
NETWORKING QUEENSHIP? QUEENS AS PROMOTERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF SANTA CLARA DE TORDESILLAS (1411-1463)**María del Mar Graña Cid**

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Resumen

La Congregación de Santa Clara de Tordesillas nació estrechamente vinculada a la monarquía castellana. En este trabajo analizamos la relación que trabaron con ella las reinas desde el punto de vista de su promoción de adhesiones monásticas. Tres reinas de Castilla favorecieron su desarrollo y una de Aragón se identificó con su modelo religioso. Buscamos valorar sus intereses políticos preguntándonos si la peculiaridad asociativa de esta institución favoreció algún tipo de política “en red” que arroje luz nueva sobre la construcción y el ejercicio de la reginalidad, su posible interrelación con el diseño de esta familia monástica y su influencia en las relaciones entre los reinos ibéricos. Para ello, reconstruimos los paisajes espirituales en que incardinaron sus acciones.

Paraules clau: Congregación de Santa Clara de Tordesillas, reginalidad, paisajes espirituales, matronazgo, clarisas, Corona de Castilla, Corona de Aragón

Abstract

The Congregation of Santa Clara de Tordesillas was born in close connection with the Castilian monarchy. In this paper we analyse the link that the queens of Castile established with it from the point of view of their promotion of monastic affiliations. Three queens of Castile favoured the development of this Congregation and a queen of Aragon identified with its religious model. We seek to assess their political interests questioning whether the associative peculiarity of this institution fostered a sort of ‘networking’ policy that may shed new light on the construction and exercise of queenship, its relation to the design of this monastic family and its influence on the relationships between Iberian kingdoms. To this end, we will reconstruct the spiritual landscapes in which their actions were embedded.

Key Words: Congregation of Santa Clara de Tordesillas, Queenship, Spiritual Landscapes, Female Sponsorship, Poor Clares, Crown of Castile, Crown of Aragon

From 1410-1411, a conventual congregation was founded around the Poor Clare nunnery of Santa María or Santa Clara la Real de Tordesillas,¹ founded in 1363 by the Infantas Beatriz and Isabel with the support of Pedro I, whose existence lasted until 1518. This association of nunneries spread throughout much of the Crown of Castile (map 1) as an exponent of religious and spiritual renewal. Due to its great importance and projection, it came to be known as the “Orden de Santa Clara de la Observancia” [Order of Saint Clare of the Observance], that is, the institutional archetype of the Poor Clares reform, the regular female branch of Franciscanism.

In the complex history of the congregation, the link with the Crown and the role of the queens as promoters are particularly noteworthy. From the first record in 1411 to the last one in 1463, three queens of Castile favoured its development and one queen of Aragon identified with its religious model. Within the framework of this superstructure, a conventual association in a process of almost continuous growth, I would like to assess what political interests this impetus reveals from the point of view of the construction and exercise of reginality (SILLERAS 2003; PELAZ, VALDIVIESO 2015). There can be no doubt that cultural and religious female sponsorship (MARTÍNEZ, SERRANO 2016; GRAÑA 2008: 373, 1100-1103, 1322) was an important vehicle for women’s action and influence in a wide range of fields (PRIETO 2015; THIEULIN-PARDO 2016; BECEIRO 2016; GARCÍA HERRERO, MUÑOZ 2017). Why was the Congregation of Tordesillas of interest to the queens? Did its peculiar relational features have any specific significance or impact that would shed light on the question of regality in the Iberian kingdoms during the 15th century?

The reconstruction of the spiritual landscapes in which the activity of each queen was embedded provides interesting answers. It is a question of the state of the congregation at the time when they were involved, but also of the landscapes that each queen shaped through a sponsorship that could involve different orders and religious establishments. In this double framework, the activities of the queens acquire significance, especially if they are considered in terms of their possible incardination and/or creation of networks, including human, religious and spatial links. Reconstructing these connections or proving that they did not exist sheds light on the reginality, the background of this reform and the political significance of both. I will also consider whether they shaped a peculiar spiritual landscape within the congregation and whether this might have something to do with a strategy shared by these queens.

1. Catherine of Lancaster and the origins of the congregation

The nunnery of Santa Clara de Tordesillas was one of the emblematic spaces of the religious reform from the last third of the 14th century, together with other projects linked to the Crown,

¹ This work is the result of the research project *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.

such as San Benito de Valladolid (URIBE 1985: 232; OLIVERA 2013). Both made the Valladolid-Palencia area the focus of religious renewal and a centre of reference in the kingdom due to its congregational character. Although it was in 1380 when Clement VII decided to appoint the confessor of John I, the Franciscan Fernando de Illescas, as Visitor of the Poor Clares of Tordesillas (LÓPEZ 1928; NIETO 1993: 142-143, 391), it was not the king who promoted the female congregation. The origin of this congregation is linked to the minority of age of John II: the first conventual adhesion to the congregation did not take place until 1410, and the next one was not until 1420.

1.1. *A congregation is born: Villafrechós y Santander*

This origin poses a documentary problem that affects the chronology and its protagonists. Tradition has it that the first nunnery to join was Santa Clara de Villafrechós (Valladolid) in 1410, when Benedict XIII placed it under the obedience of the Visitor of Tordesillas, although no trace of this important bull has survived. We are talking about the bull *Ex debito*, which had previously been granted to Tordesillas and which would later be granted to Santander. It does not seem that the fact that it was the same bull was misleading, as it is cited in later bulls with the same date, 19 September 1410 (URIBE 1985: 244, n. 45). The first reliable reference to Villafrechós as part of the congregation dates back to 1419, and in this and the following documents it is mentioned in third place after the Poor Clares of Tordesillas and Santander (URIBE 1985: n° 17, 336-338). Did this position show an order of seniority?

There is no certain answer. That Santander was the first member would be logical, given the close ties between Father Illescas and the nunnery of Tordesillas and the Crown. It would even be strange if the first adhesion was not mediated by their incumbents. It seems more logical that it was Catherine of Lancaster who was the first promoter and that afterwards the processes of adhesion to what was already a congregational cell were somehow formalised. But it is not possible to say for sure.

The process of creation of the nunnery of Villafrechós offers its own clues. On October 4, 1406, Doña Urraca de Guzmán, widow of Gonzalo Gómez de Cisneros and lady of the region, endowed the foundation of a convent in the palaces she owned within the city walls. Introducing herself as “facedora, e fundadora e fabricadora e hedificadora”, she claimed to do so to atone for several “burdens” she carried. Among other things, she had wronged certain people who were already dead, seizing things that had belonged to them, and was not able to settle the matter with their heirs either. In addition to mentioning that the construction of the nunnery was underway and that it had a licence from the bishop of León, he entrusted the endowment to the latter and to the Franciscan provincial of Santiago (URIBE 1985: n° 15, 329-333).

This noble, rural and expiatory foundation seems to have been the project of a woman in full exercise of her autonomy. Anxious to preserve her assets, the chronicles state that she was the first abbess. After her death, her relatives claimed a large part of the endowment. The community sought the support of Benedict XIII, who in September 1410 confirmed the foundation and granted the nuns the power to choose a magistrate to represent them. On that day the pope entrusted them to the Visitor of Tordesillas. Although it is possible that the date of adherence of the nunnery of Villafrechós to the congregation of Tordesillas happened after this process of litigation, it would also be reasonable to assume that the patrimonial problem could have accelerated it as a protective measure (GONZAGA 1603: 764; URIBE 1985: n° 15).

Santa Clara de Santander was an old convent in crisis. Like so many mendicant establishments of the 13th century, it must have been linked to the town and its authorities. In 1399 the symbolic link was evident: the council increased a rent in exchange for the nuns saying an annual sung mass on the feast of Saint Clare and praying to God and the saint to defend the town and its inhabitants. The Crown had hardly shown any interest: after a privilege granted by Sancho IV and confirmed by Alfonso XI, there was no contact until 1411. It was then that Queen Catherine of Lancaster and Prince Ferdinand (future Ferdinand I of Aragon), in their capacity as tutors of John II, granted the monastery one hundred bushels of wheat. The cloistered nature of this community was also very visible at that time, especially because the nuns enjoyed private property (SOLÓRZANO 2002: 224-228; PÉREZ 1974: 13-14).

This kind of property was a compelling reason for deciding to reform it and it was the queen who pulled the necessary strings. Benedict XIII, in his bull *Ex debito* of March 1411 –only six months after the one he had granted to Villafrechós– indicated the need to reform the monastery, mentioning the queen’s explicit request that it be placed under the visitation of Friar Fernando de Illescas. In the same year, communal ownership of the monastic property was imposed (URIBE 1985: n° 16, 333-336; SOLÓRZANO, 2002: 224, n. 421), which was the first step towards internal reform.

1.2. *Topographies and Links*

The nascent Congregation of Tordesillas presented a dispersed and unequal structure: two monasteries very close to each other, Tordesillas and Villafrechós, barely 60 km apart, and another much further away, Santander, and also in very different settlements, from a village to a hamlet. Although these differences are at odds with an equal distribution between the dioceses of Palencia, León and Burgos (map 2), this diversity and the fact that the following adhesions were delayed for many years seem to indicate that there was no prior design resulting from a large-scale reformist approach, but that the monasteries were incorporated on an ad hoc basis and for different reasons. In order to evaluate them, it is interesting to reconstruct the spiritual landscapes in which they were embedded.

Let us start with the topographical dimension. Distance does not seem to have been the main criterion for adhesion. Although Villafrechós was very close to Tordesillas, Santa Clara de Valladolid was even closer, and this nunnery did not join the congregation until 1440. This fact reveals the limits of the possible attracting power of the monastery of Tordesillas despite being so closely linked to the Crown. The status of towns must not have been important either, as the adhesions that took place in the 1420s show the same heterogeneity in terms of settlement as the first ones did.

Could we talk about the existence of a particular topography at this early stage? Under the influence of Queen Juana Manuel, and despite the fact that Santa Clara de Tordesillas was under Franciscan obedience, the Hieronymites of Aniago –a monastery located nearby and promoted by her– had been involved in its reformist formulation. Perhaps Catherine of Lancaster had this scheme in mind when she chose Santa Clara de Santander rather than another monastery in crisis. This may have been because she understood that the reformed Poor Clares needed to be close to the Hieronymites. Santander was then an important enclave of reformist spirituality with two communities of Hieronymites established between 1406 and 1408 (SOLÓRZANO 2002: 228-230).

On the other hand, the queen's political interest became evident through her actions. During her time as consort, her sponsorship differed greatly from that of Doña Juana Manuel, at least in terms of her religious choice, since while the latter favoured Franciscan communities, (MARTÍN PRIETO: 2007), the queen put her focus on Dominican communities. However, when she became involved with the nunnery of Santander she was the tutor of the future king and had to consider her dynastic interests, among which were the Trastámara's Franciscan tradition and the fact that Juan II considered Santa Clara de Tordesillas as "mi monesterio" [my monastery] in 1409 (CASTRO 1981: n° 396). Catherine, like all the queens of Castile, was allowed to enter the enclosure by pontifical privilege (CASTRO 1981: n° 220), but she does not seem to have established links with this community. She did endorse the documentation issued by her son at a date close to her involvement in Santander: between 1407 and 1411, John II confirmed privileges, and granted the nuns' requests (GONZÁLEZ CRISTÓBAL 1987: núms. 234-235, 241, 249), and would make no further concessions until after his mother's death (GONZÁLEZ CRISTÓBAL 1987: n° 265). It is worth remembering that two key factors underpinning Catherine's political authority, who was always conscious of her particular dynastic role, was to emphasise the line that connected her to her grandfather, Pedro I, and her status as the mother of the king (ECHEVARRÍA 2002). Two factors that she had to consolidate to face her difficult relationship with the prince Ferdinand and to which the links with Tordesillas contributed.

The period 1410-1412 was a decisive one for Catherine of Lancaster. She seems to have responded to the political pressure she was under from the co-regent, whose prestige and influence soared after the conquest of Antequera in 1411, by stepping up her presence. She was responsible for

Castile-León and the prince for Andalusia, but during 1411 she became also in charge of the administration of Seville, Cordoba and Jaen for three months on the advice of her *privada* [Queen secretary] Leonor López (PORRAS 1995: 58). She made her presence felt through the sponsorship of nunneries in the north and south of the Crown of Castile, at a time of tension. Her involvement in Santa Clara de Santander that same year could be understood in this light. Catherine and prince Ferdinand granted privileges to the nunnery, but the Queen made her own special contribution by promoting its reform and writing to the pope concerning this matter. This fact is even more interesting in we put it in the context of her sponsorship of the Dominican nunnery of Santa María la Real in Seville around the same time. The prince had written to the pope about this foundation, but both had addressed the archbishop for permission. Therefore, the reform of the Poor Clares of Santander should be considered chronologically linked to the foundation of the Sevillian Dominican nuns, but also linked to the Queen's strategy to make herself visible and to claim and assert her space (GRAÑA 2017: 89).²

Monastic topography is an important variable, but connections are also relevant for our analysis. The institutional link that lay the foundations of the Congregation of Tordesillas was obedience to a single Visitor, so that the adherence of each nunnery was based on the fact that it became under his supervision. It was in November 1411, a few months after the Queen's involvement in Santander, that Benedict XIII sanctioned the existence of an incipient congregation (URIBE 1985: 245-246). The pope also ensured the continuity of the congregation by granting perpetual power to the Visitor of Tordesillas to elect a successor for life, and recognised it as an entity exempt from the Franciscan authorities, which meant creating a reformist Franciscan cell independent of the cloistered friars of Castile (URIBE 1985: 246). Whether Santander's nunnery joined before or after that of Villafrechós, the fact is that the congregation was institutionalised as such with the adherence of the former. Thus, we cannot determine whether queen Catherine's involvement was pioneering, but it did contribute to outline an independent Franciscan reformist space, institutionally recognised and identified with the Crown, among other things because the visitor was the royal confessor Fray Fernando de Illescas. Crown, court and congregation were linked to each other.

Key to this process was the Queen's closeness to the papacy. Her loyalty to the Pope in Avignon during the Schism (ECHEVARRÍA 2002: 183-190; VILLARROEL 2015) was rewarded with papal backing for her regency (SUÁREZ 2002: 253). The Visitor of Tordesillas and the nascent congregation had a strong supporter in Benedict XIII: as a cardinal, he had appointed the former, and the latter was born and consolidated with his support. The pope strengthened his bond with Illescas, eventually appointing him his private chaplain. The period between 1409 and 1412 remains significantly related to the pontifical actions (GONZÁLEZ CRISTÓBAL 1987: núms. 106, 107, 225, 240, 246, 248, 252; CASTRO 1981: núms. 210, 367). The importance of this friar as an institutional cog in the Crown-congregation-papacy machinery would help to explain the fact

² On the spatial dimension of religious promotion by the Crown see PRIETO 2017.

that Queen Catherine, despite her Dominican leanings, appointed him executor of her will in 1418.³ It is true that this link was not an exclusive one, since she also appointed the Franciscan provincial of Castile (NIETO 1993: 244), and in doing so, she nuanced the importance of the nascent Franciscan reformism. An act that may have been motivated by the possible presence in the court of both friars, or by government interests.

With her promotion of the nascent Congregation of Tordesillas, Catherine of Lancaster became an important promoter of female mendicant reformism in the Crown of Castile, as her work for Santa Clara de Santander was complemented years earlier by the founding of San Pedro Mártir de Mayorga, a Dominican reformist congregation. (ECHEVARRÍA 2002: 80; LUCÍA GÓMEZ-CHACÓN 2016: 43-45; GRAÑA 2017: 78-79). This does not prevent us from identifying her as an eminently pro-Dominican queen.

As for Villafrechós, its establishment under the supervision of the Visitor of Tordesillas implied an institutional rupture, given its initial integration into the Franciscan province of Santiago, which belonged to the cloistered friars. This would be consistent with the adhesion taking place after 1411, and not in 1410. Another aspect worth considering is the founder's surname, Guzmán, and the proximity of her monastery to that of Tordesillas, where Leonor de Guzmán was buried by decision of the first Trastámara. There is also evidence of spiritual 'irradiation', given that Urraca was already wearing the habit of Santa Clara before she founded the monastery (GONZAGA 1603: 764; URIBE 1985: n° 15). Or perhaps the interest lay in preserving the monastic heritage and the accession to Tordesillas was understood as a protective measure. It is remarkable, in any case, that no one from the court is mentioned in the process.

2. A bridge between kingdoms. Mary of Aragon and Mary of Castile at the meridian of the 15th century

Thirty years passed until the next reginal promotion. It was led by Mary of Aragon, the first wife of Juan II, and was close in time to another of Queen Mary of Castile in Valencia. Both provide a peculiar political connection.

2.1. Mary of Aragón and the nunnery of Santa Clara de Salamanca

Mary of Aragon, a queen distinguished for her "reforming sponsorship", had been active in various areas of religious promotion, especially Dominican and Augustinian (LUCÍA GÓMEZ-CHACÓN 2016: 45, 54, 58; PELAZ 2018), before 1441. It was in that year that her relationship with Santa Clara de Tordesillas and the congregation is documented for the first time, coinciding with a vital moment in her reformist promotion.

³ There is no evidence that he was the Queen's confessor. LÓPEZ 1928: 249.

In September, the queen encouraged the adhesion of Santa Clara de Salamanca to the Congregation of Tordesillas. This gesture was part of a wider plan for Franciscan reform. Just three months earlier, in June, Pope Eugene IV had granted another request and appointed Fray Sancho de Canales visitor and reformer of the Franciscans of Salamanca, Plasencia, Molina, Soria and the rest of the convents of Castile and León (URIBE 1985: 265). At the same time, she developed another important reform agenda as founder of the Carthusian monastery of Santa María de Aniago, a place of reginal tradition where years earlier Queen Juana Manuel had promoted the aforementioned establishment of the Hieronymites. Mary of Aragon had become involved in this project as executor of the will of the bishop of Segovia, Don Juan Vázquez de Cepeda, who had planned a foundation of canons regular of St. Augustine and had designated her as patroness in 1436-1437. After establishing a community of reformist Dominicans who abandoned the site, the queen finally donated Aniago to the Carthusian Order in October 1441 (CANTERA 1998: 25, 28-30, 33-34, 78 y 241).

Her Franciscan promotion was the most ambitious and personal project. Following a chronological order, she started with a far-reaching project involving the nascent observance. The chosen visitor, Friar Sancho de Canales, was the custodian of Santoyo (RUCQUOI 1996: 80; NIETO 1990: 120; 1993: 147 y 428), one of the main centres around which the Castilian-Leonese Franciscan observance was taking shape. He was also her confessor (NIETO 1990: 129). Another key element is that the Queen expressly requested that he be recognised as a visitor and reformer of the towns in her reginal domain⁴ and, by extension, of all Castile-Leon. It is worth noting the structural design she had in mind: a visitor linked to her person who would in turn be linked to her seigniories and, consequently, to the whole kingdom. This arrangement was very similar to the one already in place for the Congregation of Tordesillas at that time.

Her work with the nuns was more limited as it was confined to a single community, although also in Salamanca, a town within her dominion. This promotion shared some features with that of Catherine of Lancaster in Santander, since it was also a 13th century foundation that the queen intended to reform, and she acted as the sole petitioner to the pope. But we also find differences, as the the cloistered nuns of Santander were in favour of the reform, while those of Salamanca opposed queen Mary's decision. The aim of placing them under the supervision of the Visitor of Tordesillas, who at the time was another Franciscan with ties to the Crown, Friar Francisco de Soria (NIETO 1990: 131), entailed their insertion into the observant sphere, as expressly indicated by Eugene IV. It has also been thought that one of the reasons for the nuns' rejection was their refusal to leave the Franciscan province of Santiago (URIBE 1985: 264). In any case, the queen was exercising her seigniorial power over the city and letting it be felt by the monastery in a coercive way.

⁴ On the seigniorship of the queens see PELAZ 2017.

Friar Soria found it difficult to reform the monastery, and died around 1442 without achieving this goal. It is very significant that the successor he appointed was queen Mary's protégé, Friar Sancho de Canales, who was thus also at the forefront of female reform in a large part of the kingdom. The nuns resisted this new visitor because they opposed his appointment and because of the excessively expeditious and inconsiderate way in which he treated them. Years later, they complained that they had received «muchas injurias e penurias e molestias» [“many insults and hardships and troubles”] from him and feared that he would want to «sujudgar e fazer lo que primeramente fazia» [“subject them and do what he had first done”] on the next visit. The queen had had to defend them from these abuses. Anticipating that the same could happen in 1448, when Mary of Aragon died, the nuns asked John II to protect and defend them from possible «opresiones, violencias e daños» [“oppression, violence and harm”], to which the king responded positively (URIBE, 1985: 265-266, 269; RIESCO 1977: n° 176; PRIETO 2015: 203; PELAZ 2018: 412).

The queen's decision to reform Santa Clara de Salamanca took place at a time when the Congregation of Tordesillas was spreading, one might almost say specialising, throughout the cities of the kingdom. In 1440 the nunneries of Segovia, Valladolid and Burgos had joined and, a few years before, Zamora and Palencia. Queen Mary's involvement in Santa Clara de Salamanca occurred after the adhesion of Santa Clara de Burgos, and was part of this urban horizon. Her status as lady of Salamanca was undoubtedly a determining factor, but it is also possible that her aim was to achieve a topographical balance by giving more weight to the western part of León. The subsequent evolution of the congregation would focus on small towns and spread throughout Andalusia in the second half of the 40s.

Queen Mary was part of the reform trends in which the Trastámara dynasty had long been engaged and showed the same preferences for the mendicant or hermit orders such as the Carthusian. The same could be said of John II. The queen imposed reformist Franciscanism on her seigniories and, in the case of men, sought to make their monasteries the gateway to the whole kingdom. In the case of nunneries, she kept the link with the Congregation of Tordesillas, already fully consolidated as the reformist option par excellence for the Poor Clares, although she also managed to have a visitor of her confidence at the head, the same one she had established for the friars. This was yet another form of indirect “seigniorship”. Moreover, with her reforming influence on the Franciscans and Poor Clares in the specific context of Salamanca, Queen Mary made her power in “her” city very visible.

The connection between religious sponsorship, power and participation in the political affairs of the kingdom is evident. Queen Mary's Franciscan projects have, on the one hand, triumphalist overtones. A year before promoting the reform, she had taken an active part in the league formed against Don Alvaro de Luna. The queen had allied herself with her brothers, the sons of Ferdinand of Antequera, including King John I of Navarre, and with a section of the nobility. Among her

aims was to hasten the marriage between Prince Henry [future Henry IV of Castile] and the daughter of John I of Navarre, Blanche [future Blanche II of Navarre], which occurred in 1440. In 1441 she continued with her major reformist projects, which could also be considered a parallel manifestation of the power and capacity for political influence she had. The open confrontation with Don Álvaro de Luna had begun in January (PORRAS 1995: 213-227) and, in order to avoid an armed conflict, Queen Mary sought the support of her sister-in-law, the Queen Blanche I of Navarre, her sister, the dowager Queen Eleanor of Portugal, and her son Prince Henry. The queens worked to bring the parties into agreement (SEGURA 2019) and Queen Mary was a major protagonist of the events (ÁLVAREZ 2006: 363-364, 366). One of the most important of these was the assault on the town of Medina del Campo, where the king was staying with his *privado*; the queen and her sister Eleanor entered with the prince and managed to get Don Álvaro out of there with all his people. It was then that John II gave full power to his wife and son to deal with the matter with other nobles. The document in which they made their final agreement begins with the name of Queen Mary as queen and lady (FLÓREZ 2002: 725).

It was at the height of her power and influence that the queen began her Franciscan reform. This religious activity allowed her to distinguish herself and develop important propaganda resources in order to project her prestige, but also to effectively exercise power by strengthening her ties with her seigniories and, on that basis, to influence the transformation of the spiritual landscape of the kingdom. In a way, Queen Mary thus created another space in which she could exercise her political power.

It has even been said that she was more *Infanta* of Aragon than Queen of Castile and more loyal to her brother, John I of Navarre, than to her own husband, John II of Castile (ÁLVAREZ 2006: 368, 370). Her sponsorship activity is a valuable indicator for assessing opinions such as this one. The different Visitators of Tordesillas, while remaining part of the Castilian court, were very close to her and her family: Friar Francisco de Soria had been confessor to John I of Navarre, and mediated in the conflicts between Aragon, Navarre and Castile (NIETO 1990: 131); and Friar Sancho de Canales was very close to the Queen. Bishop Cepeda, promoter of the foundation of Aniago, which was completed by the queen, was also close to the Crown of Aragon: the image of the Virgin that was placed in the church was donated by Fernando de Antequera to increase popular devotion and prayers for the family, and the problems with the endowment of this monastery had to do with claims from the opposing party (CANTERA 1998: 24-25). Moreover, the Queen's decision to found a Carthusian monastery in Aniago meant that the community would be integrated into the province of Catalonia, the only one the order had in the Iberian Peninsula. The integration of the eastern and western areas of her seigniories in her Franciscan project also involved areas linked to her relatives, whether in Aragon or Portugal.

At the same time, however, the queen favoured Castile: she chose Carthusian monks from Seville to populate Aniago, and this foundation contributed to the creation of a province of Castile shortly

afterwards. Her Franciscan promotions, in particular that of the Congregation of Tordesillas, are even more indicative of her pro-Castilian interests. She supported the adhesion policy of the Congregation, the absorption of urban monasteries, and promoted the basic structure that linked the congregation to the Crown and, by extension, the kingdom, through the figure of the royal confessor. The ‘Castilianisation’, even symbolic, that this fact implied, was reinforced by Queen Mary with the appointment of Canales, a friar from the custody of Santoyo, the heart of the male Franciscan observance in Castile, thus giving greater prominence to the Valladolid area as a source of influence. The same could be said of her choice of Canales to reform the Franciscan communities of her seignories and the kingdom. It is true that her interests were key factors in her decisions: the visitators of Tordesillas had previously been the king’s confessors, but this time it was specifically the queen’s confessor. Above all, with these actions she singled herself out as a powerful queen, a symbolic and pragmatic affirmation of her figure that was parallel to her political action but which at the same time she must have considered necessary to establish herself as a political subject and promote her vision of how the kingdom was to be run. Then, it is not strange that after aligning himself with her in political affairs, Prince Henry did the same in the religious sphere by giving his support to Canales (URIBE 1985: 267).

2.2. Mary of Castile and the nunnery of the Trinidad in Valencia

Shortly after these events, the sister of John II of Castile, the Queen of Aragon, Mary of Castile, also became linked to Santa Clara de Tordesillas, despite the fact that it was a Castilian nunnery.

The “spiritual landscape” of this queen was shaped by mendicant reform and Franciscanism from the 1420s onwards. She introduced Observant reform into the kingdom with the foundation of a Franciscan convent in Valencia; she also founded a convent in Mallorca and supported the reformist mendicants in various ways. (SALES 1761: 9-10). In a striking action parallel to that of Mary of Aragon in Aniago, she became involved in the Hieronymite foundation of Vall d’Hebron (1438), initiated by Queen Violant of Bar.(GARCÍA HERRERO 2013-2014; GARCÍA HERRERO, MUÑOZ 2017: 35-37). However, her most personal project was the nunnery of the Order of Saint Clare that she founded in Valencia in 1443, the Trinidad. Her ability to mobilise material resources and influence, and her personal identification with this foundation, in which she decided to bury herself, were particularly noteworthy (GARCÍA HERRERO, MUÑOZ 2017: 37-39).

While Queen Mary turned to Italy to implement her models of male Franciscan reform, she favoured Castile for her female Franciscan projects, and created a nunnery based on the model of Santa Clara de Tordesillas. Nicholas V granted her all the privileges (SALES 1761: 10-11, 18, 30) necessary for the foundation in Valencia to imitate the spirituality and customs of Tordesillas, although without being subjected to the scrutiny of the visitor of the latter, or joining the congregation, a type of bond that is also documented in Castile (URIBE 1985: 250). There is no

doubt of the Queen's genuine religious interest: in 1420, Pope Martin V claimed that the nunnery of Tordesillas was "a mirror of monastic life and a shining example of regular discipline" (URIBE 1985: 252). Its spiritual excellence, together with its link to the Crown, explains why in the mid-15th century it was considered the nunnery "of the highest authority in Castile". In turn, by granting it the same privileges as those of Tordesillas, the pope made the Valencian monastery the one with "the greatest dignity and authority in Valencia and its kingdom". (SALES 1761: 30-31).

Was Queen Mary expressing her status as queen "between two kingdoms" and the loyalty she had always shown to her original Castilian identity? (MANDINGORRA 2014: 44; NARBONA 2009: 93) This Castilian connection of her most personal foundation is very significant. With the transfer to the kingdom of Aragon of the most important female monastic model of Castile, so closely linked to the Crown, she seemed to want to make her roots visible and to strengthen her blood ties, as well as to identify herself with her brother and her mother, Catherine of Lancaster, following in her footsteps. Queen Mary did not need to make religious foundations to reinforce her power and her capacity for political intervention, given that she governed the kingdom as Alfonso V's lieutenant. Regardless of the rest of her religious sponsorship activity, the foundation of the Poor Clares nunnery in Valencia undoubtedly favoured the projection of her image. However, it is interesting to note that she was in tune with the dominant tendencies in Castile: the chronology is very close to the events of Mary of Aragon and both promoted the urban character of the congregation at that time. It would be worth studying their common features.

On the other hand, if the Queen of Castile had strengthened her Aragonese family ties and herself as a subject with a political voice through her religious sponsorship, the Queen of Aragon seemed to have intended to counterbalance these actions in some way by making Castilian spiritual influence present in the kingdom. The two queens were publicly stating where they came from. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Mary of Aragon ultimately favoured Castile, so that the two also ended up promoting the Castilian culture. Santa Clara de Tordesillas and the Congregation of Tordesillas were instruments of Castilianisation.

3. The humanist project of Joan of Portugal

Joan of Portugal, second wife of Henry IV of Castile, obtained permission from pope Pius II in November 1463 to found a Poor Clare nunnery in Aranda de Duero (URIBE 1985: 277-278). It was a reformist project subject to the Visitor of Tordesillas, who should visit it at least once a year. The Congregation of Tordesillas was in crisis and this boost was important. It was also intended to implement the female observant model in its core features: enclosure and communal properties. The role of the abbess as the governing authority was also emphasised, despite the importance of the visitor. The queen also introduced some original elements.

She gave particular visibility to the female body and the female word, issues that were the subject of debate in Humanism. Queen Joan linked them to the habit and the liturgy, and intended the nuns to recall and proclaim one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith, the Eucharist, with specific reference to the Last Supper. The habit they had to wear included a cowl –an element characteristic of the Benedictine monasticism and not of the Poor Clares– in blue, a colour linked to divinity and royalty. As if that were not enough of a novelty, a metallic insignia with a small chalice would be placed on it; its shine would emphasise the importance of this garment in the clothing as a whole.

We cannot ignore the points of similarity with the habit designed years later by another Portuguese, Beatriz de Silva, for the nunnery of the Concepcion of Toledo: both included the blue colour and a figurative element in the form of an insignia representing the theological theme on which the charism was based (DUQUE 2015: 368-383). The same was true of the liturgy. In accordance to the queen's desire, the chanting of the divine office was to be complemented by the votive chanting of the Blessed Sacrament, following the custom of the order, and to which special dedication was to be given on Thursdays.

Another great novelty lay in the composition of the group. Queen Joan seems to have intended to normalise de facto situations that were not usually regulated. In dealing with the special liturgy on Thursdays, she established that, in addition to the nuns, “las piadosas mujeres que vivían en el monasterio” [“the pious women who lived in the monastery”] should also attend, a likely reference to the frequent presence of laywomen staying within the monastic walls. The queen also gave an institutional character to the educational task of the nuns by establishing a college for maidens. It would have the function of instructing and educating girls between the ages of two and twenty, and each nun was to be responsible for the upbringing and education of five of them.

Undoubtedly, there is a political and power connotation in this foundation. Queen Joan decided to establish it in an area of her seigniorship with particular characteristics and at a special time. On the occasion of her marriage, King Henry had given her Ciudad Real and Olmedo as *arras* (dower), to which Ciudad Rodrigo was added, perhaps as a replacement for Olmedo. But the queen did not found a nunnery in any of them. The king had given her the town of Aranda with its jurisdiction when she finally managed to become pregnant after seven unsuccessful years (FLÓREZ 2002: 747, 749). In 1462 she had given birth to the Infanta Juana, who was sworn in as Princess of Asturias.⁵ With its foundation, the queen seemed to want to celebrate the birth of her daughter as the future Queen of Castile and to emphasise her motherhood by underlining the value and dignity of the female body and speech, hence its striking novelties. The uniqueness is even more pronounced if we take into account that she did not sponsor any other religious establishments.

⁵ In 1463, a few months before obtaining the pope's licence to found, the queen may have suffered a miscarriage of a male child (FLÓREZ 2002: 751)

It is clear that Queen Joan's power was also reflected in her ability to plan for it. She intervened in other internal matters, such as the selection of the places of origin of the founding nuns, which were to be the bishoprics of Cartagena, Osma and Palencia. She stipulated that there should be four of them and "provetas" [elderly], and that one of them should be the first abbess. Furthermore, she reserved for herself the power to decide the number and manner of election of the maidens. This broad power is not different from the one in other reviewed cases. However, as a novelty, Joan of Portugal took the trouble to establish and guarantee spaces of female freedom. By stipulating that one of the four foundresses should be the first abbess, she specified that the choice should be made "by themselves". Also the maidens, on reaching the age of twenty and completing their training, would freely choose their status, monastic or secular.

This foundation was never realised, probably because the succession problems arose shortly afterwards. After Henry IV died, the queen survived him by a few months, which she spent secluded in a room next to the church of San Francisco in Madrid. There she decided to bury herself in the Franciscan habit (FLÓREZ 2002: 770).

It is not documented that Queen Joan had any personal contact with the nunnery of Santa Clara de Tordesillas or with the congregation before deciding to found a nunnery in Aranda. This is in direct contrast to the case of King Henry, who, in addition to placing Santa Clara de Tordesillas under his protection, had obtained from Nicholas IV broad powers to extend the congregation to all the Poor Clare nunneries in the Crown of Castile (URIBE 1985: 266; CASTRO 1981: n° 649). Although it does not seem to have borne much fruit, as from the 1450s onwards monastery desertions began (URIBE 1985: 272-276). From this perspective, the Queen's project injected new life into an institution in crisis. Her link with the Crown would have given the innovations of the project –had it been realised– a particular religious, cultural and even ideological projection.

4. Conclusions

The Congregation of Tordesillas constituted a female religious space with a markedly reformist and autonomous identity. If we consider the group of monasteries that made it up (31), the impetus of the queens constituted a small part of it. However, their contribution was fundamental in its configuration, both in its institutional definition and in the involvement of the Crown. In fact, the queens were the ones who forged the link with the monarchy during the reign of John II.

It is not possible to claim that the congregation arose from the direct initiative of Catherine of Lancaster, but it did have her decisive support. She initiated the link with the Crown of an incipient monastic grouping which, dependent on the royal confessor, looked to the model of Santa Clara de Tordesillas, a monastery of royal foundation. The queen also emphasised its reformist character and probably made it easier for the papacy to recognise it as an institutional

entity. She acted in the interests of the Crown, because the link with the monarchy was an added prestige for the latter as a champion of women's reformism, and each monastery linked to it did emphasise this connection. In turn, Queen Mary of Aragon was aware of the value of this organisational scheme for the Crown and applied it to herself as queen. Proof of this is her attempt to generate another male congregational model rooted in her seigniories and dependent on her confessor, as well as the fact that she made her son, the future Henry IV, an enthusiastic promoter of the Congregation of Tordesillas.

The "spiritual landscape" designed by the queens in this congregational framework is characterised by the importance of urban centres and reginal seigniority (66,6%). There is a perceived interest in reinforcing the royal presence in certain sectors of the kingdom: the northern and western parts, as well as an area with such an important noble presence as Burgos, with an outstanding number of nunneries linked to the Haro family. It is true that the actions of the queens were not intensive: they did not intervene on a large scale in the towns of their seigniority or in other nunneries of the kingdom, and their promotions have a specific topographical dimension linked to specific situations. However, with their foundations they favoured the general political interest and, even if it went beyond the congregational structure, the model of Tordesillas served as a bridge between kingdoms, favouring the connection with Castile.

With regard to the question at the beginning of this article, the possible manifestation of a networked regional policy associated with this associative structure, I will limit myself to pointing out a few important ideas. There is no indication that the queens referred to each other in their actions, although Mary of Castile may have had in mind her mother, Catherine of Lancaster, and her mother her aunts, the *Infantas* Beatriz and Isabella of Castile. Both Mary of Aragon and Mary of Castile, and even Joan of Portugal, could be attuned to the first Trastámara queen, Juana Manuel.

The female reference points were numerous and important, because it was the women of the royal family who opened the way for the reform of the Poor Clares and cemented the congregation, in tune with the excellence and the female spiritual authority represented by the model of Tordesillas. They were also the ones who linked it to the Crown, which in turn linked itself to the female reform through them. They all worked for the monarchy and showed their loyalty to it through the sponsorship of nunneries. The crown thus constituted a fundamental vehicle that linked a genealogy of queens who promoted the reform model of Tordesillas.

Another point of connection between the queens was the fact that the congregation constituted a sphere of action or political training for them, a space where they could exercise power and develop their own projects, which acquired a special public dimension precisely because it was a space linked to the Crown and identified with it. It was a way of participating in the affairs of the monarchy. The forms of action were diverse: from aid to monasteries in difficulty –Santander–

to the imposition of reform in their seigniories, which also implied institutional change and the modification of the institutional geography –Salamanca– and the foundations that were directly integrated into the congregation –Aranda de Duero– or adopted the model –Valencia.

Moreover, we have noted the significant coincidence between the promotion of the congregation and the queens participation in the politics of the kingdom, as if religious action could be, on the one hand, a kind of translation or representation of political action and, on the other, a rationale for carrying it out. In any case, the coincidence between the promotion of the congregation, the exercise of power and the participation in the affairs of the kingdom as agents with a political voice was especially evident.

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Map 1: The Congregation of Tordesillas in the Crown of Castile



Map 2: The heart of Castile, the area with the densest implantation of monasteries affiliated to the Congregation of Tordesillas.