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**Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte**  
Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris  
(Institut historique allemand)  
Band 26/1 (1999)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1999.1.47293

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MONARCHY AND NEOGOTHICISM IN THE  
ASTUR KINGDOM, 711–910

The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* describes all the Astur kings of the VIII century as being members of one large family group<sup>1</sup>. Or rather, members of two subgroups, the first led by Pelayo-Alfonso I and the second by Fruela, brother of Alfonso I<sup>2</sup>. The chroniclers considered the genetics of both groups important enough to map them out for us. Alfonso and Fruela were sons of Pedro, referred to as *dux*, whose ancestry allegedly went back as far as the Visigothic ruling family. According to these sources, both groups originated *ex semine regio* or *de regni prosapie*. However, there are one or two other interesting points to mention. It is the Oviedo version (*Ad Sebastianum*), of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* which attributes royal blood to Pelayo, whereas in the Roda version (*Rotensis*), he was a *spatarius* of the last Visigothic kings, with no special family link. The *Rotensis* depicts an unclear royal ancestry for Alfonso, while the *Ad Sebastianum* stipulates that he was in fact a descendant of Leovigild and Reccared, kings of prestige, far removed from the controversial last years of Gothic rule.

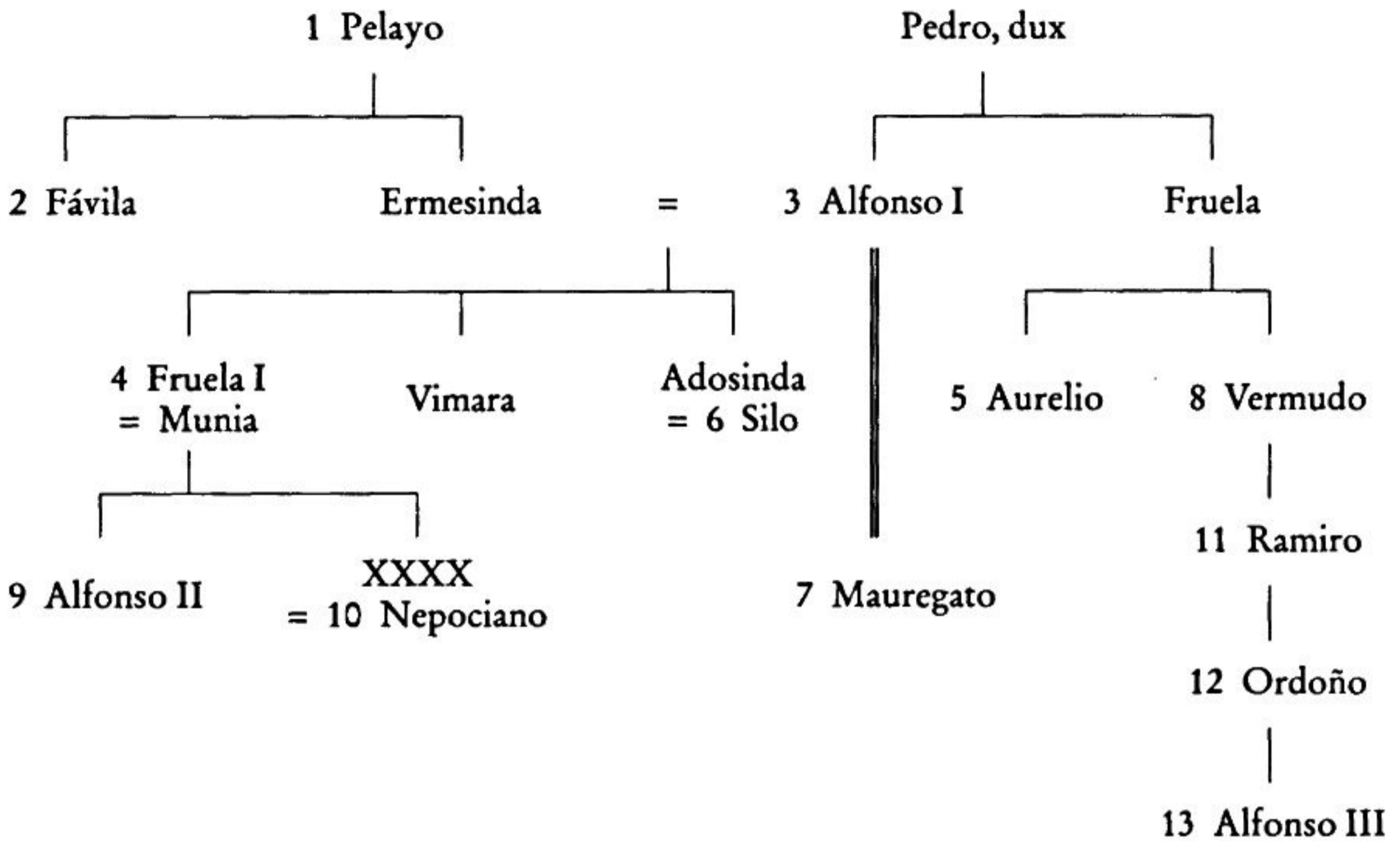
It is perhaps when we reflect on these founding moments, and in particular on Pelayo, that we see the differences between the two versions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* more clearly. In the *Rotensis*, Pelayo was elected king by the Astur *concilium*, while in the *Ad Sebastianum*, he was elected by persons of royal blood who had taken refuge in the mountains. Obviously the Oviedo version tries to emphasize Pelayo's link with the Visigothic royal family and, from this perspective, the manner of his accession fits in nicely. The *Rotensis* is not averse to this kind of supposition either, and although it does highlight the key role played by the *Astures*, it also uses a terminology derived from Visigothic council tradition, so reinforcing a certain perception regarding Pelayo's succession. Nevertheless, it is clear that, implicit in the Oviedo version, there is a deliberate attempt to put forward the Visigothic nature of the Astur kingdom and overshadow other decisive factors, such as the existence of the ethnic *Astur*, who would have to be forced into the background if the kingdom wished to lay claim to a Visigothic heritage<sup>3</sup>.

1 All references to the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* or the *Chronicle of Albelda* are according to Juan GIL's edition (*Crónicas asturianas*, Oviedo 1985). They are indicated by paragraph numbers set in parentheses within the text. See also, J. PRELOG, *Die Chronik Alfons' III. Untersuchung und kritische Edition der vier Redaktionen*, Frankfurt 1980. Also edited with useful notes by Yves BONNAZ, *Chroniques asturiennes (fin IX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris 1987. – The names of the Oviedo kings referred to in the text are given in the usual Spanish form.

2 From Alfonso III onwards this common branch became even stronger and its male descendants were the only ones to rule in the X<sup>th</sup> century.

3 Amancio ISLA, *Consideraciones sobre el reino astur*, in: *Hispania* 55 (1995) p. 158f.

## Genealogical Table



What the so-called learned chronicler, the author of the Oviedo version, or *Ad Sebastianum*, was trying to point out is that this was a perfectly normal election, that, as required by the Council of Toledo of 636, a person of Visigothic nobility was named king. There was no suggestion of any disturbance or revolt and, on this matter, both versions are agreed. According to the Roda version the new king was elected by an assembly in which the will of *omnes Astores* had been heard, in the same way that the III canon of the V Council of Toledo had underlined the need for an *electio omnium*.

The untimely death of Fávila, Pelayo's son and heir, facilitated the succession of Alfonso I, who no doubt professed his connection with Pelayo by virtue of his marriage to Ermesinda. As a consequence of these events, the chroniclers are seen to refine their vocabulary. The terminology used to describe royal accessions in the Astur kingdom is quite precise in both versions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*. The word *successio* had been used to describe Fávila's accession. Now, however, in describing Alfonso I's takeover, the chronicler hesitates between *electus*, favoured by the *Rotensis*, or *successio*, of the more polished Oviedo version, which thus highlights Alfonso's links by marriage and makes him a member of the family by virtue of his union to Ermesinda, Pelayo's daughter. On the other hand, the choice of *electus* in the *Rotensis* attempts to report Alfonso's access as if he were somebody entirely unconnected by blood with his predecessor.

We know that Fávila had children, but we know nothing whatsoever about them. Inheritance passed between male descendants of Alfonso and those of his brother,

Fruela. The chroniclers readily use the term *successio* for the accession of Fruela I, son of Alfonso and Ermesinda, but they also use it for that of Aurelio. Both versions tell us that Aurelio was a *confrater* or *consubrinus*. The *Ad Sebastianum* states that he was the son of Fruela, brother of Alfonso. Here we have the first clear reference to the enlargement of the ruling family and the inclusion of Fruela's descendants. Perhaps a greater power struggle took place in the second half of the VIII<sup>th</sup> century, in which a large and eminent family group competed to win the resources and power of the monarchy. Aurelio may have used his seniority in age over the other members of the family or perhaps, given the weakness and disunity of his rivals, he was simply able to assert himself in a bloody vendetta which pitted the groups of the brothers Fruela and Vimara against each other.

Possessing a certain blood was viewed as a deciding factor in gaining power, as we shall see as the principle of heredity becomes more and more established. Also, certain accessions could only be accepted by gaining entry into the ruling family. For this reason, Silo, whose social importance is mentioned in the chronicles, had to marry Adosinda, daughter of Alfonso I. The Roda version specifically states that, by virtue of this marriage, *pro qua re*, Silo became king. Without this union, as in the case of Alfonso I, his rule would not have been easily accepted. This is why the different versions of the chronicles again diverge in their choice of terminology. The *Rotensis* describes his accession as *adeptus*, while the *Ad Sebastianum* once again speaks in terms of *successio*.

We may presume that Adosinda, who had no children by Silo, had become the head of the family, the one around whom revolved the interests of the group of Alfonso I and Fruela I, and that this marriage was in fact a way of paving the way for the eventual accession of Alfonso II, her nephew, who held the rank of Palatine Count during the reign of Silo and Adosinda. At least, this is how we must interpret the reference that *palatium guernavit* (*Rot*, 18): the nephew appears to have held the rank at other times known as *comes palatii*, which did not exist in the Visigothic period. We also know that this title afforded whoever held it a privileged position in the line of succession<sup>4</sup>.

Their hopes, however, were dashed by Mauregato, a son of Alfonso I born outside his marriage to Ermesinda. His achievement demonstrates how open the practices regarding family and succession were. In spite of the criticisms expressed in the chronicles, the very fact that his rule could take effect and count on the necessary support, even of the clergy (including the author of the hymn entitled *O Dei verbum*), reflects the full acceptance he enjoyed. In other words, if Mauregato was able to become king, thus frustrating the plans hatched by Silo and Adosinda from within the circle of power, then this was because his accession was not only a possible option but an extraordinarily well-grounded one, too. Later chroniclers described his accession as *invasio*, that is, tyranny, a violent and unlawful break in the line of

4 Abilio BARBERO, Marcelo VIGIL, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, Barcelona 1978, p. 346. Amancio ISLA, *Nombres de reyes y sucesión al trono (siglos VIII–X)*, in: *Studia historica (medieval)* 11 (1993) p. 16. *Contra*, SÁNCHEZ ALBORNOZ, *El 'Palatium Regis' asturleonés*, in: *Viejos y nuevos estudios sobre las instituciones medievales españolas*, III, Madrid 1980, p. 1638ff; ID., *Iam factus rex*, in: *Orígenes de la nación española*, III, Oviedo 1975, p. 34. Yves BONNAZ (as n. 1) p. 186 considers his promotion a Visigothic association.

succession, but this idea may simply reflect the opinions of Alfonso II's supporters or, at least, those of the defenders of more traditional practices of succession. Nevertheless, in the Astur kingdom of the VIII<sup>th</sup> century, it was feasible that a person of royal blood, albeit *de serua natus*, could become king, a circumstance that, while open to criticism, was without impediment as far as his contemporaries were concerned.

The chronicles provide us with some interesting information about Alfonso II's background. Both versions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* narrate how his father, King Fruela, married Munia, a Basque girl. Here on, however, the two versions differ in presentation and approach. The Roda version tells us that, after suppressing a revolt by the Basques, Fruela I brought back with him an *uxor*. The Oviedo version, on the other hand, maintains that, once peace had been made with the Basques, the king took an *adulescentula, ex Vasconum praeda*, as a servant girl, and that some time later this same woman *in regali coniugio copulabit*. In the latter version, then, the narrator expounds the theory in rather more detail that Alfonso II was the son of a Basque slave who had been seized as part of the Astur king's spoils of war<sup>5</sup>.

What we are witnessing is, in fact, the development of a theme, and this reveals its interest to the chronicler. The *Ad Sebastianum* is not seeking to denigrate Alfonso's background. Rather, it is attempting to lessen any potential criticism and dignify Alfonso's origins. So for example, it tells us that Munia, at the time of her capture, was an *adulescentula*. The chronicler uses this rather imprecise terminology to emphasize the slave's extreme youthfulness and, consequently, her virginity. In addition, it goes on to stress that a royal marriage later took place, so it was not simply a union of secondary importance, the taking of a concubine. The *Rotensis*, for its part, says that Munia was an *uxor* and therefore her situation was in no way comparable to that of a slave, like Mauregato's mother was.

Both accounts stressed factors which could have been used by Alfonso II's enemies (those who deposed him at the beginning of his reign) or at least attempted to face up to difficult problems, like those presented by the clergy or newly-established procedures for succession. They tried to distance Fruela and Munia, and the product of their marriage, Alfonso, from certain characteristics which could have been the object of reproach, a fundamental one being that Alfonso shared with Mauregato a common origin: they were both products of relations with slaves. Moreover, the Gothic tradition, which the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* wanted to align itself to, in particular the *Ad Sebastianum*, forbade anybody of servile origin to occupy a position of authority<sup>6</sup>. Once again, then, we can see how Astur practices distanced themselves from their Visigothic heritage and, we believe, how these arguments may have been used in the political debate of the day.

It is also possible that in this account about Munia some oral traditions were collected, much in the same way as hagiographic stories like that of Queen Balthilde<sup>7</sup>, by a group of people interested in promoting the sanctity of Alfonso II. Further-

5 ISLA (as n. 3) p. 164f.

6 Canon XVII of the council of 638 (MARTÍNEZ DÍEZ, *Colección canónica hispana V*, Madrid 1992, p. 326).

7 Roger COLLINS, *La conquista árabe, 710-797*, Barcelona 1991, p. 143, n. 58.

more, if Alfonso was later able to take refuge among his maternal relatives, we may presume that they were people of a certain social standing, able to provide a home for the deposed king. All in all, what we are concerned with is the fact established by the chronicles that marriage to women of servile origin, or similar, was permitted, although probably not without a certain amount of criticism.

We know few of the names of the female members of the ruling family, but if we consider that some of them have managed, despite the paucity of our sources, to be remembered today, then undoubtedly they must have been women who had a very important part to play. On the other hand, the names of many other women are unknown to us. It seems likely that the role and ability of some of these royal wives was of less importance than others. I mean that, probably, not every queen enjoyed the same position or standing, that some of these unknown queens must not have been on the same level as characters like Ermesinda or Adosinda, for example, whose marriages can be used to explain the royal access of their husbands. Curiously, the majority of the female names that we do know are from the descendants of King Pelayo, while we are in almost total ignorance when it comes to those of the female descendants of Fruela. Therefore, we know the names of Pelayo's daughter, Ermesinda, and granddaughter, Adosinda, and the name of his grandson's wife, Munia. We may add the name of Fávila's wife, Froileuba, to the list, too.

Such knowledge is, to a certain extent, available to us only by pure chance; for example, the preservation of the inscription detailing the foundation work carried out by Fávila and Froileuba or the inscription of Santa María del Naranco, which mentions Paterna beside her husband, King Ramiro I. However, the fact that the names of these queens are inscribed in the first place and, especially, that the names of others are written in the chronicles is by no means entirely fortuitous.

The so-called *Testamentum* of the church of St. Salvador of Oviedo, or *Testamentum* of Alfonso II, is a document of enormous interest, firstly because it is one of the rare royal documents of the period, dated in the year 812, and secondly, because of what it contains. As well as the mention of a donation to the aforementioned church, there are various declarations, including a number on Astur royalty and its history<sup>8</sup>.

One of the more original contents of the *Testamentum* is the one which separates the Astur kingdom from the Gothic kingdom. The *Testamentum* is not alone in making this division: there are similar standpoints in several diverse accounts, such as in some of the manuscripts of the *Chronicle of Albelda*, especially those written north of the Pyrenees<sup>9</sup>, which date the end of the Visigothic kingdom to Rodrigo's defeat. In contrast, the majority of the sources develop the theme of Astur neogothicism, to a greater or lesser extent.

The brief history of the Astur kingdom and the family of Pelayo is outlined in the 812 text as the antithesis of the collapse of the Visigoths. It was God's will to save Pelayo from the scourge of the Muslims and he was to become the leading player. What is interesting for us is that the document highlights the female line of succes-

8 FLORIANO, *Diplomática española del período astur*, Oviedo 1949, I, num. 24.

9 ... *reges Gothorum defecerunt* (Moissac and Vatican manuscripts; GIL, 34a). Also in the so-called *Annales Portugalenses Veteres* which describe the end of their kingdom and mention their expulsion (P. DAVID, *Études historiques sur la Galice et le Portugal du VI<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris/Lisbon 1947, p. 291f).

sion, from Pelayo down to Alfonso II. In fact it is rather extraordinary, for not only are some of Alfonso II's antecedents not mentioned, but there is absolutely no reference to his grandfather, Alfonso I. This is quite strange since no other monarch in subsequent generations argued any similar case in laying claim to the *regnum*.

Pelayo lies at the very heart of all of the chronicles of the period. Any connection to him seems to have formed the basis for strengthening the Astur royal family. However, this is illustrated in our sources in different ways. The story recounted in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, in which Alfonso I leaves his home town, marries Pelayo's daughter and sets up home close to Pelayo and his family, serves to illustrate Alfonso's direct link with the Astur leader. On the other hand, the Oviedo version remains silent on this matter. Perhaps it was not in its interest to do so or it was sensitive to the issue. Both the *Chronicle of Albelda* and the *Rotensis*, however, point to Alfonso's presence in Asturias and his marriage to Ermesinda, sanctioned by Pelayo. The *Rotensis* even mentions Alfonso's collaboration with his father-in-law in various campaigns<sup>10</sup>.

The *Testamentum* goes even further. Its original nature is explained by certain traditions which make the link it establishes acceptable and so the channel traced by Alfonso to demonstrate his antecedents was sufficiently recognized. This reveals exactly what could be considered a family and a line of descent, with everything that this implies for matters of inheritance. It must have been socially appropriate to highlight paternal and maternal lines of succession alternately, since Alfonso II was able to assert his relation with Pelayo, although the only forebears involved were Fruela, his father, and Ermesinda, Pelayo's daughter. Therefore, the monarch could consider himself related to the family via a sinuous path which incorporated maternal lines of succession into paternal ones.

It is a path and a link in which apparently he had no adversary. The fact that Adosinda had had no children by Silo was to prove decisive, and this is noted in the Roda version, which stresses that if Alfonso occupied the post of governor of the palace, with his corresponding position at the head of the line of succession, then this was due to the fact that the royal couple had no male offspring. Were this not the case, Adosinda, as a descendant of Pelayo, would have passed her blood and rights onto him and his descendants.

Although it is not impossible that some of Fávila's male descendants lived on, they do not seem to have been considered in the direct fight for the throne. And although there could also have been male descendants of Mauregato, the *Testamentum*'s silence regarding matters of Alfonso I, stresses the non-connection of Mauregato with Pelayo and, therefore, the absence of any rights to the kingdom. Only the descendants of Fruela, the brother of Alfonso I, claimed their rights as pretenders to the crown, arguing historical justification, according to both versions of the *Chronicles* (13), on the basis of Fruela's participation with Alfonso in their various joint campaigns. Perhaps this mention was intended to attribute a leading role to Fruela which would have an influence in the future of his descendants<sup>11</sup>. And, of course, it would

10 BARBERO, VIGIL (see note 4) p. 340f.

11 This rather biased account of his role has led some to believe in a sort of two-headed kingdom. Fruela's inclusion in the account is, according to the Roda version, comparable to Alfonso I's only as far as their activities with Pelayo are concerned, and the meaning is also similar i.e. to strengthen his prestige.

not be a wild assumption to suggest, as illustrated especially in the Oviedo version of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, that mention was given at this time to the supposed relation of the *dux*, Pedro, to the Visigothic kings. They could draw their own conclusions regarding their rights to the throne from this connection with the Visigothic monarchy.

The silence of the *Testamentum* of 812 regarding some of the Astur monarchs may be due to a special interest in stressing Alfonso II's personal connection with Pelayo. However, it goes a little deeper than that, since, not only do Aurelio, Silo, etc disappear from the records but, as we have already seen, so does Alfonso I, to whom the king was linked by blood and name<sup>12</sup>. Of course, also connected to Alfonso I were all those who needed this genealogical backing to assert their claims to the kingdom. In fact, it goes as far as to avoid mentioning Ermesinda's husband in order to nullify the existence of Mauregato and the offspring of Alfonso I's brother, Fruela. In this way any connection which could have been claimed by Fruela's descendants was dismissed in what seems to have been a bitter struggle for the kingdom. In other words, Alfonso II and Fruela's descendants had no common ancestors. They were from a different family.

Moreover, a break from Visigothic tradition was introduced. Elections were considered the appropriate method for designating Visigothic monarchs<sup>13</sup>. What we find in the *Testamentum* is a clear statement of the principle of heredity: the descendants of Pelayo have the right to claim the kingdom.

Thus we can see that Alfonso marks the conclusion of the kingdom of the Goths and defines the end of an era. *Sed quia te offendit eorum prepotens iactantia, in era DCC XL VIII<sup>a</sup> simul cum rege roderico regni amisit gloria*. The Visigothic kingdom, punished for its sins, was just one more kingdom brought to an end by the will of God. For this reason, nothing that had anything specifically to do with it granted any rights. Nobody whose title was conferred by it really possessed one, since that kingdom had reached the end of the line. Rights only originated from he who, by God's will, had created a new realm, the Astur kingdom, one unconnected with the sins of the previous one. Only Pelayo offered this fundamental principle and only from him did any real claim to power originate.

The way Pelayo's royal accession is handled in the *Testamentum* of 812 is consistent with the rest of the text<sup>14</sup>. According to the Oviedo version of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, it was the Visigothic aristocracy who decided who was to wear the crown. In the Roda version, Pelayo became king thanks to his being elected by an Astur assembly. In the *Testamentum* of the church of St. Salvador of Oviedo, it is God's will which allows Pelayo to gain victory and become a king. It is not that this factor is overlooked in the *Chronicles*, but rather the reverse is true. In the 812 document there is no mention of the election in the foundation of the Pelayo dynasty.

12 The name of Alfonso II told another story – the importance of paternal family connections and of his grandfather. This is clear from the impression that Alfonso II's plans went to some extent against the prevailing tendencies and sought to counteract others.

13 However, we know that many of the last kings ascended to the throne by other means.

14 Amancio ISLA, *El adopcionismo y las evoluciones religiosas y políticas en el reino astur*, in: *Hispania*, forthcoming.



We may attempt to discover the reasons why Pelayo was actually given the title of *Princeps*, either by the man himself or, at a later date, by his immediate successors. The neogothic version was quite clear on this matter: the new monarch was elected king of the Goths by the Visigothic aristocracy which had taken refuge in Asturian lands. But from the most ancient of perspectives, what significance was there to Pelayo being king and just what was he king of? The *Testamentum* suggested the end of the Gothic kingdom and the succession of one kingdom over another (*Dan*, 2, 21) and stressed the existence of that divine intervention which places kings at the head of peoples.

The *Chronicle of Albelda* supports basically similar arguments. It highlights the founding nature of the battle of Covadonga which handed freedom back to the Christians and so *Astororum regnum diuina prouidentia exoritur* (XV, 1). Interpolation of the manuscripts also speaks of the emergence of the kingdom, indicating that Pelayo *cum Astures reuellauit* (33)<sup>15</sup>. Pelayo's exploits end in victory, thus corroborating the idea of divine will. The *Testamentum* states: *Ex qua peste, tua dextera Christe famulum tuum eruisti pelagium*. And so, following the punishment of the Visigoths' sins with the disappearance of their kingdom and the arrival of the Muslims, God wished to save his servant, Pelayo: it is the defining moment of the kingdom<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, against the pro-Gothic tendencies of the time, there were others which made Pelayo king of a new kingdom. Out of this transfer of power emerged a *regnum* desired by God, one which avoided the old vices of the Goths and, in place of Gothic *jactantia*, proposed the *seruus* or *vernulus* nature of the monarch. And, at the head of this new kingdom, there was a new king. This was an entirely new situation which ignored inheritance direct from the Visigothics.

Here is a matter of enormous significance. According to the *Testamentum*, Pelayo or his direct successors were not kings on account of being institutional or biological heirs to the Visigothic monarchy. They were new kings in a new kingdom, one saved on the insistence of God. They were monarchs who reigned *super Astures*, liberated from the Muslim government of Munuza: they did not reign over the Goths and their descendants, whose time had come to an end. From the neogothic perspective, the *Ad Sebastianum* continues to emphasize the idea of continuity, while the *Rotensis* displays rather more ambiguities and perhaps a number of compromises and so presents Pelayo as one elected by a *concilium*, convened under his *mandatum*. That is, it repeats traditional terminology even though this assembly was made up of Astures.

The *Testamentum* uses the term *sublimatus* to define Pelayo's accession. On numerous occasions Sánchez Albornoz describes the use of this word as an indication of support for the Visigoths, since it was the word used in the Visigothic kingdom to refer to such occasions. It is true that the term was used, along with others, to describe royal accessions during the time of the Visigothic kingdom<sup>17</sup>. However, it

15 The Chronicle of Alfonso III, as we have already seen, minimizes this leading role of the Astur people, but it occasionally emerges. For example, when it speaks of their victory at Lutos or, even rarer, in the *Ad Sebastianum*, when their success at Olalies is mentioned.

16 The use of *eruo* reminds one of *Ier* 1, 8ff, which speaks of divine protection over the chosen ones and which can even be understood from a royal perspective: *Ecce constitui te hodie super gentes et super regna ...*

17 *Sublimatus* implies to be raised up (*Etym.* X, 242). The traditional opinion regarding neogothicism, SÁNCHEZ ALBORNOZ, *La restauración del orden gótico*, in: *Orígenes ...* II, p. 623ff.

was simply part of the common political doctrine of the day and this explains its use in a text totally lacking a pro-Gothic stance<sup>18</sup>.

The 812 document demonstrated this ability to combat and defeat the enemy, which implies a certain version of the royal role<sup>19</sup>. Thus, Pelayo *christianorum asturumque gentem defendit*. His kingdom was, therefore, the kingdom of Astures and Christians, an ethnic kingdom, in the sense that Astur identity was all important, with all the significance that this may have had at that time. It coincided on this matter with the *Chronicle of Albelda*, which spoke of Pelayo rising up *cum Astures* and with the already mentioned references in the Roda version along similar lines. Every one of these situations, apart from the odd exception, was overlooked by the *Ad Sebastianum*. We may deduce from all this that the primitive Astur kingdom had no intention of recovering its Visigothic heritage, but rather a new kingdom was established, for a new people defined as Astures. Moreover, its ideologists soon underlined the Christianity factor. Covadonga was seen as the battleground where freedom for the *populus christianus* was achieved. A victory which paved the way for the emergence of the Astur kingdom, *Astorum regnum ... exoritur*, pairing the Christian population with the Astures who were defending themselves against the Muslims. In this sense we may understand the royal unction of Alfonso II, a ceremony intended to exalt not only the king but also his rule over a Christian people, a chosen people who had been saved thanks to the will of God and the achievements of Pelayo. It was impossible for the ceremony to ignore Visigothic precedents but there was scope for the acceptance of other spheres of influence<sup>20</sup>.

Alfonso II's genealogy outlined in the *Testamentum* is a true political manifesto, which certainly indicates a remarkable ability to develop a sophisticated political ideology. It was an attempt to put a brake on the claims of Visigothic emigrés, such as all those who bore the name Vitiza and who claimed to be *de stirpe regia*<sup>21</sup>. Basically it was a rebuttal to those who claimed to descend from Visigoth kings like Leovigild and Reccared, or from the descendants of Fruela, to whom Alfonso II probably owed his temporary deposition and imprisonment in a monastery<sup>22</sup>.

In the text of 812, Alfonso remembers Jacob and his return from exile and it is possible that he felt personally identified with this patriarch. We must bear in mind, however, that Jacob's exile was a result of grievances with his brother, Esau, over

18 We find this in the so-called Fredegar (IV, 45 and 82 among others) and Gregory the Great: ... *sicut sublimem illum inter homines potentia regalis ostendit* (Ep., VI, 5). In the *Clausula de ordinatione Pippini* it states that the new king *in regni solio sublimatus est* (M.G.H. Script.XV– I, p. 1).

19 This is also a feature of the Christian king: Gregory the Great, *In primum Regum exposit.*, IV, 5, 38 (MIGNE PL 79, 309); *De duodecim abusivis seculi*, IX (MIGNE PL 4, 957).

20 ISLA (as n. 14). LINEHAM seems to doubt King Alfonso's anointing (History and Historians of Medieval Spain, Oxford 1993, p. 132ff).

21 Beatus, *Apologeticus*, II, 61.

22 The chronicler's silence on the instigators of this revolt, in spite of their mention on other occasions, when even the name of his rescuers is referred to, always intrigued Sánchez Albornoz. He no doubt suspected that the coup had something to do with the family which subsequently ruled. We interpret that it is highly likely that the family which had been deposed and which opposed Alfonso the Chaste's plans for succession some years later must have been the same one to instigate or lead the revolt. – This monastery has been traditionally placed in Ablaña, near Mieres (SÁNCHEZ ALBORNOZ, *De Oviedo a Ablaña, Orígenes ...* II, p. 554f).

matters of inheritance. It is also possible that it was the king's family who sent him into exile, an event significantly kept quiet in both versions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, but mentioned in the *Chronicle of Albelda* since it was probably difficult to suppress it many decades later, even if it was politic to omit the names of the principle characters.

The continuing adoptionist controversy during the reign of Alfonso II must also be understood in the same context: that is, as a way of putting a block on the influence and tradition of the city of Toledo and, even better, advancing the kingdom's own proposals. The controversy centred on the criticisms of one sector of the Astur Church, supported in the end by the king, towards theological developments in Toledo and, of course, in dispute was the ability of the Toledo Church to set the standards for religious life in the Astur kingdom<sup>23</sup>. This also explains the rapprochement of the Franks and the role given in relations with the Carolingians to Basilisco, a person trained in theology, a royal ambassador and a critic of adoptionist ideas.

The site of the new capital city was also a step forward on the road towards self-assertion. A break from recent history was wanted, hence the move from Pravia to a new environment, Oviedo, which seems to have enjoyed prominence in Fruela I's day and was, apparently, Alfonso's birth place.

The growth of Santiago as a place of worship, although not mentioned in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, was another development which took place during these years and can be understood in the same context: the rift with the Church of Toledo and the establishment of a separate Church, in which Oviedo, with its recently founded bishopric, would enjoy a privileged position. This was another break away – and this has been rather underplayed – from Visigothic ecclesiastical tradition, for during that era there had been no episcopal see.

One of the corroborators on the 812 *Testamentum* was Teodemiro, who probably became bishop of Iria a few years later and may have been responsible for the »discovery« of St. James' body. We do not know if his presence in Oviedo in the year 812 was due to his position within the royal palace or if he travelled with the Iria clergy but in any case we may assume that the fact that he was known within royal circles helped him gain promotion to bishop a few years later. Bishop Quendulfo, whom we know from episcopal lists was head of the Iria bishopric, also visited Oviedo, and this fact demonstrates the connection between the royal family and the see, an extremely significant one if we consider the hostility displayed towards the monarchy in the far west of the kingdom. Moreover, it is traditionally accepted that Alfonso II was the first to erect a church on the site of the tomb<sup>24</sup>. In this task, as indeed in others, his work was continued by his namesake, Alfonso III.

If Alfonso II's Visigothic heritage was so unclear, we may ask ourselves what is the meaning of the statement in the *Chronicle of Albelda* regarding the restoration of the *ordo* of Toledo during Alfonso II's reign. Not even Sánchez Albornoz reached the rather extreme conclusion that the Church of Toledo had effectively been restored in

23 ABADAL, *La batalla del adopcionismo en la desintegración de la Iglesia visigoda*, Barcelona 1949; ISLA (as n. 14).

24 The legend originates from a document from *Tumbo A* in Santiago. The fabrication is published by FLORIANO (as n. 8) I, num. 36. Also *Chronicon Iriense*, 4; *Historia Compostelana*, I, 3 and 4 (in FLÓREZ, *España Sagrada XX*).

Oviedo. The Chronicles put a neogothic slant on something which is in fact rather obvious; that is, Alfonso II had set up a Church which had its centre in Oviedo, where he could assemble all his important people. He had also organized a *palatium* with all its dignitaries, like the already mentioned *comes palatii*, and with all its pageantry, as was seen on the day of his own unction. *Palatium* and *Ecclesia* presided the kingdom: some decades later it could only be understood as the restoration of the old order. And all this was now accompanied by a programme of construction work of great magnitude.

The chronicles, which had previously highlighted the collapse of the kingdom of the Goths, now emphasized the period of its restoration. According to the *Rotensis*, Fruela prohibited the supposed marriages of clergymen once encouraged by Vitiza. The *Chronicle of Albelda* also highlights a further step towards its supposed recovery, because at the time it was written, the restoration of Gothic ideals was already accepted as being the main aim of the kingdom i.e. the Christian kingdom was the renaissance of the Visigothic kingdom<sup>25</sup>.

The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* describes the reign of Nepociano as being an *invasio* against an *electus* king, Ramiro I. Once again the term *electus* is used in the chronicles to refer to one who gains control without strictly being the natural successor to the throne, thereby justifying other not necessarily hereditary methods. We know, however, that Nepociano became king and, furthermore, there are distinct suspicions that question Sánchez Albornoz's idea of Ramiro being the king selected by Alfonso, to the point that we may have to consider whether it was not Ramiro himself who opposed Oviedo's plans<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, perhaps, the chronicles place him in Castille in search of a wife, which would explain why he did not automatically become king. Moreover, the *Chronicle of Albelda* points out that it was Ramiro's victory over Nepociano which allowed him to take control of the kingdom, *et sic regnum accepit*<sup>27</sup>.

The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* dates Ramiro's *iam factus rex* at taking place after the capture of Nepociano, who had sought refuge in Asturias Primoriense, probably in an area where he had both property and support. The aforementioned *factus rex* possibly implies the existence of ceremonial practices which formalized Ramiro's accession. Ramiro would have awaited Nepociano's capture and punishment before going ahead with his unction ceremony. We may presume that if Alfonso II had been anointed, then Ramiro would want to do likewise to become king.

As we have noted, the *Nomina regum Legionensium* reports that Nepociano was king after Alfonso II. We also know that he had held the post of Palace Count in Alfonso II's court, an office which we normally assume to have been the next step in the line towards royal inheritance. Yet the two existing versions of the *Nomina* still

25 SÁNCHEZ ALBORNOZ asserted that if the Chronicle of Alfonso III remained silent on these matters, it was precisely in order not to highlight them, as if the survival of Gothic material had never been in question (*Investigaciones sobre historiografía hispana medieval*, Buenos Aires 1967, p. 61). Perhaps the Chronicle of Alfonso III was not able to admit the existence of neogothicism in Alfonso II.

26 SÁNCHEZ ALBORNOZ, *Tras cuarenta años de paz interior*, in: *Orígenes III*, p. 7f. Also, BONNAZ (as n. 1) p. 200 ff.

27 BARBERO, *VIGIL* (as n. 4) p. 322f.

describe Nepociano as *cognatus* of Alfonso II and the Roda version uses the term *adeptus* to refer to his accession, the same as it had used to explain how Silo became king following his marriage to a member of the royal family. We must presume that the Roda version saw something similar in Nepociano's case.

The meaning of the term *cognatus* has generated a certain amount of doubt. I believe that the major problem lies in the chronology. It is difficult to believe that Alfonso could be succeeded in the year 843 by the brother-in-law of a mysterious sister, whose father had died in the year 768. Nor is it implausible, as Sánchez Albornoz pointed out, for Alfonso to have been succeeded by someone in his seventies<sup>28</sup>. This would coincide with the term *adeptus* and the normal meaning of *cognatus* at the time the *Nomina* was written i.e. in the first few decades of the X<sup>th</sup> century.

Ramiro's coup against an old man in the final stages of his life and the uprising as a whole may be better understood if what was at stake was not simply succeeding Alfonso II's but taking over the line of succession i.e. if in this way the line was to pass on to those who were descendants of Fruela and Pedro, the *dux*, and therefore on to those who declared their descent from Visigothic kings or on the other hand, from descendants of Pelayo. We know, in fact, that a character named Aldroito played a leading role in the struggle. In the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* he is referred to as *comes palatii*, while the *Chronicle of Albelda* describes him as a tyrant. He may therefore have been an elderly Nepociano's chosen heir and must have acted like a pretender to the throne.

It is also important to bear in mind once again that if Nepociano became king thanks to his wife, then this was still a possibility in the middle of the IX century. We must also remember that the link back to Pelayo was considered to be fundamental in certain sectors and that if this connection happened to be along female family lines, then it was of no less importance. As pointed out by Barbero and Vigil, the daughters of kings could pass on the kingdom to their husbands<sup>29</sup>, but this was only in the case of the descendants of Pelayo, that is, it is in the strictly Astur milieu where this trend occurs. We find no similar traits in the other royal family. This points to a leading role on the part of (some) women in the royal family but also to the prestige attached by some to Pelayo's blood, though obviously not by those descending from Fruela who countered these trends with the neogothic political practices of these trends and sought to legitimize their accession to the throne via elections, even when these took place in uncertain circumstances like in the case of Ramiro I.

Although such an important part was played by women, this did not mean that they themselves inherited the throne, for, as long as there was no controversy, the crown passed to their adult male offspring (Fávila, Fruela I, Alfonso II). It rather meant that in the absence of adult sons, the women could transfer the kingdom to their husbands. This, as we widely observed in the case of Silo, implied the inclusion

28 *Iam factus rex*, p. 35. CASARIEGO, and others who have followed his idea, believe that *cognatus* means to have the same blood from the female line, which was not at all clear in the year 900 (Una revolución asturiana en el siglo IX. El interregno del conde Nepociano, in: Boletín del Instituto de Estudios Asturianos 23, 1969). It is not impossible that *cognatus* may still have meant a relative from either of the two sides, but in *Liber Iudiciorum*, IV, 2, 18 and in Braulio, Ep. 28 (I. MADDOZ, Epistolario de S. Braulio de Zaragoza, Madrid 1941), it means brother-in-law.

29 BARBERO, VIGIL (as n. 4) p. 327ff.

of royal wives and their marriages at the heart of political conflict. Naturally, these women handed the kingdom down to their descendants<sup>30</sup>, and for this reason Fávila's children were not considered even if they did reach adulthood, and it is also possible that Alfonso II would not have become king if his aunt Adosinda had had children by Silo.

We may be inclined to think that this procedure came into effect because of the shortage of male descendants from Pelayo and Alfonso I, but this form of accession nevertheless required a general acceptance. From this we may deduce that there were already quite similar guidelines for matters of family and inheritance in Astur circles.

We know from the chronicles that Ramiro I assembled his army in Lugo, which leads us to suppose that his support was to be found especially in the far western regions of the kingdom. Galicia had always been one of the areas more resistant to the power of the Oviedo kings, which explains the numerous revolts during the reigns of Fruela and Silo and why Alfonso II was forced to send Mahmud there, an Andalusian emigré sufficiently removed from the politics of the area to remain loyal to the Oviedo king<sup>31</sup>.

Ramiro's forces went into battle against those of Nepociano, which were made up of Astures and Basques<sup>32</sup>. It was not so much, or simply, a war of one people against another, as one which pitted against each other those sectors which both rivals were able to mobilize through their respective spheres of influence. So, caught up in the battle were those sectors in and around Oviedo loyal to Nepociano and whoever he could muster from among the Basques by means of other contacts or perhaps simply because of who the enemy actually was.

The defeat of Nepociano took place on the bridge over the Narcea<sup>33</sup>, i.e. on Astur territory. As Sánchez Albornoz has pointed out, this perhaps illustrates Nepociano's unfitness for action but above all it reflects the speed and preparation displayed by the rebel leader against the king. This calls into question the often expressed idea that Ramiro acted with a haste bordering on improvisation.

Moreover, we are not discussing here a revolt by the Galician *populi* (who in fact had fought against the other branch of the ruling family – Fruela I and Silo – many years before), striving to free themselves from Astur domination. What we have is a planned campaign against the ruling monarch to steal control of Oviedo and the kingdom. The fact that Ramiro visited the eastern regions of the kingdom in search of a wife may reveal his intention to establish certain relationships which could consolidate his support and counter that gathered by the Oviedo king.

Ramiro's victory also brought about a change in the policies undertaken since the reign of Alfonso II. This explains the new wave of construction which took place in

30 They would probably make a determined effort to achieve this (P. STAFFORD, *Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages*, in: D. BAKER ed., *Medieval Women*, Oxford 1978).

31 On Mahmud, ISLA (as n. 4) p. 12f.

32 Sánchez Albornoz has already criticized the theory that Nepociano was a Basque. His name is Latin and we find another Nepociano confirming Silo's donation in 775 (FLORIANO, *Diplomática* [as n. 8] I, 1). The only argument in support of his supposed Basque origin is the collaboration of the Basques in his battle with Ramiro and this may be explained by other reasons, while the wildest argument is to suggest that he was related to Alfonso II's mother.

33 *Iam factus rex*, p. 38.

Oviedo, the punishment of his defeated enemies – Nepociano was blinded and banished to a monastery (both traditional Visigothic punishments) – and the virtual civil war waged during his entire reign<sup>34</sup>. Much activity for such a relatively short time as king. We may deduce the importance of the period despite the rather laconic style of the chronicles<sup>35</sup>.

The unceasing civil war and the punishments against his enemies must have produced their own consequences. Firstly, the annihilation of other potential pretenders. Aldroito's execution and that of his children indicate a pre-meditated attempt to achieve this aim. Another consequence that we must bear in mind is that with this victory he would get his hands on the royal treasure and, perhaps without even having to resort to Visigothic legislation, at least a part of the estate of the defeated parties would also be confiscated by the new monarch.

Both versions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* refer to the accession of Ordoño, Ramiro's son and heir, as *successio*. His reign is described as marking a change in direction from that of his father. His character, *modestus et patiens*, was diametrically opposed to his father's and in harmony with the fundamental royal virtues which the chronicler himself had used in connection with other monarchs like the Visigothic king Ervig. Isidore of Seville had praised these virtues in general and in reference to great leaders such as Moses or King David<sup>36</sup>. The chronicler is suggesting the king's desire to find peace and his ability to overcome conflicts with his opponents through forgiveness, a policy made possible by the drastic measures of his father<sup>37</sup>.

Ordoño's character and methods did not spare him entirely from all conflicts, for in the first few years of his reign the Basques revolted, demonstrating exactly how difficult it was to control them, and perhaps even because of specific grievances with Ordoño, as Ramiro's successor, himself.

Strangely, this yearning for peace seems to contradict the raids Ordoño made outside his territories. Both the *Chronicle of Albelda* and the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*

34 The *Rotensis* twice mentions Ramiro's tendency towards civil war (*Rot.*, 24). Firstly, when it speaks of his push towards them and, secondly, when the buildings in Oviedo could be constructed at the end of this war.

35 The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* fails to mention an obscure reference made in the *Chronicle of Albelda*, which informs us that Ramiro blinded thieves as a punishment and burnt sorcerers to death. Although there are no specific references we can appreciate the violence of the period. The removal of one's eyes is an unusual punishment for thieves. I have found a certain similarity in *LI*, VI, 5, 16 and in some orders made by Charlemagne in which progressive blindness is used as punishment for the same crime (*Capitulary of Herstal del 779*, 12 and 13, in: M.G.H. *Capit. regum Francorum I*, p. 49 and 51). There is also a clear relationship between theft and blindness in an episode of the life of Millán in which the stealers of his horse suffer the divine punishment of loss of sight (*Vita S. Emiliani*, XXIV, VÁZQUEZ DE PARGA, Madrid 1943, p. 31). In any case, blindness is frequently used as a punishment for revolt against the king (*LI*, VI, 1, 7), which could indicate that by *latrones* they were speaking of those who opposed the monarch. The burning of sorcerers is in accordance with *Cod. Theod.* IX, 16, 1. In *Cod. Theod.*, IX, 16, 4 some forms of sorcery are punished with death.

36 *De ortu*, XXV (39), XXXIII (56) (MIGNE PL 83); *Sent.* III, 50, 2. It is also present in liturgy. Modesty is a feature of the king which contrasted with the cruelty of the tyrant. Perhaps the chronicler was in some way condemning Ramiro I's conduct?

37 Perhaps it was natural to assume the continuation of a tradition, very clear throughout the history of the Visigoths, in which a successor relieves the tension created by his predecessor.

are in agreement and praise his victories over the Muslims. In truth, there is no contradiction. Rather, it is simply that there were two objectives behind the same operation. To put an end to the conflicts within his kingdom, Ordoño had to deflect them to the outside and at the same time show the nobility the advantages of an aggressive policy in the south.

Following the years of efficient rule by force and the elimination of his rivals, Ordoño could then begin attempts at reconciliation. Apparently, he married Munia, or Muniadomna, whose identity we know only through Pelayo, the XII<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Oviedo, and several rather dubious Oviedo documents. It is the same name as the name of Fruela's wife, the mother of Alfonso II. Perhaps there was some family connection, but we must be careful here as Munia was in fact a common name. What is beyond doubt, though, is that their first born was named Alfonso, the name of the great Astur kings, but not of the descendants of Fruela. The names of their three other sons (Fruela and Vermudo we are sure of, Odoario not so much) do come from Fruela's line. We must ask ourselves in this case if Alfonso was named after his mother's side of the family and whether this was actually a peace-making initiative on the part of Ordoño: to marry a descendant from the other branch of the family, and begin a trend, which we can see in the case of Alfonso III and his descendants, sometimes naming the first born child after the mother's side of the family<sup>38</sup>. In any case, recovery of this name and Alfonso's reign itself brought about a certain stability as far as Astur traditions are concerned.

As an illustration of this, we can find an inscription by Alfonso III and his wife, Jimena on the gate of the city walls of Oviedo. It commemorates Alfonso II and states that the current sovereign is his successor and namesake, the fourth to rule from his *prosapia*<sup>39</sup>. This means, firstly, that the king recognized his relation to Alfonso II but also implies that he considered king Nepociano to be one of his predecessors, otherwise he would not have been the fourth monarch down from Alfonso II. Far from being condemned to oblivion as a tyrant, Nepociano was granted royal status, and commemorated as king and this obviously revealed the real conditions under which Ramiro had become king. Could this admission have had something to do with Alfonso III's parentage? Might Ordoño's patience and humility have led him to seek a wife belonging to Alfonso II's family, and therefore to Nepociano's? All this could explain why, in the *Nomina regum Legionensium*, where the names of some kings are suppressed for a variety of reasons, Nepociano is named as successor to Alfonso II.

What does seem clear, however, is a desire for integration and this formed the basis for the almost hagiographic characterization of Alfonso II in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, and in the continuity of some of his policies, like, for instance, the development of Jacobean worship, with a bishop chosen by the monarch. All of

38 The verses dedicated to Leodegundia, daughter of Ordoño I, underline the importance of her mother's family. LACARRA, *Textos navarros del código de Roda*, in: *Estudios de la Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón I* (1945) p. 82. Amancio ISLA, *Realezas hispánicas del año mil*, forthcoming; ID., *Nombres de reyes* (as n. 4) p. 24f.

39 J. URÍA RIU, *Cuestiones histórico-arqueológicas relativas a la ciudad de Oviedo de los siglos VIII al X*, in: *Symposio sobre cultura asturiana en la Edad Media*, Oviedo 1967, p. 311.



which was linked to the difficulties the king faced in consolidating his rule in those territories. His banishment from the kingdom at the beginning of his reign by one Fruela Vermúdez, described in the *Chronicle of Albelda* as *comes Gallecie* and whom, through his name and geographical link, we may assume to have belonged to the ruling family<sup>40</sup>, not only allows us to draw more parallels with the two like-named kings, but also illustrates the problems in establishing procedures for royal accession.

40 *Chronicle of Albelda*, 12. The patronymic *Veremudus* is found in some manuscripts of the chronicle of Sampiro. Other references to *Lemundi* or *Gemundi* seem to me less likely (PÉREZ DE URBEL, *Sampiro, su crónica y la monarquía leonesa en el siglo X*, Madrid 1952, p. 275, 348f.).