

Merchants and Muleteers in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula (12th to 14th centuries).

Individuals, regulations and circulation

di Rúben Filipe Teixeira da Conceição¹

Abstract: The Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula between the 12th and early 14th centuries is a space marked by various (in)definitions, and it was during this period that the frontier between the Kingdoms of Portugal and Castile was built and consolidated. However, it was not a rigid frontier, as many people crossed it. This article will focus on identifying and analysing the merchants and muleteers who travelled in this space, individuals who, due to their personal condition, were highly mobile, which makes them an interesting object of study for understanding how the border was structured and imposed.

Key words: merchants; muleteers; trade circuits; Northwest Iberian Peninsula; Middle Ages

Introduction

The Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula was no exception to the socio-political changes that marked the whole of Europe throughout the High Middle Ages, with the revival of old trade routes intensifying the mobility of individuals, especially merchants and muleteers. This article will focus on them, to identify who these individuals were, what regulations they were subjected to, what

¹ This article is the result of a paper presented at the VI edition of l'Apprendistato dello Storico, which took place between 22 and 24 January 2024 at the Sapienza Università di Roma. It was developed out as part of the doctoral project "Medieval Roads. Between Southern Galicia and Northern Portugal (1220 to 1311)", funded by the FCT (<https://doi.org/10.54499/2021.05262.BD>). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9304-0823>. The author is also a collaborator at CITCEM (I&D unit 4059 of FCT). Institutional DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04059/2020>.

products they transported and what relation they had with fairs, markets and seaports.

To understand their dynamics at a local level, we must understand the various (in)definitions that marked this territory between the 12th and early 14th centuries. The military advance of the Christian Kingdoms southwards against the Muslim powers and the corresponding socio-economic impact, or the internal disputes and conflicts within the Northern Kingdoms, led to the creation of new power structures. An example of this was the independence of the County of Portucale from the Kingdom of León and Castile, still in the 12th century, and the subsequent strengthening of Portugal as a differentiated political unit².

During this period, efforts were made to build and consolidate a frontier line, stretching from the mouth of the Minho River to the Laboreiro mountain range, continuing through the Peneda-Gerês and Barroso mountains to the territory of Bragança, and from there southwards. It was an artificial border, created for defensive purposes, combining geographical landmarks with the existing fortresses, and which solidified over time, remaining in the memory of those who were divided by it³.

Around the mid-13th century, this system was obsolete, leading to a profound reform by the Portuguese monarchs - and which led to a similar response from the opposite side - with the construction of new castles and the adaptation of existing ones to the building techniques introduced by the gothic architecture, acquiring new defensive capabilities while seeking to guarantee territorial integrity through visual control⁴. But it also involved the granting of charters to existing populations or the founding of new settlements⁵, as well as an administrative reorganisation. This was achieved through the creation of smaller geographical areas, known as *Julgados*, in an attempt by the King to optimise the control of the territory, with the royal authority being exercised directly through his local agents at a military, judicial and fiscal level⁶. It should

² T.J. Rodrigues, *D. Afonso Henriques e o Alto Minho*, in «Revista de Guimarães», 106 (1996), pp. 79-93; J. Marques, *A fronteira do Minho, espaço de convivência galaico-minhota, na Idade Média*, in *Estudos em homenagem a Luís António de Oliveira Ramos*, Porto 2004, Vol. 2, pp. 697-712.

³ I. Gonçalves, *Entre a Peneda e o Barroso - uma fronteira galaico-minhota em meados de Duzentos*, in «História: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto», 15 (1998) 1, pp. 63-76.

⁴ M.J. Barroca, *Fortificações e Povoamento no Norte de Portugal (Séc. IX a XI)*, in «Portugalia», Nova Série, XXV (2004), pp. 181-203; M.J. Barroca, *D. Dinis e a Arquitetura militar portuguesa*, in «História: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto», 15 (1998) 1, pp. 801-822.

⁵ J.A. Sottomayor-Pizarro, *Organização do Território e Fiscalidade Régia em Portugal: as Origens (Sécs. XII-XIV)*, in «Edad Media. Revista de Historia», 22 (2021), pp. 55-76. The maps published by the author demonstrate how the strengthening of the royal authority shaped the “Norte Senhorial”, but especially the border spaces.

⁶ J.A. Sottomayor-Pizarro, *Para o estudo da fiscalidade régia em Portugal. As inquirições gerais dos séculos XIII e XIV*, in «População e Sociedade» 31 (2019), pp. 8-9.

be noted that this was not a unilateral process, but one that was carried out by both sides, acting in response to each other.

But if in times of conflict the local populations were called upon to defend the territory, in times of peace the panorama was completely different, making the border more permeable. Silvia Cernadas refers to «this is an example of a *particular* border because there is no economic, social or historical division that motivates it, but it is [...] a politically constructed border»⁷, in which coexistence was, and still is, the basis of relations between both sides, whether for emotional ties or for economic reasons, such as cattle grazing or trade.

The individuals and their role in the medieval society

As there is no documental typology dedicated to merchants and muleteers for the analysed chronology, we had to resort to a wide range of sources. These include documents issued by the monarch, especially charters, fair charters and royal enquiries, but also those written in ecclesiastical contexts, such as cathedrals and monasteries, including wills. However, we must bear in mind that the coverage is not homogeneous, both in the quantity and the quality of information, leading to certain areas being easier to study in detail than others. For example, both the Galician province of Pontevedra and the Portuguese region of Trás-os-Montes suffer from fewer sources, making it difficult to achieve a more accurate analysis. This is due to the difficulty of accessing certain archival sources, such as the ones from Tui's Cathedral (Pontevedra), or the almost complete lack of information-producing centres (Trás-os-Montes).

Elisa Ferreira Priegue, more than two decades ago, posed some questions⁸ that we will try to answer in this article. Who were these individuals and what were their origins? Did religion hinder their activity? Were they within the prevailing socio-political system or against it? What set them apart from other individuals who had to sell their produce in order to survive?

In many cases, the term *merchant* included small and medium-sized traders who supplied the towns and cities, wandering through the streets or selling in tents, within pre-established places, such as the local market or fair, often in competition with the craftsmen⁹. We know some of these places from documents, such as a royal sentence from 1317 on the sale of Ribadouro wine by the residents

⁷ S. Cernadas Martínez, *Medievo, fronteira e mobilidade entre Galicia e Portugal*, in U-B. Diéguez Cequiel (a cura di), *Exilios, Migracións e Fronteiras*, Santiago de Compostela 2019, p. 278.

⁸ E.Ferreira Priegue, *Mercaderes gallegos de la Edad Media. Una aproximación pendiente*, in «SEMATA, Ciencias Sociais e Humanidades», 12 (2000), pp. 25-26.

⁹ M.H.C. Coelho, *Mestirais e Comerciantes*, in J. Serrão; A.H.O. Marques (dir), *Nova História de Portugal. Vol. III: Portugal em Definição de Fronteiras (1096-1325) – do Condado Portucalense à Crise do Século XIV*. A cura di M.H.C. Coelho; A.L.C. Homem, Lisboa 1996, pp. 284-286.

of the municipalities of Porto, Vila Nova and Gaia. It stipulated that wine that wasn't from their own harvest should be sold on barges, and everything that entered the mouth of the Douro River could be sold on barges or on the beach until St Martin's Day¹⁰. Another example is that of Domingos Martins, who in 1318 received a place in the porch of the Lamego Cathedral where he could sell his goods, with the boundaries of the space assigned to him being drawn up¹¹.

Others had a stronger itinerant component, wandering between the urban centres, the different fairs and markets scattered across the kingdom, to buy and sell their products, with their activity being often conditioned by the local dynamics - for example, by seasonal issues or by the organisation of large festivals and religious feasts¹². These were joined by the muleteers¹³, who were responsible for transporting goods between the interior and the coast¹⁴, often accumulating the sale of goods that belonged to them or that were given to them for this purpose. It was normal for many of these muleteers to have ties to the king¹⁵ or to ecclesiastical institutions, such as Braga's Cathedral, who had an *azemelaria* in Cossourado, halfway between Braga and the mouth of the river Lima¹⁶.

¹⁰ *Corpus Codicum Latinorum et Portugalensium eorum qui in Archivo Municipali Portocalensi asservantur antiquissimorum. Diplomata, Chartae et Inquisitiones. Vol. I.* Porto 1891, pp. 61-62.

¹¹ A.M.S. Saraiva, *A Sé de Lamego na primeira metade do século XIV (1296-1349)*, Leiria 2003, pp. 561-562 (561).

¹² P.M. Cunha, *Entre o abastecimento da vila e o comércio regional - feiras mensais e quinzenais na Idade Média portuguesa*, in A.A. Andrade; G.M da Silva (a cura di), *Abastecer a cidade na Europa medieval*, Lisboa 2020, pp. 586-587.

¹³ J.B. de Macedo, *Almocreve* in J. Serrão (a cura di), *Dicionário da História de Portugal, Vol. I/A-D*, Lisboa 1971, pp. 119-120.

¹⁴ Such as those mentioned in the royal enquiry at Cabeceiras de Basto, transporting wine from the mid-Tâmega region to Guimarães, in the Entre-Douro-e-Minho region. *Portogaliae Monumenta Historica: a saeculo octavo post Christum usque ad quintum decimum: Inquisitiones I, Fascicoli IV e V*, Lisboa 1897, p. 662. «Hic incipit inquisitio Judicatus Cabeyzeiris Basti et omnium parrochianorum ejusdem Judicatus et Ecclesie Sancti Senorine [...] Item, dixit quod quot almocreves venerint pro vino et pausaverint cum vino per terminum Lobele debent dare portaginem, nisi almocreves Vimaran. qui non debent dare portaginem, et omnes alii debent dare portaginem nisi homines Bracare qui nolunt dare».

¹⁵ *Vimaranis Monumenta Historica: a saeculo nono post Christum usque ad vicesimum. Tomo II*, Guimarães 1908, p. 186. «De Villa de Guimaraees [...] habet unum Castinarium in fundo de Rua de Gatos, in quo debent stare azemelas domini Regis Et quando dominus Rex fuerit in Villa Vimaranis Maiordomj debent ei dare xjm super postas cotidie et si ibi non fuerit non debent ei dare».

¹⁶ A.V. da Costa, *Liber Fidei: Sanctae Bracarensis Ecclesiae*, Braga 1965-1990, Tomo III, pp. 20-22. Regarding the service provided by muleteers to religious institutions, see I. Gonçalves, «Viajar na Idade Média - de e para Alcobaça na primeira metade do século XV», in Iria Gonçalves (a cura di), *Imagens do mundo medieval*, Lisboa 1988, pp. 177-200.

There were also those whose area of activity was much wider, who Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho defined as «long-haul merchants»¹⁷. They balanced their activity between import and export trade, buying and selling at the right time and value, which initially attracted the condemnation of the Church.

As time went by, these individuals began to appear in various documents. For example, they appear as litigants in legal matters, such as the one presented in Baiona, in 1317, that opposed a group of merchants from Valença and Paio Eanes, represented by Rui Peres¹⁸. They also appear in wills, such as the one from João Viegas, archbishop of Braga, from 1255, that mentions a Florentine merchant¹⁹, or that of Miguel Peres, canon of the cathedral of Lamego in 1250, in which he ordered the payment of eight *morabitanos burgenses* owed to João Lombardi, merchant from Palencia²⁰.

In other cases, they appear as service providers to ecclesiastical elites, as was the case of João Peres, a merchant from Bragança. In 1292, he received a payment from the archbishop of Braga, Frei Telo, to dress his company and to pay the debts owed to the merchants of the Roman Court²¹. They also appear as urban delegates, such as the Afonso Eanes who, in 1293, is nominated, along with the knight Estevão Eanes, to represent the town of Bragança to King Dinis' Court²².

At the same time, there seemed to be, at least in certain circles, a dedication to religious works. In Braga, between 1274 and 1324, we see 31 merchants associated with the brotherhood of São João de Souto, either as members or doing

¹⁷ M.H.C. Coelho, *Mesteirais e Comerciantes*, cit., pp. 286-288.

¹⁸ E. Portela Silva, *La región del obispado de Tuy en los siglos XII a XV. Una sociedad en la expansión y en la crisis*, Santiago de Compostela 1976, p. 392.

¹⁹ M.R.B. Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae Portugaliae (1071-1325)*. Lisboa 2010, p. 106. «Item mando Johanni de Pinello procuratori meo in curia cui non det (?) providi in beneficio aliquo C morabitanos et unam equitaturam mediocrem de mille libris Turonensibus quas dimisi in curia penes Dulcem mercatorem florentinum et socios suos».

²⁰ M.R.B. Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae Portugaliae*, cit., p. 501. «Item debet Joham Lunbardi mercatori Palentino VIII morabitanos Burgenses».

²¹ A.V. da Costa, *O Bispo D. Pedro e a Organização da Diocese de Braga*. Vol II. Coimbra 1959, p. 459. «Sepan todos quantos esta carta vieren commo nos Frey Tello por la gracia de Dios arçebispo de Bragaa otorgamos et connoscemos que devemos a vos Johan Perez dicto Março mercador de Bragança et veziño de Sant Yago quatro mille et nuevecientos morabitanos pera vestir nuestra conpanna e seys mille et seys cientos morabitanos de Leon de ocho sueldos el morabitano et quinientas libras de la moneda de Portugal pera pagar deubdas que nos deviamos en la corte de Roma a los mercadores en pro e en serviço de la nuestra eglefia de Bragaa de que fuemos bien pagados e nos tenemos por bien [...]».

²² M.C.A.C. Alegre; P.M.C.P. Costa, *Torre de Moncorvo na Idade Média: fontes documentais.*, Bragança 2003, pp. 1-2.

business with the institution²³. Of these, four are referred in more than one document, with Domingos Pires Palhão being mentioned on four occasions between 1308 and 1317. Although it is not possible to determine any degree of kinship between the individuals under analysis, we found three other merchants with the surname Pires – Estevão, Gonçalo, Afonso and Durão - and a fourth called Durão Palhão – maybe the father of Domingos -, which leads us to consider the possibility that these men were relatives. If such an association were to occur, it might be a family with some relevance in Braga society at the beginning of the 14th century - given their economic activity - a position reinforced by their connection to the brotherhood.

It should be noted that this brotherhood oversaw a hospital, whose first documented reference dates to 1145, when the Archbishop of Braga, João Peculiar, donated this structure to the knights of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem²⁴. A similar action took place in Zamora in 1167, when Bishop Estevão authorised Pedro Díaz and his companions, merchants of the city, to build a church and appoint a cleric in the place where they had built a hospital for the poor, next to the *new* bridge²⁵. Examples such as these are clear signs of the growing tolerance towards these individuals and their growing recognition within the society they were part of, as a result of the services they provided²⁶.

Regulations and circulation

A first approach to the spatial distribution of merchants and muleteers shows them with a broad presence, as it was possible to locate references in 13 Galician and 18 Portuguese locations. However, the major difference between the two

²³ J. Marques, *Os pergaminhos da Confraria de S. João do Souto da cidade de Braga (1186-1545)*, Braga 1982.

²⁴ A.V. da Costa, *Liber fidei*, cit., Tomo I, p. 237. For more information about the Hospital of São João de Souto, see L.M.C. Silva, *Arquitetura das estruturas de assistência no Norte de Portugal (século XII a XVI)*, Porto 2017, pp. 127-128.

²⁵ J-L. Martín, *Documentos Zamoranos. I. Documentos del Archivo Catedralicio de Zamora. Primera Parte (1128-1261)*, Salamanca 1982, pp. 21-22.

²⁶ M.H.C. Coelho, *Mesteirais e Comerciantes*, cit., pp. 286-288. For a broader approach to medieval portuguese brotherhoods, see M.H.C. Coelho, *As confrarias medievais portuguesas: espaços de solidariedades na vida e na morte*, in *Viajeros, Peregrinos, Mercaderes en el Occidente Medieval – Actas de la XVIII Semana de Estudios Medievales de Estella. 22-26 de julio de 1991*, Pamplona 1992, pp. 149-183 or the *1^{as} Jornadas Luso-Espanholas de História Medieval* of 1972, published in 1973 and dedicated to poverty and assistance to the poor in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. Regarding Galicia, we must highlight the research of Robert Plötz, on brotherhoods related to the cult and pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, *Misericordia, fraternidad y las cofradías de Santiago*, in «Ad limina: revista de investigación del Camino de Santiago y las peregrinaciones», 10 (2019), pp. 153-175.

areas lies in their distribution across the territory. In Galicia there is a high concentration in the episcopal city of Ourense, with 127 mentions, accounting for around 77 % of the references. In contrast, the modern province of Pontevedra has almost no records. On the Portuguese side there is a greater dispersion, with Braga, Guimarães, Porto and Lamego sharing around 78 % of the mentions, with the area of Trás-os-Montes east of the Tua river being almost non-existent.

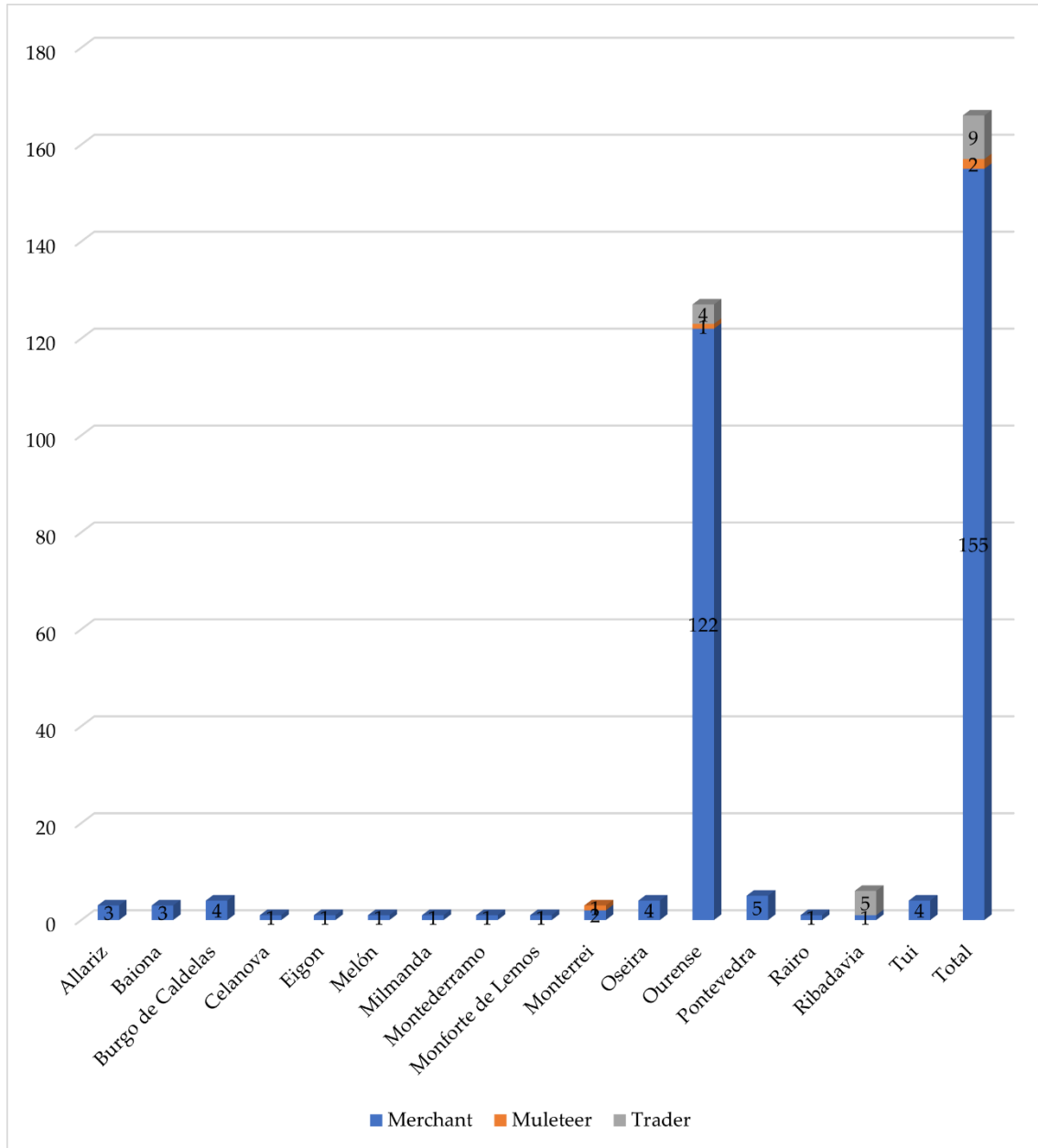


Figure 1 - Spatial distribution of individuals (no.) in southern Galicia (12th to early 14th century).

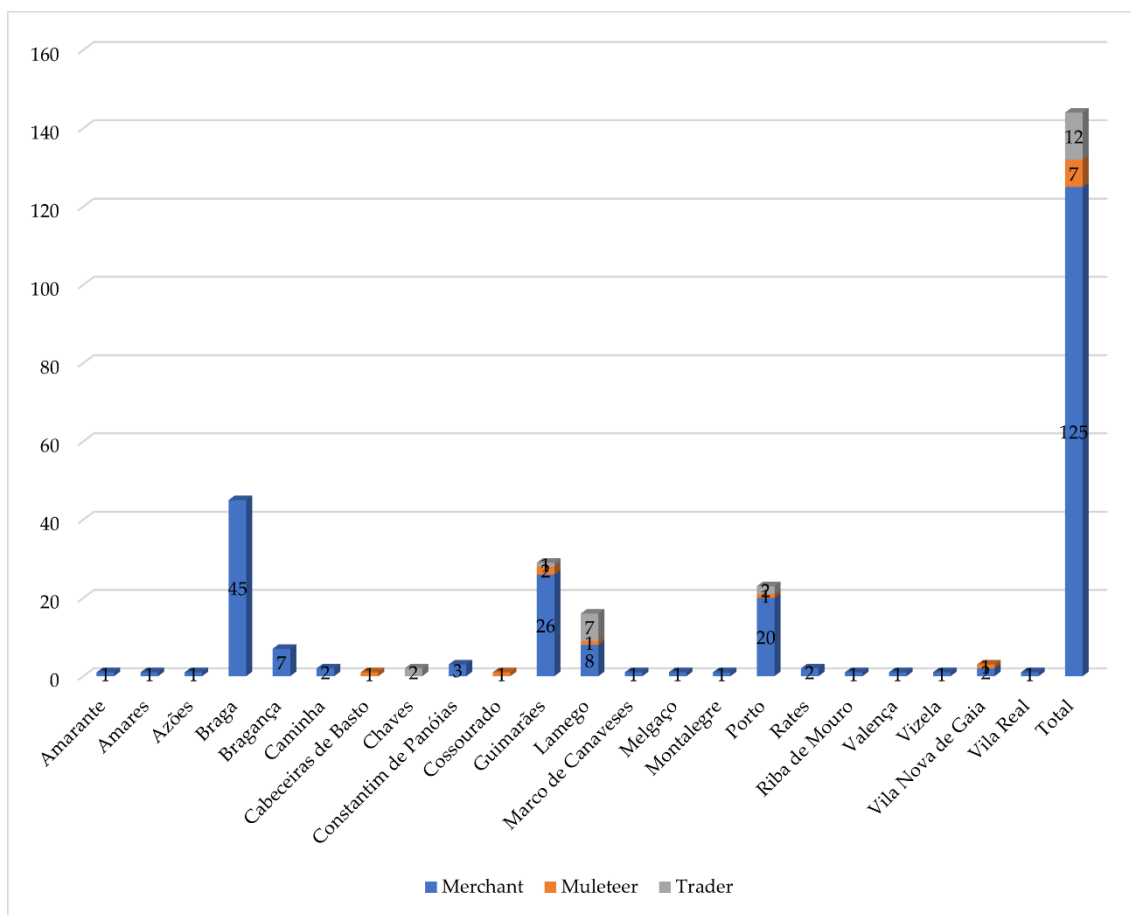


Figure 2 - Spatial distribution of individuals (no.) in northern Portugal (12th to early 14th century).

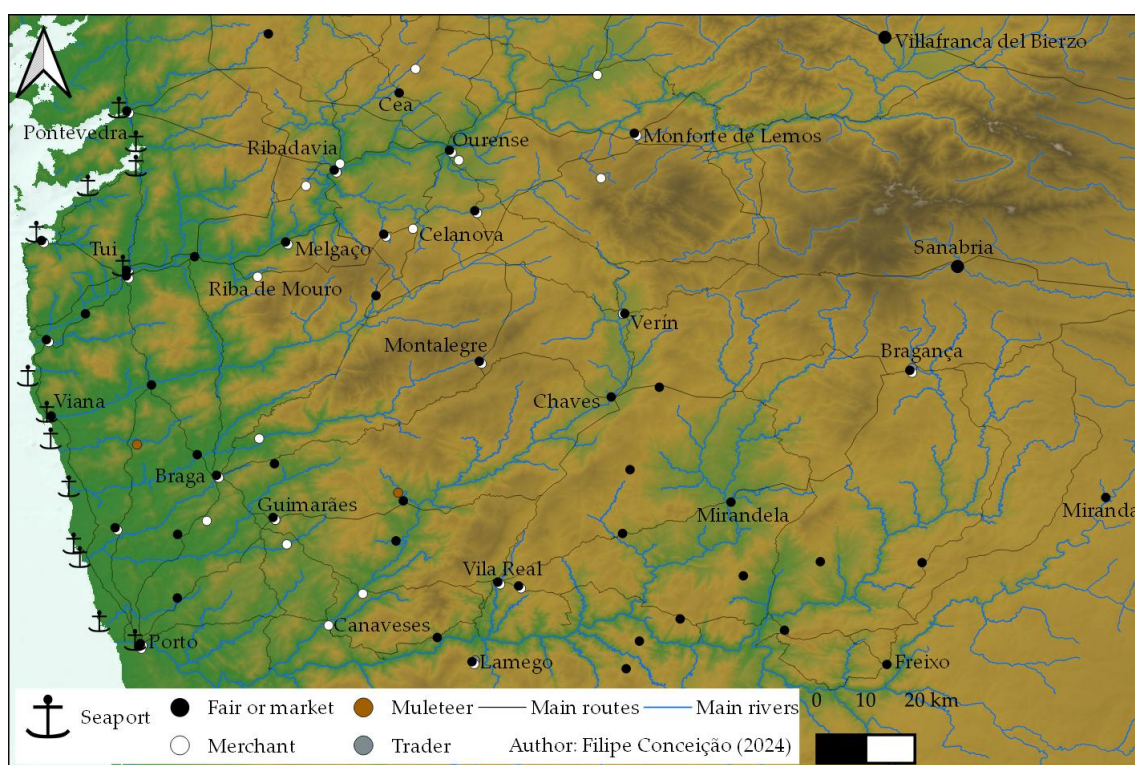


Figure 3 - Relation between individuals, fairs and markets, seaports and routes between northern Portugal and southern Galicia (12th to early 14th century).

With the aim of stimulating economic activity, the monarchs proceeded with the grant of town charters, with special attention to the residents of border territories, where there was a lower tax burden. One of these cases was Melgaço, a town located on the left bank of the Minho River and one of the entry points into the Entre-Douro-e-Minho region. The charter, dated from 1258, established the payment of a collective annual census to the king rather than individual taxes, which would allow the municipality to keep the revenue from fines, tolls and other rents for itself, thus increasing its own income, with the aim of fostering economic development and ensuring the proper administration of justice. At the same time, the possibility given to hosts to benefit from a percentage of the tolls charged to merchants coming from outside and staying in their houses, the reduction of certain fines, or the exemption from certain obligations to the clergy and nobility, were intended to instil in the residents a greater sense of belonging and defence of what was theirs and, consequently, of the territory²⁷. These guidelines are not limited to the Portuguese territory, as many of the 12th century charters in Portugal have their origins in their Leonese counterparts.

²⁷ A.M. Reis, *Os forais antigos de Melgaço*, in «História: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto», 15 (1998) 1, p. 119.

By the second half of the 13th century, fair charters were becoming increasingly common. They contained the rights and duties of a particular fair, such as the date on which it was to be held and its privileges, as well as the legal and fiscal status by which its users were to be regulated²⁸, in a new effort to reinforce control of the territory, while seeking to foster and boost trade relations and increase the revenue for the Crown.

We also must consider the seaports and their connection with the hinterland²⁹. As far as Portugal is concerned, Amélia Aguiar de Andrade tells us about the extensive royal intervention on the coastline from the second half of the 13th century, through the settlement and consequent control of these areas, with special attention to the estuaries of the most important rivers, such as the Minho, Lima and Douro. Once this strategy was put in place, it would then be possible to promote and take advantage of harbour activities, fishing and salt production, to establish a customs network or to stimulate shipbuilding³⁰. In addition, the ports became points of connection between the coast and the hinterland through river transport, as a way of transporting local productions such as wine, but also to distribute other products such as salt more quickly and efficiently throughout the hinterland. For example, an enquiry from the end of the 13th century tells us that the abbot of Santa Cruz forcibly took a tenth of the salt from all the boats that travelled up the Douro River from Porto to Régua³¹.

Regarding the Galician ports, especially Ferrol and Padrón, Elisa Ferreira Priegue noted that the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela had its impacts, however not all of them positive. The frantic flow of pilgrims and merchandise towards Galicia that took place up until the 12th century reduced Galician merchants to a passive role, with little initiative, mostly acting as mere intermediaries in commercial transactions³². The situation began to change as soon as royal and ecclesiastical initiatives began to favour the coastal populations with greater privileges and commercial capacities, which meant that, by the beginning of the 14th century, there were already a series of active ports along the

²⁸ P.M. Cunha, *As Feiras no Portugal Medieval (1125-1521): Evolução, Organização e Articulação*. Porto 2019, p. 24 and p. 58.

²⁹ A.A. Andrade, *A estratégia régia em relação aos portos marítimos no Portugal medieval - o caso da fachada Atlântica*, in B. Arízaga Bolumburu, J.A. Solórzano Telechea (a cura di), *Ciudades y Villas portuárias del Atlántico en la Edad Media*, Logroño 2005, pp. 72-74.

³⁰ Ivi, pp. 72-74.

³¹ C.M.L.B. Neves, *História Florestal, Aquícola e Cinegética. Colectânea de documentos existentes no Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo. Chancelarias Reais. Volume I (1208-1483)*, Lisboa 1980, pp. 274-278.

³² E. Ferreira Priegue, *Galicia en el comercio marítimo medieval*, Santiago de Compostela 1988, pp. 67-69.

western Galician coast, especially those of Muros, Noia, Padrón, Pontevedra, San Paio de Lodo, Redondela, Vigo and Baiona³³.

We also must consider the different rules to which they were subject to when travelling. Itinerant by nature, their activity was often conditioned by concessions between the different powers. One such case was the exemption given by Alfonso IX of León, in 1188, to the church and the municipality of Ourense, from paying tolls on wine and any other cargo that was taken to Santiago de Compostela, specifying the tolls at Cudeiro and Bubal:

[...] ego Adefonsus, filius illustrissimi et uictoriosissimi regis domni Fernandi, Dei gratia Legionensis rex, per hoc scriptum semper ualiturum notum facio presentibus et futuris de toto regno meo quod statuo firmiter et inconcusse Deo et sancto Martino et uobis episcopus domne Adefonse cum capitulo uestro et concilio ipsius ciuitatis de Auria, presentium et futurorum, quod nullum portaticum detur in toto camino de uino uel de aliis rebus ab ipsa ciuitate de Auia usque ad ciuitatem Beati Iacobi, et aufero nominatim de ipso camino portaticum de Cudeiro et de Buual, et totum aliud quod milites et potentes in ipsis terris in eodem camino statuerant, sic quod ab ista die nullus sit ausus in toto supradicto camino portaticum petere uel pro illo aliquid accipere aut pignorare aut redeuntibus uel euntibus aliquam uim facere [...]³⁴.

By contrast, the council of Milmanda and the Monastery of San Salvador de Celanova decided in 1287 to forbid merchants from using the Laboreiro roads to Portugal:

[...] et assi commo mandan sus privilegios et las cartas que an del enperador et de los reyes et que agora fueron mostrados en corte del rey en Toro et en Benavente sobresta razon de los caminos de Leboeyro et de los otros logares, todos los omnes de los cotos et de la Tierra de Çelanova vayan livremiente por quales[...] quisieren et lieven viandas para sus casas et para la Tierra de Çelanova o fuere mester, salvo que non vayan por el camino de Levore[yro] husado para Portogal por que non deven yr mercatores de pannos et de sal si los y oviere ca lo deffiende el rey en sus cartas [...]³⁵.

But what was the reason for this decision? For political and security reasons? Because of the toll charged for the products transported, such as cloths and salt? What is certain is that in the following centuries we see the need for intervention on the part of different Portuguese monarchs, with Pedro I determining in 1361 that everyone travelling to and from Galicia should pass through Melgaço³⁶, and with Afonso V arbitrating in 1459 a dispute raised by the municipality of Valença

³³ E. Ferreira Priegue, *Galicia en el comercio*, cit., pp. 70-71. The document can be found at X.M. Sánchez Sánchez, *A Vila de Redondela na Idade Media (séculos XIII-XV)*, in «Seminario de Estudios Redondeláns, 3 (2006), pp. 100-102.

³⁴ J. González, *Alfonso IX*, Madrid 1944. Vol. II, pp. 32-33.

³⁵ M.B. Vaquero Díaz, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Salvador de Celanova (ss. XIII-XV) Vol. I*, Santiago de Compostela 2004, pp. 116-117.

³⁶ C.A.F. de Almeida, *Vias Medievais Entre Douro e Minho*, Porto 1968, pp. 210-211.

against the marshal of Melgaço, who had assaulted merchants who were heading to Galician lands through the Laboreiro mountains and not over the bridge over the Mouro River, avoiding the toll there, with the monarch deciding in favour of those from Valença³⁷.

However, wine, clothes and salt were not the only products traded, and in this respect the old charters make it clear that other products were sold. Comparing the charters granted to Ribadavia in 1164 and Melgaço in 1183, two towns located on opposite banks of the Minho River and little more than 30 kilometres apart, we can see some similarities, both in the products sold and in the prices charged, with an emphasis on cattle and leathers. Many of these values disappear for Melgaço in the charter of 1258, as the council was then granted greater administrative power to determine the prices to be applied to the products sold there.

³⁷ S. Daveau, *Caminhos e fronteira na Serra da Peneda - alguns exemplos nos séculos XV e XVI e na actualidade*, in «Geografia: Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto», 19 (2003), pp. 82-84.

Fees applied to merchants coming from outside the village (for the king)			
Product	Ribadavia 1164	Melgaço 1183	Melgaço 1258
mule	12 soldos	6 soldos	-
horse	-	2 soldos	-
mare	-	12 dinheiros	-
donkey	3 dinheiros + 3 for the host	6 dinheiros	-
load of a horse or mule	1 soldo for each load	1 soldo	1 soldo
load of a mare	-	6 dinheiros	1 soldo
load of a donkey	-	4 dinheiros	-
load of a cattle	-	-	6 dinheiros or denários
load of a person	-	2 dinheiros	3 mealhas
<i>atail</i>	25 soldos	-	-
slave (moorish or <i>ignaro</i>)	1 soldo (+ 1 for the host)	-	-
ox	2 dinheiros	4 dinheiros	-
cow	2 dinheiros	2 dinheiros	-
pig	1 dinheiro	-	-
lamb	1 dinheiro	-	-
single-coloured cloak	-	4 dinheiros	-
rabbit cloak	-	4 dinheiros	-
Galician cape	-	2 dinheiros	-
single-coloured skirt	-	2 dinheiros	-
<i>viado</i> mantle	-	2 dinheiros	-
4 cubits (<i>côvados</i>) of <i>viado</i>	2 dinheiros	-	-
coloured cover	3 dinheiros	-	-
cord of fustian	2 dinheiros	-	-
12 cubits (<i>côvados</i>) of carded fabric	2 dinheiros	-	-
skirt <i>viada</i>	-	2 dinheiros	-
ox leather	1 dinheiro	-	-
lamb's skin	2 dinheiros	2 dinheiros	-
lamb's wool	2 dinheiros	-	-
goat skin	1 óbulo	1 dinheiro	-
rabbit fur	3 dinheiros	-	-
beehives	1 dinheiro	-	-
beast with bread and wine	1 dinheiro	-	-

Table 1³⁸

³⁸ The following table was adapted from A.M. Reis, *Os forais antigos de Melgaço*, cit., pp. 103-104 and J. Marques, *Os Forais de Melgaço*, Melgaço 2003, pp. 69-72.

Conclusions

Throughout this study we have tried to understand who these individuals were and how essential they were to the establishment and maintenance of commercial relations, firstly at a local level, but also at a regional and international level, regardless of the political context. Being entirely independent of the notion of a border between two kingdoms, merchants and muleteers travelled long distances in the fulfilment of their duties, as evidenced by the disputes in which they were occasionally an active party.

Consequently, they were one of the main faces of the urban growth that began to take place from the 13th century onwards and, as such, we have tried to give them names, locate them in time and space, and demonstrate the impact of their activity, which was essential for supplying cities and towns over medium and long distances, bringing them the trade that local production was unable to supply. But their role was not restricted to economic matters. Their dedication to pious works, setting up hospitals or being part of brotherhoods, but also to local politics, would in time earn them the tolerance of other parts of their communities.

We hope to have been able, with the collection of documents at our disposal, to demonstrate who these individuals were, which circulated in a wide space, at a time when it was in clear development, and that were able to cross physical and figured boundaries that others were unable or unwilling to.