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Dynasties, Legacies, and Strategies of Heritage Preservation: Elite Patrimonial Practices in Colonial La Rioja (17th–Early 18th Century)

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Abstract: During the 17th and early 18th centuries, within the framework of Castilian inheritance law—which mandated the equal partition of marital assets among all legitimate descendants—the elites of colonial La Rioja devised a set of complex and adaptive strategies to safeguard the integrity of their principal estates. This study examines four lineages spanning three to six generations to analyze the mechanisms employed to ensure patrimonial continuity. These included the foundation of mayorazgos (entailments), strategic transactions among co-heirs, differentiated inheritance arrangements, the symbolic and legal assignment of familial roles, and highly endogamous marriage patterns. In a region characterized by demographic constraints, limited commercial integration, and economic stagnation, elite families also relied on credit networks involving landowners, convents, and merchants to sustain their influence. By situating these practices within broader colonial legal frameworks and recent historiography on legal pluralism and credit economies, this article offers a nuanced understanding of the legal, social, and financial instruments that shaped elite reproduction in a peripheral colonial setting.

Keywords: colonial elites; social mobility; patrimonial continuity

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1. Introduction

During the transition from the 17th to the 18th century, a series of legal disputes redefined the social structure of prominent families in La Rioja, within the jurisdiction of the Tucumán Governorate. The distribution of accumulated inheritances across generations positioned family members—sons, nephews, sons-in-law, brothers-in-law, and siblings—in shifting roles as allies or adversaries. These litigations, often prolonged over several years, centered on debt management, asset valuation, and profit distribution, becoming even more complex when involving minor heirs. Beyond delaying the resolution of conflicts, such disputes posed a direct threat to family wealth, ultimately jeopardizing the social standing of these lineages within the regional elite (Boixadós 2003).

These tensions were rooted in the broader legal traditions of the Spanish Empire, particularly Castilian inheritance laws, which played a decisive role in shaping colonial societies throughout Latin America (Duve and Herzog 2024; Mirow and Uribe-Uran 2023).

These norms mandated the equitable division of marital assets among all legitimate heirs, irrespective of gender, while distinguishing between personal and jointly acquired property. However, parents retained a degree of discretion through the allocation of the one-third and one-fifth portions in their wills. Although designed to ensure formal equality among heirs, these regulations were applied within diverse socioeconomic contexts and

intersected with culturally embedded distinctions in roles and privileges (Fernández 1987; McDonogh 1995; Turbay Ceballos 2012). As comparative legal histories have shown (Benton 2002; Cutter 2001), these legal principles were often adapted to local geographies, political alliances, and customary uses.

While this legal framework was widely accepted among Hispano–Creole families, documentary evidence suggests that elites actively developed mechanisms to circumvent its centrifugal effects. One of the most institutionalized responses was the foundation of mayorazgos (entailments), designed to concentrate wealth in the hands of a single heir. Rooted in medieval Castilian jurisprudence, these mayorazgos created indivisible and inalienable patrimonial units—transmitted preferentially through the male line—that could neither be sold, mortgaged, nor partitioned. Their primary purpose was to preserve economic foundations, social prestige, and lineage continuity across generations (Villafañe 2022). A revealing set of sixteenth-century cases from León, Spain—involving the Lorenzana, Villafañe, and Quiñones families—illustrates the practical application of these principles through testamentary clauses, judicially enforced partitions, and religious obligations such as perpetual masses, all supported by notarial instruments and multiple judicial confirmations (ARChV 1529, 1576, 1577, 1580). In rural regions, like La Rioja, where the economy was largely based on extensive livestock production and marginal integration into broader commercial networks, families implemented alternative strategies—such as endogamous marriage alliances, delayed partition of estates, and the occupation of marginal or indigenous-held lands—to preserve territorial integrity and economic control (Boixadós and Farberman 2009; Cabrero 1985).

These practices must also be understood in relation to the demographic and social configuration of the region. By the mid-seventeenth century, La Rioja's total population numbered fewer than 3000 individuals, of which only a small fraction—approximately 30–40 interrelated families—constituted the local elite (Boixadós 1999). The limited size of this ruling class shaped a highly endogamous marriage market and restricted the incorporation of new actors, such as peninsular merchants or professionals, commonly seen in larger urban centers.

In this context, credit emerged as a fundamental mechanism for sustaining elite dominance in the absence of robust commercial circulation. As documented in notarial protocols and testamentary records, elite households engaged in extensive lending and borrowing networks that involved convents, local officials, and merchants. These credit relationships, often secured by land or kinship ties, not only facilitated the circulation of resources but also reproduced social hierarchies across generations (Mangan 2005, 2016).

This study examines the patrimonial strategies deployed by elite families in colonial La Rioja, with particular attention to mayorazgos, intra-familial transactions, credit practices, and the strategic designation of heirs in wills and marriage arrangements. The analysis is based on selected case studies drawn from unpublished testamentary, notarial, and cabildo records preserved in the Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de La Rioja and the Archivo del Arzobispado de Córdoba. Published primary sources and edited collections have also been consulted. The methodology is qualitative and comparative, oriented toward identifying recurring legal formulas, inheritance patterns, and kinship configurations. Case selection is guided by the recurrence of surnames, their representativeness within the regional elite, and the completeness of their archival documentation.

The objective of this research is to analyze the diversity and effectiveness of patrimonial strategies implemented by La Rioja's elites between the 17th and early 18th centuries. By situating these strategies within the broader legal, social, and financial framework of the Spanish Empire, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the intersection of law, kinship, and property in colonial societies. Furthermore, by incorporating recent international

scholarship on legal pluralism, inheritance, and credit economies, it offers a comparative perspective that highlights both the particularities of La Rioja and its embeddedness within wider imperial dynamics.

2. Discussion

2.1. Historical Context: Colonial La Rioja in the Tucumán Governorate

The city of Todos Santos de la Nueva Rioja, founded in 1591 by Juan Ramírez de Velasco, was one of the last settlements established as part of the territorial expansion strategy of the Tucumán Governorate, located at the southernmost edge of the Viceroyalty of Peru (Reynoso 2016). The region's rugged geography, with steep elevations to the west and vast plains to the east, played a crucial role in consolidating Spanish control over indigenous populations, many of whom offered sustained resistance to colonial domination. Beyond its function as a colonization hub, La Rioja was integrated into the commercial networks linking Alto Perú and the mining center of Potosí with the ports of the Río de la Plata, serving as a strategic node in the circulation of goods and resources.

From its inception, La Rioja was established as a frontier enclave, distant from the principal urban and economic centers of the viceroyalty. Its geographical position—bordered to the south by the jurisdictions of Cuyo under the Capitanía General de Chile and to the west by the Andes Mountains—posed significant challenges for communication and supply chains. Adverse environmental conditions, characterized by extreme aridity, irregular rainfall, and sharp temperature fluctuations, limited agricultural development and shaped an economy primarily based on livestock farming and resource extraction (Vitry 2004). The region's indigenous inhabitants, primarily the Diaguitas, practiced irrigated agriculture, supplemented by hunting and gathering, utilizing sophisticated irrigation systems in the valleys (Schaposchnik 1994).

Relations between Spanish settlers and indigenous communities were marked by persistent conflicts and episodes of resistance. Although the initial conquest was accomplished without large-scale confrontations, the consolidation of Spanish control over the territory was prolonged and met with recurring uprisings, the most significant occurrence between 1630 and 1643. A more stable colonial order was only achieved by the late 17th century, following the imposition of administrative and military structures capable of enforcing sustained governance (Wynveldt et al. 2017).

The local elite was largely composed of the descendants of the first conquistadors, who secured encomiendas that guaranteed them control over indigenous labor and access to strategic resources (Huespe Tomá 2022). Land ownership and participation in the cabildo (town council) were primary mechanisms through which these groups consolidated their social and political standing. Additionally, holding military and administrative positions further reinforced their authority, aligning their interests with the structures of viceroyal power (Boixadós and Farberman 2014).

During its early decades, La Rioja had a small population—estimated at fewer than 3000 inhabitants by the mid-17th century—including a narrow elite sector composed of no more than a few dozen interconnected families (Boixadós 2003). The local economy was predominantly self-sufficient, with limited integration into broader commercial circuits. Over time, however, the elite adopted strategies to preserve their status, the most prominent of which was endogamy, whereby marriages were arranged within a restricted group of families (Villafañe 2025; Villafañe and Villafañe 2025). Given the limited size and relatively closed nature of the ruling class, this practice reinforced networks of power and the perpetuation of a hierarchical social order, ensuring control over land and resources well into the 18th century. Unlike in larger urban centers, where professional or merchant

newcomers—often peninsulars—could marry into established criollo lineages, the social structure in La Rioja favored intra-group consolidation over integration.

2.2. Patrimonial Strategies

Throughout the 17th century, not all prominent families in colonial La Rioja possessed the economic resources necessary to sustain their social prestige. While some managed to increase their wealth and maintain their status, others experienced a decline despite retaining surnames associated with privilege. This heterogeneity in patrimonial trajectories was shaped by a complex interplay of demographic, economic, and political factors. Among the wealthiest lineages, a common trait was the possession of encomiendas, which ensured revenues in kind and labor, providing privileged access to a low-cost workforce and reinforcing local dominance.

The encomienda system in La Rioja, formally established in the early 17th century, began to exhibit signs of structural decline by the final decades of that century. Many grants had been reduced to fewer than ten tributaries, making their income insufficient to support elite lifestyles (Puente Brunke 1990). By the early eighteenth century, most encomiendas had either reverted to the Crown or persisted only as symbolic titles with minimal economic utility. Similarly, the system of repartimiento de bienes—though less systematically documented—remained active in certain rural contexts into the first decades of the eighteenth century, before being gradually dismantled under Bourbon administrative reforms. Despite their eventual extinction, both institutions left enduring social and legal legacies that continued to inform elite strategies of patrimonial preservation.

Inheritance practices frequently privileged the eldest male heir, granting him a considerable advantage over his siblings. Nevertheless, the symbolic capital attached to noble surnames often facilitated the reallocation of new encomiendas through demonstrations of loyalty to the Crown, particularly in wartime. Even when such grants were reassigned, they often remained within extended kinship networks, transferred through marital alliances, especially in cases involving female heirs who required male proxies to exercise legal and administrative authority.

Another critical factor in elite differentiation was the correlation between the number of descendants and the capacity to preserve patrimonial unity. Founding lineages with multiple collateral branches faced increasing risks of fragmentation. While the symbolic capital of a prestigious surname enabled advantageous marriages, a reduced number of offspring did not guarantee lineage continuity or economic consolidation. The absence of male heirs, premature deaths, or entry into ecclesiastical life further complicated succession. Upon marriage, daughters frequently received substantial dowries, contributing to the dispersal of family wealth (Camps 1992).

Although documented cases of mayorazgo foundations were exceptional, they provided a legal mechanism to counteract wealth division and enabled the elite to preserve their economic resources (Farberman 2015). Mayorazgos functioned as socio-legal mechanisms aimed at concentrating family wealth in a single heir, thus ensuring patrimonial continuity and reinforcing elite dominance. Their emergence was closely linked to the ecological and economic specificities of the region, and their history is marked by conflicts over succession, territorial disputes, and adjustments to the reforms implemented by the Bourbon state.

While documented cases of mayorazgos were exceptional, they offered a normative framework for circumventing the dispersion of family assets. It is notable that six of the seven mayorazgos recorded in colonial Tucumán were located in the La Rioja–Catamarca region (Toral and de Peñaranda 1996). This marginal area—characterized by limited agricultural productivity and weak integration into broader commercial circuits—favored

the consolidation of an elite whose authority rested less on diversified economic ventures than on the mobilization of ancestral prestige, legal instruments, and intergenerational strategies of patrimonial control (Boixadós 1999).

Within this broader framework, the role of credit emerges as a crucial—though often underexplored—dimension of elite reproduction. Despite the region's relative economic stagnation and modest commercial connectivity, elite families sustained their social and economic influence through complex credit networks that connected them to religious institutions, merchants, and fellow landowners. Notarial protocols and testamentary documents reveal a wide spectrum of transactions—loans, mortgages, and pledges—wherein families, such as the Brizuela, Bazán, and Villafañe, acted simultaneously as creditors and debtors. These credit arrangements, often underpinned by kinship and property ties, enabled the circulation of capital in contexts of limited monetary liquidity while reinforcing hierarchies and obligations across generations.

As Jane Mangan has demonstrated in her studies of colonial financial culture (Mangan 2005, 2016), credit functioned as both an economic tool and a mechanism for social reproduction in colonial societies. In La Rioja, it allowed elite households to sustain their positions amid fluctuating conditions, highlighting the interplay between landholding, lineage, and financial capital as interdependent pillars of colonial power.

2.2.1. Brizuela y Doria

Pedro Nicolás de Brizuela, originally from a small village in Burgos, emigrated to the Tucumán Governorate around 1630, settling in La Rioja, a strategic enclave within the broader context of frontier disputes with local indigenous communities. Initially lacking significant resources, his integration into the regional elite was facilitated through his marriage to Mariana de Doria, a woman of moderate social standing, which granted him access to an urban residence and a well-equipped chacra (small rural estate), allowing him to establish firm roots in the jurisdiction (Castilla and Adams 1996).

Brizuela began his military career in subordinate ranks and gradually ascended to the titles of general and maestre de campo, distinguishing himself in various campaigns that earned him recognition within the colonial military structure. As a reward for his service, he was granted an encomienda of indigenous laborers and held various positions in the cabildo and local administration. Simultaneously, he expanded his territorial holdings by acquiring vast properties in western La Rioja through land grants from the Crown and private transactions (Boixadós and Staricco 2017). Despite the arid nature of these territories, he consolidated a solid economic base through livestock farming, with production primarily destined for the Alto Perú market.

In one of the most productive areas of his domain, he established the estancia of Sañogasta and focused on agricultural and livestock production, including wheat, vineyards, and olive groves. In 1663, together with his wife, he stipulated in his will the foundation of the mayorazgo of San Sebastián de Sañogasta, which encompassed the estancia and its adjacent lands. This mayorazgo, valued at 50,000 pesos, included not only land and buildings but also agricultural production, livestock, enslaved people, jewelry, and various movable goods. The establishment of the mayorazgo ensured the unipersonal transmission of wealth under the principles of perpetuity, indivisibility, inalienability, and imprescriptibility, as set forth in Castilian law (Smietniansky 2018). In this regard, "the institutionalization of a mayorazgo appears akin to the process of lineage creation", consolidating family identity through the symbolic association of land, surname, and inheritance.

The succession structure established by Brizuela reflected a clear patrimonial hierarchy within the family. While the mayorazgo was assigned to his third son—who in 1673 became the first Señor de Sañogasta—the remaining assets were distributed among his other

six children according to prevailing inheritance laws. His daughters received dowries that included land, money, and household goods, while his other sons inherited smaller portions of the estate. Thus, the creation of the mayorazgo not only introduced a principle of differentiation within the lineage but also represented a carefully planned strategy for preserving and consolidating the family's economic and social power.

The case of the mayorazgo of San Sebastián de Sañogasta provides a valuable lens through which to examine the mechanisms of elite reproduction in the colonial Andes. Beyond its economic rationale, the establishment of the mayorazgo reveals a conscious effort to perpetuate lineage, concentrate resources, and preserve symbolic capital across generations. As such, it must be understood within the broader legal and sociopolitical architecture that structured colonial society in the jurisdiction of Tucumán.

2.2.2. Bazán de Pedraza y Texeda

Juan Gregorio Bazán was a key figure in the colonization of Tucumán, ranking among the first explorers and conquistadores of the region (García 2021). A native of Talavera, he participated in the founding of several cities and held crucial positions, including teniente gobernador and encomendero. However, his trajectory was abruptly cut short in 1563 when he was killed by indigenous groups while relocating his family to Santiago del Estero. His lineage, carried forward through his granddaughters, perpetuated the Bazán de Pedraza name and cemented its influence in La Rioja.

The Bazán family maintained a dominant presence in La Rioja's public sphere, with its members actively participating in frontier conflicts and holding positions of power in the cabildo and other governing bodies. This dynastic continuity was built upon the exaltation of the founder's achievements, which facilitated their integration into the local elite, securing access to productive encomiendas and fertile lands.

As part of their strategy for consolidation, the family implemented a recurring naming practice, assigning the name Juan Gregorio Bazán to the firstborn male of each generation, followed by the maternal surname. This tradition reinforced the perception of lineage continuity and prestige. One of its most notable descendants, Juan Gregorio Bazán de Pedraza y Texeda, reached the governorship of Paraguay in the fifth generation. His marriage to a woman from a commercially prominent family in Buenos Aires significantly expanded his economic base, particularly in the mule trade, increasing his fortune, which was estimated at over 110,000 pesos at the time of his death in 1717.

The accumulation of wealth and the expansion of the Bazán de Pedraza y Texeda family's economic interests illustrate their ability to capitalize on the mercantile opportunities of the time, consolidating and extending their status and power within the colonial socioeconomic order.

2.2.3. Bazán de Cabrera

Diego Ignacio Bazán de Pedraza y Texeda, a younger brother of the distinguished Bazán lineage mentioned earlier, did not achieve the military or commercial prominence of his elder brother but remained a notable figure within La Rioja's elite (Boixadós 1997; Quarleri 1999). He married Doña Josefa Luisa de Cabrera, a woman of distinguished Riojan lineage, descended from governors and the founder of Córdoba (Moyano Aliaga 2003). Josefa's dowry exceeded 9000 pesos, centered on the Cochangasta estate, a small yet highly productive property due to its irrigation systems, which supported wheat, fruit orchards, and vineyards, as well as the production of mosto (grape must), wine, and spirits.

After their marriage, Diego took over the management of Cochangasta, utilizing both indigenous labor from his encomienda and enslaved workers. The couple had three children—two daughters and one son. Diego died in 1719 without leaving a will, triggering

a prolonged process of asset evaluation and distribution that did not begin until two years after his death. In 1722, Doña Josefa sought to ensure the economic and social continuity of her family through an inter vivos donation of Cochangasta to her only son. In her foundational letter, Josefa articulated that dividing properties among multiple heirs often led to their economic degradation and, consequently, to the decline of distinguished families.

Josefa's experience underscored that the subdivision of land into small parcels led to inefficient management, resulting in the loss of family wealth within a few generations. Her decision to tie the lands together aimed to preserve the estate's unity and productivity, ensuring the perpetuation of her descendants' economic and social standing. This measure, which required her heirs to retain the Bazán de Cabrera surname, sought to preserve the memory and prestige of two of Tucumán's most eminent colonial families (Boixadós 2001).

However, this attempt to establish a mayorazgo faced significant legal challenges when Doña Josefa's sons-in-law contested the donation, alleging fraudulent management of Diego's estate and claiming their wives had legal rights to a share of the property. This legal dispute, initiated in 1723, extended into 1750 and beyond, illustrating the inherent tensions between the principles of distributive inheritance and efforts to create mayorazgos to maintain family wealth intact.

2.2.4. Villafañe y Guzmán

Beyond the establishment of mayorazgos, various noble families in the colonial governance of La Rioja adopted alternative strategies to prevent the fragmentation of their estates without resorting to legal mayorazgos. Among them, the Villafañe y Guzmán family stands out for its documented practices over five centuries, reflecting their adaptability and persistence in maintaining social and economic influence (Villafañe 2022).

The lineage found its foothold in Riojan lands through Lázaro de Villafañe, a hidalgo from León who settled in La Rioja at the beginning of the 17th century (Serrano Redonnet 1944). Shortly thereafter, three of his Spain-born sons joined him, including Manuel, who distinguished himself through a military and political career. Manuel secured a favorable marriage with the only daughter of a wealthy encomendero and owner of the hacienda of Chumbicha, which allowed him not only to inherit the estate but also to increase its productivity and consolidate control over his father-in-law's encomiendas (Villafañe 2024).

Over five generations, the Villafañe y Guzmán family implemented strategies for preserving their estate, including patrimonial transactions and advantageous marital alliances, demonstrating their ability to adapt to changing economic and social dynamics. Baltasar de Villafañe y Guzmán, the eldest son, played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of control over the encomiendas and municipal responsibilities. This included negotiations with his brothers to consolidate a substantial portion of the inheritance, reflecting the lineage's flexibility and pragmatism in facing legal and economic challenges. Following these negotiations, some of his brothers relocated to other urban centers in Tucumán, such as San Miguel, Santiago del Estero, and Córdoba, where they founded new branches of the lineage, all of which were prolific and widely extended (Villafañe 2022).

Baltasar had twelve legitimate children and, thanks to his longevity, meticulously organized the marriages of his daughters and the distribution of responsibilities among his sons. His eldest son, Manuel, succeeded him in managing the encomiendas and holding offices in the cabildo, while Lucas administered the hacienda. Isidro pursued a military career and was stationed at the frontier in San Miguel, while Santos remained under his eldest brother's guardianship. To avoid inheritance disputes, Baltasar encouraged his sons to maintain the hacienda as a communal asset and share its benefits. However, in the following decade, the successive deaths of three brothers and the emergence of a new generation of heirs with divergent interests led to a prolonged legal battle over the

ownership of the hacienda, spearheaded by Isidro Villafañe and his nephews, which left several heirs on the brink of financial ruin (Villafañe 2023).

Such conflicts became increasingly common in La Rioja from the last quarter of the 17th century onwards. In the case of the Villafañe family, the predominance of male heirs led to disputes primarily among brothers and cousins. Although initial solidarity among the brothers prevented early fragmentations, it eventually deteriorated as each sought to protect the interests of their own offspring. The most common strategy to keep estates intact was the purchase of inheritance shares among co-heirs, as seen in the hacienda of Chumbicha and other documented cases, such as Cochangasta, where a male heir acquired his sisters' rights to ensure the indivisibility of the estate.

However, these arrangements did not always guarantee patrimonial stability, as claims from the heiresses' spouses often complicated successions. Numerous legal disputes initiated by sons-in-law, many of whom were Spaniards, have been documented. These individuals contested inheritance partitions, leading to prolonged litigations. Some elite Riojan families failed to balance patrimonial accumulation with its proper transmission. The Luna and Cárdenas families, for instance, began their lineage under conditions similar to those of the Villafañe, but by the early 18th century, a complex succession trial eroded their fortune, leaving their descendants with little more than an illustrious surname.

The case of Petronila de Villafañe y Guzmán illustrates how, after being orphaned and left with limited resources, her marriage to Antonio de Almonacid, a member of a prestigious family, depended on a rigorous investigation of consanguinity. Documents from the Archivo del Arzobispado de Córdoba reveal that such close-kin marriages, justified by patrimonial considerations in times of candidate scarcity, also led to inheritance disputes, highlighting the risks of this strategy among the Riojan colonial elite.

2.3. Succession Dynamics and Patrimonial Strategies

Within the social framework of colonial Tucumán, the transmission of family wealth was shaped by Castilian inheritance laws, which mandated the equitable distribution of assets among legitimate descendants. However, the necessity of preserving the integrity of estates and ensuring social continuity led the local elite to develop succession strategies that mitigated property fragmentation. Based on an analysis of inheritance practices among La Rioja's colonial families in the 17th and 18th centuries, several mechanisms can be identified, including the establishment of mayorazgos, transactions among co-heirs, the structuring of filial roles, and the promotion of endogamous marriages within the same social stratum.

The mayorazgo emerged as a primary tool for preventing the subdivision of family assets, allowing properties to be concentrated in the hands of a single heir. Although not universally adopted, its establishment was conditioned by specific local socioeconomic and ecological factors. In La Rioja, where land productivity was uneven and resources were scarce, the mayorazgo ensured patrimonial stability. However, its implementation frequently generated tensions within lineages, particularly as increasing numbers of descendants complicated inheritance arrangements.

Where mayorazgos were absent, patrimonial consolidation was achieved through transactions among co-heirs, whereby one family member acquired the shares of others to maintain estate unity. While this strategy allowed for the preservation of patrimonial structures, it was not without conflict, as disputes often emerged between heirs and their spouses.

Marriage was another crucial mechanism for wealth preservation. Endogamous alliances—often within the same kin group—served to maintain land ownership within the family and reinforced economic and political cohesion. In La Rioja, historical records reveal

a high frequency of marriage dispensations granted for unions between close relatives, underscoring the role of kinship networks in elite reproduction.

3. Conclusions

This study has analyzed the patrimonial strategies implemented by the colonial elite of La Rioja between the 17th and 18th centuries, highlighting the ways in which these families strategically engaged with Castilian inheritance law to protect and consolidate their estates. Mechanisms, such as mayorazgos, transactions among co-heirs, inter vivos donations, and endogamous marital alliances functioned as key instruments through which elite households adapted to the prevailing socioeconomic and demographic conditions.

The inheritance dynamics documented in colonial La Rioja reveal a persistent tension between the normative framework of Castilian law—particularly the principle of equitable distribution among legitimate heirs—and the imperative of maintaining patrimonial cohesion. To navigate this contradiction, families developed and deployed a repertoire of both formal and informal strategies, evidencing a high degree of flexibility within a legal culture shaped by negotiation, localized interpretation, and procedural pragmatism.

By situating the Riojan case within broader trends in colonial Latin American legal history, this study demonstrates that such practices were not isolated but aligned with patterns observed throughout the Spanish Empire and other colonial settings. Recent contributions to the study of legal pluralism and imperial underscore the extent to which law operated simultaneously as a regulatory constraint and as a tool for social reproduction, particularly among privileged sectors.

Within this context, genealogy and familial prestige emerged as critical elements in the reproduction of elite status. The consolidation of prominent lineages and the establishment of strategic kinship networks proved essential for sustaining long-term economic and political influence. Ultimately, the interplay between legal norms and patrimonial strategies reflects the broader efforts of colonial elites to perpetuate their socioeconomic position across generations, navigating a juridical framework that was both normatively rigid and functionally adaptable.

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