A History of the Ribeiro

From Celtic Hillforts to Noble Houses

ÁLVAREZ FAMILY HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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Foreword

The Ribeiro is a small wine-growing region in the province of Ourense, in southern Galicia. For three thousand years, successive peoples have settled its river valleys, terraced its granite hillsides, and fought over its strategic crossings. This book tells their story.

It is also, in a narrower sense, a family story. The Álvarez, Rodríguez, Fernández, Méndez, Vázquez, and González families whose baptismal records fill the parish archives of Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle from 1680 onward were shaped by every layer of this history — Celtic, Roman, Germanic, Jewish, French, and Castilian. Their surnames, their villages, their trades, and their marriages all reflect the deep currents traced in these pages.

The material gathered here draws on parish records from the Diocese of Ourense, municipal archives, published scholarship, and the archaeological record. It is organised chronologically: from the Iron Age castros that still crown the hilltops above the Miño, through the Roman roads and Suevic kingdoms, to the medieval Jewish quarter of Ribadavia and the noble houses whose towers and pazos once dominated every parish.

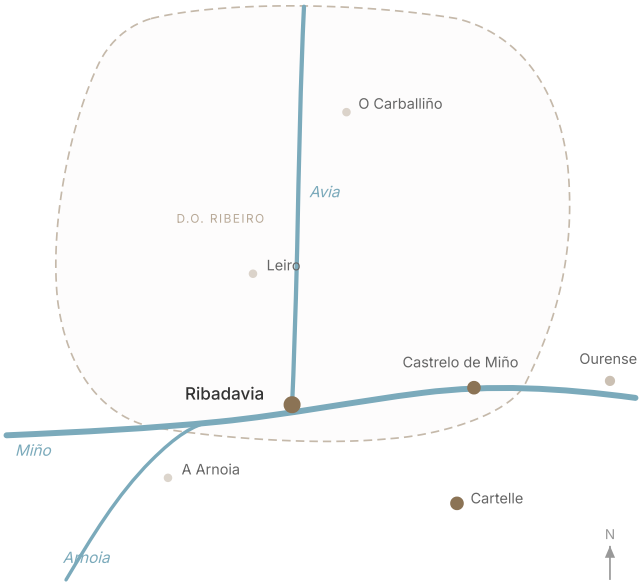
This is not an academic monograph. It is a readable history for the family — a way of understanding where we come from and what forces shaped the land we inherited.

A Note to the Reader

This book is organised chronologically, from the Celtic Iron Age to the modern era. Each part builds on the last: the ancient peoples shaped the land; the medieval institutions organised it; the noble houses governed it; and the towns are where the family lived through it all.

Readers interested primarily in the family story may wish to begin with Part IV — The Towns — which covers Castrelo de Miño, Cartelle, and Ribadavia, the parishes where six generations of records survive. From there, work backwards through the noble houses and medieval world that shaped those communities.

A timeline of key dates follows on the next page, and a glossary of Galician, Latin, and Hebrew terms can be found at the end of the book.



The Ribeiro wine region. The Avia flows south through the heart of the denomination to meet the Miño at Ribadavia. Cartelle lies south of the river.

Timeline

~1000 BC	Celtic tribes settle the hilltops of Galicia; first castros built above the Miño valley
~900 BC	Phoenician merchants establish Atlantic trade routes, seeking Galician tin and gold
~600 BC	Castro culture flourishes — fortified hilltop settlements form defensive networks
137 BC	Decimus Junius Brutus leads the first Roman campaigns into Gallaecia
19 BC	Emperor Augustus completes the conquest; Gallaecia becomes a Roman province
1st c. AD	Via Nova built through the Ribeiro; systematic viticulture begins along the Miño
409	Suevi cross the Rhine and establish a kingdom in Gallaecia — the first Germanic state in Western Europe
569	Parochiale Suevorum documents the parish system; Castrelo and Cartelle parishes likely defined
585	Visigoths conquer the Suevic kingdom, imposing the Liber Iudiciorum law code
~1100	Sephardic Jewish communities established in Ribadavia; the aljama becomes one of Galicia's largest
1117	Queen Urraca grants Ribadavia its royal charter, making it Galicia's wine capital

1148	Cistercian monks found San Clodio monastery, transforming Ribeiro viticulture
~1170	Knights Templar establish commanderies in and around Cartelle
1306	Knights Templar dissolved; their Ribeiro holdings pass to the Hospitallers
1386	English troops besiege Ribadavia; Christians and Jews defend the town together
1467	Irmandiño revolt: Galician peasants tear down noble towers across the region
1492	Edict of Expulsion: Jews forced to convert or leave; many Ribadavia families become conversos
1580	Ribeiro hidalgos serve in the Spanish Armada
1608	Last major auto de fe in Ribadavia: crypto-Jewish families betrayed by a malsín
~1680	**Earliest Álvarez and Rodríguez parish records in Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle**
1809	Napoleonic forces pass through the Ribeiro during the Peninsular War
1880s	Phylloxera devastates the vineyards; mass emigration to the Americas begins

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PART IV — THE TOWNS

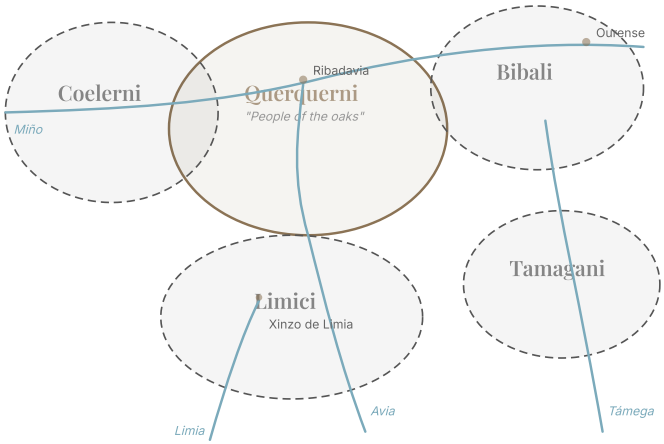
PART I

The Ancient Peoples

Before there were borders or kingdoms, the river valleys of what is now Ourense were already inhabited. Celtic hillforts crowned every strategic summit. Phoenician traders sailed the Atlantic coast. Roman legions built roads that still mark the landscape. Germanic tribes founded the first post-imperial kingdom in Western Europe. Each left an indelible mark on the land, the language, and the people.

CHAPTER 1

The Celts — Gallaeci & Castro Culture



The Celtic tribes of southern Gallaecia, c. 500 BC – 19 BC. The Querquerni territory (highlighted) corresponds to the modern Ribeiro.

THE PEOPLE Iron Age — 1st Century BC

The Gallaeci: Celtic People of Northwestern Iberia

The Gallaeci were the Celtic tribal confederation that inhabited the territory stretching from the Douro river to the Cantabrian coast — the land the Romans would name Gallaecia, and that we know today as Galicia). Greek geographer Strabo described them as "the most warlike of all the Lusitanian peoples," a confederation of dozens of smaller groups (populi) united by a common language, material culture, and the distinctive settlement pattern of the castros — fortified hilltop vil-

lages that defined the landscape of northwestern Iberia for nearly a millennium.

Among these populi, the Querquerni and Coelerni inhabited the middle Miño) valley and the territory around the Arnoia river in what is now Ourense province — precisely the ancestral homeland of the Álvarez and Rodríguez families in Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle. These tribes lived in circular stone dwellings within fortified hilltop enclosures, practiced metalworking in gold and bronze, raised cattle, and cultivated the sheltered river valleys. The Gallaeci fiercely resisted Roman expansion; it took Rome over a century of campaigns to subdue them, from Decimus Junius Brutus Callaicus in 137 BC to Augustus during the Cantabrian Wars (29–19 BC).

> The Gallaeci gave their name to Gallaecia (modern Galicia)), one of the oldest territorial identities in Western Europe

THE TRIBES Coelerni, Querquerni & the Peoples of Ourense

Warriors of Oak and Iron

Within the vast Gallaeci confederation, the tribes of southern Ourense formed a distinct cluster of Celtic peoples belonging to the Conventus Bracarensis, the Roman administrative district centred on Bracara Augusta (modern Braga). Pliny the Elder recorded 24 civitates and 285,000 people within this conventus. Among them, the Coelerni occupied the territory that is now the Terra de Celanova and the Arnoia valley — the heartland of Cartelle and the ancestral land of the Rodríguez family. Their capital was Coeliobriga, identified with the castro of Castromao near Celanova, where archaeologists found the famous openwork triskelion — a quintessential symbol of Celtic art —

and the bronze Tabula Hospitalitatis of 132 AD, recording a formal pact between the Coelerni and a Roman prefect under Emperor Hadrian.

To the south, the Querquerni — literally "the Oak People," from the same Indo-European root as Latin quercus — occupied the Baixa Limia region of southwestern Ourense. The Roman military fort of Aquis Querquennis in Bande, built c. 69–79 AD to house soldiers constructing the Via Nova, was named for the tribe's thermal springs and garrisoned some 500 legionnaires of the Legio VII Gemina. The Limici, who inhabited the lands around the River Lima on the Galician-Portuguese border, and the Bibali further east completed the mosaic of Celtic peoples whose territories converged in the Ourense river valleys — precisely where the Álvarez and Rodríguez families would later settle.

> The Coelerni held the Arnoia valley and Terra de Celanova — the ancestral territory of Cartelle

THE LAND Celtic Toponymy & Settlements

Names Written in Stone

The word "Castrelo" itself is a direct inheritance from the Celtic past. It derives from the Latin "castrum" (fortress), which Romans used to designate the native hilltop settlements they encountered. The municipality of Castrelo de Miño was named for the ancient Castrum Minei — the castro that commanded the strategic river crossing of the Miño). This is no isolated case: across Ourense province, hundreds of place names encode Celtic and Castro-period origins. Every toponym beginning with "Castro-" or "Castrelo-" marks the site of a former hillfort. The suffixes "-briga" (fortified height) and "-dunum" (fortress) appear throughout Galicia) — Nemetobriga, the sacred grove-fortress

near Trives, and Brigantium (modern A Coruña) are among the most prominent.

In the family's ancestral parishes, the Celtic imprint runs deep. The Arnoia river, flowing through Cartelle, bears a pre-Roman hydronym of probable Celtic origin. The density of "castro" place names in the Ourense river valleys — Castro de Macendo, Castro de Outeiro, Castro das Cavadas — is among the highest in all of Iberia, reflecting the intense settlement of the Gallaeci in this region. Parish names containing elements like "-riz" (from later Germanic overlay) and "-edo/-ido" (Latin suffixes applied to Celtic root words) create a layered etymological record that traces continuous habitation from the Iron Age through the present day.

> Castrum Minei — the original castro on the Miño) — gave Castrelo de Miño its name

THE HILLFORTS Fortified Settlements of the Ribeiro

Hilltop Fortresses of the River Valleys

Over 5,000 castros have been catalogued across Galicia), with at least 383 documented in Ourense province alone — and the ancestral parishes of the family sit at the centre of one of the densest concentrations. In Castrelo de Miño, five castros have been identified: Castro de Santa Lucía in Astariz (2.75 hectares, excavated 2016–2017 by the University of Vigo), Castro de Las Cavadas (the legendary Castrum Minei commanding the Miño) crossing), Castro de Macendo, Castro de Outeiro, and the Castrum Minei fortress itself. Together they formed a defensive network along the Miño) between Ourense and Ribadavia — a chain of hilltop sentinels connected by line-of-sight across the valley.

In Cartelle, the Castro de Trelle — straddling the boundaries of Toén, Barbadás, and Cartelle — is one of the five largest castros in the entire province at 3.5 hectares. Aerial photographs from 1981 revealed its radial street pattern, reminiscent of the great oppidum of San Cibrán de Lás. Archaeological campaigns in 2024 and 2025 — the first scientific excavations of this site — uncovered circular stone dwellings, defensive walls approximately 10 metres high, a bronze fibula, carbonised wheat grains, and ceramics showing contact between the castro inhabitants and the Romans. The municipality's Monte de O Castro viewpoint marks another hillfort site. Across the Avia valley, the pre-Roman settlement of Abobriga — a Celtic place name meaning "settlement on the banks of the Avia" — was the direct predecessor of modern Ribadavia, its medieval Latin name Rippa Avie a translation of the original Celtic toponym.

> Over 5,000 castros catalogued across Galicia); at least 383 in Ourense province alone

EVIDENCE Archaeological Record

Stones That Remember

The physical evidence of Celtic life surrounds the family's ancestral parishes. Castro de Santa Lucía in Astariz, a parish of Castrelo de Miño, is a 2.75-hectare fortified settlement first excavated by the University of Vigo in 2016. Archaeologists uncovered circular stone dwellings characteristic of the Castro culture alongside later rectangular Roman-era structures — a visible record of the transition from Celtic to Roman life. A rock-cut wine press discovered at the site, dated to approximately 235 AD, provides the earliest evidence of winemaking in the Ribeiro region. Castro de Las Cavadas, the leg-

endary Castrum Minei, once commanded the Miño) river crossing, while Castro de Macendo and Castro de Outeiro formed a defensive network stretching along the Miño) between Ourense and Ribadavia.

The crown jewel of the region's archaeological heritage is the Cidade de San Cibrán de Lás (Lansbrica), located between San Amaro and Punxín — just 18 km from Ourense. At approximately 10 hectares, it is the largest castro in all of Galicia), with two concentric oval walls, organized streets and drainage, over 50 excavated dwellings, and a ritual sauna (pedra formosa). At its peak around the 1st century BC, some 3,000 people lived within its walls. Nearby Castromao, identified as the ancient Coeliobriga and capital of the Coelerni tribe, yielded the famous Tabula Hospitalitatis — a bronze pact dated to 132 AD between the Coelerni and a Roman prefect, one of the most important epigraphic documents of Roman Gallaecia. The Ourense gold torcs, a pair of magnificent Iron Age neck rings found near the city and now in the British Museum, exemplify the metallurgical mastery of the Gallaeci.

> Cidade de San Cibrán de Lás (Lansbrica): ~10 hectares, the largest castro in Galicia), with an Archaeological Park since 2014

THE SACRED Celtic Gods & Holy Waters

Gods of Oak and Thermal Springs

The province of Ourense holds the largest concentration of indigenous deity inscriptions in the entire Iberian Peninsula — a remarkable window into the religious world of the Gallaeci. Chief among the local gods was Bandua, a martial deity equated with Roman Mars), attested in six votive inscriptions from Ourense alone. At San Cibrán de Lás, a dedication to "Bandua Lansbricae" — Bandua of Lansbrica —

reveals how each castro invoked the god under its own local epithet. Nabia), goddess of rivers, valleys, and fertility, appears in at least 28 inscriptions across Gallaecia and Lusitania; her sacred character may survive in the veneration of the Virgin of the Barca. The carballeira — sacred oak grove — served as a communal gathering place, echoing the Celtic reverence for trees documented by Caesar and Pliny among the Gauls and Britons.

The thermal springs that define Ourense — As Burgas in the city centre erupt at over 60°C — were sacred to the Castro-period inhabitants long before Rome. The deity Bormanicus, linked to hot springs, spas, and the subterranean world, was venerated at the Burgas alongside the god Reve. At Aquis Querquennis in Bande, the Romans built their military fort precisely at the thermal springs already sacred to the Querquerni — the fort's very name means "the waters of the Querquerni." In Castrelo de Miño, the thermal baths of O Diestro rest on Castro-Roman foundations, their curative waters drawing visitors for at least two millennia. This intertwining of sacred water and settlement is a defining feature of Celtic Gallaecia.

> Bandua: martial deity with 6 inscriptions in Ourense; "Bandua Lansbricae" found at San Cibrán de Lás

LEGACY Living Traditions

The Celtic Spirit Alive in Galicia

The gaita gallega — the Galician bagpipe — is the most visible thread connecting Galicia) to the broader Celtic world. Directly related to the bagpipe traditions of Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, and Asturias, the gaita has been the voice of Galician identity for centuries. Galicia) is recognised as one of the Celtic nations in cultural terms,

participating in the Festival Interceltique de Lorient alongside Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and the Isle of Man. Traditional circular dances (muiñeiras) echo pre-Roman communal celebrations. Castrelo de Miño itself maintains a school of bagpipes and tambourines, ensuring this ancient musical tradition passes to new generations.

The Celtic inheritance extends far beyond music. The hórreo — the raised stone granary found throughout Galicia) — descends directly from Castro-era grain storage structures, preserving a design principle over two millennia old. Communal land management practices in rural parishes recall pre-Roman collective organisation. The carballeira (sacred oak grove) served as a communal gathering place, mirroring the Celtic reverence for sacred groves documented across Europe. Galician folklore preserves unmistakable pre-Christian elements: the meigas (healers and seers), the Santa Compaña (a spectral procession of the dead that walks the night roads), and the traditions of Samhain — the Celtic new year — which survives in Galicia) as the night of departed souls. The Galician language itself retains Celtic substrate vocabulary not found in other Romance languages.

> The gaita gallega connects Galicia) to Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, and Asturias in a living Celtic musical tradition

CHAPTER 2

The Phoenicians — Mediterranean Traders

> *The tin and gold that drew Phoenician merchants to the Atlantic coast came from the river valleys of what is now Ourense. While direct evidence of Phoenician contact with the interior Ribeiro remains circumstantial — drawn from trade patterns and coastal archaeology rather than local excavation — the commercial networks they established oriented the entire region toward the Mediterranean world for centuries to come.*

THE MERCHANTS 9th–6th Century BC

Phoenicia: Traders at the Edge of the Known World

The Phoenicians were the master navigators and merchants of the ancient Mediterranean. From their city-states of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos on the Levantine coast — in what is now Lebanon — they built a maritime trading empire that stretched from the eastern Mediterranean to the Atlantic. By around 800 BC, they had established Gadir (modern Cadiz) at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, the western-most permanent colony in the ancient world. From Gadir, they ventured beyond the Pillars of Hercules into the open Atlantic, driven by one thing above all: the quest for tin.

Tin was the strategic metal of the Bronze Age. Without it, copper alone was too soft for weapons or tools. The Phoenicians discovered that the richest tin deposits in Europe lay along the Atlantic fringe — in Galicia), northern Portugal, Cornwall, and Brittany. The Greek historian Herodotus called these distant tin sources the Cassiterides, the "Tin

Islands." For the Phoenicians, the Atlantic coast of Galicia) was not the edge of the world — it was one of the most valuable places in it.

THE COLONY The Gateway to the Atlantic

Gadir: The Westernmost City of the Ancient World

Around 800 BC, Phoenician colonists from Tyre founded Gadir — modern Cadiz — on a pair of small islands near the mouth of the Guadalquivir. It was the westernmost permanent settlement in the ancient world, and it became the nerve center of all Phoenician activity in the Atlantic. Within its walls rose a great temple to Melqart, the patron god of Tyre, whose bronze pillars — each eight cubits high — were widely proclaimed to be the true Pillars of Hercules. A perpetual flame burned on its altar, tended by priests who never let it die. Hannibal, Julius Caesar, and countless other figures of antiquity came to worship here.

From Gadir, the Phoenicians built a chain of colonies along the southern and southeastern coasts of Iberia. Malaka) (modern Malaga) — named from the Phoenician word for "salt" — became a major hub for the fish-salting industry. Sexi) (Almuñécar) and Abdera) (Adra) anchored the southeastern coast. At Castillo de Doña Blanca), near El Puerto de Santa María, archaeologists found the most extensive surviving Phoenician river port in the Mediterranean — a walled city continuously occupied from the 8th to the 3rd century BC. And at Cerro del Villar near Malaga, because no later town was built on top, archaeologists have been able to study a rare intact Phoenician urban grid: streets lined with multi-room residences, metalworking shops, and pottery kilns.

TARTESSOS The Hybrid Kingdom

Tartessos: Where Phoenicia Met Iberia

In the lower valley of the Guadalquivir, something extraordinary emerged from the meeting of Phoenician merchants and indigenous Iberians: Tartessos, a civilization born around the 9th century BC as a hybrid of both worlds. The Tartessians controlled vast reserves of silver, copper, and gold in southwestern Iberia, and the Phoenicians were their partners and buyers. Tartessian artisans trained in Phoenician goldsmithing techniques produced masterworks like the Treasure of El Carambolo — 21 pieces of gold discovered in 1958 near Seville, including ox-hide pectorals and a necklace with pendants, crafted with Phoenician methods from locally mined gold. At the same site, archaeologists found a temple dedicated to Astarte, the Phoenician goddess of fertility and war.

Tartessos vanished around the 5th century BC, and its disappearance remains one of Iberia's great mysteries. At Casas del Turuñuelo in Badajoz, archaeologists uncovered a dramatic ritual closure: the people held a final banquet, then sacrificed 52 animals — predominantly horses — in three sequential phases, before intentionally destroying and burying their great adobe building under a tumulus 90 meters in diameter. It was a world ending on its own terms. The Tartessians also developed the oldest known indigenous writing system of the Iberian Peninsula — a script derived directly from the Phoenician alphabet. Though Tartessos fell, its cultural DNA — the fusion of Phoenician and Iberian — lived on in the peoples and traditions of southern Spain.

THE ROUTE The Atlantic Tin Trade

From Gadir to the Rías: The Tin Route

The Tin Route was not a single road but a web of maritime corridors connecting the Mediterranean world to the Atlantic's mineral wealth. Phoenician ships departed from Gadir, hugging the Portuguese coast northward — stopping at trading posts at the Sado) estuary (Abul), the Tagus (Lisbon), and the Mondego (Santa Olaia, the northernmost confirmed Phoenician feitoria). Beyond Santa Olaia, the route entered the waters off the Galician coast, where the deep-cut Rías Baixas — the inlets of Vigo, Pontevedra, and Arousa — offered sheltered anchorage and access to the interior.

The Miño) river was the great artery connecting the coast to the tin-rich interior. Its tributary, the Sil), drained the mountains of Ourense province — one of the most concentrated cassiterite zones in all of Europe. Tin and alluvial gold were carried downstream to the coast, where they entered the Phoenician trade network and ultimately reached the workshops of Tyre and the markets of the eastern Mediterranean. The Castro culture communities along the Miño) and Sil) valleys — including those in the territory around Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle — controlled access to these mineral resources and traded them for wine, glass, fine ceramics, and iron.

LEGACY Lasting Influence

What the Phoenicians Left Behind

The Phoenicians transformed Galicia)'s world without ever settling it permanently. Through their trade networks, iron technology reached the northwest — gradually replacing bronze for tools and weapons and marking the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in the Castro culture. The potter's wheel arrived, supplementing the hand-built ceramic tradition. Wine and olive oil — luxuries unknown in Atlantic Europe — appeared for the first time at elite Castro

feasts, beginning a wine culture that the Romans would later expand into the celebrated vineyards of the Ribeiro.

The Phoenician salting tradition took even deeper root. The fish-preserving techniques introduced by Punic merchants at sites like A Lanzada evolved into a major industry under the Romans — the massive SALINAE complex at O Areal in Vigo operated for centuries as one of the largest salt-production facilities in the entire Empire, built on foundations that Phoenician-era traders had laid. Perhaps most profoundly, the Phoenician trade connected Galicia) to the wider Mediterranean world for the first time. A castro dweller in the Miño) valley who wore a glass bead from a Phoenician workshop was linked, through chains of trade, to the great cities of the Levant. The same tin that was mined in the hills above Castrelo de Miño may have ended up as bronze armor in Tyre. This was the first globalization — and Galicia) was part of it from the very beginning.

CHAPTER 3

The Romans — Conquest & Viticulture

> *The Roman roads that crossed the Miño valley — and the vineyards the legions planted along their banks — defined a landscape that still shapes the region today. The military camp at Aquis Querquennis, barely fifteen kilometres from Castrelo de Miño, was the nearest outpost of an empire that permanently reshaped this corner of Galicia.*

THE CONQUEST 137 BC — 19 BC

The Pacification of Gallaecia

In 137 BC, the Roman general Decimus Junius Brutus crossed the Miño) river — a boundary that the native Gallaeci considered inviolable. His campaign against the Celtic tribes of the northwest earned him the cognomen "Callaicus," and it marked the first time Roman legions penetrated the heartland of what would become Gallaecia. The crossing likely occurred near the middle Miño valley — the ancestral territory of the Querquerni and Coelerni tribes in what is now Ourense province. For the communities of Castrelo de Miño, Cartelle, and Ribadavia, this was the beginning of a transformation that would reshape every aspect of life.

Over a century of intermittent warfare followed. In 61 BC, Julius Caesar, then governor of Hispania Ulterior, launched a naval expedition to Brigantium) (modern A Coruña), establishing Roman authority along the Atlantic coast. The decisive conquest came during the Cantabrian Wars (29–19 BC), when Augustus dispatched legions to subjugate the last free peoples of Iberia. The Gallaeci resisted fiercely — Strabo recorded that the women of the Gallaeci fought alongside

the men, and mothers killed their own children rather than see them enslaved. By 19 BC, Rome controlled all of Gallaecia. The territory of the Querquerni around the Miño and Limia valleys was incorporated into the Conventus Bracaraugustanus, administered from Bracara Augusta (modern Braga).

> Decimus Junius Brutus crossed the Miño) in 137 BC — the first Roman general to penetrate the Gallaeci heartland

THE ROADS Roman Engineering

The Via Nova & the Bridges of Ourense

Rome's most enduring gift to Gallaecia was its network of roads. The Via Nova (Via XVIII), built under Titus and Domitian between 79 and 89 AD, connected Bracara Augusta (Braga) to Asturica Augusta (Astorga) across the mountainous interior of Gallaecia. This 345-kilometre highway crossed diagonally through Ourense province — from Aquis Querquennis at Bande through Sandías, Baños de Molgas, and A Pobra de Trives before entering León. Secondary branch roads connected the Via Nova to the Miño valley towns of Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle, integrating them into the broader Roman road network. Milestones found along its route — including several in the Ourense area — record the names of the emperors who built and maintained it: Titus, Domitian, Hadrian, and Maximinus Thrax. A second major road, the Via XIX, connected Bracara Augusta to Lucus Augusti (Lugo) through the western valleys, creating a grid that opened the interior to trade, administration, and cultural exchange.

The roads demanded bridges, and the Romans built them to last millennia. The Ponte Bibei over the river Bibei near Puebla de Trives — a single-arch granite bridge still standing today — is the finest surviving

Roman bridge in Galicia). Ponte Navea carried the Via Nova over the Navea river in the same region. Ponte Freixo crossed the Bibei further south, and the ancient Roman crossing at Ourense itself — predecessor to the medieval Ponte Vella — served as the principal gateway across the Miño. Together, these bridges transformed the isolated valleys of Castrelo de Miño, Cartelle, and Ribadavia from remote Celtic territory into nodes on an imperial network that stretched from Rome to the Atlantic.

> The Via Nova (Via XVIII) from Bracara Augusta to Asturica Augusta crossed directly through Ourense province — 345 km of engineered roadway

THE GARRISON Military Frontier

Aquis Querquennis: Fortress on the Limia

On the banks of the Limia river at Bande, some 50 kilometres west of Ribadavia, the Romans built Aquis Querquennis — a 2.5-hectare military camp established during the reign of Vespasian (c. 69–79 AD) to garrison the soldiers building the Via Nova and control the territory of the Querquerni tribe. The camp garrisoned the Cohors I Gallica, an auxiliary cohort of approximately 500 soldiers. Excavations have revealed barracks for the troops, a headquarters building (principia), granaries (horrea), officers' quarters, and a sophisticated drainage system — all laid out on the standard Roman military grid. The camp's thermal baths, fed by nearby hot springs, provided the garrison with the comforts of Roman civilization even on this remote frontier.

The Querquerni whose territory the camp controlled were the Celtic tribe that had inhabited the middle Miño and Limia valleys — the same valleys where Castrelo de Miño, Cartelle, and Ribadavia stand today.

Under the watchful eye of the garrison, the Querquerni gradually adopted Roman customs, language, and law. Aquis Querquennis was active until the late 1st or early 2nd century AD, when the frontier moved and the legion was redeployed. The camp was partially submerged when the As Conchas reservoir was built in the 20th century, but excavations during low-water periods have made it one of the best-studied Roman military sites in northwestern Iberia.

> Aquis Querquennis (Bande): 2.5-hectare Roman military camp on the Limia river — home to the Cohors I Gallica (~500 soldiers)

THE VINE Agriculture & Mining

Birth of the Ribeiro: Rome's Gift to the Land

Of all the changes Rome brought to the Miño valley, none proved more lasting than the vine. The Romans introduced systematic viticulture to Gallaecia, planting the sheltered river valleys with grape varieties and applying the winemaking techniques of the Mediterranean. The earliest physical evidence of this transformation was found at Castro de Santa Lucía in Astariz, a parish of Castrelo de Miño: a rock-cut wine press (lagar rupestre) dated to approximately 235 AD, discovered during University of Vigo excavations in 2016. This is the oldest known evidence of winemaking in the entire Ribeiro) region — and it was found in the family's ancestral parish. The warm microclimate of the Miño, Avia, and Arnoia river valleys, with their granite soils and south-facing slopes, proved ideal for the vine. What the Romans planted would grow into the Ribeiro Denominación de Origen), one of the oldest and most celebrated wine regions in all of Spain.

Beyond the vine, Rome transformed the economy of the interior. The gold mines of Ourense province — worked through techniques includ-

ing ruina montium (hydraulic mining) — fed the Imperial treasury. While the colossal Las Médulas in León was the largest Roman gold mine in the Empire, smaller but significant operations dotted the Ourense landscape, exploiting alluvial gold from the Sil and Miño rivers and their tributaries. Tin mining — the same cassiterite deposits that had drawn Phoenician traders centuries earlier — continued under Roman management on an industrial scale. The agricultural landscape was reshaped as well: Roman settlers and Romanized Gallaeci introduced new crops and techniques, established market-oriented farming along the road network, and began the transition from the subsistence agriculture of the castro period to the diversified farming of the villas.

> Rock-cut wine press (lagar rupestre) at Castro de Santa Lucía, Astariz (Castrelo de Miño) — dated c. 235 AD, the oldest evidence of winemaking in the Ribeiro)

A NEW TONGUE Cultural Transformation

From Celtic to Latin: The Names on the Land

The most profound Roman legacy in Galicia) is the one we speak every day. Latin replaced the Celtic languages of the Gallaeci over centuries — not by decree, but through commerce, law, military service, and intermarriage. The transition was gradual: bilingual inscriptions from the 1st and 2nd centuries show Celtic names written in Latin script, and place names across Ourense preserve both Celtic and Latin roots. The very names on the land encode Roman memory: Ribadavia from Ripa Aviae ("bank of the Avia river"), Ourense from Aurienses, Castrelo de Miño from Castrum Minei ("fort on the Miño"). Over time, Latin evolved into the Galician-Portuguese that emerged in the me-

dieval period and later diverged into Galician and Portuguese — two of the world's great languages, spoken today by over 260 million people.

The Romanization of the Miño valley was not only linguistic. In 132 AD, the Coelerni tribe of the Arnoia valley — neighbours of Cartelle — sealed a Tabula Hospitalitatis (hospitality pact) in bronze with the Roman prefect Gaius Antonius Aquilus at Castromao near Celanova. This pact, discovered in the 19th century, testifies to the formal integration of native communities into Roman administrative life. In 212 AD, the Constitutio Antoniniana granted Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Empire — including the descendants of the Querquerni and Coelerni in the Miño valley. They were no longer conquered subjects but Roman citizens, with legal rights, property protections, and access to the courts. Parish boundaries in the rural Ourense countryside often follow limits first drawn by Roman administrators; the legal concept of the municipality, the grid of roads connecting villages — all are Roman foundations.

> Latin evolved into Galician-Portuguese, which diverged into Galician and Portuguese — spoken today by over 260 million people worldwide

LEGACY What Rome Left Behind

The Roman World Lives On

Christianity arrived in Gallaecia during the later Roman centuries. By the 4th century, the faith had taken root, and the Council of Elvira (c. 305 AD) — which included bishops from Gallaecia — is the earliest recorded church council in Iberia. The Romanized tribal structure provided the framework for the first dioceses: Ourense, Braga, and Lugo became episcopal seats that endure to this day. In the late 4th century, Priscillian — Bishop of Ávila whose movement found its greatest fol-

lowing in Gallaecia — led a Christian reform movement that became the first heresy to result in a death sentence by secular authorities, evidence of how deeply Christianity had penetrated Galician society.

When the Suevi crossed the Pyrenees in 409 AD and established their kingdom in Gallaecia, they inherited a thoroughly Romanized landscape — Latin-speaking, Christian, connected by roads, cultivating vines in the Miño and Avia valleys, and organized into the administrative units that would become the parishes and municipalities of modern Galicia). The bridge crossings of the Miño still carried traffic. The thermal baths of As Burgas still steamed. The vineyards that the Romans had planted around Ribadavia and Castrelo de Miño still bore fruit. Rome's legions had departed, but the world they built endured — in the language spoken in the fields of Cartelle, in the wine pressed from the hillsides of the Ribeiro, in the parish church that would rise where a Roman altar once stood.

> Christianity reached Gallaecia by the 3rd–4th century; Ourense, Braga, and Lugo became episcopal seats

CHAPTER 4

The Suevi — A Germanic Kingdom

> *When the Suevic tribes organised their parishes in the 6th century, they drew the ecclesiastical boundaries that would govern community life in Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle for the next fourteen hundred years. The parish — not the castle or the town — was the institution that shaped daily life in rural Galicia.*

THE KINGDOM 409–585 AD

The First Germanic Kingdom in Western Europe

In 409 AD, the Suevi — a confederation of Germanic peoples from the regions around the Elbe River and modern Bohemia — crossed the Pyrenees into Roman Hispania alongside the Vandals and Alans. By 411, the barbarian groups divided the western provinces among themselves. The Suevi received the western portion of Gallaecia — the Atlantic-facing lands stretching from modern Porto to Pontevedra. They chose Bracara Augusta (modern Braga) as their capital, establishing what scholars now recognise as the first independent Germanic kingdom in post-Roman Western Europe — predating even the Frankish and Visigothic kingdoms.

The Kingdom of the Suebi endured for 176 years under a succession of kings. Hermeric (c. 409–438) consolidated control over Gallaecia and made peace with the local Gallaeco-Roman population. His son Rechila (438–448) expanded the kingdom dramatically, conquering Seville and Mérida. Rechiar (448–456) became the first Germanic king in post-Roman Europe to convert to Catholicism. After a period of civil war and a "dark century" of sparse records (c. 470–550), the kingdom

emerged renewed under Ariamir and Theodemir), who convened the great church councils and reorganised the kingdom into dioceses. King Miro (c. 570–583) presided over the kingdom's golden age before the Visigothic conquest under Leovigild ended Suevi independence in 585 AD.

THE CONVERSION St. Martin of Braga

From Paganism to Christendom: The Apostle of the Suevi

The religious journey of the Suevi passed through three phases: initial paganism (409–449), a brief Catholic period under Rechiar, then conversion to Arianism around 466 when a missionary named Ajax was sent by the Visigothic king. For roughly a century, the Suevi remained Arian Christians. The transformation came in the 550s with the arrival of Martin of Braga — born in Pannonia (modern Hungary), educated in the Holy Land, and one of the most remarkable missionaries of late antiquity. Martin founded the Monastery of Dumium near Braga, became its first bishop, and ultimately rose to Metropolitan Archbishop of Gallaecia.

Martin's influence was profound. He attended the First Council of Braga (561) and shaped the final conversion of the Suevi from Arianism to Catholic orthodoxy. His treatise De correctione rusticorum ("On the Correction of Country Folk") — written as a letter to Bishop Polemius of Astorga — is an invaluable window into daily life in rural Gallaecia, describing pagan survivals among the countryside population: lighting candles at crossroads, offering food to sacred springs, divinations by birds, and observance of days dedicated to Roman and Germanic gods. Martin used persuasion rather than coercion, and his patient work transformed the spiritual landscape of the entire king-

dom. He died in 580 at Dumium, having shaped the Christianity that would endure in Galicia) for the next millennium and a half.

THE PARISHES Divisio Theodemiri

The Parochiale Suevorum: A Kingdom Mapped in Parishes

Between 572 and 582, the Suevi produced a document unique in all of early medieval Europe: the Parochiale Suevorum, also known as the Divisio Theodemiri after King Theodemir) who ordered its creation. This extraordinary text lists 134 parishes — 107 ecclesiae and 27 pagi — organised into 13 dioceses across two metropolitan provinces: Braga in the south and Lugo in the north. It is the single most important document for locating peoples and settlements in post-Roman Gallaecia, and it has no equivalent in any other region of the former Western Empire.

The Diocese of Ourense (Auriense) — one of five new episcopal sees created specifically under the Suevi — fell under the Metropolitan of Lugo. Its named parishes included Palla Aurea (Ourense itself), Bibalos (identified with Temes in the Ribeiro area), Verugio, Teporos, Geurros, Pincia, Cassavio, Verecanos, Senabria, and Calapacios. The parish of Bibalos — covering the Ribeiro heartland — is the most likely administrative unit that encompassed the territories of Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle in the 6th century. The Parochiale created the framework that would evolve into the modern Galician parish (parroquia) system — arguably the oldest continuously functioning administrative structure in Western Europe derived from a specific political act.

THE VINE Wine & Monasticism

The Ribeiro Under the Suevi: Vineyards, Monks, and Sacramental Wine

When the Suevi arrived in 409, they inherited a landscape already shaped by four centuries of Roman viticulture. The sheltered valleys of the Avia, Miño), and Arnoia rivers — where Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle lie — had produced wine since at least the 3rd century AD, as evidenced by the rock-cut wine press at Castro de Santa Lucía in Astariz. The historian Orosius, writing around 417, noted that the barbarians had "cursed their swords and turned to the plough," suggesting they adopted existing agricultural practices including vine cultivation. Though no specific Suevi-era documents mention the Ribeiro's wines, viticulture almost certainly continued: vines are a long-term agricultural investment, and the Suevi had every incentive to maintain the productive landscape they had inherited.

The conversion to Catholicism added a powerful new driver for winemaking. With 134 parishes established under the Parochiale Suevorum, each requiring sacramental wine for the Eucharist, the demand for wine became woven into the fabric of Christian governance. Martin of Braga's monastic foundations needed wine for liturgical purposes, and the monastic tradition he established would later flourish in the Ribeiro. The Monastery of San Clodio in Leiro, adjacent to Ribadavia — possibly founded as early as the 6th century, though more securely documented from 928 — would become the epicentre of medieval winemaking in the region. The Benedictine and later Cistercian monks of San Clodio were pioneers of vineyard cultivation, producing wines that reached northern Europe via merchants on the Camino de Santiago.

Swords into Ploughs: A People Reborn

The integration of the Suevi with the existing Gallaeco-Roman population is one of the most remarkable stories of cultural fusion in early medieval Europe. Unlike many Germanic migrations marked by displacement and conflict, the Suevi settlement in Gallaecia was characterised by relatively rapid assimilation. The historian Orosius, a native of Gallaecia writing just eight years after the Suevi arrived, wrote that they "cursed their swords and turned to the plough" once settled. No conflict between the local population and the Suevi is recorded between 411 and 430, though Hermeric's raids after 430 provoked fierce Gallaecian resistance before peace was restored in 438. The Suevi settled mainly in urbanised zones — Braga, Porto, Lugo, Astorga — while gradually dispersing into rural areas like the Miño valley, where Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle lie.

The Suevi rapidly adopted the local Vulgar Latin, abandoning their Germanic tongue within a few generations. They embraced Christianity — first Catholic, then Arian, then Catholic again — and merged their governance with the existing Roman administrative framework. In the countryside, settlement patterns shifted: people gradually moved from lowland Roman villas to higher ground, and burial practices transitioned from extra-mural Roman cemeteries to churchyard burials near newly built basilicas. The Miño) River served as a major communication corridor within the kingdom, making the river valley communities of Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle integral to the kingdom's internal geography. The essential temper of Galician culture — its parish-centred rural life, its Atlantic orientation, its blend of Latin Christianity with older traditions — was shaped decisively in the blending of Ibero-Roman and Suevi worlds.

CHAPTER 5

The Visigoths — Law & Faith

> *The Visigothic legal code — governing marriage, inheritance, and land tenure — laid the foundations for the hidalguía system that would define the social order of the Ribeiro for centuries. The Liber Iudiciorum remained the law of the land in Galicia well into the Reconquista, and its principles on property and noble status shaped the institutions that every subsequent generation encountered.*

THE CONQUEST 585 AD

The Fall of the Suevi: Gallaecia Becomes a Gothic Province

The end of Suevi independence came not through a clash of civilisations but through a dynastic crisis that handed Leovigild the pretext he needed. When King Miro) died in 583 — Gregory of Tours attributes his death to illness contracted during the campaign — after a disastrous military expedition near Seville, his young son Eboric inherited the throne. Within a year, Eboric's brother-in-law Audeca seized power, married Miro's widow Siseguntia, and confined the legitimate king to a monastery. The usurpation gave Leovigild — the most formidable Visigothic king of his age, who had spent a decade methodically encircling the Suevi realm — precisely the justification he sought.

In 585, Leovigild launched a decisive campaign into Gallaecia. His forces devastated the region and defeated the Suevi in open battle before advancing on Braga. The Chronicle of John of Biclar, a contemporary source, records that Leovigild deprived Audeca "of the totality of

the kingdom," capturing the last Suevi king along with the royal treasury and the leading nobles. Audeca was tonsured and exiled to Beja in the south. That same year, a man named Malaric rose in rebellion and claimed the Suevi throne, but he was swiftly defeated and captured by Leovigild's generals, who delivered him in chains to the Visigothic king. The Kingdom of the Suebi — which had endured for 176 years as the first Germanic kingdom in post-Roman Western Europe — became the sixth province of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo.

GOVERNANCE The Province

Toledo's Distant Province: Dukes, Bishops, and Continuity

The Visigothic conquest did not shatter Galician society — it absorbed it. The territorial and administrative organisation inherited from the Suevi was incorporated into the new provincial structure. The Suevi Catholic dioceses — Braga, Dumio, Porto, Tui, Iria, Britonia, Lugo, Ourense, Astorga, Coimbra, Lamego, Viseu, and Idanha — continued to operate normally. The local cultural, religious, and aristocratic elite accepted new monarchs while preserving the institutions that had governed their lives for generations. No major Visigothic settlement occurred in Gallaecia during the 6th and 7th centuries; the peasantry remained a collective of freemen and serfs of Celtic, Roman, and Suevi extraction.

Galicia) was governed by a dux provinciae — a military governor appointed by Toledo — while the day-to-day administration of justice and civil affairs fell increasingly to the comes civitatis (count) in each major city and to the bishops, who wielded enormous influence in both spiritual and temporal matters. Braga retained its status as metropolitan see, while Lugo was reduced to an ordinary bishopric subordinate to

Braga. Under Recceswinth's administrative reforms, the Lusitanian dioceses that the Suevi had annexed to Galicia — Coimbra, Idanha, Lamego, Viseu, and parts of Salamanca — were restored to the province of Lusitania. The same reform reduced the number of mints in Galicia from several dozen to just three: Lugo, Braga, and Tui. Yet Galicia persisted as a differentiated province within the realm, as evidenced by the acts of several Councils of Toledo, the Chronicle of John of Biclar, and military laws such as King Wamba)'s mobilisation decree incorporated into the Liber Iudiciorum.

Leovigild initially imposed Arianism on the conquered Suevi, installing Arian bishops alongside the existing Catholic ones in Lugo, Porto, Tui, and Viseu. This dual episcopal system lasted only a few years — ending definitively at the Third Council of Toledo in 589. In the final years of the Visigothic period, Galicia's special status was underscored when King Egica sent his son Wittiza to govern the province from Tui around 701 — effectively ruling the old regnum Suevorum as a sub-king, a remarkable echo of the region's independent past.

THE CONVERSION 589 AD

From Arianism to Orthodoxy: Reccared and the Third Council of Toledo

Leovigild's conquest brought Arianism back to a land that Martin of Braga had painstakingly converted to Catholic orthodoxy just decades earlier. The Visigothic king reinstated Arian clergy across the province, placing Arian bishops in cities like Lugo, Porto, Tui, and Viseu alongside the existing Catholic hierarchy. For the people of Gallaecia, who had witnessed Martin's patient conversion within living memory, this reversal must have been deeply unsettling. But the Arian restoration proved brief. According to Gregory of Tours, Leovigild may

have embraced Catholicism on his deathbed in 586 — though no Iberian source corroborates this — and within three years his son Reccared would transform the religious landscape of the entire kingdom.

On 8 May 589, Reccared convened the Third Council of Toledo — one of the most consequential church councils in Western European history. Before an assembly of seventy-two bishops from Hispania, Gaul, and Gallaecia, the king publicly renounced Arianism and proclaimed his conversion to Catholic Christianity. The Visigoths and Suevi would follow. Among the bishops who formally abjured their Arianism at the council were four from Gallaecia's Suevi dioceses: Beccila of Lugo, Gardingus of Tui, Argiovittus of Porto, and Sunnila of Viseu. The conversion was not without resistance — an Arian conspiracy was uncovered, and its leader Segga was punished by amputation of his hands and exiled to Galicia. But the outcome was decisive: the Catholic faith was restored as the sole orthodoxy of the kingdom, uniting Visigoths, Suevi, and Hispano-Romans under a single creed. The conversion cemented the authority of the Catholic Church in Galicia and ensured that the diocesan and parish structures created under the Suevi would endure — and indeed strengthen — under Visigothic rule.

THE CHURCHES Stone and Faith

Santa Comba, San Xes, and the Architecture of Belief

The Visigothic period gave Ourense province two of the most remarkable pre-Romanesque monuments in all of Spain — churches whose horseshoe arches, carved stonework, and austere beauty speak of a faith built to endure in stone.

Santa Comba de Bande, located in the Limia) River valley approximately 70 kilometres south of Ourense, has long been considered one of the most important early medieval churches in Galicia and one of the oldest surviving in all of Spain. Built on a Greek cross plan inscribed within a rectangle measuring 12 by 18 metres, the church features barrel vaults in the nave and transept, a horseshoe-arched apse, and a raised lantern at the crossing illuminated by windows on each side. Four marble columns reused from the nearby Roman baths of Bande support the triumphal arch with capitals in a Corinthian style — two refined, two rougher in execution. Documents from the Monastery of Celanova record the existence of a church dedicated to Santa Columba on this site by 675, when it was entrusted to a man named Odoymo for restoration. The church was declared a National Monument in 1921. Recent chronological studies have dated construction to approximately 751–789 AD, suggesting it may represent an extremely early example of Mozarabic architecture rather than a purely Visigothic creation — evidence of the dynamic circulation of influences between Islamic and Christian Iberia in the 8th century.

The Chapel of San Xes (San Ginés) de Francelos — just 2 kilometres from Ribadavia — is a small single-nave structure measuring barely 8.6 by 5.75 metres, built of granite blocks with a later wooden roof and bell tower. Though the present building dates to the 9th century, it was part of an older Visigothic monastery that has since disappeared — a Benedictine community that later relocated to the Monastery of Celanova. The chapel's extraordinary façade preserves pre-Romanesque elements of the highest quality: a horseshoe arch of Visigothic influence, half-columns decorated with stylised vine stocks ending in palm leaves, Corinthian capitals, and two carved biblical scenes — the Flight into Egypt and Jesus's Entry into Jerusalem. Its

celebrated lattice window, decorated with eight-petal flowers surrounded by three horseshoe bows, has been compared to the transenna of Santa Cristina de Lena in Asturias. San Xes de Francelos was declared a National Monument in 1951.

What makes these churches remarkable is not merely their age or their architecture, but what they represent: communities that built in stone when most of Europe was still building in wood. The horseshoe arch of San Xes de Francelos stands just two kilometres from Ribadavia — close enough that the medieval inhabitants of the Jewish quarter could see it from the Porta Nova. The fact that its biblical carvings survived the Irmandiño revolt, the Napoleonic wars, and four centuries of neglect says something about the granite, and something about the people who chose to build with it.

THE LAW 654 AD

The Liber Iudiciorum: One Law for All Peoples

In 654, King Recceswinth promulgated the Liber Iudiciorum — the Book of Judgements — at the Eighth Council of Toledo. It was the first law code in post-Roman Western Europe to apply equally to all subjects regardless of ethnic origin, abolishing the centuries-old practice of maintaining separate legal systems for Romans and Goths. The code replaced all previous legislation — including the Breviarium Alarici, which had governed the Hispano-Roman population, and the customary Gothic law that had applied to the Visigoths — with a single, comprehensive territorial system covering every free inhabitant of the kingdom.

The Liber Iudiciorum was a monumental work: twelve books containing over 500 laws addressing civil and criminal matters, property and

inheritance, marriage and family, contracts, judicial procedure, military obligations, ecclesiastical affairs, and the regulation of Jews. Though called "Visigothic," the code was written in Latin and drew heavily on Roman legal tradition, particularly the Theodosian Code and elements of Justinianic law, blended with Germanic customs and canon law. Its compilation was a royal initiative begun under Chindaswinth, with Bishop Braulio of Zaragoza playing a key editorial role in correcting and reorganising the manuscript during Chindaswinth's reign. Braulio died in 651, three years before the final version was promulgated by Recceswinth. The code was subsequently revised under King Erwig in 681, with further additions by later kings.

For Galicia, the Liber Iudiciorum had profound and lasting consequences. It formally ended any remaining legal distinction between the Suevi and their Hispano-Roman neighbours, creating a unified legal identity — hispani — across the province. The code's provisions on property, inheritance, and the rights of widows and orphans governed daily life in communities like Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle for centuries. Its influence extended far beyond the fall of the Visigothic kingdom: in 10th-century Galicia, monastic charters from Celanova, Samos, and other foundations still cited the Liber Iudiciorum as binding law. The code continued to be used by Christian judges in Muslim Spain and formed the basis of medieval Iberian legal systems during the Reconquista.

PART II

The Medieval World

The Middle Ages brought new peoples and new institutions to the Ribeiro. Sephardic Jewish merchants transformed Ribadavia into one of Galicia's wealthiest towns. French monks introduced Cistercian viticulture and the Camino de Santiago. Military orders — Templars and Hospitallers — built commanderies across the countryside. Together they created the medieval world that the noble houses would inherit.

CHAPTER 6

The Sephardic Jews — Wine, Commerce & Exile

> *The Jewish merchants who transformed Ribadavia into Galicia's wealthiest town were neighbours to everyone who lived in the surrounding parishes. In a region where Christian and Jewish lives were intertwined through commerce, winemaking, and shared defence, the Expulsion of 1492 and the Inquisition that followed tore apart a world that the Ribeiro's communities had known for centuries.*

BETWEEN LEGEND AND STONE Antiquity to Late Roman Era

Between Legend and Stone

Jewish tradition has long held that the Sephardim — the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula — arrived in the land they called Sepharad in the most distant antiquity. The great scholar Isaac Abravanel claimed — in his commentary on Zechariah — that his family had come to the Peninsula after the destruction of the First Temple, a tradition placing them in Seville for nearly two thousand years. The Malbim identified the biblical Tarshish — the place to which Jonah fled, the westernmost point of the known world — with Tartessos in southern Spain, an identification now widely supported by archaeology, though earlier rabbinical authorities (Ibn Ezra, Rashi) had placed it in North Africa. If Jewish traders accompanied the Phoenician merchants who sailed to Gadir and the tin coast of Galicia), then the roots of Sepharad may intertwine with the very dawn of Mediterranean commerce in the Atlantic.

Yet between legend and archaeology lies a vast silence. The earliest tangible evidence of Jewish presence in Iberia is modest: a trilingual

inscription — in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek — on a child's sarcophagus found in Tarragona, dating to the Roman imperial period; a mosaic at Elche from the first century that almost certainly decorated a synagogue floor; a tombstone from Adra inscribed with the name of a Jewish infant, Annia Salomonula, from the third century. In the far west, a marble slab discovered near Silves in the Algarve bearing the Hebrew name Yehiel provides some of the oldest archaeological evidence from the western Peninsula — remarkably, found in a Roman villa, evidence of Jewish life in rural Lusitania.

The Apostle Paul himself expressed his intention to travel to Hispania in his Epistle to the Romans — a passage that early Jewish commentators interpreted as confirmation that organized Jewish communities already existed there. The Council of Elvira, convened around 300 AD near Granada, issued canons specifically regulating relations between Jews and Christians — proof that by the late Roman period, the Jewish population was substantial enough to alarm the priesthood. Canon 16 prohibited intermarriage with Jews in terms more severe than those applied to pagans. The severity of these canons reveals the reality they sought to suppress: that in Roman Hispania, Jews and the earliest Christians were neighbors, dinner companions, and marriage partners — communities not yet fully separated, likely drawn from the same diaspora stock.

In Galicia specifically, the documentary trail does not begin until the eleventh century. But the region's deep integration into Phoenician and Roman trade networks — the same tin routes, the same river corridors, the same Atlantic ports — makes it plausible that Jewish merchants and settlers reached the northwest long before any parchment recorded their names. What is certain is this: by the time the medieval

documents begin, the Jews of Galicia were already there, already essential, already woven into the economic sinew of the land.

THE COMMUNITIES 11th-15th Centuries

The Jewish Communities of Galicia

By the high Middle Ages, Jewish communities — known as aljamas — had established themselves across Galicia. The 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia lists settlements at Allariz, Coruña, Orense, Monforte, Pontevedra, Rivadavia, and Rivadeo, besides individual Jews scattered throughout the territory. In most towns these were modest communities of a few dozen families, though Ribadavia — the Jerusalem of Galicia — grew into a major center whose economic weight rivaled towns many times its size. Across the region, Jews served as tax collectors and financial administrators for the Galician nobility, as wine merchants exporting Ribeiro) to the courts of Europe, and as intermediaries in the trade networks connecting the Atlantic coast to the interior.

The earliest documented incident in Galician Jewish history dates to 1044, when Jewish merchants — probably from Allariz — were attacked by one Arias Oduariz while traveling under the protection of the nobleman D. Menéndez González. Menéndez raised an armed force, pursued the attackers, and recovered the silks and other goods that had been taken. This small episode reveals much: Jews were already engaged in luxury trade, they moved under noble patronage, and their protection was considered worth a military expedition. Over time, the relationship deepened — Jewish families married into the Galician minor nobility, forging bonds of blood as well as commerce. These alliances would prove dangerous: when the Inquisition arrived, converso

lineages entangled with hidalgo) houses made the question of limpieza de sangre a matter not only of faith but of inheritance and honor.

The formal establishment of juderías accelerated under royal charters. Fernando II granted Ribadavia its Foro Real in 1164, creating the conditions for a merchant class — including Jewish traders — to flourish. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Ribadavia's judería had crystallized into the quarter that still survives today, centered on the street formerly known as Rúa da Xudería.

Ribadavia — known as the Jerusalem of Galicia — was the most prosperous aljama in the northwest. Its judería, formed in the 12th–13th centuries, was sustained by the Ribeiro wine trade and export to Italy, Flanders, England, and Germany. In 1386, when the Duke of Lancaster besieged the town, Christians and Jews fought side by side to defend it.

A Coruña was home to Europe's largest school of Jewish illuminators, including the master Abraham ben Judah ibn Hayyim. The first documentation of Jewish presence dates to 1375, though the community grew rapidly as refugees from Castilian persecution arrived. Here, in 1476, the Kennicott Bible was created — the most magnificent Hebrew manuscript of the Middle Ages.

Allariz had a flourishing community in the Socastelo district, outside the town walls. In 1289, the prior of the monastery complained, and Isaac Ishmael — head of the aljama — was ordered to keep Jews within the quarter.

Tui, on the Portuguese border, had a Jewish presence dating from at least the 11th century. A seven-branched menorah) carved into the Gothic cloister of the cathedral remains as a permanent witness. The

nuclei of the judería were on Oliveira Street and Canicouva Street, where the 15th-century house of Salomón Caadia still stands. The Torre do Xudeu (Tower of the Jew) marks the quarter's boundary.

In Ourense, Jews settled by the 11th century, with 30–40 families by the medieval period. In 1489, a writ of protection was issued against knights attempting to attack the community. The judería originally bordered the Rúa Nova but was relocated in 1488 to a site near the Fuente del Obispo.

Monterrei and Verín stood at the gateway to Portugal, seat of the powerful Counts of Monterrei. Inquisition records place converso families here, including Felipe Álvarez, described as "natural de Tamaguelos — Verín." The fortress town served as both a haven and a corridor for Jewish families moving between Galicia and northern Portugal.

Monforte de Lemos had an initially sparse Jewish population that grew after 1147 as refugees fled the Almohad invasion of southern Iberia. By the 14th century, Jews served at the court of the Counts of Lemos. After the massacres of 1391, Monforte sheltered refugees from Castile. Stars of Solomon are engraved in the ashlars of the Torre da Homenaxe.

Pontevedra was a port city with documented Jewish merchants and tax collectors. Inquisition records later placed converso families here, including Beatriz Gómez, born in Ribadavia, married to the wealthy merchant Francisco Denis. The Falagueira street connected the judería between the Porta Nova and the Pescadería.

RIBADAVIA 12th-17th Centuries

Ribadavia: Wine, Faith, and Commerce

In the Middle Ages, the town of Ribadavia was rich, endowed with political and economic importance in which Jewish traders played a major role. Their community supported its economy through the Ribeiro) wine trade — exporting the prized white wine of the Avia) and Miño) valleys to the peninsular kingdoms and beyond: to Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, and England. The judería was not merely a ghetto but a thriving commercial district, and its inhabitants excelled in the administration of goods, in craft trades, and above all as the intermediaries who connected Galician viticulture to the markets of Europe.

The Jewish quarter formed around the 12th and 13th centuries, benefiting from the settlement of Jews since the 10th century in the neighboring lands of Celanova and from the presence of a powerful group of merchants following Fernando II's charter of 1164. The nucleus of the judería extended from the Plaza Mayor to the medieval wall. The main artery was the street formerly known as Rúa da Xudería — later renamed Merelles Caula — running from the Plaza Mayor to the Praza da Madalena, where the synagogue is believed to have stood. From there, through the Praza de Buxán, the quarter descended to the Porta Nova de Abaixo, the southern gate through which one reached the Miño river.

The most dramatic episode of the medieval judería came in 1386, when the Duke of Lancaster — married to the eldest daughter of the late King Pedro I — invaded Galicia, claiming the Castilian throne. Ribadavia was besieged by more than 2,000 English spearmen and archers under Sir Thomas Percy. According to the contemporary chronicle of Froissart, both Christians and Jews fought together to defend the town. The English took Ribadavia using a spectacular siege tower on wheels, and upon entering, looted the Jewish houses in par-

ticular. Froissart claimed there were quinze cens — fifteen hundred — Jews in Ribadavia.

This cohabitation — convivencia — appears to have been largely amicable. Jews and Christians shared the defense of their town. Even after the expulsion decree of 1492, many Jews in Ribadavia chose to convert rather than leave, and the community continued, transformed but not destroyed, into the converso networks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The judería of Ribadavia is one of the best-preserved Jewish quarters in Spain and a member of the Red de Juderías — Caminos de Sefarad. The Centro de Información Xudía de Galicia (Sephardic Museum of Galicia) is housed in the Pazo de los Condes on the Plaza Mayor. Every August, the Festa da Istoria commemorates the town's medieval heritage, including a reenactment of a Jewish wedding. The Casa de la Inquisición stands at 25 Rúa de San Martiño — five heraldic shields on its façade proclaim the power of the Puga, Mosquera, and Bahamonde lineages. Until recently, A Tafona da Herminia (Herminia's Bakery) sold traditional Sephardic confections from old family recipes — almond flour, dates, sesame, and cardamom.

THE BIBLE 1476

The Kennicott Bible

On Wednesday, the third day of the month of Av in the year 5236 of Creation — 24 July 1476 — the scribe Moses ibn Zabarah finished the most magnificent Hebrew Bible of the Middle Ages. He completed it in the city of A Coruña, in the province of Galicia, on the northwestern coast of Spain. The commission had come from Isaac, son of the late Don Salomón de Braga — a silversmith from a

Portuguese Jewish family settled in Galicia. The illuminations were the work of Joseph ibn Hayyim, considered the most distinguished master of Jewish manuscript art in all of Europe.

The Kennicott Bible is a complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) — the five books of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Hagiographers — together with the grammatical treatise Sefer Mikhlol by Rabbi David Kimhi. It comprises 462 folios of vellum, nearly 30 centimeters in height, written in impeccable Sephardic square script with full Masoretic apparatus. More than 200 pages blaze with illuminations: lavish carpet pages, gold leaf silhouettes, marginal decorations that integrate Jewish symbolism with Iberian Gothic influences, and extraordinary zoomorphic and anthropomorphic letters in the artist's colophon. King David on his throne. Jonah swallowed by the great fish. Balaam consulting an astrolabe. The collaboration between scribe and illuminator was, according to the historian Cecil Roth, exceptionally close — rare in this type of work.

What makes the manuscript even more extraordinary is its timing. It was created just sixteen years before the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which expelled all Jews from Spain. The Kennicott Bible is the last great act of a civilization about to be destroyed. Isaac de Braga, who had commissioned this treasure, was among those who left. The Bible's subsequent journey through North Africa, Gibraltar, and eventually into the hands of the English Hebraist Benjamin Kennicott at Oxford remains partially mysterious. It now resides in the Bodleian Library, where it is recognized as the most lavishly illuminated Hebrew Bible to survive from medieval Spain.

A Coruña was not a marginal outpost of Jewish culture — it was home to the largest school of Jewish illuminators in Europe. Abraham ben

Judah ibn Hayyim, active in the mid-15th century, was considered the continent's foremost master in the art of mixing colors for manuscripts. The city's Jewish population had grown rapidly through the late Middle Ages, swelled by refugees fleeing persecution in Castile and Portugal. In this crucible of displacement and cultural resilience, the Kennicott Bible was born — a defiant masterpiece created at the edge of the world, at the edge of time.

In November 2019, the Bible was loaned back to Galicia for the first time in 527 years and displayed at the Museo Centro Gaiás in Santiago de Compostela. The Centro de Información Xudía de Galicia in Ribadavia has a digital system allowing visitors to browse the manuscript page by page. A facsimile is held by the Real Academia Galega de Belas Artes in A Coruña. The Comunidade Xudía Bnei Israel de Galiza has campaigned since 2015 for the Bible's permanent return to A Coruña.

THE MALSÍN 1575-1610

The Malsín and the Auto de Fe

After the expulsion decree of 1492, the Jewish community of Ribadavia did not vanish — it transformed. Many Jews accepted baptism and remained as conversos (New Christians), outwardly practicing Catholicism while privately maintaining the faith of their ancestors. For nearly a century, they lived in relative peace. The Inquisition tribunal nearest to Galicia was in Valladolid, far enough away that its reach rarely extended to the remote northwest. Portuguese conversos fleeing the persecution of the Inquisition of Coimbra in 1522 found refuge in the Ribeiro, attracted by the booming wine economy. By the 1570s, a second wave of Portuguese conversos had arrived, quickly integrating into the town's civic life. Some rose to positions of promi-

nence — Felipe Álvarez became Procurador General of Ribadavia; Juan López Hurtado served as Regidor of the town.

This fragile equilibrium shattered in 1575, when the Tribunal of the Inquisition was established in Santiago de Compostela, bringing the machinery of persecution directly to Galicia's doorstep. Even then, two more decades passed before catastrophe struck.

In 1606, a man named Jerónimo Bautista de Mena — himself a converso, born in Ribadavia — delivered a list to the Tribunal of Santiago naming approximately two hundred people as practitioners of Jewish rites. He accused his own mother, Ana Méndez, his sister Ana de Mena (aged 17), and his brother Nicolás (aged 7 or 8). The motive, according to local tradition, was revenge — he had received a smaller inheritance than his brothers. Jerónimo Bautista de Mena was found dead in the street in 1607, assassinated by an unknown hand.

But the damage was done. On 11 May 1608, in the Plaza de la Quintana in Santiago de Compostela, an auto de fe was held. Forty-two persons from Ribadavia and the surrounding region were condemned to penalties ranging from confiscation of property to imprisonment to death. The charges were identical in every case: living according to the Law of Moses, observing Shabbat, fasting on Yom Kippur, preparing kosher meat, and reciting psalms without the Gloria Patri.

The condemned were not marginal figures — they were the civic and commercial backbone of Ribadavia. Felipe Álvarez, the town's Procurador General, was arrested alongside four of his sons. Xerónimo de Morais, a sixty-year-old councilman, endured torture without confessing. Xoán López Hurtado, Regidor and scribe, was shown leniency only because he had young children — two of them blind — while his wife Beatriz Méndez received the harsher sentence in his place.

Fernando Gómez, a merchant from Vila Flor who had lived in the Law of Moses for nearly thirty years, also overcame the rack without adding to his confession. Among the women, Leonor Gómez — sixty-eight years old, widow of the lawyer Marcos López, whom the Inquisition called "the master of the judaizantes" — defeated the torture entirely. Xinebra Vázquez, seventy-two, was put on the rack despite her frailty and confessed nothing. María Vázquez, sixty, crippled, was stripped and given two turns of the wheel — and held. The Inquisition's machinery broke bodies, but it did not always break silence.

Behind the list of names lay distinct family networks, each with its own history. The Morais clan constituted a second dynasty of converso power in Ribadavia, parallel to the Álvarez. Xerónimo de Morais was a councilman; his brother Antonio "the walker" lived off his estate; his son Antonio had come from Mirandela in Portugal; his daughter Isabel, a widow of twenty-six from Salvaterra, confessed eight years in the old law, taught by her mother. Their father, Alonso Rodríguez de Morais, was already dead by 1608 — but the Inquisition opened proceedings against his memory, accusing him of having cursed a servant who invoked the name of Jesus. A separate network radiated from Vila Flor in Portugal: Marcos López, the lawyer whom the Inquisition called "the master of the judaizantes," had taught the Law of Moses with a Hebrew Bible and funded the escape of judaizantes from Spain. His widow Leonor Gómez survived him and survived the rack. Fernando Gómez and Manuel Gómez, also from Vila Flor, were merchants — the commercial sinew of the Portuguese converso migration into the Ribeiro.

Perhaps the most intimate tragedy was the household of Fernando Álvarez "the old one" and Catalina de León. Catalina, aged thirty-two,

from Ourense, had taught the Law of Moses to her daughters Isabel (fifteen) and Felipa (seventeen) — and had been taught it herself by her mother and grandmother. In the second auto de fe on 22 February 1609, all three were condemned. All three had been denounced by Catalina's own husband.

Duarte Coronel of Salvaterra — aged thirty, denounced among others by his own wife, Ana de Mena, the malsín's sister — confessed three years in the Law of Moses. Simón Pereira, a medical student from Pontevedra, admitted to seven years as a public Jew in Pisa, where he had been circumcised and taken the name Isaac — and in 1609, he exchanged his sentence for immediate freedom through a financial agreement with the Holy Office. The elderly tailor Álvaro Vázquez of Valença do Miño — sixty-nine, ill — was subjected to the rack despite his condition, and received two hundred lashes on top of perpetual prison. Then, on 8 September 1610, the Inquisition staged a final auto particular: four already-dead judaizantes were burned in effigy, their memory and reputation formally destroyed. Among them was Marcos López, the man who had kept the Hebrew Bible. And among them was the malsín himself — Jerónimo Bautista de Mena — accused by sixteen former accomplices of the very rites he had denounced.

"Everything in Ribadavia proceeded normally — the crypto-Jewish community coexisted harmoniously with the other inhabitants of the town. But suddenly, the foundations of coexistence trembled, and a bolt of dread ran through the bodies of its people upon learning that the Inquisition was preparing a publication of an edict of faith." — José Ramón Estévez Pérez, "La tumba de Felipe Álvarez, judaizante" (2017)

FELIPE ÁLVAREZ c. 1549-Before 1624

Felipe Álvarez, Judaizante

Felipe Álvarez, born around 1549 in Tamaguelos, Verín (Ourense), was an apothecary (boticario), tax farmer on foodstuffs (arrendador de la sisa), and merchant who rose to become Procurador General of Ribadavia — effectively the town's chief financial officer. He was a man of considerable means, owning vineyards, urban properties on the Plaza Mayor, and maintaining a household of some standing. He was also, as he would confess under interrogation, a man who had lived in the Law of Moses for twenty-three years.

Felipe married twice. His first wife was Isabel Méndez, by whom he had at least seven children: Francisco Méndez (a Licentiate), Gaspar Álvarez (a law student at Salamanca), Antonio Méndez, Baltasar Méndez, Ana, Isabel Méndez the younger, and María Álvarez. His second wife was Justa Rodríguez de Dueñas, by whom he had Pedro Álvarez de Dueñas and possibly other unnamed children. One of his sons, Fernando Álvarez de Morais ("the young," a cloth merchant), married Bárbara Enríquez — whose sister Ana Rodríguez married Enrique Coronel, connecting the family to the illustrious Coronel lineage.

When the Inquisition arrested Felipe, they found a man unapologetic in his faith. In his interrogation, he admitted to being a descendant of the Hebrew nation. He confessed to observing kashrut — purifying, draining, and de-veining the meat his family ate. He had fasted on Yom Kippur (the "Day Grande," the tenth of September) without eating or drinking until nightfall. He had kept Shabbat, wearing clean shirts and refraining from work. He recited the psalms of penitence without the Gloria Patri, and he prayed the Amidah (the standing prayer) and the Shema Israel. He had taught these practices to his four sons — all of whom were arrested alongside him.

His sons' testimonies reveal the texture of converso life. Fernando Méndez, aged 23, said his father had taught him the Law of Moses nine years earlier. He prepared kosher meat with his own hands, "with the greatest dissimulation he could manage." He dreamed of fleeing to Turkey with his cellmate Simón Pereira to live freely as Jews — he would take the name David, and Simón would become Isaac. Gaspar Álvarez, aged 20, a law student at Salamanca, confessed that on Holy Thursday 1605, he and other judaizantes had refused to walk the Stations of the Cross. He had decided he wished to be circumcised.

The Inquisition's verdicts were devastating: Antonio Méndez, aged twenty-one, was relaxed — handed to the secular authority for execution. Fernando Álvarez de Morais and Gaspar Álvarez received perpetual prison; Fernando later died in confinement alongside his wife Bárbara Enríquez. Francisco Méndez was imprisoned. Felipe himself — the most named by all the others, the man the Inquisition regarded as the rabbi of the Jews of Ribadavia — was sentenced to death. He was to be relaxed in person. But Felipe bought his life: in 1612, after his persecutors, the inquisitors Ochoa and Cuesta, had been expelled from Galicia, he negotiated a pact with the Holy Office, paying 11,000 reais to commute his sentence.

The litigation that followed — documented in AHN, Inquisición, Leg. 2029, Exp. 9 — reveals both the brutality and the resilience of the family. Pedro Álvarez de Dueñas, Felipe's son from the second marriage — himself still a minor in 1624, assigned his own curador ad litem, Diego de Villar — negotiated a composición of 150 ducats to buy back the confiscated vineyards. Gaspar Álvarez, legally declared loco furioso and mentecato (insane and simple-minded) — though some historians suspect he feigned madness to escape harsher punishment — required a legal curator. Fifteen years later, the Licenciado Francisco

Méndez launched a renewed offensive, arguing that his mother Isabel Méndez's dowry properties had been illegally seized, since under Castilian law, a wife's dowry took precedence even over the Inquisition's confiscatory rights.

The inventory of confiscated assets reads like a cadastral map of 17th-century Ribadavia: the Corredera de San Francisco (90 jornales — a massive commercial holding), the Viña de la Pedreira, the Viña de la Costa, the Viña de San Lázaro, and the family house on the Plaza Mayor, bordering the Calle de la Zapatería. Four hundred reales in silver had been hidden before the confiscation agents arrived. Felipe Álvarez was a man of considerable means — a major wine producer and landowner in the Ribeiro, brought to ruin by the machinery of the Holy Office.

Having escaped the pyre, Felipe endured confiscation of property, the penitential habit (sanbenito), and perpetual prison. He was eventually released, negotiating the return of part of his estate through further financial compositions with the Inquisition. He died before November 1624 — old enough to petition the Holy Office for a guardian for his grandchildren Jerónimo and Mariana, the orphaned children of Fernando Álvarez de Morais.

The fate of those orphans is documented in a civil lawsuit that dragged on from 1640 to 1649 (AHN, Inquisición, 4552, Exp. 8). After the deaths of both their parents, the children Mariana Enríquez and Jerónimo de Morais were taken to Ferreiros, near the Portuguese border, to live under the care of their uncle and aunt — Enrique Coronel and Ana Rodríguez. Their curator ad litem, Diego de Pardiñas, fought for years to recover their mother Bárbara Enríquez's dowry of 2,000 ducats — funded from the estate of Bárbara's brother, Capitán Manuel

Rodríguez, and formalized in the 1608 deed by Ana Rodríguez and Enrique Coronel. The minors argued that this dowry was a privileged debt, owed before the Inquisition's confiscatory claims. Opposing them was the Fiscal of the Holy Office, Fernando de Valmayor, and two private creditors from Vilanova dos Infantes. The court ruled in favor of the orphans: the mother's dowry had precedence even over the Royal Fisc. It was a small victory — but it proved that Castilian law, when pressed, could still shield a family from the full weight of the Inquisition's greed.

Felipe was buried in the Iglesia de Santo Domingo de Ribadavia — the same church where Pedro Vázquez de Puga and Sancha Vella Mosquera, the local familiars of the Inquisition, lay in their heraldic tombs. The Inquisition considered that a reconciled man, having served his sentence, was returned to the bosom of the Church. His tombstone, measuring 1.90 meters by 0.64 meters, is the only known burial marker of a confessed judaizante in a Galician church.

THE DIASPORA 17th-19th Centuries

From Ribadavia to the New World

The auto de fe of 1608 did not destroy Ribadavia's converso community — it trapped it. Most families had no choice but to stay. To flee was to invite the death penalty and to endanger every relative left behind. The condemned served their sentences, paid their compositions, and returned to a town that now watched them. Many dispersed into the villages and parishes surrounding Ribadavia — away from the Casa de la Inquisición on Rúa de San Martiño, away from the sanbenitos hanging in the churches, but never far from the vineyards that sustained them. The stigma of condemnation followed these families for generations. In a society obsessed with limpieza de sangre, a con-

verso surname was a mark that closed doors — to cathedral chapters, military orders, university colleges, and advantageous marriages with Old Christian houses. The result was predictable: converso families married within their own networks, generation after generation, producing densely endogamous clusters bound by the same surnames, the same parishes, and the same silence.

Yet even before the Inquisition struck, some conversos had quietly maintained connections abroad. Simón Pereira, Felipe Álvarez's cellmate, had already been circumcised in Pisa, where his uncle Antonio Núñez lived. Fernando Méndez, Felipe's son, dreamed of fleeing to Turkey to live freely as a Jew under the name David. These were not idle fantasies — they were threads in a clandestine network that had long connected Galician conversos to the open Sephardic communities of Italy, the Ottoman Empire, and eventually the Atlantic world.

The most illustrious — and most genealogically tangled — example is the Senior Coronel family of Amsterdam. The Amsterdam branch descends from the brothers Duarte and António Saraiva, who upon returning to Judaism took the names David and Salomon Senior Coronel. Their family almost certainly came from the converso networks of Salvaterra de Miño and the Galician-Portuguese border, where both the Saraiva and Coronel surnames are densely documented. Among the Coronels of Salvaterra there existed a tradition of descent from Abraham Senior, the last Rab Mayor of Castile, who had converted under pressure in 1492 and taken the name Fernando Pérez Coronel. Whether the Saraiva brothers were direct patrilineal descendants of Abraham Senior or connected through the female line — or simply adopted the prestigious name upon returning to Judaism, as others in their milieu did — remains an open question. What is certain is that Duarte Saraiva reached Amsterdam by 1604, traded with Lisbon for

years, and by 1636 had established himself in Recife, Pernambuco, where he owned sugar mills and leased tax farms. His son Isaac Senior Coronel even spent time in Pontevedra — suggesting the family still had direct kin in Galicia. A later descendant, Nahmán Natán Senior Coronel, emigrated to Jerusalem in 1820 and became a prominent religious author. His great-grandson, David Coren, served in the Israeli Knesset and founded the kibbutz Bet HaAravá on the Dead Sea — his roots in the border country of Salvaterra unknown to him.

The Enrique Coronel who married Ana Rodríguez — Bárbara Enríquez's sister — lived in Ferreiros, near the Portuguese border. It was there that Mariana Enríquez and Jerónimo de Morais were later documented under the care of Enrique and Ana, and from there emerged the 2,000-ducat dowry claim that Diego de Pardiñas pursued in court decades later. This places the Coronel-Rodríguez kin group at the center of Ribadavia's converso legal and property networks in the mid-seventeenth century.

The surname networks that emerge from the Inquisition records of 1608 — Álvarez, Méndez, Rodríguez, Gómez, Fernández, Coronel, Morais, Enríquez, Pereira — read like a map of the Sephardic diaspora itself. These same names appear in the Jewish communities of Amsterdam, the Azores, Brazil, the Caribbean, and colonial Spanish America. The conversos of Ribadavia were not an isolated pocket — they were nodes in a vast Atlantic network, connected by blood, trade, and the shared memory of the Law of Moses.

The surnames themselves tell the story of persistence. Álvarez, Méndez, Rodríguez, Fernández, González — the five family names that fill the parish registers of Castrelo de Miño and Cartelle from the seventeenth century onward — are precisely the surnames that appear in

the Inquisition records of Ribadavia. Felipe Álvarez, Procurador General of Ribadavia. Isabel Méndez, his first wife. Justa Rodríguez de Dueñas, his second. Fernando Álvarez de Morais. Bárbara Enríquez. The question that can never be fully answered — but that the patterns relentlessly suggest — is whether the families who appear in the baptismal records of neighbouring parishes a few generations later are descended from the converso networks that the Inquisition scattered into the countryside.

The endogamy is striking. In the parish records from 1680 onward, the same five or six surnames recur in marriage after marriage, generation after generation, producing densely interlocked kinship clusters that mirror exactly the pattern described by historians of converso communities across Iberia. Converso families married within their own networks because limpieza de sangre — the obsession with "purity of blood" — closed the door to marriage with Old Christian houses. Over time, the stigma faded, the religious practices were forgotten, and the surnames lost their converso associations. But the endogamous pattern, visible in the parish registers, endured long after its original cause had been buried.

CHAPTER 7

The French — Burgundy, Cluny & the Camino

> *The Cistercian monks who built San Clodio monastery — visible from the vineyards of Castrelo de Miño across the river — introduced the advanced winemaking techniques that would sustain the region's economy for five hundred years. The French influence in the Ribeiro was not military conquest but cultural transformation: new agriculture, new religious life, and a new road — the Camino de Santiago — that connected this remote valley to the rest of Europe.*

THE BURGUNDIANS 1086 — 1112

Knights from Burgundy, Kings of Galicia

In the 1080s, French knights rode south across the Pyrenees to fight in the Reconquista. Among them was Raymond of Burgundy, a younger son of Count William I of Burgundy, who arrived around 1086 with the army of Duke Odo I. King Alfonso VI of León and Castile — whose wife Constance of Burgundy was niece to Abbot Hugh of Cluny — rewarded Raymond with the hand of his daughter Urraca and governance of the entire Kingdom of Galicia. From approximately 1090 until his death in 1107, a French Burgundian nobleman ruled the land where Castrelo de Miño, Cartelle, and Ribadavia stand.

Raymond's cousin Henry of Burgundy received the County of Portugal from Alfonso VI around 1095. Henry's son, Afonso Henriques, would become the first King of Portugal — meaning the founding dynasty of Portugal was of French Burgundian origin, born directly from the governance of Galicia. Raymond's own brother, Guido of Burgundy, be-

came Pope Callixtus II in 1119, elevating Santiago de Compostela to an archdiocese and making the Jubilee Year pilgrimage official. In a single generation, the House of Burgundy reshaped the politics, religion, and destiny of Galicia and the entire Iberian Peninsula.

THE CLUNIAC REFORM 1080 — 1150

Cluny: The Power Behind the Throne

The Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy was the most powerful monastic institution in medieval Europe, and its influence on Galicia was profound. Through the marriage of Constance of Burgundy to Alfonso VI in 1079, the Cluniac order gained direct access to the highest levels of Iberian power. The reforms that followed transformed Galician society: the ancient Mozarabic rite was replaced by the Roman liturgy, the Visigothic script gave way to Carolingian minuscule, and Romanesque architecture — the building language of Cluny — began to reshape the churches and monasteries of the Ourense countryside.

Cluny's first permanent priory in Galicia was San Vicente de Pombeiro in the diocese of Lugo, donated by Queen Urraca — Raymond of Burgundy's widow — in 1108. While Cluny's direct monastic footprint in Galicia was smaller than in Castile, its indirect influence was immense: the order promoted the Santiago pilgrimage across Europe, provided infrastructure along the route, and its network of monasteries served as intellectual and cultural bridges between France and the Atlantic northwest of Iberia.

THE PILGRIM ROAD 11th — 13th Century

The Camino de Santiago & the French Way

The Camino de Santiago — the great pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle Saint James — was above all a French enterprise. The Camino Francés) (French Way), entering Spain at Roncesvalles and Somport, was the main artery. But the Vía de la Plata, following the ancient Roman road from the south, passed directly through the Ribeiro — through Ourense, Ribadavia, and onward to Santiago — carrying pilgrims through the heart of the wine country. The pilgrimage brought continental innovations to Galicia: Romanesque art, new agricultural techniques, and urban models that transformed the landscape.

The most important literary monument of this French connection is the Codex Calixtinus, compiled around 1138–1145 and nominally attributed to Pope Callixtus II — Raymond of Burgundy's brother. Scholars believe it was primarily arranged by the French cleric Aymeric Picaud, who journeyed to Santiago and produced what is essentially Europe's first travel guide. Book V describes the French routes in extraordinary detail, recording the customs, rivers, and peoples encountered along the way. The Rua do Franco in Santiago de Compostela — the old town's most famous street — is named for the French merchants who settled there to serve the pilgrims.

THE WHITE MONKS 1141 — 13th Century

Cistercians: From Burgundy to the Ribeiro

The Cistercian Order, founded in 1098 at Cîteaux in Burgundy — the heartland of French viticulture — brought a revolution to the Ribeiro. Under Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the order expanded explosively across Europe, and by his death in 1153 there were over 300 Cistercian houses. The same monks credited with developing the great vineyards of Burgundy arrived in Galicia and applied their disciplined approach to the land. The Monastery of Santa María de Oseira in

Ourense province became the first Cistercian foundation in Galicia in 1141, directly affiliated to Clairvaux — monks sent by Bernard himself.

The Cistercians worked the three river valleys of the Ribeiro — the Miño, Avia, and Arnoia — and gradually expanded viticulture outward. They stimulated cultivation through specific regional contracts called foros), agreements with local landowners who planted vineyards and returned a portion of the wine to the monasteries. The Monastery of Santa María de Melón, another key Cistercian foundation in the Ourense province, joined Oseira in driving this viticultural expansion. By 1133, Ribeiro wine commanded the highest price among foods sold in Santiago de Compostela — a testament to the quality the monks achieved.

THE MONASTERY Heart of the Ribeiro

San Clodio: Where Monks Made Wine

In the heart of the Ribeiro) wine region, on the banks of the Avia river near Ribadavia, stands the Monastery of San Clodio in Leiro. Founded as a Benedictine community in the 10th century, San Clodio joined the Cistercian Order around 1225, affiliating with the Monastery of Melón. From that moment, the monastery became the principal religious, intellectual, and agricultural centre of the Ribeiro. Its monks recovered native grape varieties, expanded vineyard cultivation along the Avia valley, and perfected winemaking techniques inherited from the Burgundian Cistercian tradition.

Wine production gave San Clodio times of great prosperity, peaking between the 12th and 13th centuries. The monastery's abbot Pelagio González documented "the great work for the vineyard reintroduction" and "the excellent quality of the wines that reached the rest of Europe

through local merchants." The wines of the Ribeiro were exported to England, France, the Low Countries, Italy, and Germany. The monastery housed a Holy Relic — said to be a splinter of the True Cross — that was venerated specifically to protect the vineyards from hailstorms. Today the monastery is a national monument, its medieval bridge over the Avia a symbol of the deep bond between French monasticism and Galician wine.

THE SETTLERS 11th — 13th Century

The Francos: French Names on Galician Soil

Beyond the knights and monks, a broader wave of French settlers — known as francos) — arrived in Galicia during the 11th to 13th centuries. The term franco originally meant "Frank" but in medieval Iberian usage came to mean "free foreigner" — settlers from beyond the Pyrenees, mainly from France, but also from Germany, Flanders, and the Low Countries. They were military adventurers, clergy, artisans, and merchants who received exclusive settlement permits from Christian monarchs, attracted by the opportunities created by the Reconquista and the pilgrimage trade.

The francos established themselves in commercial suburbs called burgos — essentially a French importation — that grew outside the walls of castles and monasteries. The first documented franco in Galicia was Bretenaldo, recorded in Santiago de Compostela around 920. By the 12th century, entire streets and neighbourhoods bore their name: the Rua do Franco in Santiago, Rua dos Francos in Teo, and settlements called Francos in Maceda (Ourense) and Baralla (Lugo). They brought French personal names — Aimeric, Guillem, Ramo, Raol — that persisted for two or three generations before blending into the Galician population. The burgo model of urban development trans-

formed the social structure of Galician towns, diversifying the economy and building the trade networks through which Ribeiro wine would travel to the ports of Europe.

CHAPTER 8

The Military Orders — Templars & Hospitallers

> *The Templar and Hospitaller commanderies that dotted the parishes around Cartelle and Castrelo de Miño were among the earliest institutions to organise the countryside of the Ribeiro. When these orders were dissolved, their lands passed into the hands of the local nobility and the emerging hidalgo class — the social layer that would define parish life in the region for centuries.*

THE TEMPLE 1120 — 1312

Soldiers of Christ on the Road to Compostela

The Knights Templar arrived in Galicia around the middle of the twelfth century, drawn by the strategic importance of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage routes and the Atlantic trade networks that connected the peninsula's northwestern coast to the wider Christian world. The earliest documented reference to their presence in the region dates to 1142, when a charter from the Benedictine monastery of Celanova mentions figures styled "seniores cavallaria de Iherusalem" — seniors of the cavalry of Jerusalem — confirming that the order had established a foothold in the province of Ourense within two decades of their formal recognition by the Council of Troyes in 1129.

In Galicia, the Templars organized their holdings into a network of bailías (commanderies) — at least six are documented, at Faro, Amoeiro, Coia, Canabal, San Fiz do Ermo, and Neira — encompassing dozens of churches and monasteries. These were not mere religious foundations: each bailía was a self-sustaining economic unit that com-

bined agricultural estates, mills, fisheries, and toll revenues with the spiritual duties of protecting pilgrims and maintaining the road infrastructure. The commanderies formed a network stretching from the coast to the interior, with major houses at Faro, Neda, and Canabal in the north, and Amoeiro in the province of Ourense — the closest major Templar base to the Arnoia and Miño river valleys where Cartelle and Castrelo de Miño sit. The lands typically came through royal donations: Galician kings and nobles granted territories to the military orders in exchange for their service defending the realm and safeguarding the pilgrimage.

THE TEMPLAR CHURCH 12th — 14th Century

Santa María de Cartelle: A Temple in the Arnoia Valley

The church of Santa María de Cartelle stands as the most tangible surviving link to the Templar presence in the Arnoia valley. Built on a basilical plan with three naves — a layout characteristic of Templar churches across Europe, designed for both liturgical ceremony and the accommodation of the armed brotherhood — the church belonged to the Knights Templar throughout their period of operation in Galicia. Administratively, Santa María de Cartelle fell under the jurisdiction of the commandery of Quiroga in the province of Lugo, one of the important Templar bailías in the region, demonstrating the order's capacity to manage properties across considerable distances from their command centres.

The Templar connection situates the church within a broader strategic landscape. Cartelle sits at the confluence of the Arnoia and Miño rivers, a position that controlled access to the fertile valleys of the Ribeiro) wine region and the trade routes connecting the interior of Ourense to the coast. The Templars' choice of this location was no ac-

cident: it placed them at a key crossing point where agricultural wealth, pilgrimage traffic, and commercial exchange converged. The church's current appearance is largely Baroque, the result of eighteenth-century renovations, but beneath the ornamental plasterwork the original Templar ground plan endures — three naves oriented east-west, the proportions of a fortress church built to last.

THE HOSPITAL 1172 — Present

Castrelo de Miño: Fortress of the Knights of St. John

While the Templars held Cartelle, the neighbouring municipality of Castrelo de Miño belonged to a different military order from the very beginning. On 6 December 1172, King Fernando II of León formally donated the church of Santa María de Castrelo and its surrounding lands to the Knights Hospitaller — the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, later known as the Knights of Malta. This donation was part of Fernando II's broader strategy of distributing Galician territories to the military orders: in 1158 he had already ceded Santa Mariña to the Order of St. John at Portomarín, and in 1170 he founded the Order of Santiago at Cáceres. The 1172 grant placed Castrelo squarely within the Hospitaller network alongside Portomarín, which became the most important House of the Order in all of Galicia.

The logic of the donation was geographic. The Hospitaller monk-knights had a consistent tendency to seek key positions on rivers in order to protect and control human traffic — pilgrims, merchants, and military columns alike. Castrelo de Miño, sitting right on the Miño river crossing, was a textbook Hospitaller strategic position, just as Portomarín controlled the Miño further north. The castle that gave the municipality its name had already demonstrated its military value: in the early twelfth century it served as a barrier against Archbishop

Diego Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela in his attempts to cross the river, and during one dramatic episode it was the site where King Alfonso VII himself was captured along with the bishop and the Countess of Traba. The Hospitaller encomienda at Castrelo eventually held full ecclesiastical and civil lordship over the territory, a jurisdictional authority that endured for centuries.

THE NASI 11th — 12th Century

Ibn Ferruziel: The Little Cid and the Origins of the Benveniste

The late medieval *Crónica del famoso cavallero Cid Ruydiez Campeador* — a 1512 compilation by Juan de Velorado drawing on earlier sources — records a Jewish commander among the Campeador's retinue at Nájera, identified as commanding fifty knights under the banner of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar. Genealogical tradition has identified this figure, listed as "Felez Ferruz," with Mar Solomon Shealtiel, father of Joseph ibn Ferruziel, though this identification rests on later reconstruction rather than contemporary documentation. Joseph ibn Ferruziel himself is far better attested. As personal physician and principal counselor to Alfonso VI of Castile — the king who conquered Toledo) in 1085 — Ferruziel wielded extraordinary influence over the Jewish communities of the kingdom and bore the title *ha-Nasi* (prince). Contemporaries called him *Cidellus*, "the Little Cid," a diminutive of the same Arabic honorific *sīdī* (lord) that gave the great Campeador his own title. It was no idle comparison: Ferruziel moved through the highest circles of Reconquista power with an authority that Pope Gregory VII found alarming enough to write to Alfonso in 1081, warning against permitting Jews to exercise authority over Christians. In June 1110, roughly a year after Alfonso VI's death, the signature

"Citiello iudeo" appeared alongside the kingdom's highest dignitaries on a charter of immunities granted by Queen Urraca — a document notable as a rare instance in Christian Iberia of a Jewish figure standing among the royal signatories.

The poet Yehuda Halevi — the greatest voice of the Sephardic golden age — found refuge under Ferruziel's protection in Toledo and dedicated to him a *muwashshaḥa* whose closing *jarcha* in Mozarabic Romance is among the most celebrated early examples of verse in a peninsular vernacular: *"Respond(e) meu Cidiello / venid con buena albixara / como rayo de sol exid / en Wad-al-ḥajara"* — "Answer, my Little Cid! Come with good tidings, like a ray of sun shine forth in Guadalajara." Ferruziel's kinsman Solomon — also a Nasi — was killed in 1108 while reportedly returning from a diplomatic mission to Aragon. Halevi set aside the victory ode he had been composing and wrote instead an elegy ending with a curse against the "Daughter of Edom" — rabbinic code for Christendom — suggesting it was Christian hands, not Muslim, that bore responsibility for the murder. According to genealogical tradition preserved in later sources, the Ferruziel line continued through Joseph's son Meshulam to a figure documented as Joseph Benveniste (d. c. 1205), establishing the direct lineage of the Benveniste family. This connection, while widely repeated in genealogical compilations, has not been confirmed by modern academic scholarship and should be treated with appropriate caution. What is better established is the broader pattern linking both dynasties: both the Ferruziel and Benveniste families held the *ha-Nasi* title, both claimed descent from the House of David through the Exilarchs, and both had deep roots in Narbonne — a city whose Jewish *nesi'im* traced an ancient lineage of communal leadership. The arc from Cidellus to the *homines templi* of Aragon traces what tradition

presents as a single dynasty's passage from the battlefield to the counting house — from riding under El Cid's banner to administering the treasuries of the Temple.

THE TAX FARMERS 13th — 15th Century

The Benveniste: Jewish Financiers of the Military Orders

The military orders could not function without sophisticated financial administration, and across medieval Iberia it was Jewish families who most often filled this critical role. The Benveniste were among the most prominent Sephardic lineages involved. In the Crown of Aragon, the connection runs deep: documents refer to members of the family as *homines templi* — men of the Temple — a formulation that went beyond honorific title to describe a structural relationship. From their base in Zaragoza, the Benveniste-Cavallería managed tax farming operations and administered the complex financial flows that sustained Templar commanderies across the kingdom. But the family's reach extended beyond the Temple: Judah Benveniste (d. 1411) farmed the church revenues of the archdiocese of Saragossa *and* of the Order of St. John — meaning the family served as financial infrastructure for both great military orders simultaneously. By 1372, Vidal de la Cavallería had moved beyond tax farming altogether: he and Perpinyán Blan received the right to mint the gold coin of Aragon, sovereign-level financial agency.

In Galicia, Abraham Benveniste appears in royal tax records in A Coruña as late as 1435, demonstrating the family's enduring presence well into the fifteenth century. The Ourense-Ribadavia corridor — home to the largest Jewish communities in medieval Galicia — sat directly adjacent to the Templar and Hospitaller territories at Cartelle and Castrelo de Miño. Jewish arrendadores (tax farmers) are documented

throughout the region, managing ecclesiastical and seigneurial revenues. The convergence of converso history and military order history in this narrow stretch of the Miño valley is no coincidence: where the orders needed financial expertise, Jewish families provided it.

The relationship between Jewish financiers and the military orders was not merely transactional — it was structural. The orders needed capital to maintain their far-flung commanderies, equip their knights, and fund their eastern campaigns. They could not lend money at interest, which the Church forbade among Christians. Jewish bankers could and did. The result was a symbiosis so deep that the Benveniste-Cavallería were literally described as "men of the Temple" — homines templi — not just business partners but embedded members of the order's economic machinery. When Philip IV of France decided to destroy both communities in the space of fifteen months — expelling the Jews in 1306, arresting the Templars in 1307 — he was dismantling a single interconnected system.

THE FALL 1307 — 1371

When the Templars Fell: The Dissolution and Its Aftermath

Philip IV of France — "Philip the Fair" — had already rehearsed the playbook before he turned it on the Templars. In July 1306 he expelled every Jew from his kingdom in a single stroke: property seized, goods auctioned, outstanding debts redirected into royal coffers. Fifteen months later, on Friday 13 October 1307, he ran the same operation against the Knights Templar, ordering the simultaneous arrest of every member of the order in France.

It took five years for the papacy to catch up. On 22 March 1312, Clement V formally dissolved the order at the Council of Vienne with the bull Vox in excelso, and a companion decree, Ad providam, directed that all former Templar properties should pass to the Knights Hospitaller — the Order of St. John, the Templars' old rivals and their chief rival among the military orders. In Portugal and Aragon the transfer largely took effect, enriching the Hospitallers overnight. But in Castile-León, the Crown had other ideas. Fernando IV simply began helping himself to the choicest Templar holdings, diverting to the throne what the Pope had intended for the Hospital.

Galicia was no exception. What followed was not a single act of confiscation but decades of piecemeal redistribution. Alfonso XI initially honoured the papal directive, granting certain former Templar properties to the Order of San Juan — but in 1340 he handed the greatest prize to Pedro Fernández de Castro, known as *o da Guerra*, Lord of Lemos and Sarria and the king's own chief steward: the town and castle of Ponferrada — the iconic Templar fortress on the Camino de Santiago. (Pedro was also the father of Inês de Castro, the tragic queen whose story became one of the great legends of Iberian history.) The decisive break came with the Trastámara revolution: after Enrique II seized the throne in 1369, he granted the Tenca do Temple — a significant bloc of former Templar land — to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. But even that grant did not settle matters: Pedro Enríquez de Trastámara, Count of Lemos, subsequently seized the cathedral's new holdings through his agent Gonzalo López de Goyanes, keeping the revenues for himself. By the time the dust settled, the Hospitallers had received only a fraction of what Ad providam had promised them; the rest had been carved up between the Crown, the nobility, and the Church — and was still being fought over decades

later. Meanwhile, the Hospitaller encomienda at Castrelo de Miño, having never been Templar property in the first place, continued undisturbed — a quiet survivor amid the upheaval.

PART III

The Noble Houses

From the twelfth century onward, a handful of noble families dominated the Ribeiro. They built towers and castles, fought civil wars, swore allegiance to rival kings, and married strategically to consolidate power. Their heraldry still marks the churches and pazos of the region. These are their stories.

CHAPTER 9

Torre de Sande — The Oldest Lineage

ROYAL LINEAGE 9th — 12th Century

From the Counts of Galicia to the Lords of Sande

According to Padre José Santiago Crespo del Pozo's Blasones y linajes de Galicia, the Sande are an ancient and illustrious Galician lineage traditionally claiming descent through the male line from the royal family of Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez (c. 850 — after 912), Mayordomo Mayor of King Alfonso III of Asturias. Hermenegildo was a magnate of immense power: repopulator and Count of Coimbra, his daughter Elvira) became Queen Consort of León as wife of King Ordoño II. Their son Sancho Ordóñez became the first King of Galicia (926–929); like most medieval monarchs his court was itinerant, but the Miño valley remained closely tied to his royal household — he was buried at the monastery of Castrelo de Miño, and his widow Goto Muñiz stayed on as its abbess. Over a century later, Garcia II — a direct descendant of Ordoño II and Elvira through the Leonese royal line — chose nearby Ribadavia as the capital of his Kingdom of Galicia (1065–1071).

From this exalted line descended Don Juan de Sande, who established himself as lord of the valley and castle of Sande in the parish of San Salvador de Sande, municipality of Cartelle, in the Terra de Celanova. The Sande family name is toponymic, derived from the Latin sabulum (coarse sand), marking the sandy alluvial soils where the Arnoia and Miño rivers converge below the fortress. The earliest documented reference to the Sande surname in Galicia dates to 1274.

THE FORTRESS 12th — 14th Century

The Tower of Sande: Granite Sentinel of the Arnoia

The Torre de Sande stands on a solitary granite outcrop at 506 metres altitude in the parish of San Salvador de Sande, Cartelle. Positioned between the rivers Arnoia and Miño, the tower commands panoramic views across a vast agricultural valley of approximately 12 kilometres per side. Built in late Gothic style from quality granite ashlar blocks, the rectangular keep measures 6.4 by 5.8 metres and rises approximately 13 metres. A single semicircular arched entrance on the east face, elevated 3.5 metres above ground, preserves two corbels that once supported a wooden landing platform. Above the entrance, the carved coat of arms of the Sande lineage endures in stone.

The tower was the nucleus of a broader architectural complex that included the Pazo de Sande and the Romanesque church of San Salvador de Sande, which houses a magnificent Baroque retablo by Francisco de Castro Canseco (c. 1700-1710), one of the great sculptors of Galician Baroque. The parish also contains pre-Roman castro remains, creating a layered archaeological landscape spanning from the Iron Age through the medieval period.

THE CRIME 12th Century

The Murder of the Abbot and the Royal Confiscation

The defining event in the early history of the Casa de Sande was an act of violence whose roots lay in the entangled history of a noble family and a monastic institution. The lords of Sande and the founder of the Monastery of San Salvador de Celanova shared a common ancestor: Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez (c. 850–912), the mayordomo mayor of King Alfonso III and conqueror of Coimbra. His son, Count

Gutierre Menéndez, was the most powerful magnate in 10th-century Galicia, and his grandson San Rosendo — bishop, viceroy, and celibate Benedictine monk — founded the Monastery of Celanova in 936 on lands donated by his own brother, Count Froila Gutiérrez. From this same stock, according to Padre Crespo's Linajes y Blasones de Galicia, descended the lords of Sande, who held the Torre de Sande as their ancestral seat overlooking the valleys of the Arnoia and Miño rivers. But San Rosendo left no heirs: within a generation, Celanova became an autonomous Benedictine institution governed by elected abbots with no blood ties to the family that had endowed it. Over the centuries, these abbots accumulated vast territorial holdings, priories across Ourense and beyond, and titles including Count of Bande, Marquis of the Torre de Sande, and Chaplain of the Royal House. Prolonged territorial clashes erupted between the monastery and the secular Sande lords, culminating in an act of extraordinary gravity: Nuño de Sande, Señor del Castillo y Valle de Sande, killed the abbot of Celanova during one of these confrontations. In medieval Galicia, where monasteries held immense spiritual and temporal authority, the murder of such a churchman demanded the harshest royal response.

The killing precipitated — or provided the justification for — a definitive royal confiscation. King Alfonso VII of León and Castile, together with Queen Berenguela of Barcelona, issued a charter on 5 May 1141 in Zamora, donating the Castle of Sande — with all its hereditary lands, jurisdictional rights, and revenues — to the Monastery of San Salvador de Celanova. The confiscation was definitive: the Sande family lost their ancestral fortress to the very institution their ancestor's relative had founded two centuries earlier. The abbots of Celanova thereafter held the title of Marquises of the Tower of Sande — the family name now adorning a monastic dignity. This donation was later confirmed by

Alfonso IX of León, and the original Latin parchment (378 × 430 mm, in Caroline script showing Gothic influences) survives in the Archivo Histórico Nacional.

THE UPRISING 1467 — 1469

The Irmandiño Revolt: When the People Rose Against the Towers

In the 14th century, the Tower of Sande had passed to Paio Rodríguez de Araujo, lord of Araujo and Lobios, who served King Juan I of Castile and controlled the parishes of Lobios, Xendive, and Milmada. The fortress continued to function as a centre of seigneurial power over the surrounding countryside.

Then came the great convulsion. The Revolta Irmandiña (1467-1469) was one of the largest popular uprisings in medieval European history. Tens of thousands of Galician commoners — peasants, artisans, minor clergy, and even some lesser nobles — rose against the aristocratic towers that symbolised feudal oppression. Across Galicia, the irmandiños systematically attacked and demolished seigneurial fortresses. The Torre de Sande was among those besieged and destroyed. Though subsequently rebuilt, the tower never regained its former military significance. The uprising marked the beginning of the end for the old Galician warrior nobility.

Imagine the scene at the Torre de Sande in the spring of 1467. The raised entrance — three and a half metres above the ground, accessible only by a wooden platform that the lord could retract — had been designed to keep out exactly this kind of assault. But the irmandiños were not a raiding party. They were a movement. They came with picks, hammers, ropes, and the collective fury of generations ground

down by the foral system that channelled their labour into seigneurial coffers. They pulled down the wooden platform, then went to work on the granite itself. Stone by stone, the tower that the Sande family had held since the twelfth century came apart. Across Galicia, the irmandiños demolished an estimated 130 fortresses in two years — a systematic deconstruction of the feudal infrastructure that had governed their lives. When the nobility eventually regrouped and crushed the revolt in 1469, they rebuilt many of their towers. The Torre de Sande was rebuilt too, but the old authority was gone. A tower you have to rebuild is not the same as one that has always stood.

DIASPORA 15th Century

The Scattering: From Galicia to Extremadura and Portugal

Reduced in status after the 1141 confiscation, and with their ancestral fortress later destroyed by the irmandiños, the Sande family gradually dispersed across the Iberian Peninsula. The first Sande knight to leave Galicia for Extremadura donated his remaining Galician lands to the Convent of Celanova before departing south, establishing the family in Cáceres, where they became part of the urban lower nobility.

Meanwhile, Lopo Afonso de Sande fled to Portugal at the beginning of the reign of João I (c. 1385), reportedly after defenestrating an abbot of Celanova — an echo, perhaps, of the original crime. His brother Pedro Lopes de Sande remained in Castile. From these branches arose extraordinary figures: Álvaro de Sande (c. 1489-1573), hero of the Spanish Tercios who captured the Elector of Saxony at Mühlberg; Francisco de Sande y Picón (c. 1540-1602), Governor of the Philippines who founded Nueva Cáceres; Rui de Sande, ambassador

of João II whose diplomacy led to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494); and Francisco de Melo e Torres,_1st_Marquis_of_Sande, 1st Marquis of Sande, who negotiated the marriage of Catherine of Braganza to Charles II of England.

Each of these figures deserves more than a semicolon. Álvaro de Sande was one of the most feared soldiers in sixteenth-century Europe. At the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547, serving under the Duke of Alba, he personally captured Johann Friedrich, Elector of Saxony — the leader of the Protestant League — in hand-to-hand combat. He later commanded the disastrous expedition to Djerba in 1560, where he was captured by the Ottomans and ransomed; fought at the Great Siege of Malta in 1565; and ended his career as Governor of Milan.

Francisco de Sande y Picón, born in Cáceres, governed the Philippines from 1575 to 1580, founding the city of Nueva Cáceres (now Naga) — named after his Extremaduran hometown. He went on to govern Guatemala before dying in Mexico City in 1602. A Sande from the granite valleys of the Arnoia, building cities on the far side of the Pacific.

The Portuguese branch produced Rui de Sande, whose diplomatic negotiations on behalf of King João II helped produce the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 — the agreement that divided the newly discovered world between Spain and Portugal. A century and a half later, Francisco de Melo e Torres, 1st Marquis of Sande, negotiated the marriage of Catherine of Braganza to Charles II of England — a union that brought Tangier, Bombay, and free trade with the Portuguese Empire into English hands, reshaping the Atlantic world.

HERITAGE Present Day

A Tower in Danger: The Fight to Save Sande

Today the Torre de Sande stands in private hands, owned by the Reza family, in a state of severe deterioration. Significant structural cracks threaten the tower with imminent collapse. In 1949, the fortress was declared a Bien de Interés Cultural (BIC) and protected under Spanish heritage law. Despite this legal protection, decades of abandonment have taken their toll.

In 2020, the tower was added to the Lista Roja de Patrimonio (Red List of Heritage in Danger) maintained by Hispania Nostra, bringing international attention to its precarious condition. The cultural loss would be immense: the Torre de Sande is not merely a ruin but a tangible connection to nine centuries of Galician history — from the royal counts of the Reconquista to the great irmandiño revolt, from the splendour of the medieval lordships to the silent decay of rural Galicia. The carved Sande coat of arms above the entrance still watches over the valley of the Arnoia, waiting.

CHAPTER 10

Casa de Sarmiento — Lords of Ribadavia

THE LINEAGE 12th — 14th Century

From Burgundy to the Vine Shoots of Galicia

The Sarmiento name derives from the Latin *sarmentum* — a vine shoot or cutting — a fitting etymology for a dynasty that would come to dominate the Ribeiro), Galicia's oldest and most celebrated wine region. The family traced their origins to a Burgundian knight who accompanied the French dynasties into Iberia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, part of the broader migration of Frankish aristocracy that reshaped the kingdoms of León and Castile. Early Sarmientos held lands in the Castilian heartland — around Carrión de los Condes and the Tierra de Campos — where Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento's father, Diego Pérez Sarmiento, served as Adelantado Mayor de Castilla and held the county of Castrojeriz under Pedro I.

The Sarmientos' fortunes turned on a single political gamble. During the Castilian civil war between Pedro I and his half-brother Enrique de Trastámara, the family backed the challenger. It was a shrewd wager. When Enrique's forces cornered Pedro I at Montiel in 1369, the war ended in fratricide — and the Sarmientos found themselves on the winning side of the revolution that remade Castile. The same Trastámara upheaval that redistributed former Templar and Hospitaller lands across Galicia would transform the Sarmientos from minor Castilian gentry into the dominant feudal power of the southern Galician valleys.

THE GRANT 1370 — 1375

Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento: Adelantado Mayor of Galicia

On 30 July 1370, King Enrique II named Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento Adelantado Mayor del Reino de Galicia — the crown's chief military and judicial officer in the kingdom — and sent him west to crush the last Petrist loyalists. The mission was Fernando de Castro, the most powerful holdout, who still controlled much of Galicia. Sarmiento prosecuted the campaign with ferocity. He burned part of Tui during an assault, and in 1371, alongside Pedro Manrique, destroyed Fernando de Castro's forces at the battle of Porto de Bois near Lugo. The victory broke Petrist resistance and established Sarmiento as Enrique II's strongman in Galicia.

The rewards came in stages. In 1372, the king granted Sarmiento the Burgo do Faro. In 1375, Ribadavia and Santa Marta de Ortigueira followed. Ribadavia was no minor gift: it was the commercial heart of the Ribeiro wine region), the town whose market controlled the export of wine down the Miño) to the Atlantic. Juan I later added Sobroso, Avión, the coto of Anllo, and the entire Ribeiro de Avia — extending Sarmiento control across the full breadth of southern Galicia's wine country.

Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento did not live to consolidate what he had won. In 1383, Juan I summoned him south to press the Castilian claim to the Portuguese throne. Sarmiento invaded Portugal from the northwest, reaching as far as Barcelos, where he defeated a Portuguese force. But when the Castilian army settled into its siege of Lisbon in the summer of 1384, plague swept the encampment. Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento died of pestilence during the siege, alongside much of the Castilian high command. A Castilian by birth, he asked to be buried in the chapel of Santa María de Sasamón in Burgos — but his lordship survived him, passing intact to his son Diego Pérez Sarmiento.

THE SIEGE 1386

Lancaster at the Gates of Ribadavia

Two years after Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento's death, his lordship faced its first great test. In 1386, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster — who claimed the Castilian throne through his marriage to Constanza, eldest daughter of the murdered Pedro I — invaded Galicia with an English army. Most Galician towns surrendered without a fight. Ribadavia did not.

An English force of over two thousand spearmen and archers laid siege to the town. The defenders held out until the English brought up a siege tower on wheels — a formidable piece of military engineering that allowed the attackers to overtop the walls. When the town finally fell, the contemporary French chronicler Jean Froissart recorded what happened next: the English killed indiscriminately and looted the town, targeting Jewish homes in particular for the gold and silver they found there. Froissart claimed fifteen hundred Jews lived in Ribadavia — an impossible exaggeration for a town of roughly five hundred inhabitants, but one that reflects how numerous the Jewish merchant community appeared to the invaders, probably as much as half the town.

What Froissart did not exaggerate was the fighting itself. The Jewish quarter's inhabitants mounted a fierce defence of the Magdalena and Porta Nova gates, fighting alongside their Christian neighbours on the walls. Ribadavia's resistance was the exception in a campaign that swept through Galicia with little opposition. The conflict was resolved diplomatically at the Treaty of Bayonne in 1388, but the scars — physical and economic — endured for a generation.

THE FORTRESS 15th Century

The Castle of the Counts: Commanding the Confluence

The Castillo de los Sarmiento stands on a rocky promontory at the southern edge of Ribadavia's old quarter, overlooking the point where the river Avia) empties into the Miño). The position was chosen for total control: from the castle walls, the Sarmientos commanded both the river crossing and the market town below, monitoring the flow of wine barrels, merchant traffic, and tolls that were the economic lifeblood of their lordship. The present castle was begun around 1471, built on the site of an earlier church — San Xés de Francelos — and a pre-Romanesque necropolis with anthropomorphic tombs carved into the rock, dating from the ninth to twelfth centuries.

But the Sarmientos were not the first lords to control this ground. Before they arrived, the Order of St. John — the Knights Hospitaller — held a commandery headquartered in Ribadavia itself, one of four Hospitaller *encomiendas* in the province of Ourense. The Hospitallers had been producing and collecting wine revenues across the Ribeiro de Avia since the twelfth century, and their church — San Xoán — still stands in the town. When the Sarmientos secured the lordship in 1375, the Hospitallers found themselves squeezed. By the fifteenth century, the commandery's administrative seat had relocated to the village of Beade — likely under pressure from the Sarmiento lords, whose expanding jurisdiction left little room for a rival authority. The Sarmientos had not merely inherited former military order lands. They had displaced the last military order still operating in the valley (see The Military Orders).

THE RIVALS 15th Century

Pedro Madruga and the Wars of Southern Galicia

The Sarmientos did not rule southern Galicia unchallenged. Their great rivals were the Sotomayor — the lords of the fortress of Soutomaior — and no figure embodied the rivalry more vividly than Pedro Álvarez de Soutomaior, known to history as Pedro Madruga.

The nickname itself was born from a confrontation with the Sarmientos. In a boundary dispute with the Count of Ribadavia, the two men agreed to ride at the first cockcrow toward each other's castle, with the meeting point marking the new border. Pedro decided that first cockcrow was at midnight, rode through the darkness all night, and was standing at the Count's castle door by dawn. "*Madrugas, Pedro, madrugas!*" the Count exclaimed — "You're an early riser, Pedro!" The name stuck.

The rivalry escalated into open war. At Sobroso Castle — a Sarmiento stronghold granted by Juan I in 1379 — Pedro Madruga's brother Álvaro captured García Sarmiento during a raid, dragged him to the castle walls, held him bound on a table with a sword at his throat, and demanded the garrison surrender. The defenders refused, telling Álvaro he could kill their lord before they would open the gates. The Sarmiento-Sotomayor feud only ended with the pacification imposed by the Catholic Monarchs in the 1480s, when Isabella and Ferdinand broke the power of both houses as part of their campaign to centralise royal authority.

THE FALL 1467 — 1478

The Irmandiño Revolts and the Son of Úrsula

The Sarmiento lordship met its greatest crisis during the Irmandiño revolts of 1467–1469, when Galician peasants, townspeople, and minor gentry rose against the great feudal lords. The *irmandiños* — the

"little brothers" — attacked noble castles throughout the kingdom, and the Castillo de Ribadavia was among their targets. The revolt struck at the worst possible moment: Diego Pérez Sarmiento, the first Count of Santa Marta, had died in 1466, and the succession was contested. His designated heir was not a legitimate son, but Bernardino — a child born of Diego's relationship with a slave named Úrsula, legitimized by royal decree in 1457.

Bernardino was a teenager when the *irmandiños* came. He fled Galicia entirely, taking refuge in the Castilian town of Mucientes. His stepmother Teresa de Zúñiga was killed by the rebels in 1470. When Bernardino returned, he found a shattered inheritance — destroyed castles, hostile vassals, and a nephew named Francisco who disputed his right to rule. The two reached a settlement in 1476: Bernardino kept Ribadavia, the Adelantamiento, and the bulk of the family's holdings; Francisco received Santa Marta de Ortigueira.

Two years later, on 20 April 1478, the Catholic Monarchs rewarded Bernardino for his support during the War of the Castilian Succession — against Juana la Beltraneja and her Galician ally Pedro Madruga — by creating the formal Condado de Ribadavia. The son of a slave, a refugee from revolution, a man who negotiated his own inheritance at swordpoint — and now, by royal decree, the legitimate count of the richest wine town in Galicia. The monasteries of the region named him one of the most voracious *encomenderos* in Galicia. He died in Valladolid in 1522, having donated his estates to his daughters.

THE ARMS Heraldry

Thirteen Bezants on a Field of Blood

The arms of the Casa de Sarmiento bear thirteen gold bezants) (*bezantes de oro*) on a red field (*gules*). The bezant — a gold roundel — recalls the currency of Byzantium, a symbol carried home by crusading families and perpetuated in the heraldry of lineages that claimed descent from the warriors of the eastern Mediterranean. Whether the Sarmientos' Burgundian ancestors actually fought in the East is uncertain, but the claim mattered: in medieval Castile, crusading symbolism was the currency of legitimacy, and thirteen gold coins on a blood-red field announced a house that traced its honour to the Holy Land.

Today the castle of Ribadavia stands in ruins above the old town. The Sarmientos abandoned it in the seventeenth century, relocating to a Baroque palace on the Plaza Mayor — the Pazo de los Condes — before the family's leading representatives left Galicia altogether to seek influence at court in Madrid and Valladolid, following the pattern of noble absenteeism that hollowed out Galician lordships across the early modern period. Each year on the last weekend of August, the *Festa da Istoria* transforms the medieval streets below the castle into a living recreation of the town's Sarmiento-era past.

CHAPTER 11

House of Castro — The Kingsmen

THE LINEAGE 12th — 14th Century

From Castrogeriz to the Lords of Galicia

The Castro name derives from the Latin *castrum* — a fortified place — and the family traced its origins to Castrogeriz, the ancient hill-top town on the Camino de Santiago in the province of Burgos. They belonged, alongside the Lara, the Haro, and the Guzmán, to the five great houses linked by blood to the first kings of Castile. The Castro-Lara rivalry — a bitter contest for influence over the Castilian crown during the reign of Alfonso VIII — defined twelfth-century court politics before the family's centre of gravity shifted permanently westward.

By the thirteenth century, the Galician branch of the house had eclipsed the Castilian line. Through a series of strategic marriages — most critically to the royal house of León — the Castros established themselves as Lords of Lemos and Sarria, controlling the great fortified towns of interior Galicia from Monforte de Lemos to Castro Caldelas. The historian Murguía called them a "semi-royal dynasty"; Crespo Pozo observed that no other Galician house could claim so many blood ties to the medieval kings of Spain. It was not an exaggeration. The Castros descended from Alfonso IX of León, married into the line of Sancho IV of Castile, and produced children who would sit on — or shake — the thrones of both Castile and Portugal.

THE KINGS' MEN 13th — 14th Century

Adelantados, Pertigueros, and the Sultan's Gold Spurs

Esteban Fernández de Castro held the Adelantamiento Mayor de Galicia — the same office the Sarmientos would later inherit — and the Pertiguería Mayor de Santiago, the powerful military governorship of the lands belonging to the cathedral of Compostela. His domains stretched from Lemos and Sarria in the interior to Valladares and Castro Caldelas in the province of Ourense, with holdings extending into the Tierra de Toroño — the territory that encompassed the Ribeiro wine country and the Miño valley from Ribadavia south to the Portuguese border.

But the most extraordinary Castro of the thirteenth century was Pedro Fernández de Castro, known as *el de la Guerra* — "of the War." Grandson of Sancho IV of Castile, orphaned when his father was killed fighting royal forces at Monforte de Lemos in 1304, Pedro was sent as a child to the Portuguese court. Returning to Galicia around 1319, he recovered the family lordships and became Alfonso XI's most trusted commander — serving simultaneously as Lord Steward of the realm, Adelantado of Galicia, Andalusia, and Murcia, and Pertiguero Mayor of Santiago. At the Battle of Salado in 1340, Pedro Fernández de Castro fought against the Marinid sultan of Morocco and, according to tradition, seized the sultan's golden spurs from the battlefield. He died of plague during the Siege of Algeciras in 1342. His body was carried back to Galicia and buried in the choir of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where his tomb was opened in the nineteenth century and the gold spurs found still beside his bones.

THE DEAD QUEEN 1340 — 1355

Inês de Castro and the Crowned Corpse

Pedro Fernández de Castro "el de la Guerra" fathered four children who would shape the history of two kingdoms. By his wife Isabel

Ponce de León, he had Fernando — who would become the last great Castro lord of Galicia — and Juana, who married Pedro I of Castile. By his mistress, a Portuguese noblewoman named Aldonça Lourenço de Valladares, he had Álvaro — who would become Constable of Portugal — and Inês.

Inês de Castro arrived at the Portuguese court around 1340 as a lady-in-waiting to Constance of Castile, the bride of Prince Pedro, heir to the Portuguese throne. Pedro fell in love with the Galician noblewoman. The affair endured beyond the death of Constance in 1345, producing four children, and drew the Castro family — through Inês's brothers Fernando and Álvaro — dangerously deep into Portuguese court politics. King Afonso IV, fearing the Castro clan would drag Portugal into the Castilian succession crisis, ordered Inês killed. On 7 January 1355, three courtiers murdered her at the monastery of Santa Clara in Coimbra.

When Pedro became king in 1357, he hunted down two of the killers and had their hearts torn from their bodies. He then announced that he had secretly married Inês before her death, legitimizing their children. According to the legend that has never left the Portuguese imagination, he ordered her body exhumed, dressed in royal robes, seated on the throne, crowned, and the entire court compelled to kiss the dead queen's hand. The twin tombs at the Monastery of Alcobaça are real. Pedro and Inês lie face to face across the nave, placed so that, according to legend, they will see each other first when they rise on the Day of Judgment. The daughter of a Galician lord of Lemos and Sarria became the most famous queen in Portuguese history. The phrase *Agora é tarde; Inês é morta* — "It's too late; Inês is dead" — remains a common Portuguese expression to this day.

THE LOYALIST 1354 — 1369

Fernando de Castro: All the Loyalty of Spain

Fernando Ruiz de Castro inherited his father's lordships, his titles, and his instinct for the losing side. When the Castilian civil war erupted between Pedro I and his half-brother Enrique de Trastámara, Fernando became the king's right hand — Pertiguero Mayor de Santiago, Mayordomo Mayor del Rey, Alférez Mayor, Count of Lemos, Trastámara, and Sarria. He was Pedro I's most powerful and loyal supporter.

The loyalty was tested. In 1354, Fernando briefly defected to Enrique's camp after Pedro I repudiated Fernando's sister Juana — abandoning her the day after their wedding. A question of family honour drove the break, and the suspicion that Enrique's faction may have been involved in the murder of his half-sister Inês in Portugal deepened his eventual hatred of the Trastámara cause. He returned to Pedro I and never wavered again.

When the war turned against the king, Fernando de Castro became the de facto regent of Galicia. He held the fortresses of the archbishopric of Santiago, controlled most of the kingdom, and fought Fernán Pérez de Andrade — the great Trastámara partisan — to a standstill in a two-month siege of Lugo. Then, in the spring of 1369, with Fernando de Castro still undefeated in the field, Enrique murdered Pedro I with his own hands at Montiel, and the war changed from a dynastic contest into a cause without a king.

Fernando refused to surrender. He allied with Fernando I of Portugal, who claimed the Castilian throne, and together they seized nearly all of Galicia. For three years after Montiel, the kingdom did not recognise

the fratricide. The Galician towns held out. Fernando de Castro held out. The last Petrist in Spain would not bend the knee.

THE DEFEAT 1370 — 1377

Porto de Bois and the End of the Castro Kingdom

In 1370, Enrique II sent his enforcer west. Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento — a Castilian nobleman with no Galician roots, carrying the title Adelantado Mayor de Castilla — arrived in Galicia at the head of the feared *Compañías Blancas*, the French mercenary companies that had helped Enrique seize the throne. His mission was simple: destroy Fernando de Castro and break the last Petrist resistance in the kingdom.

Fernando gathered an army of Galician loyalists and Portuguese allies and rode to meet him. The two forces clashed at Porto de Bois, near Palas de Rei in the province of Lugo, in early 1371. The site held a grim family resonance — Fernando's grandfather had been killed in battle at the same place in 1304. History repeated itself. The Castros were routed. Fernando fled south across the Miño into Portugal, wounded and broken.

The Treaty of Santarém in 1371 forced the Portuguese to expel the Petrist exiles. Fernando retreated to the castle of Ourém, then to English-held Bayonne in Gascony, where he died in 1377 — the last lord of the greatest Galician noble house, buried in exile in a foreign city. His tomb bore the inscription: *Aquí iace Don Fernando Ruiz de Castro, toda la lealtad de España.* The man who replaced him — Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento — received the Adelantamiento Mayor de Galicia from Enrique II and, in 1375, the lordship of Ribadavia. The lands the Castros

had controlled or influenced for two centuries passed to newcomers. Porto de Bois was not just a battle. It was the end of a world.

THE ARMS Heraldry

Six Roundels on a Field of Silver

The arms of the Galician branch of the Casa de Castro bear six blue roundels (*roeles de azur*) on a silver field (*argent*), arranged 2-2-2. The Portuguese branch used thirteen roundels on gold. The roundel — called a *torteau* in French blazon and a *roel* in Castilian — is among the oldest charges in Iberian heraldry, and the Castro arms are considered one of the most ancient armorial devices on the peninsula. Over time, as the house merged with the Osorios to form the Castro-Osorio line that held the County of Lemos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the arms were quartered with the Osorio wolves passant — but the six blue roundels remained the identifying mark of the original house.

Murguía called the Castros a "semi-royal dynasty." Hermida Balado went further: "the only lineage that could have forged a dynasty of kings in Galicia." The arms survive on churches and pazos across the interior of Galicia — from Monforte de Lemos to Castro Caldelas to the ruins of lordly houses in the Ribeira Sacra. When the senior Castro line failed for lack of heirs, the County of Lemos passed through the Osorios and eventually to the House of Alba, where the title rests today. But the six blue roundels on silver — the oldest heraldic mark of Galician lordship — endure on stone lintels and church walls throughout the kingdom the Castros once ruled.

CHAPTER 12

House of Zúñiga — Biedma to Monterrei

THE BIEDMA Late 13th Century

Frontier Men: From Castile to the Southern Marches of Galicia

The Biedma were a Castilian military lineage — not Galician by origin, but sent to Galicia as the crown's enforcers. At the end of the thirteenth century, Sancho IV despatched Fernán Ruiz de Biedma westward as merino mayor of the kingdom, with orders to hold the frontier territories of southern Ourense against Portuguese encroachment and to serve as ayo — tutor and guardian — to the Infante Felipe, the king's brother. The Biedma came not from the ancient kingdoms of the west but from the heartland of Castile, with Andalusian branches already established in Jaén from the time of Fernando III's reconquest. Their kinsman Rodrigo Iñiguez de Biedma had fought alongside the sainted king and founded a house in Jaén, facing the old Merced convent. The Biedma who arrived in Galicia brought a warrior's pedigree and a royal mandate.

Fernán Ruiz married Marina Páez de Sotomayor, daughter of the great troubadour-admiral Payo Gómez Charino, anchoring the family in the Galician aristocracy. His son Ruy Páez de Biedma became adelantado de Galicia and copero (cupbearer) to the Infante Pedro, holding the strategic castles of Allariz and Monterrey — the twin fortresses that commanded the valley of the Támega and the road to Portugal. When Alfonso XI granted Ruy Páez the lordship of Portela, Abavides, and the castle of A Pena in A Limia, the foundations of a new Galician power

were laid in the broad plain south of Ourense, precisely the territory that would one day become the great state of Monterrey.

THE WAR 1340 — 1369

Salado, Montiel, and the Opposite Side of Loyalty

In 1340, the Biedma brothers rode south to fight alongside Alfonso XI at the Battle of Salado — the same battle where Pedro Fernández de Castro seized the Moroccan sultan's golden spurs. The two great houses of southern Galicia fought on the same field that day. It would be the last time they stood together.

Juan Rodríguez de Biedma, the third lord, inherited his father's offices and the tenancy of Allariz and Monterrey. He served Pedro I as copero mayor — chief cupbearer, a position of intimate trust. But when the king ordered the execution of Juan Rodríguez's son and heir, Rodrigo Yáñez de Biedma, for having entered what the crown called "royal disservice," the father's loyalty broke. The señor de Biedma switched allegiance to Enrique de Trastámara — and in doing so placed himself on the opposite side of history from Fernando de Castro, the great Petrist loyalist who would hold Galicia for three years after his king's murder.

The Biedma fought against the Castros. When Fernando de Castro held the fortresses of Galicia for Pedro I, Juan Rodríguez de Biedma defended the towers of the Támega, Limia, and Arnoya valleys for the Trastámara pretender. He was besieged in Allariz by Fernando de Castro and forced to flee to Monterrey, where he held out until the end. When Enrique murdered Pedro I with his own hands at Montiel on 23 March 1369, Juan Rodríguez de Biedma was present. He had chosen the winning side.

And he was rewarded for it. Between 1368 and 1369, Enrique II showered the Biedma lord with donations that would define the map of southern Galicia for centuries. In January 1368: Loveira, Entrimo, Araúxo, and Abelenda. In April 1369: Vilanova dos Infantes, Castrelo, and Espinoso. In July 1369: Xinzo de Limia, Gánade, Miño, and Barbantes. And in October, the great final grant, issued at Braganza: "Villa de Rey con todos sus alfoces, e Soto Bermud, con Val de Laza, y el castillo de Santibáñez de Barra, con las tierras de Todea e de Peñafiel."

The irony was bitter. Vilanova dos Infantes, Castrelo, and Espinoso — the three places granted to the Biedma in April 1369 — had previously belonged to the Castros. They had formed part of the dote brought to Pedro Fernández de Castro "el de la Guerra" by his wife Isabel Ponce de León. The lands the greatest Castro lord had held through marriage were stripped from his son's defeated cause and handed to the family that had helped destroy him.

THE ZÚÑIGA Navarra to Castile

Kings of Pamplona: The Navarrese Blood of Monterrey

The Zúñiga were not Galician. They were not even Castilian. They were Navarrese — descendants, by tradition, of the first king of Pamplona, Iñigo Arista himself — and they took their name from the village of Zúñiga in the merindad of Estella. In 1274, when civil war erupted in Navarra over the tutelage of the child-queen Joan I and her French marriage, Iñigo Ortiz de Stúñiga, lord of Stúñiga and alférez mayor of the kingdom, refused to support the French party. He left Navarra with his entire family and entered the service of the Crown of Castile. The Zúñiga never returned.

In Castile they rose fast. By the early fifteenth century, the House of Zúñiga was one of the fifteen ricoshombres families of the kingdom — the highest rank of the Castilian nobility. Diego López de Stúñiga el Viejo served as Justicia Mayor of the realm. His namesake grandson, Diego López de Stúñiga el Mozo, was given the castle of Monterrey by Juan II of Castile in 1432. But it was through marriage, not royal grant, that the Zúñiga acquired their real Galician power.

In 1406, Diego López de Stúñiga el Mozo married Elvira de Biedma, only daughter and sole heiress of Juan Rodríguez de Biedma. The male line of the Biedma had failed. The great frontier señorío — all the valleys of the Támega, Limia, and Arnoya, all the fortresses from Monterrey to Xinzo de Limia — passed into Zúñiga hands. The minor branch of a Navarrese house became the inheritors of the Biedma state: a well-cemented, homogeneous territory in the south of Ourense, built to guard the border with Portugal. Monterrey was not originally part of the Biedma señorío, but the two would soon become one.

THE COUNTY 15th — 17th Century

The County of Monterrey: From Galicia to the Americas

From the marriage of Diego and Elvira came two streams of descendants — and decades of litigation. Juan de Stúñiga, the firstborn, inherited the Biedma and Zúñiga mayorazgos and received the title of Vizconde de Monterrey from Juan II of Castile. But Diego's second marriage, to Constanza Barba de Monsalve, produced a rival line, and the two branches fought over the castle and the lordships for half a century. In 1474, the Reyes Católicos cut through the knot by granting the title of first Conde de Monterrey to Sancho Sánchez de Ulloa, who had married Teresa de Zúñiga y Biedma, the second vizcondesa.

The Ulloa name entered the equation, but the underlying patrimony — the Biedma señorío, the Zúñiga titles, the castle overlooking the Támega valley — remained.

The county became one of the great noble states of early modern Galicia. The counts of Monterrey held the Pertiguería Mayor de Santiago — the same military governorship the Castros had wielded in the thirteenth century — and exercised jurisdictional authority over dozens of parishes across southern Ourense. They built the Palacio de los Condes within the walls of the castle, raised the Torre del Homenaje that still dominates the skyline above Verín, and founded a Jesuit college inside the fortress walls where their sons were educated.

But the most extraordinary Monterrey was Gaspar de Zúñiga y Acevedo, the fifth count, born inside the castle in 1560. Born señor de Biedma, Ulloa, and de la Casa de la Ribera, and pertiguero mayor de Santiago, Gaspar studied under the Jesuits his grandfather had installed in the fortress, then entered the service of Philip II. He led the Galician militia during the Portuguese campaign, defended La Coruña against the English corsair Francis Drake in 1589, and in 1595 was named Viceroy of New Spain. On 20 September 1596, Diego de Montemayor founded a city in the northern reaches of the viceroyalty and named it after his sovereign's representative: Nuestra Señora de Monterrey. Monterrey, Mexico — the great industrial capital of northern Mexico — carries the name of a castle in Ourense. When Sebastián Vizcaíno explored the coast of California in 1602, he named the finest bay he found in honour of the same viceroy: Monterey Bay. From Galicia to Mexico to California — the name of a Navarrese-Galician frontier family inscribed on the map of two continents.

Gaspar died in Lima in 1606, having served as viceroy of Peru after New Spain. His debts were so great that the Royal Audiencia had to pay for his funeral. His body was returned to Spain and buried in the Jesuit church inside the castle of Monterrey — the same fortress where he had been born.

THE ARMS Heraldry

A Black Band, a Gold Chain, and Eight Calderas

The Casa de Zúñiga-Biedma bore two sets of arms, each with its own story. The Zúñiga shield — argent, a bend sable, brochant over all a chain of eight links or in orle — was among the most recognisable armorial devices in Spain. The Biedma shield — or, a pale gules between eight calderas sable, four to each side — signalled the military heritage of a frontier house charged with defending the southern approaches to Galicia.

The Zúñiga arms changed twice. The original device was a golden band on red. After the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, when Navarrese knights broke through the chain-linked human wall of the Almohad caliph's Black Guard, the Zúñiga added a gold chain of eight links in border — the same device that entered the arms of the Kingdom of Navarra itself. In 1270, Diego López de Stúñiga changed the colours again, to silver, black, and gold, in mourning for the deaths of Saint Louis IX of France and Theobald II of Navarra during the Eighth Crusade. The arms remained unchanged from that date. The black band across a silver field, enclosed by a chain of gold, was carried from Navarra to Castile, from Castile to Galicia, from Galicia to the Americas.

The Biedma calderas — the heraldic cooking pots that denoted the right to maintain armed retainers and feed a war host — marked the family as ricoshombres, magnates of the first rank. The two shields united in 1406. When they appear together on the facade of a church in Cartelle, in the province of Ourense, they still speak across seven centuries.

CHAPTER 13

The Hidalgos of the Ribeiro

THE NETWORK 15th — 18th Century

The Hidalgo Web of the Ribeiro Valley

Below the great lords — the Sarmiento counts of Ribadavia, the Castro lords of Lemos, the Zúñiga-Biedma counts of Monterrey — there existed a denser, more permanent layer of local power. These were the *hidalgos*: the lesser nobility of proven blood who held the fortified towers, the casas solares, and the pazos that dot the landscape of the Ribeiro valley. They served as regidores of Ourense, captains of local militia, administrators of tithes and taxes. They proved their noble status before the Real Chancillería de Valladolid, entered the military orders, and — most importantly — married each other.

Three families dominated the hidalgo network of Castrelo de Miño and Ribadavia: the **Armada, whose casa solar stood in the parish of Vide do Miño; the Puga, whose fortified tower commanded the heights above the Miño valley from Toen; and the Mosquera**, whose escuderos appear in Ribadavia's records from the late fifteenth century. Together with the Feijóo, the Araújo, the Noboa, and the Villamarín, they formed an interconnected web of marriage alliances, shared jurisdictions, and quartered arms that bound the region's lesser nobility into a single system. The Casa da Señora in Lapela — where the arms of the Armada appear quartered with the Sarmiento, Castro, Feijóo, and Araújo — is the physical proof of how tightly these families were woven together.

To understand the hidalgos, one must understand the foro — the institution that made their world possible. The foral system was a hereditary lease: a monastery or great house would grant use of its land to a family in exchange for a fixed rent, typically payable in wine, grain, or money. The leaseholder — the foreiro — held the land for three lifetimes (often interpreted as three generations), after which it reverted to the original owner unless renewed. In practice, many foros became effectively permanent.

The system created a layered hierarchy of landholding. At the top sat the great monasteries — Celanova, Oseira, San Clodio — and the fortress lords who had received their lands from the crown. Below them, the hidalgos managed the day-to-day business of the parish: collecting rents, maintaining roads and bridges, adjudicating minor disputes, and ensuring that the foral obligations were met. Below the hidalgos, the labradores (working farmers) tilled the terraced vineyards and chestnut groves that covered every south-facing slope in the Ribeiro. The hidalgo was neither lord nor peasant — he was the indispensable middle layer, the man who kept the system running. His pazo, with its granite coat of arms above the door, was both a home and an office — the administrative centre of a parish-level economy built on wine.

CASA DE ARMADA 15th — 18th Century

From Vide do Miño to the Marqueses de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

The Armada family's casa solar was the *Casa do Casar*, in the parish of San Salvador de Vide do Miño, municipality of Castrelo de Miño — placing them at the geographic heart of the Ribeiro valley, within sight of Ribadavia across the river. The surname is toponymic,

derived from the various places in Galicia called "A Armada," though genealogical tradition traces the family's deeper roots to Rivadulla, along the banks of the Ulla river in the shadow of Pico Sacro. The Casa do Casar still stands today, listed as a heritage property by the Xunta de Galicia.

The first documented head of the line was *Captain Juan de Armada, owner of the Casa do Casar, who died in October 1629. He married Francisca Fernández de Araújo — the Araújo connection, like the Feijóo and Mosquera alliances that followed, was typical of the local hidalgo marriage network. His son, also Captain Juan de Armada, served as regidor and* alguacil de millones* (tax administrator) of Ourense, marrying Isabel Salgado y Taboada, señora de la Casa de Gargalo from Monterrey. The family's trajectory was clear: local captains and property owners rising through municipal service and strategic marriage.

The critical leap came with *Pedro Manuel de Armada y Taboada, baptised in 1645, who became regidor of Ourense and — on 7 November 1668 — was admitted as a Knight of the Order of Santiago. Admission to Santiago required rigorous proof of noble blood going back four generations,* limpieza de sangre*, and the absence of any manual trade. It was the gold standard of proven* hidalguía*, and Pedro Manuel's admission placed the Armada definitively among the military elite of the kingdom.

The family's transformation from local hidalgos to titled nobility came through *Ignacio Antonio de Armada y Salgado de Mondragón, baptised in Vide do Miño in 1690. He served as regidor mayor and alcalde de millones of Ourense and, through a complex inheritance from his mother's Mondragón line, became the Marqués de Santa Cruz de

*Ribadulla** — a title originally created by Carlos II in 1683. The Armada name was now attached to one of the most celebrated estates in Galicia: the Pazo de Santa Cruz de Rivadulla, a thirty-hectare Renaissance garden considered the finest in the kingdom.

CASA DE PUGA 13th — 17th Century

The Tower on the Heights: Lords of Puga and Vassals of the Catholic Monarchs

The Puga family took their name from their primitive solar — the *Torre de Puga, in the parish of San Mamede de Puga, municipality of Toen, in the heart of the O Ribeiro wine region. The tower stood at 180 metres elevation on a granite outcrop above the Miño valley, commanding views across the landscape that is now the Castrelo de Miño reservoir and the entrance to the Barbantino valley — two critical routes connecting Ourense with the coast and the northern province. Its proximity to Portugal made it an observation post of exceptional strategic importance. The Puga held a second ancestral seat — the Torre de Louredo in Cortegada, twelve kilometres south of Ribadavia — which controlled the Miño valley below the town. The tower was razed during the Irmandiño revolt of 1467, when peasant armies destroyed the feudal fortresses of the Galician nobility; the Catholic Monarchs' subsequent* doma y castración* policy prohibited full military reconstruction, and the tower was rebuilt only as a domestic residence. Its ruins still stand in the village of Louredo, beside the shell of the old Baroque church.

The first documented record of the surname dates to 1276, when *Migeel Eanes de Puga* appears in medieval Galician charters. Heraldic sources trace the lineage further back to the twelfth century, during the reign of Alfonso VII. The Torre de Puga itself — built in the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries — was a fortified house divided into several enclosures, with exterior defensive walls, a central tower, auxiliary dependencies including wine cellars (*bodegas*) and haylofts, and three noble shields displaying the Puga family arms on the entrance and tower facades. An ornamental cornice with baroque-style ball pinnacles crowned the tower at all four corners.

The most prominent figure of the house was **Gonzalo de Puga (d. c. 1512), knight and lord of the Torre de Puga and Casa de Maceda,* vasallo de los Reyes Católicos* (vassal of Ferdinand and Isabella) and regidor of Ourense. His marriage to Teresa de Noboa linked the Puga to the ancient Noboa lineage; their tomb chapel in the Church of San Francisco de Ourense is a masterpiece of early-sixteenth-century plateresque sculpture. Gonzalo's recumbent effigy shows him in full armour and helmet, hands clasped on his chest, head resting on two cushions, feet on a greyhound, with an angel holding a book of prayers at his side. The heraldry on the tombs connects the Puga to the House of Villamarín.

Gonzalo's daughter Susana married Suero Feijóo — son of Diego Feijóo "el Bravo," lord of Soto de Penedo — forging another link in the valley's hidalgo network. The adjacent Pazo de Olivar, built in the seventeenth century when the family moved from the tower to a more comfortable manor house, displays a shield showing an eagle with extended wings (the Novoa connection) sheltering the arms of the Puga, Villamarín, and possibly Araújo or Deza families. In the mid-nineteenth century, the pazo belonged to *D. Fernando de Puga*, described as "owner and lord of many lands and houses in the region."

CASA DE MOSQUERA 15th — 18th Century

From the Escuderos of Ribadavia to the Lords of Guimarei

The Mosquera were among the oldest families in Galicia. According to Padre Crespo's *Linajes y Blasones de Galicia*, their first ancestral house was the **Casa de Lodoira, in the lands of Mesía near Santiago de Compostela. The founding trunk was Don Pedro Vidal de Santiago, who married Doña Teresa Sánchez de Ulloa; their son, Lope Sánchez de Moscoso, inherited the house of Lodoira, from which both the Moscoso and the Mosquera lineages descended. The Mosquera surname, in other words, shared blood with the Moscoso — one of the four oldest* casas solares* in the kingdom of Galicia.

The Mosquera's military pedigree ran deep. In the early fifteenth century, **Pedro López Mosquera "el Viejo" served as* alférez mayor *(chief standard-bearer) of Don Fadrique, Duke of Arjona) and* tenente *of the Castle of Alba. On 29 November 1425, he appeared before the Cabildo of Ourense seeking absolution after his squire killed the bishop at Pozo Meimón — a dramatic incident recorded in the cathedral archives and studied by Eduardo Pardo de Guevara. His granddaughter Violante López Mosquera married Afonso Vázquez de Vilar and settled in Prado de Miño, Castrelo de Miño, receiving a* foro *(land grant) from the Monastery of Oseira in 1474. Their daughter Sancha Bello de Mosquera married Pedro Vázquez de Puga of the Louredo branch — the marriage that fused the Puga and Mosquera lines in the heart of the Ribeiro valley. Meanwhile, in 1489, an escudero named Ares Mosquera appears in the records of Ribadavia, and in 1504, Pedro López Mosquera renewed the family's* foro *in the district of Castrelo. The academic Pablo S. Otero Piñeyro Maseda has studied them specifically as a lineage of* escuderos* (squires) — the lower ranks of the Galician lesser nobility — in a paper published through the CSIC's Instituto de Estudios Gallegos Padre Sarmiento.

But the Mosquera were not destined to remain squires. The family's senior branch accumulated an extraordinary series of military order admissions: **Order of Santiago (1541, 1619, 1631, 1647, 1667, 1751), Order of Calatrava (1532, 1717), and Order of Alcántara** (1638). Each admission required formal proof of noble blood — the Mosquera's genealogical dossiers, submitted and accepted again and again over two centuries, constitute one of the most complete documentary records of provincial hidalguía in Galicia.

The physical seat of the Mosquera's power was the **Torre and Pazo de Guimarei in A Estrada, Pontevedra — a fortified complex with a twelfth- to thirteenth-century tower and a late-seventeenth-century pazo. The tower, measuring 6.6 by 6.6 metres with thick ashlar walls rising to fifteen metres, was damaged during the Irmandiño revolts of the 1460s and subsequently rebuilt. Antonio de Mosquera Novoa, born in 1589 and lord of Villar de Payo Muñiz, was a Knight of Alcántara (1638) and the first documented inhabitant of the pazo. His descendant Melchor de Mosquera y Sarmiento, lord of the fortress of Guimarei, became a Knight of Santiago in 1667. The Marquesado de Guimarei was created by Felipe V on 30 September 1716 in favour of Fray Pedro Mosquera Pimentel de Sotomayor, a Knight of the Order of St. John and** Gran Prior de Castilla* of the Order of Malta.

THE WEB 15th — 18th Century

The Marriage Alliances That Bound the Valley

The hidalgo families of the Ribeiro did not marry at random. They married each other, generation after generation, in a pattern so consistent that the genealogical records read like a periodic table of local nobility. The most consequential alliance was the **Puga × Mosquera marriage: Pedro Vázquez de Puga, lord of the Torre de

Louredo, regidor of Ribadavia, and alcaide of the Castle of Roucos, married Sancha Bello de Mosquera — whose mother Violante López Mosquera had brought the family to Prado de Miño, Castrelo de Miño, through a foro *from the Monastery of Oseira. Pedro and Sancha were buried in the apsidal chapel of the Church of Santo Domingo in Ribadavia, their sarcophagi carved with the Puga cauldrons and the Mosquera wolves. Their daughter Violante married Lope García de Baamonde, lord of Regodeigón, and around 1533 the family consolidated their holdings through a* vínculo *(entail). The five heraldic shields on the façade of the Casa de la Inquisición** in Ribadavia's Jewish quarter — Puga, García Camba, Bahamonde, an unidentified house, and Mosquera-Sandoval — are the stone record of this network.

The quartered arms on the pazos and church facades of the Ribeiro are the permanent record of these alliances. At the Pazo de Olivar in Puga, the shield shows the eagle of Novoa sheltering the arms of Puga and Villamarín. At the Pazo de Guimarei, the Mosquera wolf heads sit beside the Sarmiento roundels and the Villar bands. At the Casa da Señora in Lapela, the Armada arms are quartered with Sarmiento, Castro, Feijóo, and Araújo. Each stone shield is a marriage contract made permanent — a declaration that two families had merged their blood, their property, and their claims to noble status.

The logic was simple. In a society where *hidalguía* was transmitted by blood, and where the Real Chancillería required proof of noble lineage on both sides for four generations, marrying within the network guaranteed that your grandchildren would pass the test. Marrying outside it — into a family of uncertain or non-noble status — risked contaminating the blood and disqualifying future generations from the military orders, from municipal office, and from the legal privileges that made life

as an hidalgo different from life as a commoner. The web was not sentimental. It was structural.

CASA DE FEIJÓO 10th — 18th Century

Lords of Arenteiro, Knights of Malta, and the Wine Parish

The Feijóo were among the oldest lineages in Galicia. The surname derives from the Galician *feixón* ("broad bean," from Latin *faseolus*), rooting the family in the agricultural landscape of southern Galicia. Genealogical tradition traces the line to **Giraldo Feijóo, a knight of Gothic lineage who lived in the tenth century and is said to have founded the villa of Freixo de Espada à Cinta in Trás-os-Montes, Portugal. His ancestry connects to Duke Hermenegildo, whose son Gutier received the county of Celanova; Gutier's son San Rosendo** founded the great Monastery of Celanova in 936. Numerous Feijóo knights are buried in its cloister.

The documented trunk begins with **Juan Feijóo de Prado "el Bueno", esquire, buried at Celanova. His descendant Gonzalo Méndez Feijóo Sotelo held the lordships of Vilardecas, Fruíme, and Podentes. From this line descended Diego Feijóo "el Bravo" — lord of Sorga, Freixo, and Sotopenedo — whose marriage to Berenguela de Noboa (of the house of Villamarín) wove the Feijóo into the wider Ribeiro network. Their son Suero Feijóo became alcalde and merino of Sarria, lord of Bóveda de Limia and the cotos of Sorga and Sotopenedo. He married Susana de Puga**, daughter of Gonzalo de Puga and Teresa de Noboa — linking the Feijóo line directly to the tower lords of the Ribeiro.

The family's spiritual and economic capital was **Pazos de Arenteiro — a parish in the municipality of Boborás that holds the distinction of being the only rural settlement in Galicia declared a Historic-Artistic

Ensemble (17 August 1973). The ensemble includes seven noble houses — among them the Pazo dos Feixóo (1553), with its solaina *of semicircular arches on pillars and three heraldic shields above the entrance — the thirteenth-century Romanesque Church of San Salvador, two medieval bridges, and the Pazo de la Encomienda, whose walls are studded with Malta crosses. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre first established a commandery at Arenteiro in the twelfth century; in 1542** the Order of Malta took over — one of only four Maltese commanderies in Galicia — controlling tax collection and wine commerce toward Santiago de Compostela.

The Feijóo's most famous son came from this world of wine and learning. **Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (1676–1764) was born at the family pazo of Casdemiro in the parish of Santa María de Melías, near the Miño. His mother — Doña María de Puga Sandoval Novoa y Feijóo — carried both the Puga and Novoa surnames, placing the great Benedictine scholar at the intersection of the Ribeiro hidalgo network. He renounced his rights as firstborn to the family's* mayorazgo *upon entering the monastery and went on to become the most influential Spanish intellectual of the eighteenth century, a one-man Enlightenment whose* Teatro Crítico Universal* dismantled superstition in favour of empirical reason.

CASA DE NOBOA 12th — 18th Century

Lords of Pena Novoa, Keepers of Maceda, and the Plateresque Tombs

The Noboa — also rendered Novoa — were one of the most ancient noble houses in Galicia. Their primitive solar was at **Pena Novoa**, in the parish of Novoa, within the district of Ribadavia, province of Ourense. From this castle the family took their name. They were lords

of the land of Novoa and its castle, and married several times into descendants of the Royal House of Castile and León.

A critical branch took root at the *Castle of Maceda — an eleventh-century fortress in the Allariz region of Ourense, notable for its massive granite walls. In the twelfth century, the castle was given as a dowry to Doña María Fernández, daughter of Teresa of Portugal (daughter of Alfonso VI) and — according to tradition — Count Pedro Froilaz de Traba, though some genealogists attribute the parentage to his son Fernando Pérez de Traba. Her marriage to Juan Ares de Novoa established the Noboa lineage at Maceda, where it continued until the seventeenth century. The castle hosted the young Alfonso X the Wise* (age eleven), who studied the Galician language within its walls — a detail that connects the Noboa to the very origins of Galician literary culture. Declared a Historic-Artistic Monument in 1949 and a Cultural Heritage Asset in 1994, the castle now operates as a hotel-monument.

The most vivid record of the Noboa is carved in stone. In the *Church of San Francisco de Ourense, four plateresque tombs from the early sixteenth century preserve the memory of the Noboa-Puga alliance. Teresa de Noboa*, wife of Gonzalo de Puga, lies beneath an ornamental arch — her effigy with hands clasped in prayer, two small dogs playing at her feet. Gonzalo's adjacent tomb shows him in full armour, helmet, hands on chest, head on two cushions, a greyhound at his feet, an angel bearing a prayer book at his side. His epitaph — the most extensive and laudatory of the entire funerary ensemble — declares him a vassal of Ferdinand and Isabella and a regidor of Ourense. The heraldry on the tombs connects both families to the house of Villamarín.

Two further tombs complete the ensemble: *Juan de Noboa, in battle attire with hands joined in prayer, and his granddaughter Elvira de Noboa — described as the eighteenth lady of the house of Maceda. Elvira's arcosolium features a carved* vultus trifrons* (three-faced head sharing only four eyes) — an extremely rare iconographic element that speaks to the theological sophistication of the patrons who commissioned it. She wears platform shoes, holds a rosary, and rests her head on rich pillows, while a small dog pauses from gnawing a bone at her feet.

CASA DE VILLAMARÍN 14th — 18th Century

From Oseira Tenants to Fortress Lords: The Pazo-Fortaleza de Vilamarín

The Villamarín story is the most dramatic social ascent in the Ribeiro network — from monastery tenants to fortress lords in three generations. The property that became their seat was originally called the *Casal de Bouzoa, under the domain of the Monastery of Oseira — the great Cistercian house of Ourense. In 1321, the monastic administrator leased it for eight years to Gil Fernández de Vilamarín* — the man whose name would become the family's surname and the name of the fortress itself.

The transformation from tenant to lord came in *1372, when King Enrique II granted the district and jurisdiction of Vilamarín to Alfonso Ougea de Vilamarín* and his descendants. This royal grant converted what had been a lease into a lordship. The Vilamarín lords built their fortress on the leased land while nominally continuing to pay tribute to Oseira, but over time payments became negligent and the family claimed outright possession. Litigation with the monastery arose at the beginning of the sixteenth century and was presumably settled in the

family's favour — by then, the fortress they had built was the most imposing private residence in the province.

The *Pazo-Fortaleza de Vilamarín stands at nearly 450 metres elevation on a rocky formation. Its plan is an irregular polygon with seven corners — a kind of elongated hexagonal shape — built of granite masonry. Five crenellated towers rise from the walls — three circular and two square according to the Galician Wikipedia, though other sources such as Galicia Máxica describe four circular and one square — all supported by corbels. The central entrance, a round-arch doorway flanked by semicircular towers, leads into a complex that includes a barbican on the less protected sides, four chimneys (the kitchen chimney alone measuring over two metres per side), and multiple construction phases spanning the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. Reportedly damaged during the Irmandiño revolt of 1467 — though no documentary evidence confirms outright destruction — it was rebuilt with Baroque additions and declared a* Monumento Histórico-Artístico* in 1977. Owned since 1976 by the Diputación Provincial de Ourense, it now serves as a museum.

The Villamarín name appears throughout the network's heraldry. **Leonor López de Noboa Villamarín married into the Neira family; their son Suero de Neira Villamarín married Constanza Feijóo — linking Noboa, Villamarín, and Feijóo in a single alliance. Catalina Feijóo "of the house of Villamarín" married Cristóbal Rodríguez de Noboa — again uniting all three surnames. At the Pazo de Olivar in Puga, the Villamarín arms sit beside those of Puga and Novoa on the combined shield. And Suero de Villamarín** ceded the lordship of Maceda to his half-brother Juan Pérez de Novoa — binding the Villamarín and Noboa houses through shared jurisdiction over one of the greatest fortresses in Ourense.

Three Shields, One Valley

The Armada bore arms showing *warriors wielding swords and banners*, with castles and towers defended by armed figures — a martial vocabulary appropriate for a family named after a fleet. Seven distinct variants are documented, certified by the Cronista and Dean King of Arms Don Vicente de Cadenas y Vicent. The tinctures favoured sable, azure, gules, and argent — dark, military colours. The arms appear on the facade of the Pazo dos Armada in the old quarter of Ourense and on the Casa do Casar in Vide do Miño.

The Puga bore two principal devices. The older, from Padre Crespo's *Blasones y Linajes de Galicia*, shows a field of *azur with two silver cauldrons (*calderas de plata*), one in the chief and one in the base, with two gold spurs in the centre of each flank. The alternative shows a field of gules with a gold rampant lion** surrounded by four gold fleur-de-lis. Thirteen variants are documented in total. Three shields displaying the Puga arms survive on the Torre de Puga itself.

The Mosquera bore a field of *azur with five gold flies (*moscas de oro*) arranged in saltire — a canting device derived from the family's Moscoso origins (mosca = fly). The alternative blazon — argent, five wolf heads of sable — appears on the stone escutcheon at the Pazo de Guimarei. The wolf heads, contoured with tongues and cut necks in gules, are the more common variant in the surviving stone carvings. At Guimarei, the Mosquera wolves share a quartered shield with the Villar bands, the Sarmiento roundels, and an Aranda lion — four families, one stone.

PART IV

The Towns

The history of a region is ultimately the history of its places — the towns where people were born, baptised, married, and buried. Ribadavia, Castrelo de Miño, and Cartelle are not just points on a map. They are the parishes whose archives hold six generations of family records, and whose landscapes still bear the traces of three millennia of settlement.

CHAPTER 14

Ribadavia — Royal Capital & Golden Age

THE TOWN Geography & Setting

Where the Avia Meets the Miño

Ribadavia (from the Latin ripa Aviae, "bank of the Avia") sits on the right bank of the river Miño, precisely where the river Avia flows into it. Capital of the comarca of O Ribeiro in the province of Ourense, it has served as the commercial and administrative heart of Galicia)'s most famous wine region for nearly a thousand years.

Sheltered by mountains that create a warm microclimate far warmer and drier than the Atlantic coast, Ribadavia's position at the confluence of two rivers made it a natural site for settlement and agriculture from the earliest times. The town's medieval core, perched above the riverbanks, preserves one of the most remarkable urban landscapes in all of Galicia).

ANCIENT ORIGINS Prehistory — 5th Century AD

From Castros to Roman Roads

The river valleys around Ribadavia were inhabited long before written history. Neolithic communities built megalithic monuments — dolmens and mámoas — dating to approximately 4000-3000 BC across the hillsides. By the Bronze Age, sophisticated metalworking had developed, as evidenced by gold ornaments and bronze tools found in the Miño valley. The famous castros — fortified Celtic hilltop settlements — dotted the landscape, with notable examples at Castromao.

The Roman conquest of Gallaecia in the 1st century BC brought transformative change. The Romans introduced systematic viticulture, building upon native wild vines. Wine production was established by the 2nd century BC, as confirmed by winepresses discovered in the area. Roman roads, including the Via XVIII connecting Bracara Augusta (Braga) to Asturica Augusta (Astorga), facilitated trade throughout the region.

ROYAL CAPITAL 1065 — 1071

Capital of the Kingdom of Galicia

In 1065, King Fernando I of León divided his lands among his three sons. The youngest, Garcia II, received the Kingdom of Galicia — encompassing what would become both Galicia) and Portugal. Garcia chose Ribadavia as his capital and styled himself "King of Galicia) and Portugal," becoming the first monarch to use the title "King of Portugal." This brief but pivotal reign (1065-1071) transformed a riverside settlement into a royal seat. Garcia II was himself a descendant of Ordoño II and Elvira Menéndez) through the Leonese royal line — Elvira being the daughter of Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, traditional ancestor of the Casa de Sande.

Though Garcia's reign ended when his brothers Alfonso VI and Sancho II imprisoned him, the town's time as a royal capital sparked its growth. Ribadavia received its founding charter (foro) around 1065, establishing it as a formal municipality. Historians traditionally date the first Jewish settlement in Ribadavia to this period, drawn by the opportunities of the royal court and the expanding town — though no municipal documents survive to confirm this, and the earliest recorded mention of Jews in Ribadavia dates to 1386. Jewish communities were already present in the broader region: documents from the nearby Celanova

monastery archives record Jewish merchants under noble protection as early as 1044. The founding charter laid the foundations for what would become one of medieval Iberia's most prosperous commercial centres.

> Garcia II chose Ribadavia as capital of the Kingdom of Galicia and Portugal (1065-1071)

THE CASTLE 9th — 17th Century

Castelo dos Condes de Sarmiento

The Castle of the Counts of Sarmiento stands on a promontory overlooking the river Avia. Its origins trace to the 9th century, though the definitive construction was completed in the second half of the 15th century. In 1375, King Enrique II de Trastámara granted the Lordship of Ribadavia to Pedro Ruiz Sarmiento as reward for supporting him in the dynastic war against Pedro I "the Cruel." A house-tower already existed on the site.

In 1476, the Catholic Monarchs elevated the lordship to a county, granting the title of Count of Ribadavia to Bernardino Pérez Sarmiento for his aid against Juana la Beltraneja. The Sarmiento family resided in the castle from the 15th to the 17th century, when they moved to the Pazo dos Condes on the Plaza Mayor. The castle complex retains a unique necropolis with a dozen anthropomorphic tombs carved into rock, dating from the 9th-12th centuries.

> In 1476, elevated to a county by the Catholic Monarchs for Bernardino Pérez Sarmiento

GOLDEN AGE 14th — 16th Century

When Ribadavia's Wine Conquered the World

The 14th to 16th centuries represent the zenith of Ribadavia's prosperity. In 1386, John of Gaunt's English army besieged and sacked Ribadavia — but in doing so discovered Ribeiro wine and inadvertently opened the English market, where it became known simply as "Ribadavia." In 1492, wine from Ribadavia was loaded aboard Columbus's caravels for the voyage to America — making it the first European wine to cross the Atlantic. A priest who fell ill during the voyage asked Columbus for more of "the good wine from Ribadavia."

In 1564, a geographical denomination of origin "Ribadavia" was carefully drawn up to prevent fraudulent sales. Then in 1579, the Ordinances of Ribadavia established what may be the world's oldest wine denomination of origin — predating Portugal's Douro by 177 years. The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) recognises these ordinances as the oldest regulatory document of a Denomination of Origin in Spain.

> 1386: John of Gaunt's army discovers Ribeiro wine — opens the English market

THE INQUISITION 15th — 17th Century

Expulsion, Conversion & Persecution

On March 30, 1492, the Edict of Expulsion issued by the Catholic Monarchs arrived in Ribadavia, granting a four-month deadline to leave Spain. Most of Ribadavia's Jews chose baptism and stayed as conversos (converts), but the Santiago Inquisition took harsh measures against them. The Casa da Inquisición, built in the 16th century, housed Inquisitorial activities. Its portal displays five coats of arms

representing the five local families tasked with carrying out the Inquisition.

A particularly dark episode occurred in the early 17th century: Xerónimo Bautista de Mena, known locally as "the snitch," delivered a list to Inquisitorial authorities naming local families that continued secretly practising Judaism. This triggered devastating autos-da-fé (public burnings), asset seizures, and imprisonments that ruined the converso community. The loss of the Jewish merchant networks that had driven international wine exports devastated Ribadavia's economy for generations.

> 1492: Edict of Expulsion — most Jews in Ribadavia chose baptism and stayed as conversos

MODERN ERA 17th — 20th Century

Decline, Railway & Transformation

After the destruction of the Jewish merchant networks, Ribadavia entered a long decline. Economic stagnation, competition from other wine regions, and rural poverty led to vineyard abandonment and mass emigration. On March 4, 1881, the railway station of Ribadavia was inaugurated on the Vigo-Ourense line, connecting the town to modernity, but it could not reverse the tide of decline.

The devastating phylloxera plague reached the Ribeiro around 1882-1886, destroying virtually all vineyards. Recovery was slow: many replanted with inferior Palomino grapes instead of traditional varieties. Over 80% of historic terraces were abandoned. The D.O. Ribeiro was officially established in 1957, but the true transformation came in the 1980s-1990s when pioneer winemakers began recovering indigenous

grape varieties like Treixadura, restoring Ribeiro's reputation for quality.

LIVING HERITAGE 1693 — Present

The Festa da Istoria

The Festa da Istoria is one of Galicia's most important cultural celebrations, declared a Festival of National Tourist Interest in 1997. Its origins trace to 1693, documented in municipal records from 1693 to 1865. The original festivals lasted between four and eight days, drawing people from all over the Kingdom of Galicia. Council members would ride on horseback, inviting everyone to gather in the main square to watch a play — a "historia" or "istoria" in medieval Galician.

The modern festival was revived in 1989 and now draws approximately 75,000 visitors annually. It transports visitors back to Ribadavia's golden age around 1600, when international wine exports reached their peak. Highlights include medieval dinners, falconry demonstrations, archery competitions, living chess, knight fights, and a Jewish wedding by the Sephardic rite — a unique tribute to the town's multicultural heritage. A distinctive local currency, the maravedí, is used for all transactions during the festival.

The Festa da Istoria is more than a heritage festival — it is an act of collective memory. Each year, the medieval streets below the ruined Sarmiento castle fill with the sounds and smells of a recreated golden age: falconers, archers, and merchants trade in maravedíes, the medieval currency minted for the occasion. Most remarkably, a Jewish wedding by the Sephardic rite is performed in the old judería — unique in Spain, and a public acknowledgment of the community that the Inquisition tried to erase. The fifteen hundred visitors that Froissart

claimed to find in 1386 would recognise the streets. The seventy-five thousand who come each August ensure that the story is not forgotten.

CHAPTER 15

Castrelo de Miño — Castros to Thermal Springs

THE LAND Geography & Landscape

On the Banks of the Miño

Castrelo de Miño sits on the left bank of the River Miño), the great artery of Galicia, in the heart of the O Ribeiro wine comarca of Ourense province. The municipality encompasses 39.74 square kilometres of gentle hills, mountainous reliefs, and extensive vineyards that cascade down sheltered slopes toward the river. Its name derives from the Latin "castrum" — a small fortress — recalling the ancient Celtic fortification, Castrum Minei, that once commanded the river crossing.

The landscape is defined by its relationship with the Miño. The Castrelo Reservoir, created when the river was dammed in 1968, now stretches over 10 kilometres, fundamentally transforming the terrain from fertile agricultural valley to a vast inland lake flanked by vineyards and forest. The municipality lies at the intersection of Atlantic and Mediterranean climates, with mountains providing a protective microclimate ideal for viticulture — warm summers averaging 14.5°C annually, with 1,915 hours of sunshine.

PREHISTORIC 4th Millennium BC — 1st Century BC

Megaliths, Petroglyphs & Castros

Human presence in Castrelo de Miño stretches back to the Neolithic, evidenced by the megalithic burial mounds (mámoas)

at Veiga de Arriba in Reigoso — a necropolis of five tumuli — and the Vedado do Roxón in Macendo with three more. These ancient tombs, dating to roughly 4000-3000 BC, speak of communities already drawn to these fertile river terraces and their sheltered microclimate.

The Bronze Age (1800-700 BC) left remarkable petroglyphs at Reigoso, featuring geometric designs — cup marks, cruciform shapes, circles, and aligned patterns carved into the granite outcrop. During the Iron Age (700-19 BC), the Castro culture flourished across the municipality. Fortified hilltop settlements including Castro de Las Cavadas (the legendary Castrum Minei), Castro de Macendo, Castro de Outeiro, and the archaeologically significant Castro de Santa Lucía stood as a defensive network guarding the banks of the Miño between Ourense and Ribadavia.

ROMAN ERA 1st Century BC — 5th Century AD

Gold, Roads & the First Wine

Roman conquest in the late 1st century BC brought Castrelo de Miño into the province of Gallaecia, transforming the landscape through mining, road-building, and the introduction of systematic agriculture. Gold mining operations were established at Los Cotos (between Prado and Astariz), Monte Rosario (Macendo), and the Lavadero de Prado de Miño. Four Roman communication routes crossed the territory, connecting Castrelo to Ourense, Arnoia, Celanova, and beyond — roads that would serve as medieval pathways for centuries.

The most extraordinary discovery came in 2016-2017, when archaeologists from the University of Vigo excavated the Castro de Santa Lucía in Astariz. Among circular Castro dwellings and Roman-era structures,

they uncovered a Galician-Roman rock-cut wine press (lagar rupestre), dated using a coin from 235 AD. This proved that vine cultivation and winemaking in Castrelo de Miño dates back to at least the 1st-3rd centuries AD — making it one of the oldest documented wine-producing sites in all of Galicia. The Romans also established thermal baths at El Diestro, exploiting the natural hot springs that bubble up along the Miño.

EARLY MEDIEVAL 5th — 10th Century

Kings, Queens & the Monastery

The arrival of the Suebi in the 5th century established the Kingdom of Gallaecia, and by the 9th century — following the discovery of the Apostle Santiago's tomb — the region entered a new era of splendour. Castrelo de Miño gained fame as part of "A Castela Auriense" (the Fortress Land of Ourense), named for the quantity of fortifications guarding the Miño valley, chief among them Castrum Minei.

At the heart of Castrelo's medieval identity stood its monastery — a "duplex" house for both monks and nuns, built on the site of an ancient castro. King Sancho Ordóñez (c. 895-929), son of Ordoño II of León and Elvira Menéndez — and grandson of the powerful Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, traditional ancestor of the Casa de Sande — became King of Galicia from 926 until his death. Like most medieval monarchs, his court was itinerant, but the Miño valley remained closely tied to his royal household. He was buried in the Monastery of Castrelo de Miño. His widow, Doña Goto (c. 900-964), entered the monastery and became its abbess — she is documented in this role in 947 when King Ramiro II of León made a donation to the community. The monastery later witnessed another royal death: King Sancho I of León,

known as "El Craso" (The Fat), was reportedly poisoned here by the rebel Count Gonzalo Menéndez, who offered him a toxic apple.

> King Sancho Ordóñez, King of Galicia (926-929), was buried at the monastery — grandson of Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, ancestor of the Casa de Sande

HIGH MEDIEVAL 11th — 15th Century

The Lost Fortress

Two fortified positions guarded the river crossing at Castrelo — one at the monastery site, another across the Miño. This strategic crossing became the stage for some of the most dramatic episodes in Galician medieval history. In 1110-1111, following King Alfonso VI's death, civil war erupted between supporters of his daughter Queen Urraca and those backing her young son Alfonso. Count Pedro Froilaz de Traba seized the fortress of Castrelo de Miño and installed the six-year-old prince under his protection. When Archbishop Diego Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela arrived to negotiate, he was briefly arrested by Arias Pérez. Released shortly after, Gelmírez personally crowned the boy as King Alfonso VII of Galicia on September 17, 1111 in the Cathedral of Santiago. A famous legend tells of an eagle that warned the Archbishop of the betrayal.

A decade later, in 1121, Queen Urraca had the Archbishop arrested again at Castrelo de Miño while he was returning from Portugal — episodes documented in the Historia Compostelana. The medieval bridge, reputedly built by San Telmo and said to have had eight arches, was destroyed by flooding in the mid-16th century when a massive walnut tree lodged in one of its arches. The 15th century brought the Irmandiño revolts (1467-1469), when approximately

80,000 peasants, fishermen, and artisans rose against the feudal nobility across Galicia, transforming the social order.

WINE HERITAGE 3rd Century AD — Present

Heart of the Ribeiro

Castrelo de Miño sits at the very heart of the D.O. Ribeiro), one of Spain's oldest protected wine appellations. The discovery of the 3rd-century rock-cut wine press at Castro de Santa Lucía proves that this municipality has been producing wine for nearly two millennia — among the oldest documented winemaking sites in Galicia. Viticulture is the economic engine of Castrelo, with 10 bodegas and 14 grape growers tending vineyards on the sheltered hillsides surrounding the reservoir.

The wines of the Ribeiro achieved "worldwide renown" in the 16th century, mentioned by Cervantes himself and exported to Flanders, Germany, and across Europe. In 1592, 127 barrels of Ribeiro wine shipped from Ferrol sailed with Columbus to America. Today, Castrelo's wineries continue this legacy: Bodegas Eduardo Peña won the Acio de Ouro (Golden Cluster) for the best white wine in all of Galicia. The predominant grape is Treixadura, the "Queen of Ribeiro," producing elegant whites characterised by high acidity, floral notes, honey, and aromatic herbs.

HEALING WATERS Roman Times — Present

Thermal Springs Beneath the Lake

Castrelo de Miño's thermal springs have been known since Roman times, when baths at El Diestro served travellers along the Miño valley. By 1772, the Baths of Santa María were formally constructed

over the remains of a Castro-Roman settlement, featuring two springs: the Burga Alta (60°C) and the Burga de Abaixo (47°C). The sulphurous-chloride-sodium waters were contained in small granite bathing pools, just 178 centimetres long and 50 centimetres deep. In 1888, these waters represented Ourense province at the Barcelona Universal Exposition.

When the reservoir was filled in 1968-1969, the thermal baths of Santa María vanished beneath the waters — but remarkably, the springs remain active. During dry seasons when the reservoir level drops, the original stone pools emerge from the lake and can still be used, the hot water bubbling up as it has for millennia. Local authorities have installed wooden walkways to facilitate access during these periods. The Termas de O Diestro near the power station also remain accessible, their curative waters a living link to the Roman past. Ourense province, known as the "Capital of Thermalism" in Spain, counts these among its most evocative thermal sites.

The thermal springs of Castrelo are a reminder that the deepest history of a place is geological, not human. The hot water that bubbles up at sixty degrees from the granite bedrock has been doing so since long before the Celts built their castros on the hilltops above. When the reservoir swallowed the old baths in 1968, it seemed as if this continuity had been broken. But in dry years, when the water level drops, the original stone pools of the 1772 baths emerge from the lake like a memory surfacing — the hot springs still active, still healing, indifferent to the dam that tried to contain them. Locals walk out on wooden boardwalks to bathe in the same waters the Romans knew.

CHAPTER 16

Cartelle — From Trelle to Emigration

THE LAND Geography & Landscape

Between the Mino and the Arnoia

Cartelle lies in the southwestern reaches of the Ourense Depression, a municipality of 94 square kilometres where the valleys of the Mino and Arnoia rivers define the landscape. The territory belongs to the comarca of Terra de Celanova, a land of granite outcrops, dense conifer forests, and terraced hillsides that still bear the marks of centuries of viticulture and subsistence farming.

The Arnoia river — the longest river entirely within Ourense province at 84.5 kilometres — carves a deep, enclosed valley through the municipality's southern sector, creating the dramatic "Cartelle canyon" of significant scenic value. Along its banks, abandoned terraces testify to past wine and corn cultivation, while ancient flour mills stand as silent witnesses to a vanished way of life.

> Elevation ranges from the river valleys to 718 metres at Coto de Novelle, offering panoramic views across the Ribeiro region

ROMAN ERA 2nd — 5th Century AD

The Bridge and the Road

Long before the medieval fortress or the Baroque churches, Roman engineers left their mark on Cartelle. The Ponte do Freixo — a magnificent four-arched bridge spanning the Arnoia river between Cartelle and Celanova — is one of the few genuinely Roman bridges

surviving in Galicia. Built with cushioned ashlar blocks, semicircular arches, and a horizontal slope, it carried travellers along a secondary route of the Via Nova (Via XVIII of the Antonine Itinerary), connecting Aquis Querquennis to Lucus Augusti.

Further evidence of Roman presence lies embedded in the very walls of the Church of Santa María de Couxil, where a Roman altar (ara romana) with inscriptions was incorporated into the building's exterior — a remarkable survival of pre-Christian worship repurposed by later generations. These traces suggest that the territory of Cartelle was not merely passed through but actively settled during the centuries of Roman Gallaecia.

> The bridge was declared a Historic-Artistic Monument in 1984 and included in the Inventory of Historic Bridges of Galicia in 1985

MEDIEVAL PERIOD 10th — 15th Century

Under the Shadow of Celanova

The history of Cartelle is inseparable from the Monastery of San Salvador de Celanova, one of the most powerful Benedictine abbeys in all of Galicia. Founded in 936 AD by San Rosendo — nobleman, Bishop of Dumio and Iria-Santiago, and Viceroy of Galicia — the monastery accumulated vast domains between the rivers Mino, Arnoia, and Limia, exercising jurisdiction over the entire Terra de Celanova.

Through generous royal donations, the monastery established dependent priories across the region, collecting rents and taxes, managing farms, 42 parochial granaries, grain stores, wine presses, and cellars. Near the Mino river, the monks actively promoted viticulture, contribut-

ing to what would later become the Ribeiro wine tradition. The monastery's abbot accumulated prestigious titles: Count of Bande, Marquis of the Tower of Sande, and Chaplain of the Royal House — directly linking Cartelle's most famous landmark to the highest ecclesiastical authority in the region.

> San Rosendo (907–977) founded Celanova after serving as Bishop and Viceroy of Galicia

THE FORTRESS 12th — 15th Century

The Tower of Sande

Rising 13 metres from a granite outcrop at 506 metres elevation, the Torre de Sande commands the landscape between the Arnoia and Mino river valleys. Its silhouette is visible from many kilometres around — a deliberate statement of power over the surrounding territory. This medieval fortress, with its rectangular base of 6.4 by 5.8 metres and crenellated parapet, controlled communication routes and defended the territory of "Limiam" against Portuguese incursions.

The first documented mention dates to 1141, when King Alfonso VII "The Emperor" and Queen Berenguela donated the Castle of Sande — with all its properties, rights, and jurisdiction — to the Monastery of San Salvador de Celanova in a charter issued at Zamora on 5 May. This donation was later confirmed by Alfonso IX. By the 14th century, the fortress had passed to Paio Rodríguez de Araujo, a vassal of King Juan I of Castile who also controlled the lands of Lobios, Xendive, and Milmada.

> The tower is built of granite ashlar with an east-facing entrance bearing the Casa de Sande coat of arms

REBELLION 1467 — 1469

The Irmandino Revolt

In the 15th century, Galicia erupted in one of the most remarkable social uprisings in medieval Europe. Driven by hunger, epidemics, and the relentless abuses of the feudal nobility, approximately 80,000 commoners rose up in arms during the Great Irmandino War (1467–1469). Across Galicia, the enraged populace demolished between 130 and 140 castles, fortresses, towers, and manor houses — the very symbols of their oppression.

The peasants of Sande played their part. They sent representatives and formal letters of complaint to the Junta de Medina, documenting the abuses committed from the fortress. When the revolt reached its climax, the Irmandinos destroyed the Torre de Sande — though it was subsequently rebuilt, likely in the late Gothic style visible today. This episode reveals that even in this remote corner of Galicia, the people were willing to rise against injustice, leaving a legacy of resistance that echoes through the centuries.

> The Irmandino Revolt (1467–1469) was the largest peasant uprising in medieval Galicia

SACRED HERITAGE Since 1646

The Sanctuary of As Marabillas

In 1646, according to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared three times at a site in the parish of As Marabillas, leading to the construction of one of the most important Marian sanctuaries in the province of Ourense. The Santuario de Nosa Señora das Marabillas stands imposingly within a centuries-old oak grove, its façade crowned by a large

two-body tower with a niche above the main door housing the figure of the Virgin.

Every year on Whit Monday (the Monday after Pentecost), the sanctuary hosts the Romería da Virxe das Marabillas — a spectacular pilgrimage and celebration that is one of the province's most important Marian festivals. The procession is distinguished by magnificent ramos de bolas — large floral arches and bouquets fashioned from multicoloured paper balls — accompanied by a fair with over 100 stalls. Nearby stands a poignant sculpture dedicated to Galician emigrants, a reminder of the deep connection between faith and the experience of those who left.

LIVING TRADITIONS Since the 1890s

The Entroido of Sande: As Bonitas

The most distinctive cultural tradition of Cartelle is the Entroido de Sande — a carnival celebration whose signature characters, As Bonitas, emerged from the aftermath of the Spanish–American War (1896–1898). When soldiers returned from the Philippines and Cuba, they brought back exotic Manila shawls — silk garments embroidered with flowers. These shawls became the centrepiece of a carnival costume that is unique in all of Galicia.

The Bonitas wear white pants and shirt as a base, with two silk Manila shawls draped over each shoulder and tied at the waist, a flower-fringed overskirt, black gaiters adorned with small bells, and a wire mask painted to match the wearer's character. They are accompanied by other figures: O Oso (the Bear), a figure with brass face and fur covering symbolising untamed nature; A Vaca (the Cow), chasing children through the streets; and the mysterious Avutardas who parade as

heralds of disorder. The tradition disappeared for years but was recovered in 2001, and in 2026 gained international recognition at the Surva Festival in Bulgaria.

The Entroido de Sande is the most vivid proof that history in the Ribeiro is not confined to archives and ruins. The Manila shawls that returning soldiers brought from the Philippines in 1898 became the centrepiece of a carnival tradition — As Bonitas — that survived Franco's suppression of regional festivals, rural depopulation, and decades of silence before being revived in 2001. When the masked Bonitas parade through the streets of Sande accompanied by O Oso (the Bear) and A Vaca (the Cow), chasing children and performing Os Números — satirical recitations that address local conflicts with collective laughter — they are maintaining a tradition born from empire, war, and homecoming. In 2026, the Entroido de Sande gained international recognition at the Surva Festival in Bulgaria. The parish of San Salvador de Sande — the same parish where the medieval tower still stands in danger of collapse — is alive with the sounds of bells, drums, and silk.

MODERN TIMES 19th Century — Present

Emigration and Resilience

Like much of rural Ourense, Cartelle has experienced a dramatic demographic transformation over the past century. From nearly 9,000 inhabitants in 1950, the population has declined to approximately 2,500 today — a reflection of the massive Galician emigration that saw over two million people leave for the Americas between 1850 and 1960, with Buenos Aires becoming known as the "Fifth Province of Galicia."

The second wave of emigration, between 1960 and 1990, took over 130,000 people from the province of Ourense alone to France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Today, Cartelle's aging population — with seniors comprising approximately 45% of residents — faces the challenge of preserving its extraordinary heritage. Yet the community endures: the recovery of the Entroido de Sande, ongoing efforts to restore the Torre de Sande, and the vitality of festivals like As Marabillas speak to a resilience that defines these communities.

> The Torre de Sande was added to the Lista Roja (Red List) of Hispania Nostra in 2020 due to collapse danger

CHAPTER 17

The Ribeiro Wine Region

THE LAND Geography & Landscape

Where Three Rivers Meet

The Ribeiro wine region lies in the heart of Galicia's Ourense province, where the valleys of the Miño, Avia, and Arnoia rivers converge to create a unique microclimate. Sheltered by mountains on all sides, this inland basin traps warm air rising from the river valleys, producing conditions far warmer and drier than the rest of Atlantic Galicia.

Terraced vineyards — known locally as "socalcos" — cascade down steep granite hillsides at elevations between 75 and 400 metres. These ancient stone terraces, many built over centuries by hand, represent one of Europe's most dramatic viticultural landscapes. The granitic and alluvial soils, combined with exceptional sun exposure on south-facing slopes, give Ribeiro wines their distinctive minerality and aromatic complexity.

PREHISTORIC Before 1000 BC

The First Inhabitants

Long before written records, the river valleys of the Ribeiro were home to Neolithic communities who left behind megalithic monuments — dolmens and mámoas (burial mounds) — scattered across the hillsides. These early settlers were drawn to the same qualities that would later make the region famous: fertile river terraces, abundant water, and a sheltered climate.

By the Bronze Age (2000-800 BC), the region's inhabitants had developed sophisticated metalworking techniques. Gold ornaments and bronze tools found in the Miño valley attest to trade networks stretching across the Iberian Peninsula. The famous "castros" — fortified hilltop settlements — began appearing during the late Bronze Age, many strategically positioned above the river confluences.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD 9th — 13th Century

Monasteries & the Birth of Ribeiro Wine

The medieval period saw the Ribeiro emerge as one of Europe's most celebrated wine regions, driven largely by the monastic orders. Cistercian monks at monasteries like San Clodio (founded 1225), Oseira, and Melón perfected viticultural techniques on the steep valley slopes, developing the terraced landscape that defines the Ribeiro today. The Benedictines at Celanova, founded in 936 by San Rosendo, also played a crucial role in preserving and advancing winemaking knowledge.

Ribeiro wine first appears in documented records in the 10th century, and by the 12th century it was already exported beyond Galicia. The growth of Ribadavia as the commercial capital of the region — granted its founding charter (foro) around 1065 under Garcia II, who chose it as the capital of his Kingdom of Galicia — created a thriving market town where wine, trade, and diverse cultures intersected. Garcia II was himself a descendant of Ordoño II and Elvira Menéndez) through the Leonese royal line — Elvira being the daughter of Count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez, traditional ancestor of the Casa de Sande. The town's strategic position at the confluence of the Avia and Miño rivers made it a natural hub.

> Garcia II chose Ribadavia as capital of Galicia (1065–1071) — a descendant of Ordoño II and Elvira Menéndez), whose father Hermenegildo Gutiérrez was ancestor of the Casa de Sande

GOLDEN AGE 14th — 16th Century

When Ribeiro Conquered the World

The 14th to 16th centuries represent the absolute zenith of Ribeiro wine. In 1386, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, arrived in Galicia with an English army to press his claim to the Castilian throne. The chronicler Jean Froissart recorded that the English soldiers discovered the wines of Ribeiro and were so enchanted — and so devastated by the resulting hangovers — that they could barely march. This episode opened the English market to Ribeiro wine, which became known in London as "Ribadavia".

The most remarkable chapter came in 1492: documents preserved in the National Archive of Simancas prove that Ribeiro wine was loaded aboard Christopher Columbus's caravels for the voyage that discovered America — making it the first European wine to cross the Atlantic. Meanwhile, in 1579, the Ordinances of Ribadavia established what may be the world's oldest wine denomination of origin — predating Portugal's Douro by 177 years.

> The Jewish community of Ribadavia — one of the largest in Iberia — controlled much of the wine trade

CRISIS 17th — 19th Century

Decline, Phylloxera & Transformation

The 17th and 18th centuries brought gradual decline to the Ribeiro. The expulsion of the Jews, increasing competition from wines of other regions, and the general economic stagnation of Galicia eroded the region's former glory. The loss of the Jewish merchant networks that had driven international exports was particularly damaging. Many vineyards were abandoned as rural poverty drove emigration.

The final blow came in the 1880s when the phylloxera plague — a devastating vine louse from North America — reached the Ribeiro and destroyed virtually all the vineyards. Unlike more prosperous regions that could afford immediate replanting with resistant American rootstock, the Ribeiro's recovery was slow and painful. When vines were finally replanted, many growers chose high-yielding but inferior varieties like Palomino) (known locally as Jerez) over the traditional indigenous grapes — a decision that would haunt the region's reputation for decades.

> Phylloxera arrived in the Ribeiro around 1882-1886, devastating the entire region

REVIVAL 20th Century — Present

Renaissance of Ribeiro

The modern renaissance of Ribeiro wine began with the official recognition of the Denominación de Origen (D.O.) in 1957 — making it one of the oldest protected wine appellations in Spain. However, the true transformation came in the 1980s and 1990s, when pioneer winemakers like Emilio Rojo, Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez, and others began the painstaking work of recovering the indigenous grape varieties that had made Ribeiro famous in the Middle Ages.

Today, the D.O. Ribeiro is experiencing a genuine golden age of quality. The white wines — built around the magnificent Treixadura grape, often blended with Torrontés, Godello, Loureira, and Albariño — are aromatic, mineral, and complex, rivalling anything produced in Galicia. Red wines from Caíño, Sousón, Ferrón, and Brancellao offer distinctive expressions of the terroir. A new generation of winemakers is restoring abandoned terraces, practising organic viticulture, and producing some of Spain's most exciting wines.

> Treixadura is considered the "queen" grape of Ribeiro — aromatic, elegant, with notes of stone fruit and flowers

VITICULTURE The Grapes of Ribeiro

Indigenous Varieties

The Ribeiro's greatest treasure is its extraordinary diversity of indigenous grape varieties — many unique to this small corner of Galicia. The white Treixadura, considered the emblematic grape of the denomination, produces wines of remarkable aromatic complexity: white flowers, ripe stone fruits, and a distinctive mineral backbone. Alongside it, Torrontés (not to be confused with the Argentine variety) brings citrus and herbal notes, while Godello adds structure and body.

The red varieties are equally compelling. Caíño Tinto, Sousón, Ferrón, Brancellao, and Mencía create wines of surprising depth and character. Many of these varieties nearly disappeared during the Palomino era, and their recovery by dedicated growers represents one of the great conservation stories of European viticulture. The D.O. regulations now recognise and protect this diversity, ensuring that the Ribeiro's viticultural heritage continues for future generations.

Glossary

Aljama — A self-governing Jewish (or Moorish) community within a Christian town. In Ribadavia, the aljama administered the judería, collected taxes, and maintained its own court of law.

Castro — An Iron Age hillfort, typically circular with concentric defensive walls, from Latin castrum. Hundreds survive on the hilltops of Galicia, giving the "castro culture" its name.

Converso — A Jew (or Muslim) who converted to Christianity, often under duress after the 1492 Edict of Expulsion. Many converso families in the Ribeiro were later suspected of practising Judaism in secret.

Encomienda — A landed estate granted to a military order — Templars, Hospitallers, or the Order of Santiago — for administration and defence.

Foro — A long-term hereditary lease of land from a monastery or noble house to a tenant farmer. The foral system structured Galician rural life from the Middle Ages through the 19th century.

Hidalgo — A member of the lower nobility (hijo de algo, "son of something"). In the Ribeiro, hidalgos were local landowners who managed parish life, served the crown, and maintained the pazos.

Irmandiño — A participant in the 1467 Galician peasant revolt (from irmandade, "brotherhood"). The Irmandiños destroyed noble towers and castles across the region before being suppressed by the nobility.

Judería — The Jewish quarter of a medieval town. Ribadavia's judería, centred on the Rúa Nova, was one of the largest and best-preserved in Galicia.

Malsín — An informer within a Jewish community who denounced fellow Jews to the Christian authorities or the Inquisition. The malsín Jerónimo Bautista de Mena betrayed the crypto-Jews of Ribadavia in 1608.

Pazo — A Galician manor house, from Latin palatium. Pazos were the rural seats of the hidalgo class, often fortified and surrounded by vineyards and orchards.

Parochiale Suevorum — A 6th-century document listing the parishes of the Suevic kingdom — the earliest known record of the ecclesiastical organisation of Galicia, and the framework that would define community life for over a millennium.

Reconquista — The centuries-long Christian campaign to recover the Iberian Peninsula from Moorish rule (711–1492). Galicia, at the northwestern extreme, was recovered early and served as a base for the southward expansion.

Sephardi — Jews of Iberian origin, from Hebrew Sefarad (Spain). Sephardic communities flourished in Ribadavia from the 12th through 15th centuries before the Expulsion.

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