Under the Shadow of a Central Place: Defining the Landscape with Fortified Places and Their Memory in the Written Sources of the Kingdom of León*

by Daniel Justo Sánchez

Castles usually appear in the Kingdom of León's written sources during the medieval period. The tenth and eleventh centuries show an increase in those mentions, including some that helped scribes describe the landscape and territory. This study analyses the different terminology that represented fortifications, and their use as spatial markers to situate other settlements, lands, or relevant sites. Further, it considers some fortifications that appear to have been abandoned when the documents were written as a useful tool to enhance the relationship between local territories and memory.

Tenth-Eleventh Century; kingdom of León; fortifications; landscape; territory; memory.

Abbreviations
CDCL1 = Sáez Sánchez, Emilio (ed.). *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230). I (775-952)*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 1987.
CDCL2 = Sáez Sánchez, Emilio, and Carlos Sáez Sánchez. *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230). II (935-985)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1990.
CDCL3 = Ruiz Asencio, José Manuel. *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230). III (986-1031)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1987.

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CDCL4 = Ruiz Asencio, José Manuel (ed.). *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230). IV (1032-1109)*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 1987.
CDS = Mínguez Fernández, José María. *Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún: (Siglos IX y X)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1976.
CDS2 = Herrero de la Fuente, Marta (ed.). *Colección diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún: 857-1300, II (1000-1073)*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 1988.
OD = Fernández Flórez, José Antonio, and Marta Herrero de la Fuente (eds.). *Colección documental del monasterio de Santa María de Otero de las Dueñas. Vol. I (854-1108)*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 1999
SPE = Ruiz Asencio, José Manuel, and Irene Ruiz Albi. *Colección documental del monasterio de San Pedro de Eslonza, I (912-1300)*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 2007.
TVM = Quintana Prieto, Augusto. *Tumbo Viejo de San Pedro de Montes*. León: Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 1971.

1. *Introduction*

The territorial articulation of the areas between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Duero River changed through the Middle Ages, but cities were never the exclusive centres of power. Despite the growing relevance of some urban centres such as Burgos, Zamora, and León from ninth century onwards,[1] the organisation of space and the territorial articulation on different scales were developed from a series of central places of different categories with diverse and changing projections over time.[2] Some of these centres of power are identified in written sources by using an individual toponym that differentiates them from other settlements and different features of the landscape. Additionally, a term that alludes to the fact that they were at least partially fortified places complements those toponyms. This study considered the importance of the fortified centres of power identified in written sources, to better understand their impact on the way the people who lived at the time perceived the landscape when the analysed testimonies were written. These centres of power were not the only fortified spaces in the kingdom. There were of course some other fortifications inside larger settlements, such as city walls and urban castles, whose construction undoubtedly promoted urban centres.[3] But the functions in the territorial articulation of these kinds of places and their impact on the landscape must be analysed as part of the role played by the larger settlements in which they were built. The focus of this study lies on isolated locations individually categorized as fortified places, a broad group that encompass a broad spectrum of terminology that can be found on the written sources, such as *castellum*, *castrum*, *turris* or *castrillo*. While the distinctive characteristics of each fortification typology are pertinent, how

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[1] Gutiérrez González, "Procesos de formación;" Gutiérrez González, "La ciudad de Zamora;" Gutiérrez González, "Las fuentes arqueológicas;" Lovelle, and Quiroga, "Ciudades atlánticas en transición."
[2] Castellanos, and Martín Viso, "The Local Articulation;" Díez Herrera, "La organización social"; Estepa Díez, *Los territorios del rey*.
[3] Gutiérrez González, "Las fortificaciones altomedievales," 179-81.

they worked remains partially obscure for the context studied here, notwithstanding the inherent logical disparities. Elucidating these nuances and disparities would necessitate a separate comprehensive investigation, which is currently in progress, but which also exceeds the scope of this study.

It is evident that the impact on the landscape and territory differs significantly between a big castle and a small watchtower. Nevertheless, their utility as spatial markers for scribes, a facet examined in this research, may exhibit closer correlation. Consequently, the usage of the terms "castles" or "fortified places" throughout this discourse serves as a pragmatic concession, facilitating a more efficient and concise communication. It is imperative to recognize that these terms encompass a diverse array of fortified centres, each with particularities contingent upon individual cases.

Leonese areas' fortified centres have been studied from different perspectives. The first consisted of classical works of castellology and catalogues of monuments, which focused mainly on the best-preserved fortifications from the later centuries of the Middle Ages.[4] Castles were also considered, to some extent, in all works focusing on the region's political history from its integration into the Asturian kingdom until the definitive union of León and Castile under Fernando III. However, few works have focused exclusively on fortifications and their role in certain contexts of military conflict.[5] The role of fortified spaces as centres of power and control over the territory can be considered an aspect that has enjoyed a certain prominence in the research focused on administering royal power and shaping lordly power over territory, especially through the study of the administration system based on *tenencias*.[6] The specific situations are better known as we approach Castile and move beyond the year 1100, though.[7] The inclusion of fortified centres in research that analyses the social, economic, and settlement transformation processes related to the integration of this area into the political structure of the Kingdom of Asturias and the formation of feudal-type power structures is relevant.[8] Since the end of the twentieth century, valuable contributions from archaeology have been integrated into these works,[9] although there is

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[4] Gómez-Moreno, and Martínez, *Catálogo Monumental*; Luengo Martínez, *Monumentos militares leoneses*; Guitart Aparicio, "El castillo leonés de Cea."
[5] Gutiérrez González, "Castillos y sistemas de defensa;" Justo Sánchez, "¿Paisajes de guerra o paisajes del poder?."
[6] *Tenencia* is the name given by the historiography to each area of royal authority that conformed an intermittent apparatus of territorial organization in which the king delegated his power to a certain person who often had already some economic interests or power networks in the area. They were representatives of the royal authority and benefited from their access and management of the royal resources. For further information, see Estepa Díez, "Las tenencias."
[7] Monsalvo Antón, "De los alfoces regios al realengo concejil;" Monsalvo Antón, *La construcción*, 49-60; Estepa Díez, "El poder regio y los territorios;" Estepa Díez, "Las tenencias;" Martínez Sopena, "Los espacios."
[8] Mínguez Fernández, "La nueva ordenación;" Carvajal Castro, "Los castros." Justo Sánchez, and Martín Viso, "Territories."
[9] Quirós Castillo, "Defensive Sites;" Quirós Castillo, "Los castillos altomedievales." The biggest synthesis about this topic in León is Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*.

still a long way to go compared with the existing trajectory for other European areas. Archaeological research is necessary to learn about places whose attributes like the construction date or the existence of permanent occupation are rarely known. However, it is also important to keep utilising the interpretative potential of the studies using written sources. After all, the questions that can be answered by each discipline are very different.

The materiality observed from the periods in which these fortified centres were documented offers several specific records, including masonry fortifications built on high ground, earthen forts in the plateaus and some smaller edifications, such as towers or mottes.[10] Few works and research projects have been able to develop relevant archaeological interventions in the fortified places of the northwest Douro Basin, though. It had been more common that those practices occurred as rescue archaeology interventions, in the context of construction or engineering works. Such interventions rarely resulted in direct publications and being in rural spaces make these practices quite rare.[11] Other practices that were undertaken are the archaeological works as part of restoration projects, which sometimes produced some publications, although they rarely focused on early medieval chronology.[12]

There is still ground for further investigation both from written sources and archaeology. It is necessary to conduct studies that go beyond traditional castellology and integrate the interpretation of fortified spaces into the understanding of the whole society. What was the meaning that contemporary people gift to these prominent places? They did not necessarily represent merely a defensive link against external threats and their relevance is not restricted to their construction, abandonment and conflicts in which each of them took part. The significance of castles in social organization and landscape management has long been recognized across various contexts. Probably one of the most notable discussions in this regard emerged from the discourse surrounding the Italian *incastellamento*.[13] However, an alternative perspective seeks to emphasize the symbolic significance of fortified sites. Throughout the Middle Ages, fortified places were symbols of power projected over the landscape, and they often served to exercise some kind of control over a territory.[14] Although these interpretations have not been without criticism, their influence on current studies is enormous and allows for new lines of research related to fortified structures and their significance not only in the landscape but also in their perception and representation.

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[10] Gutiérrez González, "Las fortificaciones altomedievales."
[11] See, for example, the thoughts on this topic in Campomanes Alvaredo, "Relectura."
[12] E. g. Cobos Guerra, and Retuerce Velasco, *El castillo de Cornatel.*
[13] From the extensive literature on this subject, it is essential to reference the seminal work of Pierre Toubert, *Les structures.* However, for insight into the latest developments in this discourse and its influence on European historiography and archaeology, I recommend consulting the research works published in Augenti, and Galetti (eds.), *L'incastellamento*
[14] Creighton, *Early European Castles*; Liddiard, *Castles in Context*; Bourin and Schneider, "Avant-propos;" Hansson, *Aristocratic Landscape.*

Based on this premise, analysing the mental construction that existed around these places, the memory that was configured as a result of their imprint on the present or previous landscape, and the role of both issues in territorial articulation is interesting. This study approaches the presence of fortified centres in written sources, to analyse the place they occupied in the cosmovision of the individuals who were the protagonists in the elaboration of the documents and chronicles of the time. In other words, our intention is to delve into written documentation to trace the use that scribes of the period made of the fortified spaces that populated their landscape, in order to better understand the role these places could play in the perception and representation of the landscape. Our hypothesis suggests that castles played a significant role in shaping the mental perception and organization of the landscape, whether they were actively used as defensive structures or appeared abandoned long before. Therefore, our primary focus will be on fortifications referenced in written sources. We will conduct an analysis of the characteristics of these mentions and the activities associated with these fortifications. However, we will not delve into evaluating the specific characteristics of each of these fortifications. The reflections presented here will be more focused on suggesting the widespread use of fortified spaces in shaping and describe the landscape rather than on the functional analysis of specific situations.

We focus on the areas between the Cantabrian Mountains and The Douro and between the Galician-Portuguese borders with the current Castilla y León and the Pisuerga River (see Figure 1). This area was the main axis of expansion for the political domination of the Asturian kings by the end of the ninth century. A process which discarded the ideas of appropriation and colonisation from the north over depopulated territories,[15] highlighting the importance of the relationships between the encompassing powers, smaller-scale authorities, and local populations.[16] Written sources reveal the existence of fortified places of different characteristics throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries. They have been considered part of the group of central places used to settle the domain and defend the Leonese mountain territories and nuclei of settlement in the flatter areas of Tierra de Campos.[17] Likewise, they appear as centres radiating royal power in territories whose previous existence sometimes can be proved.[18] Thus, making our selection attractive in the geographical and chronological context for researching the characteristics proposed here.

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[15] Escalona Monge, and Martín Viso, "The Life and Death."
[16] Mínguez Fernández, "Poderes locales;" Carvajal Castro, *Bajo la máscara*; Carvajal Castro, and Martín Viso, "Historias regionales."
[17] Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*.
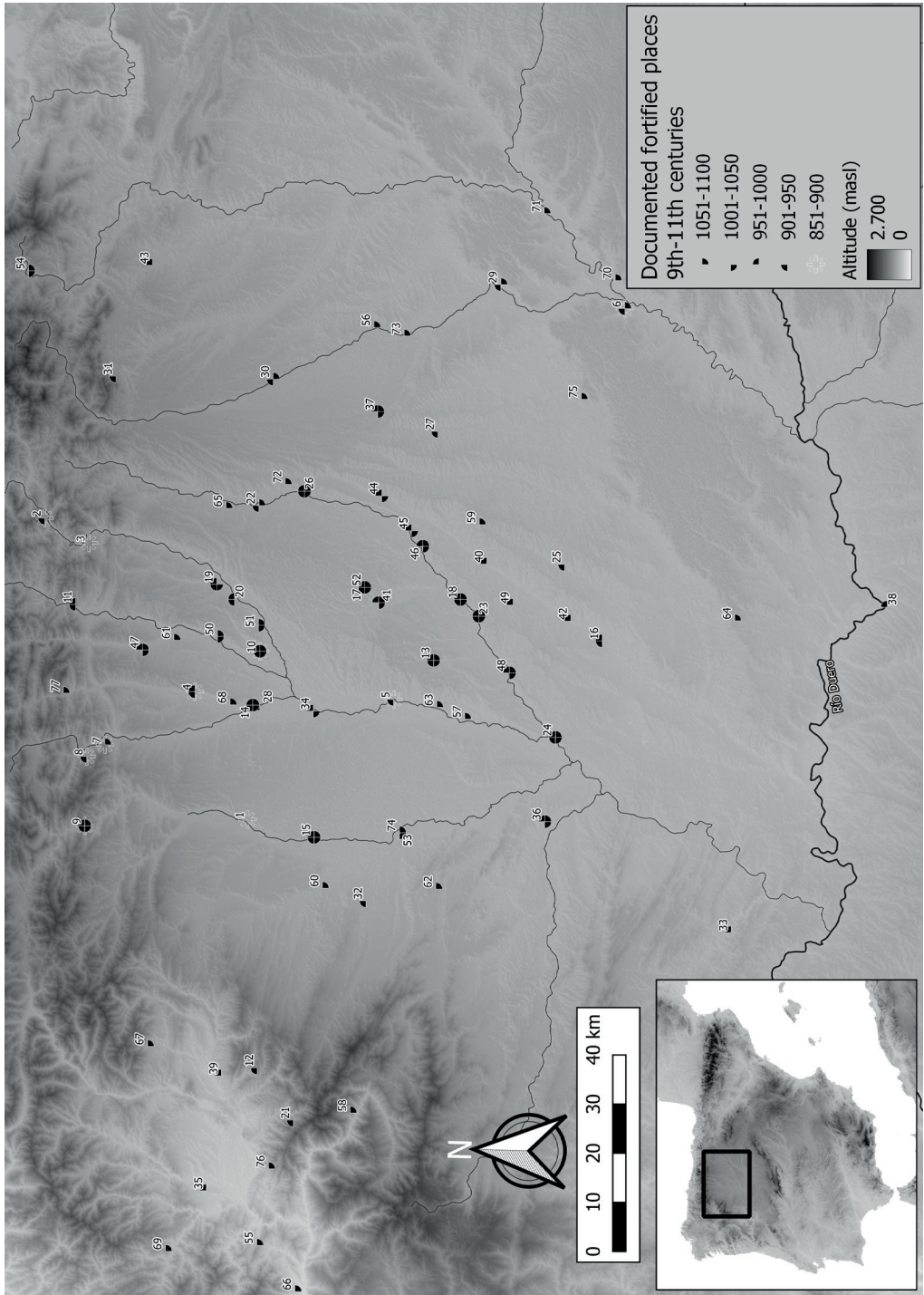[18] Justo Sánchez, and Martín Viso, "Territories."

Figure 1 (on the previous page). Map of the studied area including the fortified places mentioned in the written sources between 850 and 1100 which could have been located. 1. Castro Alcoba, 2. Castro Dueñas, 3. Castro Pelayo, 4. Castro Regio, 5. Coyanza, 6. Dueñas, 7. Llanos de Alba, 8. Los Barrios de Gordón, 9. Los Barrios de Luna, 10. Sublancio, 11. Boñar, 12. Castel de Xano, 13. Castilfalé, 14. Castrillo de la Ribera, 15. Castrillo de San Pelayo, 16. Castro Azebal, 17. Castro de Iuvara, 18. Castro Froila, 19. Castro Milanos, 20. Castro Rueda, 21. Castro Rufianense, 22. Castroañe, 23. Castrobol, 24. Castrogonzalo, 25. Castromayor, 26. Cea, 27. Cisneros, 28. Marialba, 29. Monzón, 30. Saldaña, 31. San Román, 32. Torre de Fresno de la Valduerna, 33. Alba de Aliste, 34. Ardón, 35. Castro Ventosa, 36. Castroferrol, 37. Castromuza, 38. Castronuño, 39. Castropodame, 40. Castroponce, 41. Castrovega, 42. Castroverde, 43. Ebur, 44. Grajal de Campos, 45. Melgar, 46. Melgar de Abajo, 47. San Salvador de Curueño, 48. Valderas, 49. Villalugán, 50. Castrillo de Porma, 51. Castro en Valle de Mansilla, 52. Castrotierra, 53. Torres junto al Órbigo, 54. Tremaya, 55. Aguilar, 56. Carrión, 57. Castrillino, 58. Castrillo de Cabrera, 59. Castrillo de Chaves, 60. Castrillo de Halile, 61. Castro del Condado, 62. Castrocalbón, 63. Castrofuerte, 64. Castromembibre, 65. Castromudarra, 66. Cavarcos, 67. Noceda, 68. Puente Castro, 69. Santa María de Autares, 70. Tariego, 71. Torquemada, 72. Torre de Barriales, 73. Torre de los Molinos, 74. Torres junto al Órbigo, 75. Torremormojón, 76. Ulver, 77. Vegacervera.

2. *How are fortifications mentioned in the Leonese written sources of the tenth and eleventh centuries?*

The written sources studied here include all the chronicles and historiographical sources produced in the Christian and Andalusian spheres between the tenth and eleventh centuries and, particularly, the nearly 3.000 documents produced in the areas studied and preserved with a sufficient degree of reliability regarding their content. The distribution of these charters is indeed uneven, with a notable increase in the eleventh century, especially in the last years (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, the sample is large enough to propose some ideas linked to the visibility of Leonese fortifications in the written sources.

These sources are problematic in some ways that should be pointed out. The first issue arises from the different information provided by each type of source regarding fortifications. It cannot be definitively stated that chronicle texts address certain aspects while diplomatic sources cover others, but certain trends do exist. Chronicles more frequently depict the involvement of fortified spaces in military events and certain activities related to fortification, such as the defence capabilities of the site and its potential as a refuge for nearby inhabitants. An example that serves to illustrate both the situation of abandonment or incomplete fortification of some of these strong points and their use to protect the people of the surrounding area is that of the appearances of the Burgos fortress of Castrojeriz in the Albeldense version of the Chronicle of Alfonso III. The chronicle narrates that, in 882, Munio Nuñez ordered the place to be abandoned because it was not sufficiently fortified to withstand the potential attack of the troops of al-Mundir, son of the emir Mohamed I. Faced with this event, shortly thereafter the same chronicle narrates that in the next incursion of the emir's son, Castrojeriz was sufficiently garrisoned to prevent an attack, and therefore, the Andalusian troops decided
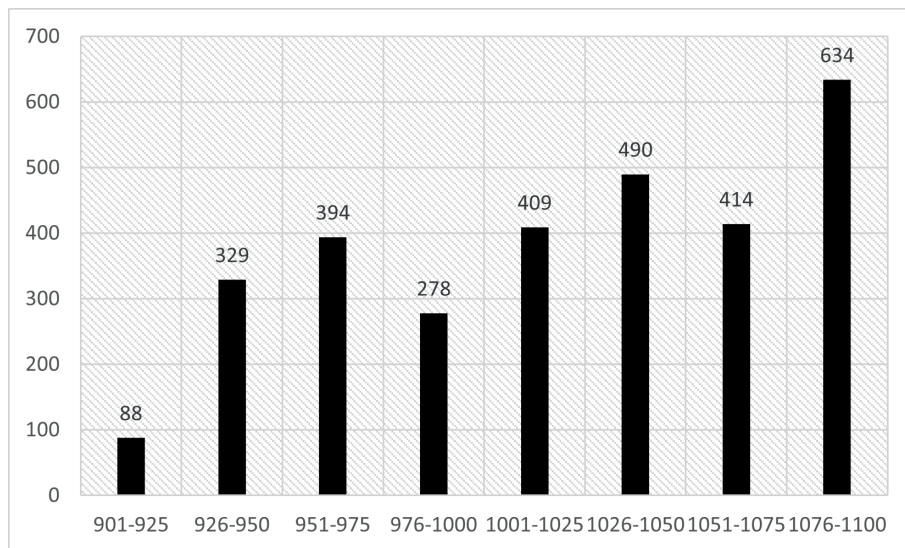
Figure 2. Number of preserved documents in the study area between tenth and eleventh centuries.

to pass by.[19] However, these narrations do only nuance the fact that chronicles produced between the tenth and eleventh centuries are very scant when it comes to reporting events that took place in certain fortified spaces.[20] This sparseness is illustrated by the early references to events that could be dated to the second half of the ninth century.[21] They rarely detail the events narrated in such a way as to emphasise the presence of certain individuals in a specific fortified centre, something that contrasts with the more eloquent chronicles of the 12th century onwards.[22] There are some generic references to the fortifications of an area in the context of its conquest, of processes of establish-

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[19] Gil Fernández, Luis Moralejo, and Ruiz de la Peña Solar, *Crónicas asturianas* – hereafter *Albeldense* –, 178 and 180. It is striking, and would give rise to further specific research, the fact that the fortification fulfils its mission of protecting the people and goods sheltered inside, but did not act as a defensive barrier that prevented the passage of enemy troops.

[20] For example, the imprisonment of Count Diego Muñoz in Gordón in the year 943, which the chronicle of Sampiro narrates from the viewpoint of the early eleventh century, Pérez de Urbel, *Sampiro*, 329.

[21] Accounts of events affecting the fortifications of Sublancio, Cea and Coyanza in *Albeldense*, 177 and 180. For the same early chronology, the chronicler Sampiro also contributes with the well-known passage in which he attributes the construction of the castles of Luna, Gordón and Alba to Alfonso III, a commonly accepted fragment despite being included in the version that was interpolated in the twelfth century by Pelayo de Oviedo, Pérez de Urbel, *Sampiro*, 279.

[22] For instance, at the beginning of the twelfth century, the first Anonymous Chronicle of Sahagún includes an extensive passage narrating the alliance that Queen Urraca must have forged with the Abbot of Sahagún to expel the Aragonese who had taken over the forts in the castle of Cea, Ubieto Arteta, *Crónicas anónimas*, 65-6. Another example, taken from a source that shows a wider scale is the reference in the *Historia Compostelana* to the control that the castle of Santa

ment of higher authority or as part of military campaign routes, carried out by both Christian and Muslim powers.[23] These are also the contexts in which these chronicles tend to individually situate the fortifications they mention, such as the famous reference in Sampiro's chronicle to the castles of Luna, Gordón and Alba.[24]

On the other hand, charters, the kind of source on which this research is mostly focused, present some other specific problematics. First, as they have been preserved mainly through monastic archives, the type of information available to us is biased. This is an aspect that likely has some impact on the presence of castles in the written sources. As centres of powers linked to military activity, they were probably more relevant in the life of the social agents related to the activity and control of the territory than what can be seen by reading these sources, much more interested in the economic activity of ecclesiastical institutions. Thus, the scarce preservation of the archives of the lay aristocracies would negatively affect the representation of fortified spaces in the documentary sources. Second, the copying processes could have affected the content of the information and we do not know to what extent references to fortifications were eliminated in this process, especially the more indirect ones. The label "indirect" is applied to those references in which the fortification appears apparently incidentally. It may be as part of the delimitation of an agricultural exploitation or a population, by referring to a communication route that leads to or passes through one of the fortified centres, or as an allusion in the date of the charter to the centre of power from which a certain powerful individual operates, among other diverse situations. As mentioned earlier, among these indirect mentions, those related to the definition and description of the landscape will have particular importance in this work, considering that the decision of the scribes to include certain fortified places in their valuable writing space may be related to the value attributed to those places themselves in the articulation of space and in the recognition of the present –and sometimes past– weight of the place.

Another warning is linked to the fact that, even though fortified centres are commonly mentioned places in the written sources of León in the tenth and eleventh centuries, their distribution is uneven in time and space, and they cannot be considered omnipresent in the documentation (see Figure 3).

María de Autares had over the passes that allowed the entrance to the Galician mountains from El Bierzo, Falque Rey, *Historia Compostellana*, 149.
[23] The reference to the *alia castra munivit* that the Albeldense made about the fortification activity that was developed while León, Astorga, Amaya Patricia and Tuy were being resettled could be mentioned as an example of this matter, *Albeldense*, 175. With regard to the debate about the use of the term *populare* see Escalona Monge, and Martín Viso, "The Life and Death."
[24] *Fecit eciam castella plurima, et ecclesias multas, sicut hic subscriptum est: In territorio Legionensi Lunam Gordonem et Aluam*: *Sampiro*, 279. About this references and the debate about its acceptance even considering that it only appears in the version of the chronicle written in the twelfth century by Pelayo, the bishop of Oviedo, see Gutiérrez González, "Las fortificaciones altomedievales."
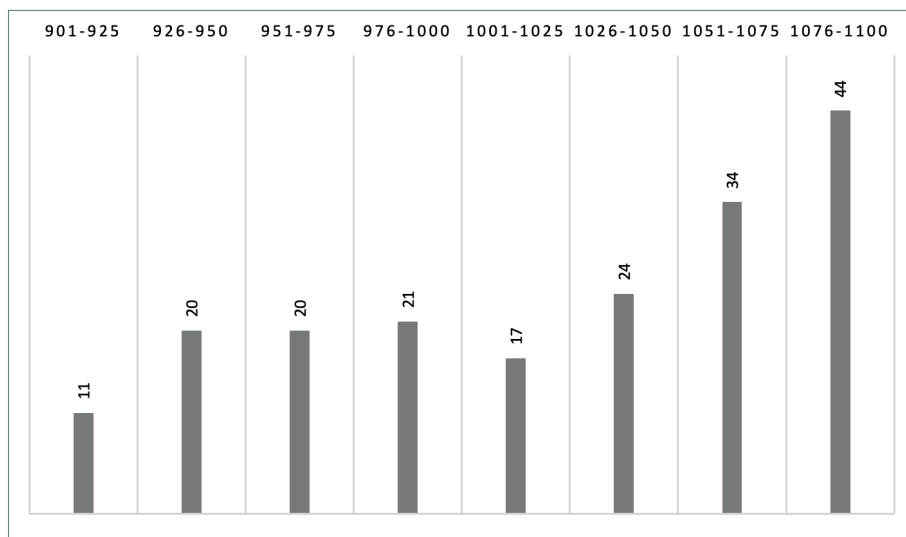
Figure 3. Number of fortifications of the studied area that are explicitly mentioned in charters and chronicles of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Although some of them are already mentioned in the sources at the beginning of the studied period, their frequency increases throughout the eleventh century, ending in a peak period that will continue in the following century. The increasing presence of fortified centres in the written sources of the second half of the eleventh century is related to the processes of formalisation of the *tenencias* as an administrative apparatus of royal territoriality during the reigns of Fernando I and Alfonso VI.[25] In this context, references to individuals exercising power in each place, often integrated into the topical dates of the documents, are increasingly common, although not new. However, these citations referring to the place by using a label identifying the fortified nature of the site is uncommon.[26]

When places are referred to by some kind of label that allows us to infer their fortification, the list of terms used by the scribes is varied but very unbalanced. Taking only the original charters as a reference, the most frequently preferred terms are *castrum* and *castellum*, synonyms that are usually interchangeable. *Oppidum, civitas,* and *urbs* also appear occasionally in reference to places that are labelled with one of the first two terms in other charters. *Oppidum* was probably used by certain more highly educated scribes as a

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[25] Estepa Díez, "Las tenencias;" Monsalvo Antón, *La construcción*, 49-53.
[26] It is common to find some generic references to sites in structures such as *Guterre Adefonso et Monnio Adefonso in Graliare* in the date of CDS2, doc. 468 (1042.04.17). Cases in which sites are mentioned as fortified places are far less common, although there are some early examples like *Comite Garsea Gomiz in Ceia Castello*; CDS, doc. 263 (971.05.26).

cultism, a reminiscence of the terminology that was used in ancient times, which nevertheless shows its utility through time to refer to fortifications.[27] The mentions of *civitas* or *urbs* emphasise the role of the centre of power in the articulation of the territory on a supra-local scale and describe the fine line between some fortified centres of power and the urban world. *Firmitas* and *forcia*, terms used in other European contexts,[28] do not appear in sources from the Hispanic northwest between the tenth and eleventh centuries. Another group of terms alludes to the most prominent part of the fortified architecture: *vallum* in allusion to a fence, *turris* or *dungio* to refer an isolated or prominent tower in the complex, or terms that allude to the type of work carried out in the fortification, such as *agger* used for the English motes, which does not appear in our corpus. Of this second group, the most common term in this area is *turris*, normally linked to second-order fortified spaces which had only a projection in their territorial control on a local scale. Finally, there are also references to a series of *castrillos*, a label that suggests some fortification work, although its interpretation as an active fortified centre are usually doubtful and, at most, they played a certain role in the articulation of local territories. The diversity of used terms, often interchangeable, and their relationship with classical Latin allow us to simultaneously appreciate the difficulties of applying changing labels to heterogeneous material realities and the variable influence that classical works may have had on the different authors of chronicles and documents.

Accompanied by these terms, the written sources mention fortified centres as important places in the eyes of their contemporaries in different contexts. The diversity of specific situations makes it possible to appreciate different functions both in terms of the functions exercised from the fortifications and in terms of the purpose of their reference in the text. The first aspect that is negatively striking is that finding references to building or reinforcing fortifications is very rare. It is even more difficult to see references to the decision to create a fortified space in a specific place. This contrasts with what can be seen in the kind of references found in other parts of Europe, for example, Italy.[29]

Thus, instances of fortified centres are often mentioned in charters in relation to the presence of individuals or groups in specific locations, or the production of documents within these fortified centres. Some of them are direct references to the fortified place, while others mention a place within the castle or maybe a light allusion to its territory, either as part of the events narrated in the document or as the place where the charter was written or

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[27] It was even used in the 13th century by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada in his *De rebus hispaniae* to refer to fortifications of a less well-defined entity, Pérez de Tudela y Velasco *et al.*, *Arquitectura*, 66-7.
[28] For references to terminology used in other European contexts, see Creighton, *Early European Castles*, 34.
[29] Settia, *Proteggere e dominare*.

signed.[30] However, references specifically addressing the fortified structures themselves, including construction or renovation activities, are very infrequent. No mention from the tenth and eleventh centuries has been found in the charters that have been consulted. Furthermore, while limited diplomas recounting the legal acts that triggered their creation may allude to political actions impacting fortified centres, such references are scarce too. Castles are usually indirectly mentioned in charters, with no clear allusion to their fortifications and highlighting their bond with the landscapes and some territorial functions.

Fortifications do not always appear in the sources in connection with any function. The most common way in which they are mentioned is as spatial markers, to locate other places nearby. Indeed, these are not very eloquent in terms of knowing the history and functions of fortified centres, but they allow us to observe a practical utility in the writing process and initiate a better understanding of the role of fortified centres in the mentality of their contemporaries.[31]

3. *Fortified centres as spatial markers*

The use of fortifications to situate other kinds of landscape features or settlements nearby is the most common reference that can be found in written sources. The analysed written records offered a total of 150 references considering only those situations in which a place was explicitly mentioned using one of the previously-mentioned fortification labels. The number doubles when considering indirect mentions of fortifications. That is, the instances in which a place where a known fortification is mentioned only by using the toponym. These castles as spatial markers are defined very simply, as they include every situation where a castle appears in the text, connected to another place, helping the reader to situate one of those places or a third one. One example that serves to illustrate one of the most common situations is that of Castro Froila, used to indicate that the place where some lands were was situated next to (*iuxta*) it.[32] However, a typological classification including three different groups of these references can be made. This will help us better understand the different situations in which fortifications were used as spatial markers. While moving through this casuistic, sometimes the kind of places that are connected to the castles are more interesting, while others

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[30] In relation to the former, Castro Froila was the place where the king Fernando I solved the conflict between Sahagún monks and the family of Gutier Velaz in CDS2, doc. 588 (1057.01.12). One example of the latter is the reference to the convent of Saint Michael and Saint Clement in Castro de Nunni, where a charter was signed in the presence of the count Fernando Vermúdez and his wife, Elvira, CDS, doc. 279 (975.01.05).

[31] A comprehensive analysis of these features for the English case can be found in Bintley, *Settlements and Strongholds.*

[32] CDS, doc. 214 (963.09.19).

allow us to discuss the terms used to reflect the spatial link between fortifications and landscape features. In this second situation, the fact that an original version of the document had been preserved has been particularly considered.

The given example regarding Castro Froila is part of one first group of mentions, that can be called by the general statement of "references of proximity". Considering only original charters to minimize the risk of dealing with altered language, we have examples that concern only a few places. They are Castro Azebal, Castro Regio, Cea, Melgar, Sublancio and an unidentified *kastro* that could be Castro Pelayo (in Valdoré). The use of expressions like *iuxta* or *non longe* focused on spatial proximity far more than territorial adscriptions or relations of dependence.[33] This second idea might indeed be suggested considering that a relatively common preposition that is used is *subtus* or its short variant *sub*.[34] However, no relation has been found between the use of this preposition and some additional services that could make us think about relations of dependence. Thinking of a spatial link focused on the different altitudes seems more reasonable. Furthermore, fortifications were used to situate different spaces or landscapes features, from the lands that were situated *ad Castrum Rege* in one of the earliest charters we work with,[35] to the mountains that were mentioned as *super Kastro* in the Leonese area of Valdoré, where some lands and apple trees were situated *in locum super castrum*.[36] Some of these examples demonstrate that the combination of different spatial and territorial references when situating a place is common. This can be interpreted as a resource to different scales that were useful in the definition and usage of the landscape.[37] Castles are sometimes mentioned in combination with local references such as the Villa Mozorore that appears directly linked to Cea.[38] This kind of mention is circumscribed neither to a specific typology of fortification nor to a geographical area. Additionally, the language used to express this idea of proximity and particularly the prepositions through which the link is written in the original charters indicate a very flexible language which always allowed for more concise settlement, land unit, and landscape feature placement. Thus, this first group of mentions helps us to better understand the relation be-

[33] *Ereditate possessum vel quantum a nobis fuit aucmentatum quod situm dinoscitur esse in ora ribuli Zeie iuxta Melcare castellum*; CDS, doc. 164 (959.04.09). *Ereditate qui est in Villahale, decurente alueum Estola, non longe de Castro Solanzo*; SPE, doc. 34 (1032.06.24).
[34] *Sancta Maria in Aratoy subtus Castro de Azebal*; CDCL2, doc. 508 (985.11.16). *Villa uocabula Vale iusta ribo Istula sub castro*; CDCL3, doc. 679 (1009.06.28).
[35] *Terra in territorio Legionense, ad Castrum de Rege*; CDCL1, doc. 12 (897).
[36] OD, doc. 104 (1016.04.08): *illa serra de super Kastro*; doc. 105 (1016.05.11): *alia terra super Kastro*; and 174 (1025.04.01): *terras et pumiferos qui sunt in Orede, in locum predicto super Kastro.*
[37] On this topic and the use of it as a theoretical and methodological tool see Escalona Monge, and Reynolds (eds.), *Scale and Scale Change.*
[38] *In territorio de flumine Ceia subtus castello simili modo Ceia vocato in Villa Mozorore*; CDS, doc. 327 (984.12.10).

tween different features of the landscape and, in some cases, also the inner structure of settlements.

Moving forward to the second group, another relatively common kind of reference to fortresses is that which combines them with some kind of road, path, or river. Some of them tell us about the existence of some active roads directly connected to the fortress. For example, we can see that there was a path that arrived at the *castrum* of Sublancio, which later was also connected with a church in the same area by another path.[39] A similar *karrale* led to Coyanza,[40] which seems to be a more important road arriving in Cea.[41] However, some of these mentions cannot be properly linked to an identified castle and it can be argued that they use some kind of ancient *castro* to explain the route to arrive at a certain settlement or to better define the landscape that was relevant while elaborating the document. This last situation could be what happened in the case of the *castro* mentioned in a mountainous area around Villa Zalama, a village that was connected to Villa Nova by a path that crossed the mountains and went through a kind of fortified place that seemed to be empty.[42] The main problem that can be detected in this group of references is that using them to reconstruct the road network in an area for a certain chronology is very difficult because the mentions are too sporadic, and are separated by a large chronological gap.

Connections between castles and rivers were important too. They appeared in a similar way to the previous connections and sometimes combined them with some references to paths. For instance, the stream that came from Torre in a fragment that mentions other references to pathways in the area.[43] But other references highlight the spatial connection between castles and rivers to define the landscape. For example, a charter mentions together the *castro* that has been identified with Castro Regio the river Torio and a ford that connected the fortified space with a mount.[44] This demonstrates that the spatial connection between fortifications and rivers was relevant both to situate other places or landscape features in the vicinity of both landmarks and to highlight the presence of some fords. Fluvial connections were also important in the analysed area and their relevance in the choosing of a castle position is something that must be considered. Moreover, some of these mentions highlight the position of the fortress in the vicinity of a certain valley, which adds

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[39] *Senara in Sublantio, subtus via que pergit ad castrum*; CDCL1, doc. 5 (873.12.28). *Et alia vinea, super villa ad illo semendero qui discure de eglesia pro ad illo castro*; SPE, doc. 54 (1085.12.30).
[40] CDCL1, doc. 45 (918.01.08).
[41] *Carrera que discurrit a Ceia et ubique*; CDS3, doc. 929 (1094.11.17). It also appears in connection with the river Cea in CDS2, doc. 430 (1032.01.30).
[42] *Per termino de Villa Noua adherente prope de ipsa villa, et inde per via montana per illo kastro discurrente a Villa Zalama*; CDCL4, doc. 919 (1033.08.26).
[43] *Et ad illa karra qui venit de Petraficta, et per illo regum qui venit de Torre, et per illo vestro prado*; OD, doc. 232 (1043.07.31).
[44] *Terra in territorio Legionense, ad Castrum de Rege, super ripam fluminis Turio, ad vado qui discurrit de ipso Castro et de monte de Balle de Apeliares ad civitate*; CDCL1, doc. 12 (897).

a small territorial element to the connection between rivers and castles. This is the case of Castel de Xano, which is linked to the stream of Tabladillo, its valley and the path that went to a place called Irago, which could be the current Mount Irago, next to Foncebadón.[45] This often was important enough to make the documents refer to a certain valley as *Val de Castro.*[46] The use of rivers and paths in combination with fortresses as salient spatial features was a useful tool that scribes used to describe the landscape where the places and properties that were relevant in a charter lay. This group's last example clearly shows a document from the late eleventh century in which some paths that connected different settlements passing Cea and Castro Froila are mentioned in combination with different rivers and streams.[47] This second group of references helps us to better understand people's perception of the landscape and how fortifications were integrated into broader settlement networks.

A clearer description of the landscape was useful to help people identify the precise position of other places, which helped to know where the properties involved in a certain charter were. However, clarifying the limits of those properties or certain territories was important too, and here were also used as spatial markers. This allows us to identify a third group, which includes the mentions of castles as liminal references. They are usually vague allusions to the fortified place as part of the limits of a land plot, which reached the castle or its nearby area. See, for instance, the tower mentioned as one of the limits of the mountainous fields that Pedro Flaínez bought from the abbot of Saint Cripiano de Fano.[48] A clearer example is that of Castro Pedroso, repeatedly mentioned in the resolution of the conflict between the monks of Pardomino and the inhabitants of the area.[49] Castro Froila is mentioned with fewer additional indications when situating some lands in *Angario*, which makes it more difficult to define the precise scale of the description.[50] It seems pertinent to

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[45] *Ipsum ribulum de Tablatello et deinde ascendit per illum vallem qui exit ad Castel de Xano et recudit ad ipsam stratam de Irago*; Cavero Domínguez, and Martín López (eds.), *Colección Catedral Astorga*, doc. 65 (946.09.05).

[46] *Terra in Val de Castro […] et alia terra in exito de villa de termino Alboni, et per karraria qui discurret ad Val de Castro*; CDCL2, doc. 275 (954.08.29). Castro Regio offers another example, as there is a reference to some *terras in ipso valle de Castro*; CDCL1, doc. 75 (927.11.05). About this topic, see Justo Sánchez, "El control desde arriba".

[47] *Nostra divisa quam habemus in Petra Fitta, in rivulo de Ceia, carrera que discurrit de Villa Aliba et intra in Ceia et exit a Sancto Martino; et per carrera que discurrit a Castro Froila et super carrera et subtus carrera rivo cum suo soto et suas eiras et inde exit a Siero*; CDS3, doc. 824 (1086.05.09).

[48] *Per locis terminis suis: de terminum unde aquas invertunt ex andiore parte et de penna Rubecaria et de rego de Salce et flium molle; et de alia parte de Turre que digunt et de illo betuleto minore et per alio betuleto magiore usque in flium molle, et aflige ad terminum unde iam supra diximus*; OD, doc. 165 (1024.03.24).

[49] *Et posuerunt terminum per locis prenominatis: de rivo Perameno, et per illa lumba, per summa zerra, directa linea, usque illum Castrum Petrosum, qui est super regum Palumbare, et exinde, parte occidentis, aqua invertente, per summa lumba, invertente usque in Porma*; CDCL1, doc. 184 (944.06.17).

[50] *In Angario usque ad castro de Froila*; CDCL1, doc. 15 (904).

indicate that fortresses are mentioned as liminal spaces on different scales, even in a single charter. This is the case of Castro Regio and the valley associated with it. A document situated some lands limiting to the surroundings of the fortified place, mentioning at a certain point that two mills were at the lowest part of the *castrum*.[51] While analysing the first group, the prominence of castles in the landscape explains their practical use for explaining other places' locations. The position of some vineyards on the slope of a *castro* in the river Sabugo's valley is an example of this.[52]

However, what is more common is finding mentions of fortifications as liminal references alluding to some kind of territoriality. There are a few very explicit mentions that used the word *terminus* to allude to that territoriality, just as with the boundaries of Castro Tierra while delimiting *Villa Mayor*.[53] Quite a similar territoriality can be inferred from less explicit mentions, such as the placement of *Villa Palaciolo* amongst other settlements, including Castilfalé.[54] It seems logical that this kind of relationship between settlements occurred more often when discussing them on a small scale. A clear example of this is the combined mention of Melgar de Arriba and Melgar de Abajo, two very close villages that were mentioned together as part of the boundaries of different places in the area.[55] All these examples show how this third group tells us about the double reality of fortifications in the landscape and the territory, as they were considered good references both as prominent places and relevant settlements with which its territoriality was associated. This third group of references is useful to identify the existence of some basic territorialities. The separation between these liminal references and actual territorial references is very light, as some of these mentions combined the spatial link with a fortress and the placement of certain places inside either local or supra-local territories.

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[51] *Et alias terras in ipso valle de Castro: de terminu Sancti Iuliani, per viam de Couellas et Bustum Ramelli, quod testati sunt filii eius, usque ad Fontem Incalatam; et de alia parte de Castro, per ripam de Turio, usque ad Uillarem Uiridem, et mulinus duos ad radicem de Castro*; CDCL1, doc. 75 (927.11.05). The language used is reminiscent of that which is used to situate places in relation to a mount. For example, in the placement of some vineyards *ad radice de Monte Aurio*: CDCL3, doc. 737 (1015.03.13).

[52] CDCL2, doc. 341 (961.05.08).

[53] *Ipsa Villa Maior, integra, per suos terminos antiquos [...] de prima parte, termino de ambas villas de Valle de Frexeno; de alia parte, terminu de Castro Terra; de IIIᵃ parte, terminum de Gordaliza; de IIIIᵃ parte, ipsa vestra hereditate de Berzianos*; CDS2, doc. 519 (1048.09.21).

[54] *Inter Castrello de Falei et Oteriolo, et de alia parte Matancia, et de alia parte Sancti Cipriani et de alia parte Terrestres et afliget ad Valle de Mora*; CDCL4, doc. 926 (1034.02.22).

[55] *Decania in ripam amme vocitato Ceia inter castello quod dicunt de Foracasas et alium Castrum Abduzi [...] hereditate propria que fuit de domno Fruminio episcopo qui est in ripa fluminis Ceia per cunctis suis terminis determinata: de una parte Castro Abduzi et figet desuper in hereditatem Castrum a Foracasas, de IIIᵃ parte per illeas vineas de Barciale et figet in aqua fluminis Ceia*; CDS, doc. 340 (988.11.25).

4. *The use of ancient fortresses in landscape construction*

While analysing the different situations in which fortifications are mentioned in the written sources as part of the landscape, a very particular kind of reference occasionally emerges. There is a little group of notices that gathers those references to ancient fortifications. They are allusions to the memory of a fortified place that people inhabiting a certain area remembered despite the fortifications seeming abandoned by the time the charter was written. They refer to the fortified place by using adjectives such as *anticum* or *vellio*, which appear to be allusions to a definitive abandonment –possibly some time ago– and not to a strategic withdrawal from the site or a momentary vacancy, like those mentions from the chronicles that we discussed above. In addition, these situations remind us of realities analysed in other areas.[56] It would be plausible to consider these mentions as reminiscences of the previous importance of the site, maybe a memory bound with the collective knowledge of the populations of the area or, at least, to those people directly or indirectly connected to the written record production. However, it is difficult to say how ancient that memory was. To further explore this general idea, a more careful look at different cases is needed.

The first example is Boñar, in the Leonese mountains.[57] A charter containing a delimitation of the boundaries of the monastery of Saint Adrian and Saint Natalia mentions that it was placed in *Balneare* and uses a *castellum anticum* as the northern limit. This charter also mentions the position of some lands on the slope that reached the *castro*.[58] Seventy years later, another document mentions a *castro antiquo* to describe the boundaries of a *villa* in *Bovata* – probably the current Las Bodas, in the same area of Boñar –.[59] Considering the coincidence of some place names and the presence of a toponym "Castro" in the area, it seems logical to assume that these three ref-

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[56] For example, the study about the region between Arlanza and Duero rivers, made by Roberto Vázquez Álvarez, identified this kind of mentions with the use of the expresions *castrum vetus*, *castro vetulo*, *derruinata de Castillo* or *castellum antiquum*, Vázquez Álvarez, "Castros, castillos y torres," 362-3. Thus, some were quite like the terms used in the area that is analysed here.

[57] About this area and the socio-political dynamics that took place there in early Middle Ages see, Carvajal Castro, "Poder regio y control territorial," 107-11.

[58] *Ex parte septendrionali castellum anticum, qui est supra monasterium ex penna ad pennam per illum arborem ac per illam portam de ipso castro seu per terminum de tio nostro Vegila necnon terminum de Braulio, germano nostro, predesignatum locum stagnum, a vulgis vocitatum Tintraria, et exinde directum ad regum sursum vero ad ipsum regum usque ad limitem de Venario sive per ipsam lumbam invertentem ad illam spinam et carrare maiore* [...] *in lumbam de Castro, interea ex parte orientalis terminum de germano nostro Braulio*; SPE, doc. 9 (929.03.05).

[59] *Per suis terminis antiquis per terminos de Sancto Adriano, per terminos de Grandoso et de rivulo ad iusum que discurrit ad Ascuita et per carrera que discurrit ad Ascuita afiget a Villare ad illa penna Venereria ad valatare et ipsos vallatare et figet ad illo pelago et exiet a summa serra usque ad termino de Sancto Adriano et per termino qui discurrit de monte Mauroso et afiget a penna orientale per termino de illa presa de Sancti Adriani et exiet ad castro antiquo et discurrit a termino de Sancto Adriano*; CDS, doc. 352 (996.06.29).

erences allude to the same place. The contemporary activity of a castle in the area has not been documented, though. Moreover, the only place where some remains of a fortified place potentially associated with theninth or tenth century have been found is 4 km to the north, on a hill called "Peña de la Solana". However, no exhaustive archaeological intervention has been made there.[60] Nonetheless, the activity of a territory of Boñar between the tenth and twelfth centuries is very well documented. More than 45 appearances in the written sources have been found, including some references to the territory as an *alfoz* and allusions to the *tenentes* of the area. This situation possibly included the existence of a fortified place in the territory, but no proof exists that allows us to bind that idea to the ancient fortress used as a spatial marker. Thus, that fortress could be a prominent place that was relevant in the process of territory formation, although abandoned before the elaboration of the charters, maybe a long time ago.

The situation of Castrobol seems different. A charter dated 1099 mentions the *castello vellio de Castrovaiu* to describe the boundaries of the estate of Morales.[61] If the term *vellio* is translated as "old", it is possible to see this as a reference to a non-operative fortified place in a settlement or a local territory whose toponym shows the previous importance of that fortification.[62] In contrast to what happened in Boñar, a fortified place is documented here several times in the tenth century as *castro de Abaiub*, two of which are in original charters.[63] After a gap of almost a hundred years, the place is usually mentioned only as *Castro Abaiub*, *Castro Vaiu,* and some close variants that evidence the evolution to the current Castrobol.[64] Moreover, Castrobol is identified as a *villa* in some of those later documents, which enforces the idea of a differentiated old fortified area inside a wider settlement.[65] Thus, the transformation of this fortified place and the formation of that memory associated with the idea of an ancient castle in the area had taken place during the studied period, likely between the second half of the tenth century and the first decades of the eleventh century

This second process is very similar to what happened in Melgar de Abajo, a current village that could be identified with the *Castro Abduzi* that appears

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[60] Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*, 200.
[61] *Villa per terminis suis* [...]: *per castello vellio de Castrovaiu et inde vadit per Tenebrella et per karraria de Castellares et per karraria de Foiola de Costanella et figit se in illa karrera que discurrit de Furones a Villa Nova et inde per illa karrera que discurrit de Villa Grad ad illum pontem de super Terrados et per illa aqua de Ceia quosque peruenit ad castello vellio, unde prius diximus*; SPE, doc. 72 (1099.05.14).
[62] About the little archaeological information regarding a fortress in this place, see Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y feudalismo*, 330-1.
[63] CDCL1, docs. 202 (948.06.21) and 221 (950.05.29).
[64] About this place and the evolution of the toponomy and the population there, see Martínez Sopena, *La Tierra de Campos occidental*, 118-25.
[65] CDS2, doc. 608 (1059.10.01), CDS3, doc. 729 (1074.01.11) and Martín López, María Encarnación, Antonio Viñayo, and Vicente García Lobo (eds.), *Patrimonio cultural*, doc. 132 (1184.11.25).

in the written sources of the tenth century.[66] Eighty years later, a *castrum anticum Melgare de Abduze* is used to situate the monastery of Saint Cristóbal and Saint Andrés of Vega.[67] This is another example of a fortified place whose meaning had changed at a certain moment during the period analysed here, although the scarcity of the information provided by the written sources does not allow us to speak about a relevant power centre in the tenth century. However, the *Castro Rufianense* appears in some charters of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to situate the monastery of San Pedro de Montes, in the region of El Bierzo.[68] This fortified place is never documented as an active centre during the analysed period and the only reference to the site identified as an ancient fortress is in a false document created to attribute the concession of possession to the monastery by Ordoño II.[69] The fortress likely is the same as that mentioned by Valerio of El Bierzo in his *Ordo Querimoniae* when the author tells us the story of the foundation of the monastery of San Pedro de Montes by Fructuoso.[70] This second situation was probably closer to that explained by Boñar, with a reminiscence of an ancient fortified place used to clarify the later landscape description and to enhance the importance of the monastery through a connection with the past.

Therefore, this kind of mentions of fortified spaces in the written sources contains references to a past whose proximity is not clear. Nevertheless, they were useful for the description of the landscape in the written documentation. It may also harbour relations of a deeper nature, because it is striking that several of the examples shared here link the existence of these ancient fortifications with those of certain monastic centres. The link between the fortified and the sacred in the space studied here is an aspect that deserves a specific in-depth analysis, linking, in the future, the small pieces of information obtained through written sources with reflections from archaeology. On some occasions, this relationship will allow us to know more about the chronology to which the allusion to the ancient fortifications refers and, with it, the memory that emerges from their mention in the documents.

5. *Conclusions*

When medieval scribes used fortifications to describe the landscape, they were admitting their usefulness as spatial references for their contemporaries. It is true that these are not the most eloquent mentions and that indi-

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[66] CDS, doc. 340 (988.11.25).
[67] Domínguez Sánchez (ed.), *Colección documental medieval*, doc. 13 (1071.08.29).
[68] TVM, docs. 39 (1083.08.28), 40 (1084.10.15), 66 (1093.07.09), 86 (1096.04.16), 124 (1111.10.24), and 161 (1144.03.09).
[69] *Monasterium constructum iusta rivolum quod dicitur Oza, sub Monte Aquiliana subtus castello antiquissimo in confinio bergidense*; TVM, doc. 6 (918.04.24).
[70] Díaz y Díaz, *Valerio del Bierzo*, 169. About this episode and its context, see Isla Frez, "Villa, villula, castellum" and Martín Viso, "Monasterios y redes sociales."

vidually they do not facilitate very well-founded interpretations. However, references to fortified spaces as spatial markers are the most common in the early medieval documentation of the kingdom of León and deserve specific attention. The journey we have made here has immersed us in a world of active fortifications, although mentioned passively and indirectly in the documents, and of others which show the skeletal image of what may have been a relevant and strong place in the past. A past that could be not so far as it is usually presumed. Their usefulness was subsumed in a use linked to memory that tells us more about the vision of the landscape by the inhabitants of the period than about the activities that the fortifications may have been conducted at a given time. Even now, not all the spatial references were equally useful for everybody. They depend on the context, the scale that was being defined, and the previous knowledge of the people that got access to those charters.

Castles are frequently mentioned in the written sources of the studied context. That said, they do not appear in every single document, and the frequency of their appearance is uneven. Simultaneously, the way through which we access that information sometimes is hard to deal with, as they tend to be scarce, indirect, and isolated mentions. However, it is possible to order them to better understand when and how fortified places were used to describe the landscape. Touring castles in Leonese written sources has allowed us to observe how castles are documented relative to other elements of the landscape, such as paths, rivers, and mountains. This general view offers us an understanding of the documentary representation's complexity of these fortified spaces.

Further, we identify the link between spaces of power and how kingdoms' territorial worldview is linked to different actors. The details about who were those powers and how they acted in the design and transformation of the landscape is something that must be done in more specific following studies, in which some case studies could be analyse in more detail. Given the scarcity of information that we have about a lot of the fortified places mentioned in this work, the aspiration of knowing the kind of power that managed each of the fortified places mentioned here seems impossible to achieve. One general impression that surfaces in this work is the bound between royal power and some of the best documented castles, which tells us about the existence of a royal interest for controlling fortified spaces and the areas linked to them. However, there are some hints, such as the existence of some secondary fortifications named after certain people whose analysis could give us some more complex information about this matter.

For the moment, we have only done a small portion of what can be done when studying the landscape. Historical research of this nature demonstrates the difficulty of researching texts that rarely include contemporary maps and with limited spatial information. Employing interdisciplinary methods is very important for better understanding medieval landscapes. That kind of work should integrate the information obtained from the written sources with material data and archaeological concepts, place name studies, and the

raw analysis of historical landscapes on the visible scars of the current land-scape.[71] Rescuing the vague mentions of fortifications as spatial markers and integrating them in the wider analysis of landscape is only a first and small step but one that allows us to better understand the role of fortified places in the landscape and within the memory of contemporary people.

[71] Rippon, *Territoriality*, 5.

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