

ON *INFANTAS*, *DOMNAE* AND *DEO VOTAE*. A FEW REMARKS ON THE *INFANTADO* AND ITS LADIES**Laura Cayrol Bernardo**

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Resumen

En este artículo se revisan algunas propuestas relativas al vínculo establecido entre las infantas castellano-leonesas y los monasterios de su propiedad, insertándolas en el contexto más amplio de las mujeres de su época con el fin de averiguar hasta qué punto su situación fue o no diferente de la de las aristócratas más poderosas. Asimismo, se analizan algunos de los elementos que determinaron la evolución y transformación del concepto original de *Infantado*, consecuencia de una «reescritura» de la historia en la que confluyeron los intereses de las propias infantas y los de ciertos monasterios tradicionalmente ligados a estas damas.

Palabras clave: Infantas, infantado, Señoras, monasterios, patronazgo**Abstract**

This paper aims to review the links between the Castilian and Leonese *infantas* and the monasteries they owned, placing them in the broader context of the women of their time in order to clarify the extent to which their situation differed from that of the most powerful aristocrats. In addition, it deals with the revision of some of the elements that determined the evolution and transformation of the original concept of *Infantado*, as a result of a “rewriting” of history in which the interests of the *infantas* came together with those of certain monasteries traditionally related to these ladies.

Key words: *Infantas*, *infantado*, *Señoras*, monasteries, patronage

In recent years, a large number of studies devoted to the *Infantado*—the inheritance of the daughters of the Castilian and Leonese monarchs—have been published.¹ Their valuable inputs have contributed significantly to fill the historiographical void concerning the women who occupied principal positions in the court of Leon and Castile, relegated to the background by traditional historiography. However, the fact that a substantial part of the works on the subject have focused on unmarried *infantas* and their links with the paraecclesiastical sphere, together with the tendency to study their case regardless of the rest of the women of their time, has sometimes led to somewhat reductionistic conclusions. In order to contribute to a better understanding of an issue that still raises many questions, I will review below some of these issues from a contextual perspective.

In 1972, in a pioneering study that still remains a reference work, Luisa García Calles defined the *Infantado* as “señoríos constituidos como dote de una determinada infanta que deseaba o se comprometía a permanecer soltera” (seigniories established as the dowry of a certain *infanta* who wanted or agreed to remain unmarried) (GARCÍA CALLES 1972: 106).² This definition was almost invariably taken up by later scholars, including Patrick Henriët, the author of a suggestive article whose main contribution was to show that these *infantas*, far from living *more monastico*, were laywomen who remained politically active. To do this, he selected a group of women who, holding the title of *Deo vota* or *Deo dicata*,³ were at the head of important monastic foundations, managing their very vast territories without ever becoming abbesses, maybe not even nuns (HENRIËT 2000).

The scarcity and the laconic style of the documents complicate significantly the approach to the origin and the early days of the *Infantado*. According to the chronicler Sampiro, King Ramiro II (931–950) commissioned the building of a monastery dedicated to the Holy Saviour in the city of Leon for his daughter, the *infanta* Elvira; due to its proximity to the royal palace, the monastery was known by the name of Palat del Rey.⁴ It seems that Doña Elvira saw to the construction within the monastery of a monumental burial space for her father, and the kings Ordoño III, Sancho I and Ordoño IV were also buried there.⁵ This building, barely studied despite recent

¹ Main works on the *Infantado* are presented by GARCÍA CALLES 1972; VIÑAYO GONZÁLEZ 1982; PÉREZ DE TUDELA Y VELASCO 1988; WALKER 1998; HENRIËT 2000; MARTIN 2006. The publication of the fifth issue of the journal *e-Spania* (<http://e-spania.revues.org/8613>, last consulted 21/09/2011) in December 2008, gathering the conclusions of the colloquium *Infantes (Péninsule ibérique, XIe-XVIIe siècle)*, that took place at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, greatly increased the bibliography on the topic. See also MARTIN 2010; BOTO VARELA 2010; FERREIRA 2011; MARTIN 2012; REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a, 2012b.

² Although not delving deeply into the subject, previous authors had already conveyed a similar view of the *Infantado*, drawing on the Lucas de Tuy: SERRANO 1907: XXVII, XXXII, XXXIV; PÉREZ LLAMAZARES 1927: 38.

³ The denominations *Deo vota*, *Deo dicata* or *Christi ancilla* were commonly used in different contexts, not necessarily linked to a monastic background. This topic was addressed, in the case of the Catalan territory, by CABRE I PAIRET 1989. See also DAVIES 2007.

⁴ PÉREZ DE URBEL 1952, p. 332. The chronicler E Sampiro emphasizes the role entrusted to the Infanta to preserve the memory of her family. on this question, see WALKER 2001: 154.

⁵ PÉREZ DE URBEL 1952: 334 and 339 (according to the Pelagian version), for the two first kings; FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE 1987: 158, for the third. See and interpretation in ALONSO ÁLVAREZ 2007a: 9-10 and ALONSO ÁLVAREZ 2012: 14-15.

excavations (MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ 1996), had a double-apse plan, an arrangement commonly used in the Early Middle Ages in privileged burial places, which, in this case, probably tried to emulate the model of the pantheon of Santa Maria in Oviedo (ALONSO ÁLVAREZ 2007a: 9-10).

Little else is known about this monastery and the role it might have played in connection with the Leonese *Infantado*. In 967, thanks to the negotiations of King Sancho I and Elvira herself, the remains of the child-martyr Pelagius were transferred from Cordoba to Leon. Presumably, the first monastery of San Pelayo, which would end up replacing Palat del Rey as the residence of the *infanta* and royal cemetery, was built then (MARTIN 2006: 33), although there is no extant reference to it prior to 1013.⁶ The documents related to the *infanta* show that she already presented some of the most interesting features of her successors: Elvira occupied a prominent place in the Leonese court, actively participating in the policy of the realm, alone or in the company of the monarch, and sanctioning documents with the title of *regina*. And all this long before the period in which she was appointed as regent during the minority of her nephew, Ramiro III.⁷

Trying to define the *Infantado* of the the 10th and 11th centuries, Henriët included, together with the royal monasteries of Palat del Rey and San Juan Bautista and San Pelayo—later San Isidoro—in Leon, the monastery of San Pelayo in Oviedo, governed at the end of the tenth century by Queen Teresa Ansúrez, the widow of King Sancho I, the Fat, as well as the comital foundations of Covarrubias and Oña. In 978, Count García Fernández and his wife Ava gave their daughter Urraca a monastery located in Covarrubias, dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian. Among its properties were numerous monasteries and towns, whose inhabitants were granted various privileges.⁸ Its extensive domains constitute the core of what would later become known as the “*Infantado de Covarrubias*”. In 1011, Sancho García, the brother of Urraca, founded the monastery of San Salvador de Oña for his daughter Tigridia.⁹

As in the previous case, he made a very generous donation.¹⁰ We know for certain that, initially, it accommodated a community of men and women at the head of which was Tigridia who, nevertheless, is only named as the abbess in a counterfeit document written in the 12th century (HENRIËT 2000: 193). A donation made by King Vermudo II in 996¹¹ proves that, after the transfer of the relics of Saint Pelagius from Leon to Oviedo, Teresa Ansúrez, *Deo vota* and the widow of King Sancho I, the Fat, governed the monastery of San Juan Bautista in Oviedo, which housed

⁶ A document about a domna Gracilo, who seems to be at the head of the community is dated in 1013, she sells *una cum collegio monasterii Sancti Pelagii martiris virginum et continentium fratrum et monagorum*. See, MARTÍN LÓPEZ 1995, doc. 2.

⁷ On the *infanta* Elvira Ramírez, see CARRIEDO TEJEDO 2000, *passim*; PICK 2002.

⁸ ZABALZADUQUE 1998, docs. 53 and 54. See also MARTIN 2003: 243-261.

⁹ As Amancio Isla Frez notes (ISLA FREZ 2007: 155), it is very likely that it was a refoundation.

¹⁰ ZABALZADUQUE 1998, doc. 64.

¹¹ F. J. FERNÁNDEZ CONDE, I. TORRENTE FERNÁNDEZ, G. DE LA NOVAL MENÉNDEZ, *El monasterio de San Pelayo. Historia y Fuentes*, Oviedo, 1978, vol. I, doc. 1.

the remains of the martyr and would eventually be dedicated to him.¹² It does not seem that Teresa ever acted as the abbess either.

This group of monasteries, later used by other authors, is somewhat arbitrary and presents certain irregularities: Teresa Ansúrez was never a celibate *infanta* but a queen dowager who belonged to the high aristocracy; Urraca, the lady of Covarrubias, and Tigridia, the lady of Oña, did not belong to any royal family either but were daughters of the Counts of Castile. Thereafter, San Pelayo de Oviedo would be very closely linked to the *infantas* and, with the addition to their heritage of Castilian territories following the death of Fernando I, Covarrubias would also depend on these ladies (GARCÍA CALLES 1972: 111-113). Oña, however, was never particularly connected to women of royal blood (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 50-52).

Moreover, these were not the only cases in which women whose proper monastic condition is more than doubtful headed family monastic foundations. This is not at all strange considering that, in addition to the poor regulation of female monasticism at that time, the early medieval tradition allowed certain women, usually from the environment of the promoter family, resided in male monasteries. In this regard, the example of the Asturian monastery of San Salvador de Cornellana—founded in 1024 by the *infanta* Cristina, daughter of Vermudo II and his first wife—is significant. According to its foundational charter, Cristina and her husband had built in that place a *baselica* dedicated to the Saviour, the twelve Apostles and all the saints. Cristina donated important pieces of liturgical furnishing and household items, including two beds, which, according to Antonio C. Floriano Cumbreño, were to be used by the *infanta* herself, who would reside in the monastery until her death, and another woman, who sanctions the document as *Animia Deo vota* (FLORIANO CUMBREÑO 1949: 9-11).

Before 1038, Countess Sancha Moniz founded the monastery of San Antolín del Esla, near Valencia de Don Juan. The foundress was the daughter of Munio Fernandi and was married to Pedro Fernandi, both related to the court of Ramiro III (966-985) and Alfonso V (999-1028), from whom they had received substantial territories (TORRES SEVILLA 1999:70). In 1038, after the demise of her husband and daughter, Sancha endowed her foundation generously and started to govern the mixed community as *domna*, exercising her authority even over Abbot García, while she continued actively participating in politics, maintaining close ties with the Leonese court (MARTÍNEZ SOPENA 2003: 39-40). In 1040, she donated San Antolín to the cathedral of León and its bishop, along with the village of Cimanés and another monastery, San Salvador de Barriones, which she had built.¹³

Count Fruela Vélez and his wife, Totilde, founded the Asturian monastery of San Miguel de Bárzana in the 10th century. Several members of the Vela family, especially women, used it as a

¹² Although the extant document is a severely interpolated copy of the 12th century, we know for sure that Queen Teresa was in Oviedo before the year 994. FERNÁNDEZ CONDE, TORRENTE FERNÁNDEZ 2007: 187.

¹³ RUIZ ASENCIO 1990, doc. 992.

retreat at the end of their lives and chose to be buried within its walls. It was the case of Doña Aragonta (d. 1006), the mother of Count Piniolo, founder of the great monastery of Corias.¹⁴ Although traditionally considered a nun, the extant documents only refer to her as *famula Dei* and *confessa*, more general and imprecise terms, which distinguish her from the community of *sanctimoniales* (FLORIANO LLORENTE 1975: 335-336). Her daughter Auria, *comitissa* and the sister of Piniolo, appears governing the monastery as *domina* without adopting any religious title. Neither did Urraca Alfonso, the daughter of Alfonso Díaz, Count of Grajal, *christi ancilla* and *deovota*, who was at the head of the monastery of Santa María de Piasca, in Liébana (LORING GARCÍA 1987: 99).

In addition to these examples, similar situations can be found in other family foundations scattered throughout the Leonese and Castilian territory. We can conclude, therefore, that the link between the *infantas* and their monasteries equalled the ties of other ladies of the aristocracy with their own foundations, as a result of a significant lay presence in the affairs of the communities, which resulted from the character of the monasteries as “properties”.¹⁵ As we shall see in the following pages, some of these features of early medieval monasticism would last, with certain changes, until the end of the Middle Ages.

Origins, Evolution and Manipulation of the Concept of infantaticum

It is worth considering which were the specificities of the *infantas*. The infrequent explicit appearance of the inheritances usually related to the *Infantado* as such is rather striking. The term *infantaticum* is first documented in the acts of the *Curia* of Villalpando, held in 1089. It resolved a complaint raised by the Leonese Bishop against Urraca, the sister of Alfonso VI, in the presence of the king himself and his other sister, the *infanta* Elvira.¹⁶ As Carlos M. Reglero de la Fuente noted, we find here a first idea of *infantaticum* as a legal category: the properties included in the *Infantado* belonged to the *infantas* just as Crown lands belonged to the king (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 5). The term reappears, with the same meaning, to refer to the possessions in Galicia of the still *infanta* Urraca Alfonso (1107), and again later when she has become the Queen.¹⁷ In the late 12th and early 13th century it is common to find lands that are referred to as *infantado*, and regardless of their owner, an *infanta*, the king, a nobleman, or a monastery (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 6). Also at the time of Queen Urraca, *infantaticum* started to

¹⁴ On Bárzana, see FLORIANO LLORENTE 1975; GARCÍA GARCÍA 1997: 2; TORRENTE FERNÁNDEZ 2000: 92-98; CALLEJA PUERTA 2001: 430; FERNÁNDEZ CONDE 2006.

¹⁵ Without attempting to be exhaustive, some of the main contributions on the topic of family and own monasteries in Iberia are ORLANDIS ROVIRA 1971, bringing together some of the major works of the author related to this topic. See also LORING GARCÍA 1987; MARTÍN VISO 1996; GARCÍA GARCÍA 1997; PALLARES MÉNDEZ 1998; CALLEJA PUERTA 2001; MARTÍNEZ SOPENA 2003; FERNÁNDEZ CONDE 2008: 222-276.

¹⁶ RUIZ ASENCIO 1990, doc. 1244.

¹⁷ RUIZ ALBI 2003, docs. 31, 32, 61.

be used to refer to the specific domain of the *infantas* over a region. There are references to the *Infantado* of Pistomarcos, in Galicia (1118), and later on her daughter Sancha will refer to the *Infantado* of Carracedo, in Bierzo (1130) or to that of San Pelayo, in León (1148).¹⁸

On the basis of these data, we can affirm that the tenure of an *Infantado* was in no way connected with religious life: the only condition was to be the offspring of a monarch. As Therese Martin pointed out, married women also made use of the properties and rights related to the *Infantado* (MARTIN 2006: 63). It was the case of Queen Sancha, the wife of Fernando I. Some authors consider that in her youth and after widowing she was the abbess of the monastery of San Pelayo, in León (VIÑAYO 1982: 130), although she never professed as a nun, but the truth is that it seems that even during her marriage she had remained at the head of the monastic community. Thus, in the document of consecration of the church of San Isidoro in 1063, she is presented as *Sancia regina quamuis domina sim ipsius monasterii*.¹⁹ Martin defines the *infanta* as a secular *domina* who governs a monastery and its possessions from her palace, while, at the same time, a regular abbot or abbess stands at the head of the establishment (MARTIN 2006: 32). Anyway, we should bear in mind that the patrimony of the *infantas* consisted, in addition to monasteries, of numerous towns and estates they had received from their parents or acquired through various procedures.²⁰ Like Doña Sancha, Queen Urraca made use of the *Infantado* while she was married, and it did not pass on to her daughter Sancha until Urraca's demise. After the *infanta* Sancha, the inheritance would pass on to her niece, a namesake of hers, who was married to King Sancho VI of Navarre. In addition, as indicated by the same author, scholars seem to have forgotten the *Chronicon Compostellanum*, a work that defines the *Infantado* omitting any reference to marriage (MARTIN 2006: 63) and to which we shall return later.

In any case, the process of centralization of the *Infantado* reached its peak with Doña Sancha, the sister of Alfonso VII, who, after the death of her mother Queen Urraca in 1126, concentrated in her hands the whole *Infantaticum*. Like her predecessors, she would become the main councillor of her brother, she would sanction documents with the title of *regina*, often occupying a position over the king's own wife (GARCÍA CALLES 1972: 28). In 1148, she appears to be the main responsible for the eviction of the nuns from San Pelayo in León, who were transferred to the monastery of Santa María de Carbajal. A community of Canons Regular of the Order of Saint Augustine, more in line with the spirituality of her time, would be installed in San Isidoro; she would herself leave the monastery, which had been for generations the residence of the *infantas*.²¹

¹⁸ RUIZ ALBI 2003, doc. 95; FERNÁNDEZ CATÓN 1990, doc. 1457.

¹⁹ MARTÍN LÓPEZ 1995, doc. 6.

²⁰ The document that best illustrates the diverse nature of the property which belonged to the *Infantado* is the testament of the *infanta* Elvira (1099), which has been analysed in detail in MARTIN 2008. As regards monasteries, the procedures by which the *infantas* obtained them and the type of protection they exercised over them were varied. On this subject, see REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012b: 841-846.

²¹ MARTÍN LÓPEZ 1995, doc. 44.

This has been interpreted as the culmination of a decline that began in the reign of Alfonso VI. The fact that no monastery of the *Infantado* was donated to Cluny²² has been used as an argument to try to prove an alleged confrontation between the monarch and his sisters Urraca and Elvira, who would have seen reformed monasticism as a threat to their privileges.²³ A detailed analysis of the reception of Cluny in the Peninsula shows that its influence was very limited, both in space and time. The collaboration of the monarch with the Burgundian house was part of a broader political strategy to dodge the papal claims to impose papal power over his. In this context, the Castilian-Leonese monarchy was forced to make some changes, more epidermal than structural, to adapt to the times of reform without submitting to Rome. With the adoption of the Roman Rite, the donations to Cluny and good relationship with the papal legates and the pontiffs, the king skillfully managed to continue summoning councils, appointing bishops and retaining temporal guardianship over major monasteries.²⁴ Since Alfonso VI himself, far from having waived any privilege, held a monastic policy similar to that of his sisters (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 70), I consider that the reform can hardly be interpreted as a matter of dispute between the king and the *infantas*.

The analysis of the role of the *infantas* as monastic ladies in the broader context of the powerful women of their time, allows us to notice that neither the so-called “Gregorian reform” nor the arrival of Cistercians and other reformed orders presented an obstacle to secular ladies continued involvement in the affairs of the monasteries founded by them or their relatives. However, with the increasingly strong presence of reformist tendencies, it can be assumed that traditional monasteries where men and women, religious and lay people shared the same space began to be viewed with a certain prejudice, which could underlie the transfer of the female community of San Pelayo de León.

In times of Sancha Raimúndez, the references to the *Infantado* are increasingly frequent.²⁵ In my opinion, their aim is to emphasize the legitimacy of some of the properties of the *infantas* and the role they played in relation to the same.²⁶ When Sancha alienates the monastery of Wamba, she insists she had received it from her aunt Elvira. The word *infantaticum*, usually absent from the documentation appears here four times.²⁷ The increasing recurrence of this term coincides with

²² Neither the donation of San Salvador de Palat del Rey nor San Juan de Hérmedes de Cerrato, which had also been assigned to the *Infantado*, were effective: REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2008: 164-166; RUCQUOI 2010: 120. This did not prevent the *infanta* Urraca from appearing in the necrology of Cluny (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2008: 165 y 196).

²³ MARTIN 2008: 18; MARTIN 2010: 12-24. Carlos M. Reglero de la Fuente, in turn, believes that the reluctance of the *infantas* against Cluny was due to the clash of two opposing forms of spiritual intercession (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2008: 227).

²⁴ RUCQUOI 2010: 106-115; RUCQUOI 2012: 148-150.

²⁵ Although, as noted by Therese Martin, of the ninety-six papers collected by Encarnación López Martín in the documentary collection of the *infanta* Sancha (MARTÍN LOPEZ, 2003), only eleven use the term *infantaticum*, this is a very high number compared to the documents related to previous *infantas*. See MARTIN 2008, n. 35.

²⁶ The term appears more frequently in the documents where Sancha refers to properties inherited from the *infantas* Urraca and Elvira, and these documents require of her that she performs the same function as her aunts: FERNÁNDEZ CATÓN 1990, doc. 1440 y 1454.

²⁷ MARTÍN LÓPEZ 2003: 264-266.

the development of a new idea of *Infantado*, now understood as a domain linked to a monastery, created by the Kings of Leon for women of their family who did not wish to marry, and passed on from one *infanta* to another. It is difficult to establish to what extent the *infantas* themselves contributed to the creation of this concept, since the bulk of the extant references belong to chronicles or interpolated documents inserted in subsequent propaganda operations. The foundational diploma of San Isidoro as a canonry in 1148 contains all the defining elements of the *Infantado* later used in the work of Lucas of Tuy: a domain belonging to a celibate *infanta*, who leads a life of exemplary chastity and protects the monastery. However, the original document is not extant and the copies made in the 12th century do not match in this part another copy dating from the 13th century, which suggests that it is an interpolation.²⁸ Other data would confirm these suspicions. After the death of the *infanta* Sancha Raimúndez in 1159, a decade after the nuns of San Pelayo de León had been moved and the *infantas* had left their residence in León, the Canons Regular of San Isidoro began a prestige operation caused by the loss of relevance of the old royal cemetery. They undertook the renovation of the portico-pantheon, whose tombs were reorganized, and the cult of the memory of their dead was resumed, especially of the main benefactors of the monastery: Fernando I (d. 1065), Queen Urraca (d. 1126), and the *infanta* Sancha Raimúndez (d. 1159). The placement of this space under the patronage of Catherine of Alexandria, a saint and a princess, also appears to have strengthened the relationship thereof with the women of the royal family (SÁNCHEZ AMEIJERAS 2005: 486-490).

The definition of the *infanta* as a laywoman who led an almost monastic life was developed and perpetuated by the major chroniclers of the 12th and 13th centuries. The *Chronicon Compostellanum* describes the division of the kingdom of Fernando I among his descendants. It records that the monasteries of the kingdom went to his daughters,²⁹ but it does not specify that to access their inheritance they had to submit to any specific clause.³⁰ However, the author of the so-called *Historia Silense*, considered the domain of the monasteries by the *infantas* as a lifetime transfer subject to the condition that they remained chaste.³¹ This would have meant that the *infantas* were

²⁸ *Et ego Sancia infanta, germana imperatoris, quae omnem honorem de infantadgo teneo... et si qua mulier de de progenie nostra fuerit ad quam infantagum pertineat et innupta manere et bonam et honestam uitam ducere uoluerit, ipsas easdem ecclesias et canonicos ibi degentes et omnes possessiones eorum protegat et defendat ab omnibus hominibus manu teneant et in necessariis adiuuet et consilietur et nichil de suis exigere presumat. Si uero aliqua mulier talis ut supradiximus cui infantazgum pertineat superstes non fuerit, rex terrae quod ipsa deberet eis supplere.* MARTÍN LÓPEZ 1995, doc. 44. The editor indicates that the parts in bold are not included in another 13th-century copy, which reinforces the idea that the document was interpolated in this passage.

²⁹ Lucy Pick (PICK 2011a: 50-51, n. 96) cites a document dated in 1071 that already suggests that the monasteries of the kingdom corresponded to the *infantas*, as the *Silense* and the *Chronicon Compostellanum* would also indicate later: *Genitor meus, domnus Ferdinandus per scripturam concessit mihi Geloira et ad germana mea domina Vrracha predictum monasterium sancte Eolalie de Fingon cum cunctos monasterios regni sui per omnes prouincias et regiones* (Archivo Histórico Nacional, MS 1043B, fol. 69r). Unfortunately, I have not had occasion to consult that document. It would be desirable to conduct a palaeographic study to rule out the possibility that the passage has been interpolated. If it were an original, it would be extremely interesting that the *infanta* Elvira herself had used in such an early date, this formula to refer to the inheritance from her parents.

³⁰ (...) *omnia uero totius regni monasteria suis duabus filiabus, Urrache scilicet et Geloire hereditario iure tenenda et possidenda concessit.* E. FALQUE REY (ed.) 1983: 73-83.

³¹ *Tradidit etiam filiabus suis omnia totius regni sui monasteria, in quibus usque ad exitum huius vite absque mariti copula uiverent,* J. PÉREZ DE URBEL, A. GONZÁLEZ RUIZ-ZORRILLA (eds.) 1959: 205.

not the owners of their monasteries and could not, therefore, donate them or pass them on to their possible descendants or their spouses (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 1-2). Although the author does not use the term *infantaticum*, the idea of the *Infantado* that Tuy will pick up a century later is already there. But, as I said, this was not the usual meaning of the word at the time, for it was used primarily to designate a legal category of property, belonging to an *infanta*. Although it is hard to put a precise date on the chronicle, we know that it was written before the *infanta* Sancha left her previous residence in León and, therefore, prior to the propaganda operation conducted by the canons of San Isidoro.³² Since the work was written, in all likelihood, in the courtly milieu, it seems plausible that the creation of this new image of Urraca as an almost nun developed within the same context. This is a complex topic on which opinions are far from unanimous, but the hypothesis proposed by Carlos M. Reglero de la Fuente, who considers that the *Silense* could have been written in the time of Sancha Raimúndez (REGLERO DE LA FUENTE 2012a: 73) is very attractive.

The vision of Urraca conveyed by the chronicler monk, radically different from that provided by other sources, makes the tenure of monasteries by laywomen acceptable in the eyes of the reforming Church.³³ As Therese Martin noted, a century later Lucas de Tuy would use several elements of this description to configure his own of the *infanta* Sancha (MARTIN 2006: 66 y 154).

By the end of the 12th century, the *Chronica Nairerensis* recovers the passage of the division of the kingdom of Fernando I included in the *Silense* with no variations.³⁴ But several decades later, Lucas de Tuy, a canon of San Isidoro, rewrites it introducing the term *infantaticum* and maintaining the condition that their owners should remain celibate.³⁵ It is important to place this passage again in a historical context, manipulated by Isidorian canons. In times of Lucas de Tuy, the tombs and inscriptions of the royal pantheon were subjected to new interpretations and manipulations, linked to a complex textual block (SUÁREZ GONZÁLEZ 2003) comprising his own hagiographic and chronicle works and supported in turn by the diplomas produced in the *scriptorium* of San Isidoro (SÁNCHEZ AMEJEIRAS 2005: 493-508). The work of Lucas de Tuy transmits a disproportionate vision of a glorious past, related to the present through the figure of the *infanta* Sancha, “the wife of San Isidoro”, who was responsible for the installation of the community of canons, at the behest of the saint himself.³⁶

³² We know that it was written sometime between the reign of Urraca Alfonso and that of her son, Alfonso VII. See issue 14 of the journal *e-Spania*, devoted to the *Historia Legionensis* (called *Silensis*) <http://e-spania.revues.org/21568>. [10/02/2013]

³³ *Tradidit etiam filiabus suis omnia totius regni sui monasteria, in quibus usque ad exitum huius vite absque mariti copula viverent*, J. PÉREZ DE URBEL, A. GONZÁLEZ RUIZ-ZORRILLA (eds.) 1959: 205.

³⁴ ESTÉVEZ SOLA (ed.) 1995, 81 A, III: 167.

³⁵ *Tradidit etiam filiabus suis Urracae silicet et Geloyrae totum infantaticum cum omnibus monasteriis, quae ipse construxerat, admonens ut usque ad exitum huius vitae ipsas ecclesias adornarent et absque mariti copula viverent*, *Chronicon mundi*, IV, 57, FALQUE REY (ed.) 2003: 292.

³⁶ *Cum regina prefecta Santia in palatio quod erat contiguum beati confessoris ecclesie moraretur, et per fenestram que in eminentiori templi eiusdem parieti, id est in pinaculo contra maius altare respicit aspiciendo frequenter almi doctoris corpus, hoc est sepulcrum, oraret dominum... quadam die raptam in extasi vidit celos apertos, et in thalamo*

Soon after, from his characteristic pro-Castilian standpoint, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada takes up the definition of Lucas de Tuy in order to demonstrate that the monastery of Covarrubias, originally a comital foundation, had been at the head of an *infantado* from the beginning.³⁷

Infantas and Señoras from the 12th Century Onwards. Survival and Transformations.

After the death of the *infanta* Sancha in 1159 some of her possessions were donated to new congregations (hospitallers, Cistercians), while others became part of the heritage of the sovereign. In 1165 the *infantaticum* would reappear, this time in relation to another Sancha, the sister of Fernando II—married to King Sancho VI of Navarre—to whom his brother donated a number of estates and monasteries located in León and around Toledo. The intervention of this *infanta* in the matters related to San Isidoro was, however, negligible. There were those who felt that the fact that a substantial part of *Infantado* was donated to a married woman was a change in its function, becoming a political tool to consolidate the control of the monarch over the territories that formed it and to garner the support of the husband of his sister, only to disappear permanently in the end (HENRIET 2000: 199-200).

Already in the previous centuries, the *Infantado* had not been limited to a series of celibate *infantas* at the head of a monastic dominion, but it was a really fluctuating reality depending on the political situation of the kingdom and the circumstances of each heir. Pending a thorough study of the patrimony of the *infantas* that includes married women, Rose Walker's proposal, according to which Las Huelgas de Burgos would be a product of the evolution of this type of property (WALKER 2001:154; WALKER 2005), is very suggestive. The fact that a significant part of the *Infantado* of Covarrubias was donated to this monastery, whose ladies were precisely the Castilian *infantas*, seems to confirm this theory (SERRANO 1907: XLIX; BAURY 2012: 46-47).

Las Huelgas belonged to a reformed order, but this was not an obstacle for the *infantas* to continue their secular tradition. In this case, we find a number of unmarried *infantas* permanently connected to the monastery, but who still held power in the public arena, playing the role of intermediaries between the community and secular powers. They were known as “*infantas de*

auro et gemmis radiantibus insignito, sponsum suum magnum doctorem Ysidorum... sibi dicentem : “Soror mea, dilecta et dulcissima sponsa... dum vero quia his qui te continet locus est domino consecratus, et ecclesie valde propinquus, recede ab isto palatio, et aliud tibi edifica et hoc trade meis canonicis...” Convocatis ad se reverende sanctitatis Petrum Arie priorem cum suis canonicis, illico illis palatium contullit supradictum... Quibus peractis ad aliam in platea eiusdem ecclesie se transtulit domum. Apparition of Saint Isidore of Seville to the *regina* Sancha according to Lucas de Tuy, *Liber miraculorum beatissimi Isidori*, cap. 35, Archivo de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León, MS 63, fol. 18r–18v. Published and translated in HENRIET 2008.

³⁷ ...*construxit monasterium in honorem Sancti Cosmae et Damiani iuxta ripam Dorii fluminis Aslantiae, in villa quae Cavae rubeae nuncupatur; et amplissimis possessionibus dilatavit, et loca quae dedit, statuit Infantaticum appellari eo intuitu, quod si aliqua de genere suo non posset, aut nollet mariti comparis solatia adipisci, de bonis monasterii provideretur eidem largiter et decenter; demptis dumtaxat necessariis clericorum qui inibi Deo et Sancti Martyribus deservirent.* FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE (ed.) 1987: 150.

las Huelgas” and some held the title of *mayor*. From 1245 onwards, in times of Berenguela, the daughter of Fernando III, they began to be called *señoras* (ladies) of Las Huelgas. These ladies were engaged in the material aspects of the monastery, whereas the spiritual matters corresponded to the abbesses, who never came from the royal family. Thus, they used their privileged social position to favour the institution for which they were responsible, without withdrawing from secular life and the affairs of the kingdom (LIZOAIN GARRIDO 1998:375-377; BAURY 2012:46-48).

Something similar can be perceived in the Portuguese foundations of Lorvão, protected by Queen Teresa, and Celas, where the documents refer to its foundress and patroness, the *infanta* Sancha, with the title of *domina* (FERNÁNDES MARQUES 2001:220; ALONSO ÁLVAREZ 2007b: 687-689; SHADIS 2012: 671-702).

The presence in the monasteries of women who, with or without a specific title, exercised more power than the abbess herself, was more common than we might think (ALONSO ÁLVAREZ 2007b: 704-705). This figure also appears in other Cistercian monasteries brilliantly studied by Ghislain Baurly (BAURY 2012: 46-48). But it was not a Cistercian particularity. Gontrodo Petriz, mistress of Emperor Alfonso VII and mother of Queen Urraca “the Asturian”, acted as the *señora* of her Fontevrist foundation of Santa María de la Vega, in Oviedo. Without playing any explicit role within the community, she authorized and likely inspired the most important actions taken by the prioress or the prior of the monastery (MARTÍNEZ VEGA 1991, docs. 4, 5, 6, 7 y 8).

Likewise, Countess Inés appears to have occupied a similar position in the homonymous monastery of Vega del Cea, also linked to the Fontevrist order (DOMÍNGUEZ SÁNCHEZ 2001, docs. 33, 34, 36 y 41).

In conclusion, although it exceeds the chronological boundaries of this study, it is interesting to note that the figure of the monastic “señora” survived even the arrival of the mendicant orders. Beatriz Manrique, the wife of Count Pedro Fernández de Velasco, retired, after widowing, with several servants to a house that she had built in the orchard of the Poor Clares of Medina del Pomar, without ever professing as a nun. In 1471, she made her testament in which she stated that upon her death her house should pass on to other *mugeres con deboçion*—who would not embrace tmonastic life—and their personal service (PEREDA 2012: 981). These women do not seem very different from the *Deo votae* of the preceding centuries. Also, there were many ladies of the royalty or the aristocracy who, until the end of Middle Ages, lived in houses next to monastic foundations, sometimes intervening in the affairs of the religious community. While some ended up taking the veil, others maintained their lay status. We are particularly interested in the case of Santo Domingo de Caleruega, for we find several *infantas* among its protectors. Thus, Doña Blanca de Portugal, the granddaughter of Alfonso X, was entrusted the monastery between 1298 and 1320. Like the previous “señoras”, the “protectors of Caleruega” were in charge of the

economic and legal management of the monastery, acting as intermediaries with the sovereign, and often played an important political role (PÉREZ VIDAL 2013: 145-149).

But, over the centuries, these ladies were increasingly presented as religious women, sometimes even surrounded with a certain halo of sanctity. Their prominence within the community, before solely based on their family origins, became justified by their exemplary conduct and extraordinary spiritual power.³⁸ In any case, although the evolution of the image of the monastic “señoras” is very interesting, we must not lose sight that this vision often comes not from the documents of their daily lives but from chronicles or hagiographic works, loaded with elements of propaganda.

Conclusions

The immense importance of the royal and seigniorial representation in the monasteries with female presence can, to a large extent, be explained in relation to the independence women enjoyed in León and Castile. These features, observed during the early Middle Ages, have been attributed to an extensive succession system of Roman-Visigothic roots, which allowed women to inherit and manages of their own properties: the Hispanic *infantas*, queens and aristocrats were powerful because they were rich. Although some authors argue that the situation changed from the 12th century onwards,³⁹ it appears that Castilian-Leonese women maintained those capabilities in later centuries.

As regards the monasteries, although the forms of secular patronage gradually evolved throughout the Middle Ages, we note that certain behaviours survived with few variations, probably due to the little influence of canon law on nunneries. In these pages I have outlined, in general terms, an extremely complex subject; further studies on Iberian monasticism that analyse both the mechanisms of power that regulated the royal and aristocratic foundations, and the patrimony of the *infantas* are still necessary. Furthermore, once we strip the *Infantado* of propaganda,⁴⁰ and considering that the area where the royal women exercised their power was not limited to monasteries, it is difficult to maintain, as has already been done, that the female side of power

³⁸ For example, after the death of the Infanta Sancha Raimúndez, in both the popular and the erudite imagination emerged the figure of a true saint, to which several miracles and pilgrimages to the Holy Places—that she never made—were attributed: GARCÍACALLES 1972: 58-67. It is also of great interest the *Crónica da Fundação do Mosteiro de Jesus Aveiro*, which recounts how the *infanta* Joana, the lady of the monastery, used to mortify his flesh, especially in the days dedicated to the celebration of Christ’s humanity, such as the feast of the Circumcision. This woman, compared in the chronicle with Catherine of Alexandria for her wisdom, her culture and her exemplary conduct, was worshiped as a saint after her death. *Crónica da Fundação do Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro e Memorial da Infanta Santa Joana*, ed. Madahil, 1939: 78-83, cited in MOITEIRO, in press. Consulted thanks to the kindness of the author.

³⁹ “Después, la mayoría de las mujeres de la aristocracia perdió capacidad de proyección social. Religiosas o laicas, sus acciones tuvieron, en general, menos repercusión fuera de los muros del convento o en el exterior del espacio doméstico. Y aquellas que la alcanzaron fue venciendo una mentalidad firmemente asentada en la supremacía del varón”. PALLARES MÉNDEZ 2005: 441.

⁴⁰ On the use of the *infantas* and the *Infantado* for propaganda, besides the aforementioned work of Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, see CAYROL BERNARDO 2013.

was also its most divine part.⁴¹ It is worth asking about the actual spiritual implication of the *infantas* in their monasteries, role they played in the care of the deceased in the royal pantheons and the extent to which these functions were a hallmark of the *infantas* or a feature characteristic of the women of their time.

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⁴¹ The idea that the women of the royal family served as a factor of sacralisation for the Hispanic monarchy was pressed to extremes in PICK, 2011b.

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