers to fill out the portraits of the background stars in Bianchini's "constellation of authority."⁹⁸ This kind of personal focus can be very illuminating for larger conversations while avoiding the problems posed by "great man histories." The biographical treatments offered in this volume provide a base on which larger, more complex narratives can later rest.