
TRIBUNE: STUDYING SPIRITUAL NETWORKS, BUILDING RESEARCH NETWORKS**Blanca Garí**Institut de Recerca en Cultures Medievales (IRCVM)
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Monastic and Spirituality Networks is far from being a monograph that presents the final conclusions of a research project. This is not its purpose. It is, however, the last in a series of monographs born in the last five years under the umbrella of the *Spiritual Landscapes* project as a result of the research carried out by its team.¹ Moreover, like the previous studies, *Monastic and Spirituality Networks* includes some of the results of this project.² Therefore, in order to introduce this volume of essays, it is necessary to frame it within its broader context. The nature of our work over the years, the means we have used to disseminate it, and the manner in which we have shared it are inextricably linked to the overall design of *Spiritual Landscapes* as a Digital Humanities project that is innovative in its format and in the way it transmits and exchanges knowledge. This approach has led us to combine digital products, deep-mapping techniques, and the publication of research results in journals and books.

Right from the start, *Spiritual Landscapes* was organised around four Research Lines and two Exchange Areas. These Research Lines encompass four different ways of approaching and developing landscape analysis models which, at four different levels, highlight the historical topography of the territory, the topography of each female monastery, the analysis of their interior spaces, and finally emphasise their visualization and study as networks. Thus, each of the four research lines (Research Line 1 – *Monastic Landscapes*, Research Line 2, *The Nunnery and its Environment*, Research Line 3, *Inside the Nunnery*, and Research Line 4, *Networks of Reform and Dissent*) comprises several online pilot studies directly related to the scientific production of the overall project and developed with varying degrees of difficulty and mixed success. These pilot studies, now on the *Spiritual Landscapes* website, show the work carried out so far and, at the

¹ *Paisajes espirituales. Una aproximación espacial a las transformaciones de la religiosidad femenina medieval en los Reinos Peninsulares en la Edad Media (siglos XII-XVI)*, HAR2014-52198-P <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/>

² Several journals have published monographic issues presenting our research results, see GARÍ, 2014; RODRIGUES, 2015; PÉREZ GONZÁLEZ, 2019; and GARCÍA HERRERO, 2017, an outcome of the collaboration between *Spiritual Landscapes* and the project *Las transformaciones del Estado* HAR2015-68209-P. Some of the books published within the framework of our project are CIRLOT, GARÍ, 2017; COLESANTI, GARÍ, JORNET-BENITO, 2018; COLESANTI, MELONI, SARDINA, PAVONE, 2018.

same time, open new questions and put forward new potential avenues for further research. These projects are closely connected with our academic and scientific activities, and their results are also presented on the *Spiritual Landscapes* website under the ‘scientific production’ tab.³ Today we know much better what can be gained by working on digital pilot projects in their multiple forms and, at the same time, we have learned how to establish a fruitful dialogue between them, the team’s general research lines, and the publication of results in journals and books, such as those mentioned above and the present volume.

This volume, presented as a monographic issue of SVMMA, discusses networks, a trendy term that, as often happens in these cases, is both vague and illuminating, suggestive and useful, but also tricky. This is certainly not the first time that our team has used this concept to explore our main research topic: medieval spirituality and, in particular, the role of women in it. A previous project, *Claustra*, led to the double publication, in a multilingual edition and in English, of a book on women’s networks of spiritual promotion (GARÍ 2013).⁴ In that work, which paved the way for the subsequent *Spiritual Landscapes* project, we used the idea of ‘networks of promotion’ as an instrument of analysis, referring to “the web of kinship, affinity, affection, and authority relations, among others, through which the activity of spiritual promotion circulates and becomes a reality” (GARÍ 2013, 9). In turn, we understood ‘promotion’ as “all those activities that imply the existence of initiatives capable of setting the conditions for, elevating, improving or supporting the realisation of something concrete, in this case, medieval spaces of female spirituality” (GARÍ 2013, 9). The result undoubtedly allowed us to advance in the conceptualisation and use of the notion of ‘networks’, and to work with it not to draw stable frameworks nor as a structure for passive analysis but rather as a fabric of action and connection in which the most important thing was not the detection of such networks but the analysis of their behaviour. This was central to further research in the *Spiritual Landscapes* project.

Networks and women’s spirituality have been the main themes of many of our contributions, and once again they are the focus of this monographic issue. Specifically, this volume conveys some significant results of the *Spiritual Landscapes* project, which have as their common thread the analysis of monastic networks, networks of non-regulated spirituality, and networks of dissidence analysed from a gender perspective. The five articles that make up this issue have by no means been chosen at random. All five approach the subject from the different perspectives pursued by our project and two of them also present some of the results of two doctoral theses supervised, carried out, and defended within the framework of *Spiritual Landscapes*.⁵

³ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/proyecto/produccion-cientifica-difusion>

⁴ Since the publication of this book, which gathered the results of *Claustra* (HAR2011-25127) this has been a central theme of debate and study for our team.

⁵ On the significant formative capacity of *Spiritual Landscapes* at the doctoral level, see the six doctoral dissertations already completed and those currently in progress at <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/proyecto/produccion-cientifica-difusion>

The first of these five essays, authored by João Luís Inglês Fontes, Maria Filomena Andrade, and Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues is entitled “Monasteries and Convents in Medieval Portugal: Spiritual Life and Establishment Logic,” and stems from Research Line 1 – *Monastic Landscapes*.⁶ This research line builds on one of the main research results of *Claustra*, namely a sequential cartography of spaces of female spirituality that was uploaded to the *Spiritual Landscapes* website in 2015 with the aim of enabling the comparison with spaces of male spirituality in certain regions of the Iberian Peninsula, specifically, Portugal, Andalusia, and Catalonia. This article is concerned with the first of these three territories. The sequential mapping of all the spaces of regulated and non-regulated spirituality in the Kingdom of Portugal is one of the pilot studies featured on the website and has also led to an in-depth discussion by the authors of this article—all of whom are members of the *Spiritual Landscapes* team—on the evolution of monastic and spiritual networks in the Kingdom of Portugal from the eleventh to the sixteenth century. The article addresses the dynamics, the rationale, and strategies for the establishment of the different religious orders and, above all, takes a gender-based approach by comparing and connecting these rationales both for female and male spaces. The reflection on promotional strategies is particularly important, as it has allowed the authors to bring to the fore aspects related to royal and noble promotional patterns and, again, to make a gender-based comparison between the agency and promotional strategies of queens and kings, both of which were often emulated by the nobility.

The second study, authored by Xavier Costa Badia, is entitled “Non-regulated Female Religiosity in the Catalan Counties in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries: A Territorial and Network-Oriented Approach,” and results from one of the two aforementioned doctoral theses. It was carried out within the framework of the project and defended in July 2019 under the title *Paisatges monàstics. El monacat alt-medieval als comtats catalans (segles IX-X)*. In his doctoral research, Xavier Costa Badia reconstructs the monastic landscape of early medieval Catalonia painstakingly and effectively, using deep mapping techniques within a GIS environment to produce general and specific cartographies of the properties of some monasteries. The article published here outlines a key aspect of his work that affects the gender debate on monastic networks, which the author discusses in a section of his doctoral dissertation. In this paper, the author addresses a problem that, according to his doctoral research, seems to be specific to the territories of the Catalan counties: the lack of a real network of female monasteries, which contrasts with the importance and complexity of the strategies for establishing male Benedictine monasticism in Carolingian Catalonia. However, this lack of evidence does not mean that there were no women religious, given that women, visible but not well documented in early-medieval Catalan documents, seemed to propose a different and distinct rationale for the female religiosity of the time. In this article, Xavier Costa, who has worked with other members of the team on the comparative analysis of

⁶ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/ejes/paisajes-monasticos>

Research Line 1 for the territory of Catalonia,⁷ as well as on the analysis of monastic estates and landscapes in Research Line 2,⁸ considers a new approach and chronology that opens up new research lines for the future.

The third article, by Antonio Bertini, Gemma Teresa Colesanti, and Maria Soler, is “The Monastic Network in the Urban Neapolitan Fabric (12th–16th centuries).” It marks both a milestone and a starting point for one of the most innovative research lines of the *Spiritual Landscapes* project, the deep mapping of urban monastic spaces within a fully developed GIS environment. In fact, Research Line 2, *The Nunnery and its Environment*, implements several pilot projects that use GIS cartographies as a tool to analyse rural monastic heritage chronologically, and to establish dynamic topographies for the establishment of monastic houses in urban settings.⁹ This article focuses on the case study of Naples and the urban impact of religious institutions in the city between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Georeferencing monasteries and their urban topography has made it possible to see the city and its spaces in a distinctly new way in which the balance between religious architecture and living space appears surprisingly altered. The monastic network is outlined over time, establishing behavioural logics in the constantly changing urban fabric. This article also allows for a gender-based comparison and a reflection on the impact capacity of female and male institutions, as well as on the regional policies that were often behind foundation processes. Finally, it focuses on the comparison of models in the western Mediterranean and raises questions about foundation and establishment rationales and their urban impact that should continue to be studied in the future.

The following two studies focus specifically on the conceptualization and use in historical research of networks, a theme that presides over Research Line 4 of *Spiritual Landscapes*.¹⁰ Both works do so, however, from two clearly differentiated perspectives. The fourth article, by María del Mar Graña Cid, is “Networking Queenship? Queens as Promoters of the Congregation of Santa Clara de Tordesillas (1411-1463).” This paper has as its central objective one of the main and pioneering research lines conducted by our team, namely spiritual promotion led by queens. This theme has already been addressed in some of the articles included in the monographs mentioned above (GARÍ 2013; GARÍ 2014; COLESANTI, GARÍ, JORNET 2018) and was also the focus of debate during a scientific seminar organised in collaboration with another project that led to the publication entitled “Reginalidad, religiosidad y fundaciones monásticas” (GARCÍA HERRERO 2017). The present study deals with an issue related to network analysis. The article focuses on the agency of the queens of Castile and Aragon, i.e. their capacity for political action as queens through networked spiritual promotion. Specifically, it studies the queens’ involvement in the control, development, and support strategies of a conventual network that presented its own

⁷ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/ejes/paisajes-monasticos>

⁸ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/ejes/monasterio-entorno>

⁹ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/ejes/monasterio-entorno?id=90>

¹⁰ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/ejes/redes-espiritualidad>

distinctive characteristics, the congregation of Tordesillas, a paradigm of reform among fifteenth century Poor Clares. The article thus addresses the question of the combined behaviour of a queenship network and a reform network. Of particular interest is the fact that it does not analyse the coordinated action of queens in the construction of a reform network, which probably never existed, but rather explores the behaviour of a network of influences over the course of half a century of adhesions and actions of spiritual policy that converged in the same direction.

The fifth and final article of this monographic issue is authored by Delfi I. Nieto-Isabel, and is entitled “Beliefs in Progress: The Beguins of Languedoc and the Construction of a New Heretical Identity.” This article is devoted to rethinking the identity building parameters of the so-called ‘Beguin heresy’ through network analysis. This is again based on the results of a doctoral dissertation, which the author carried out within the framework of *Spiritual Landscapes* and presented in November 2018 under the title *Communities of Dissent. Social Network Analysis of Religious Dissident Groups in Languedoc in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. This doctoral thesis advocates the application of network analysis methods, developed for other disciplines (mathematics and sociology), to the study of religious dissident movements in late-medieval Languedoc, and analyses the community performance of late Cathars and Beguins of Languedoc in order to identify and compare organisational patterns and reassess the participation of women in the spiritual dissidence of this period. To carry out this study, the author relied mainly on inquisitorial records, showing how the relational character of these sources allows the reconstruction and analysis of behavioural patterns within Beguin and Cathar networks. This work, therefore, features an outstanding methodological effort, providing not only a framework for the analysis of the dynamics of dissident networks but also for the application of a gender perspective that renews the study of the role of women in these communities in an impressive way. In the present article, Delfi Nieto presents a concrete aspect of her work, that of the construction of the Beguin community and its distinct identity, forged as such in the context that preceded the persecution, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The article shows how, in the case of women, the application of network analysis methods leads to the conclusion that they were central to the material support of dissident networks, but also occupied a privileged position regarding the flows of information, beliefs, money, supplies and relics, all of which contributed to the creation of the Beguin identity.

These five contributions add to the scientific production of *Spiritual Landscapes*, focusing on different aspects of the theme of *Monastic and Spirituality networks*, each one of them connecting, in its own way, with the central research lines of the project. As noted above, *Spiritual Landscapes* was organised from the very beginning around four main Research Lines that form the backbone of the project, which channels and feeds back into our research. In addition, *Spiritual Landscapes* has also developed digital and face-to-face areas of exchange with society that are equally important for the project and have their own website tabs, ‘Experiences’ and ‘Spaces’. On the

one hand, under ‘Experiences’, we have included the interactions aimed at involving Master’s students in educational aspects of the project (such as the creation of a Virtual Exhibition on devotional practices and spaces of spirituality), at encouraging the massive and free participation of a wider audience in open courses related to the project (such as the MOOC implemented in the Coursera platform under the title *A voice of their Own. Women’s Spirituality in the Middle Ages*), and finally, at exchanging experiences with projects and audiences that are completely different from our usual target audience (such as participating in the Grand Tour organised by the Nau Còclea Contemporary Creation Centre).¹¹ On the other hand, under the ‘Spaces’ tab, we have created information and debate forums aimed at establishing optimal interaction with the public through Social Media and at engaging their participation at different levels and in different activities.¹² The scientific knowledge showcased by the five articles that form this monographic issue of SVMMA is also present in these spaces of experiences and exchange and has been enriched by this public and interactive side of the project.

To conclude, *Monastic and Spirituality Networks* is far from being a monograph that presents the final conclusions of a research project; in fact, it is much more. It is a link in a long chain that connects the past and the future of our research and that cannot be explained without the background of both *Spiritual Landscapes*, today completed, and the ongoing research trajectory of a team that started years ago, but now points towards the future with a new project, purposely named “Monastic Landscapes. Representations and virtualisations of medieval spiritual and material reality in the Western Mediterranean (6th-16th centuries),” that is just beginning its journey. Building on the past, it has renewed essential aspects in terms of coordination, equipment and content.

¹¹ <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/experiencias> see also GARÍ; CARRILLO-RANGEL 2019

¹² <http://www.ub.edu/proyectopaisajes/index.php/es/espacios>

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