

Women's Networks  
of Spiritual Promotion in the Peninsular Kingdoms  
(13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

*ed. by Blanca Garí*

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MARÍA DEL MAR GRAÑA CID

Queens, Infantas and Court Ladies at the Origin  
of Castilian Mendicant Nuns (c. 1222-1316).  
Spiritual Sponsorship and Female Religious Movement\*

The initial establishment of female mendicant orders in the Crown of Castile was a complex phenomenon in which the participation of various socio-political agents with diverse interests superimposed on a double problem: the lengthy processes of canonical definition of a female mendicant model, especially difficult for the Clarist-Franciscan case and, closely related to that, the tension between charisma and institution, one of the expressions of which was the institutionalisation of non-regulated female communities. In the background were the different expressions of what historiography has called the “female religious movement” (GRUNDMANN 1980) and the framework that brought about female mendicant nuns. Queens and women belonging to the royal and courtly circle were not the first nor the only ones involved, but devoting these pages to them arises from the interest in appraising the nature of their implication in that religious mobilisation and in the new trends of female spirituality that nurtured it. As members of power circles, did they share their interests? Where did they position themselves regarding the religious movement and what was their contribution to the devising of a female mendicant model? Did they develop original forms of spiritual promotion and specific relational networks? Those questions emerge from the wish to investigate the historical forms of action led by women against the backdrop of those approaches that try to define the social spaces of women and admit the existence of a female culture with its own traits (DUBOIS ET AL. 1980; LERNER 1993; GRAÑA CID 1998, p. 114-117). I will study both Clarisses and Dominican nuns in a time frame that, according to tradition, starts in 1222 with the foundation of San Salvador de Guadalajara and that would end in 1316 with that of Sancti Spiritus de Toro. Until the last third of the 14<sup>th</sup> century this kind of female promotion didn’t happen again, and when it did it was in a different religious context. These pages constitute a first attempt that doesn’t intend to exhaust the topic, but to reflect on that specific dimension of the first female mendicant foundational reality. The other implications of establishment policies will be accounted for in future works.

\* Throughout this chapter the author uses the word “matronazgo” instead of the word “patronazgo” (patronage) when referring to actions of sponsorship carried out by women. We will translate it as “sponsorship” except when the author explicitly suggests the creation of a new concept, in which case we suggest the word “matronage” in order to respect the symmetry (NT).

### 1. *The Female Promoters of Mendicant Nuns*

The first references to women of the royal family of Castile and its court promoting the female mendicant phenomenon point to queens. According to tradition, Doña Berenguela founded San Salvador de Guadalajara in 1222.<sup>1</sup> A document by Alfonso X (1256) would prove it, since it confirmed the privileges bestowed upon the monastery by his grandmother and Fernando III, but its loss prompted the alteration of both date and, consequently, authorship that was finally attributed to the infanta Berenguela, his daughter, lady of Guadalajara and alleged foundress between 1274 and 1284. The recent find of the document in which the Wise King acknowledged that the cenoby «fue fecho por la mui noble y mui alta señora doña Berenguela, reina de Castilla, nuestra abuela muy querida» (was made by the very noble and very high lady Doña Berenguela, queen of Castile, our dearest grandmother), makes it possible to respect the royal authorship even if a precise chronology cannot be proved without further documentary support; we can only consider as a limit 1246, the year of the queen's death.

The next accounts come from the chronicle tradition. The first one notes that the Dominican monastery of Santa María de las Dueñas de Zamora was promoted around 1238 by Queen Teresa of León; the second one states that Queen Violante of Castile founded Santa Clara de Santiago de Compostela around 1260.<sup>2</sup> Even though there is proof that Doña Violante already supported the existing communities by the end of the decade of the 1250s, the foundations of queens are not documented until 1292 when the same queen promoted Santa Clara de Allariz. Almost at the same time and especially during the first decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Queen María de Molina favoured several processes already initiated in Santa Clara de Guadalajara and in Santa Clara and Sancti Spiritus de Toro without being actually their foundress. Noteworthy on her own is Queen Mencía of Portugal, who was since 1256 the driving force behind Santa Clara de Carrión de los Condes.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the participation of royal female relatives are also legendary. Just as legendary as the vague information regarding the venerable Urraca, of alleged royal blood, as a member of the community that gave rise to Santa María de Salamanca. There are no reliable news until the decade of the 1250s – for instance the material support the infanta Berenguela I, daughter of Fernando III, provided for that community before 1258 –, but they keep showing during the decade of the 1260s – with the reconstruction of Santa Clara de Toro by the infanta Berenguela II, daughter of Alfonso X and Doña Violante –, although the best documented facts don't appear until the transition from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the

1. See PÉREZ 1913, p. 36, n. 2; PÉREZ 1913, p. 37, n. 2; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 65; TORMO SANZ 1994, p. 452.

2. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 54r; CASTRO 1976, p. 313; CASTRO Y CASTRO 1983, p. 3-4; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 122; GARCÍA ORO 1990; BUENO DOMÍNGUEZ 1993; GARCÍA ORO 1994; LINEHAN 2000, p. 94.

3. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 58r-59r; PÉREZ 1913, p. 37; CASTRO 1976, p. 327; CALDERÓN 2008, p. 286-287.

refoundation of Santa Clara de Guadalajara, in which the infanta Isabel, daughter of Sancho IV and María de Molina, took part.<sup>4</sup> Maybe Doña Teresa Alfonso, who is described by the chronicles as “infanta” and could have been the aunt of María de Molina (CASTILLO 1592, f. 54v-56r), should be also included in this group as the foundress of the Dominican nuns of San Cebrián de Mazote in 1305.

Two different categories can be distinguished among the women in the court. The first one included royal mistresses, as Doña Mayor Guillén, mistress to Alfonso X and foundress of San Miguel del Monte (Alcocer) around 1252, and Doña Teresa Gil, related to Sancho IV and foundress of the Dominican nuns of Sancti Spiritus de Toro in 1307.<sup>5</sup> The other one comprised the women that had been either in the service of queens and infantas or married to retainers of kings. Their action took place later and was characteristic of the transition from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. That was the case of Doña María Fernández Coronel, former governess to María de Molina and her daughter, the infanta Isabel, and refoundress of Santa Clara de Guadalajara between 1307 and 1312, or that of Doña Berenguela Díaz de Haro, daughter of the lord of Biscay and widow of the lord steward of the King Fernando III, who took part in the foundation of Santa Clara de Vitoria in 1296.<sup>6</sup> In order to better locate these initiatives is interesting to take into account that the first actions led by women belonging to regional urban elites are documented around 1240, and all of them meant to promote what would be finally called the Order of Saint Clare. Starting with the foundation in Valladolid around 1239 by the noble widow Doña Sol, they stood especially out in the decades of the 1280s and 1290s. With the turn of the century those initiatives somehow changed and, since 1310, the participation of noblemen became more prominent (CASTRO 1976, p. 335 and 353; URIBE 1988, p. 167 and 180; CALDERÓN 2008, p. 279 and 296).

Despite some earlier significant reference, chronologically difficult to place, the promotion of mendicant nuns by women related to the royal family and the court didn't occur until after 1250. There was some degree of concentration between 1255 and 1265 and the period between 1290 and 1310 stood particularly out. Several institutions seem to have aroused a particular interest, as shown by the intervention of either female relatives of different generations or women of the royal family in combination with their female retainers: Santa María de Salamanca, Santa Clara de Toro, Santa Clara de Guadalajara and Sancti Spiritus de Toro. There were also two protagonist queens: Doña Violante and Doña María de Molina. The forms of promotion were diverse, although foundation itself predominated in the Dominican sphere. The form studied here represented the 50% of the creations of the Dominican monasteries of the period, even though they

4. See CASTRO 1976, p. 319-320; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977a, p. 393-394; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 153; NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1994, p. 302 and 315.

5. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 58r; ORTEGA 1980, p. 41-47; RUCQUI 1992, p. 307-323; MARTÍN PRIETO 2005, p. 227-241.

6. See PÉREZ 1913, p. 40; SALAZAR 1977, p. 372; RUIZ DE LOIZAGA 1988, p. 151-162; URIBE 1988, p. 164.

were concentrated in a specific and late context, the first decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The future Clarisses, who were the female mendicants with a strongest geographical and quantitative presence in thirteenth-century Castile (LÓPEZ 1912a, p. 185-190; GARCÍA ORO 1988; GARCÍA ORO 1994), were promoted earlier by these women in a more diversified manner and in greater numbers, although the purely foundational percentage in their case would not go beyond the 30%.

## *2. Life Statuses and Forms of Spiritual Promotion*

Female promoters were in their majority (86,5%) free from family ties when they got involved in the female mendicant impulse. The queens did so chiefly after widowhood – Berenguela, Violante of Castile, María de Molina and Mencia of Portugal – or separating from their husbands – Teresa of León –, a situation similar to that of royal mistresses – Mayor Guillén and Teresa Gil –, although the collaboration as a couple is also documented: it is manifest in the case of Alfonso X and his mistress Mayor Guillén and probably also for him and his wife Violante. Infantas, for their part, were either still unmarried – Berenguela II and Isabel – or nuns – Berenguela I at Las Huelgas de Burgos – and the rest of the women of the court were already widows. Were their motives and their forms of spiritual promotion connected with their life status?

The most complete form of promotion was monastic foundation, the initiative to establish a monastery and the achievement of its material realisation. Most of them, of course, were not creations *ex novo* but the transformation of preexisting communities. Through those foundations they pursued in any case, and among other things, diverse life objectives. Their eagerness to turn the monastery into their residential space for life and especially after death is remarkable; it entailed a sort of inclusion within the monastic family and could be accompanied by several components of both personal and family individuation.

Monastic residences seem to have been characteristic of the women who were related to Alfonso X and looked for a life refuge after dissociating themselves from him. That is the case of dowager Queen Violante and her foundation in Allariz, devised as the space where she would end her days removed from the court and professing as a nun. Mayor Guillén, the former royal mistress, retired to a house adjacent to her monastery. It is significant to notice that she founded it in the same year the king got married: even though she never took vows, she lived with the nuns leading an exemplary life. A case outside this typology is María Fernández Coronel, who lived for some time in her foundation of Santa Clara de Guadalajara, where she also died. But in most cases it was about securing a burial place. Doña Violante must have attached great importance to the fact of being buried in Santa Clara de Allariz because it entailed revoking previous provisions and giving up a pontifical privilege by which those who went against her will would be excommunicated – was it the permission to be buried with her mother, Violant of Hungary, whose mortal remains lay in the monastery of Sijena, in the



realm of Aragon? It is noteworthy that the queen tried to individualise herself by means of a burial she didn't want to share with her husband and through which she showed her own affiliations and interests. For their most part, foundresses were buried in the nuns' choirs, the preferred space for the burials of the sisters, an alternative way of integration into the religious family. The expiatory-salvific function, unquestionably present here, is only mentioned a few times.<sup>7</sup>

The documentation emphasises the material aspect of monastic promotion. Being a founder implied, first and foremost, providing the necessary goods – premises and a basic patrimony – for the foundation to work with dignity as a community. The direct donation of properties and the provision of currency for its acquisition are both well documented. The legacies of Doña Violante to Santa Clara de Allariz – several amounts of money to cover for the expenses of the building works, books or the bequeathing of tenements, whilst setting apart the funding for her burial – and of Doña Berenguela López de Haro to Santa Clara de Vitoria – for the construction of the church and monastery – were remarkable. The properties could be theirs or bought for that express purpose.<sup>8</sup> The liturgical-spiritual endowment, primarily relics, images and liturgical objects, was a basic component of what constituted one of the main forms of religious promotion exercised by women, closely related to the foundational concept itself. Precisely, the fact that tradition attributes to Queen Teresa the provision of relics to Las Dueñas de Zamora made the chroniclers think she might have been its foundress. The same happens in Santa Clara de Santiago de Compostela, where the donation of an image of the Virgin called “the Virgin of the keys” and a small carved chest are attributed to Queen Violante when trying to support the tradition presenting her as its foundress, in parallel with the Virgin “abrideira” this queen donated to Santa Clara de Allariz (LÓPEZ 1613, p. 237; CASTRO Y CASTRO 1983, p. 4-5, n. 12).

Material transfer is viewed as the main realisation of the female link with women's religious communities. The act of founding offers, in this sense, three peculiar possibilities. Being a foundress usually entailed, as a distinctive feature, the devotion to the foundation of the totality of the personal patrimony after settling all debts and commitments – just like in other periods and geographical spaces (GRAÑA CID 2008, p. 749) –: the preserved testaments show that was the case for the queens Violante and Mencía of Portugal and also for Mayor Guillén, Teresa Alfonso and Teresa Gil. Foundational promotion shared with members of the clergy or with laymen was also frequent in processes in which women kept their fostering prominence all the same (CASTRO Y CASTRO 1983, p. 6; RUIZ DE LOIZAGA 1988, p. 152; CALDERÓN 2008, p. 287). The material interventions and

7. See MEDRANO 1729, p. 157; ORTEGA 1980, p. 31; SANTA CLARA DE ALLARIZ 1986, p. 13-14; VILLALBA RUIZ DE TOLEDO 1989, p. 319-324; PERAL VILLAFRUELA 1994, p. 97; MARTÍN PRIETO 2005, p. 229.

8. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 54v-56r; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 64-65; ORTEGA 1980, p. 30; SANTA CLARA DE ALLARIZ 1986, p. 13; PERAL VILLAFRUELA 1994, p. 97, n. 3.

the participation in governance of several women, simultaneously or spaced out, were also frequent, as the refoundations of Santa Clara de Guadalajara and Santa Clara de Toro exemplify. In the first case, the community founded by Queen Berenguela moved to another place, an event that entailed a refoundation process with several protagonists: maybe the infanta Berenguela II, lady of the city, between 1274 and 1284 and, in all certainty, the infanta Doña Isabel together with her governess María Fernández Coronel since the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (PÉREZ 1913, p. 37; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 65; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 397-398). Santa Clara de Toro, probably founded around 1255, had been destroyed during the conflicts of the reign of Alfonso X and it could be thought that the infanta Berenguela II had something to do with its restoration – she is traditionally considered its foundress –, as well as Queen María de Molina, who gave away several dwellings of her own to the Poor Clares while the building was rebuilt, works she also favoured in 1301 (NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1980, p. 17-18; NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1994, p. 306-308).

It is important to point out that the forms of promotion in which these women were involved didn't always end up as foundations but, in any case, the transfer of properties always played a central role. Partial material endowments that tried to solve the problems of necessity afflicting female communities – that could be accompanied by protection – were very characteristic. It is in that sense that the material support provided by Queen Violante and the infanta Berenguela I to the Damianites of Salamanca must be understood. Within these cases, the wish to share spaces with consecrated women also emerges as a central interest: female intervention could be rewarded by pontiffs by means of granting permission to enter the enclosure, as the one Queen Violante was awarded with “*causa devotionis*” for the monastery of Salamanca twice or thrice a year and accompanied by five or six honest matrons. A wish that, in the end, expressed the existence of usual contacts with religious women – also perceptible for the case of the infanta Berenguela I and that same community – and the assumption of a protecting and defensive role with regard to them: the queen was acquainted with the problems of the community of Salamanca that knew “*per experientiae claritatem*”, and the nuns themselves requested the licence for her to access the enclosure; furthermore, Clement IV recommended her to assume their defence. However, no pontiff addressed Alfonso X in similar terms (RIESCO TERRERO 1977; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977c).

If material transfer was the preferred form of promotion, there was another kind of initiative especially favoured by their privileged status: the intercession in front of the highest authorities in order to make foundations a reality and facilitate their posterior development. Female intervention could result in a royal implication in foundations that crystallised in the granting of protection and material privileges. Queen Berenguela would have obtained for the monastery of Guadalajara several privileges from her son Fernando III that later kings would confirm and extend; its refoundresses, the infanta Isabel and María Fernández Coronel obtained since 1299 in like manner several graces from Fernando IV. And Queen

Doña Violante asserted her influence on her son Sancho IV in order for him to support the foundation of Santa Clara de Allariz, in which he got actively involved. In some cases –San Miguel del Monte –, royal implication was in tune with female foundational activity. And, as a general trend, the presence of women of the royal family in the cenobies fostered the support of the monarchy: according to the chronicles, the fact that Doña Blanca, first cousin of Sancho IV, was the prioress of Santa María de las Dueñas de Zamora would have facilitated the monarchs “taking a liking” to the house and giving it a good part of their possessions.<sup>9</sup> Intercession in front of the papacy was also important in order to achieve the necessary permissions and canonical acknowledgement for the foundations, and female material investment could be accompanied by indulgences.

Female promoters of female mendicant communities obtained the authority, renown and memory associated to the status of a founder – plus in some cases, centuries after, an acknowledgement of sanctity linked with the incorruptibility of their bodies, as Mayor Guillén or María Fernández Coronel exemplify –, although the most remarkable thing seems to be the fact that foundations and patrimonial transfers constituted a good opportunity to assert personal individuality and economic autonomy; in some cases they were even an occasion to make symbolically visible their exercise of power. The liberty with which they managed and gave their properties is not the only astonishing fact; in some cases their interest in founding or promoting nuns in the places over which they held dominion is visible: if Doña Teresa Alfonso donated her village of San Cebrián de Mazote to the Dominican nuns, the interest of Queen María de Molina in female foundations in Toro is remarkable. She placed there according to her own wish, in a village where she was the lady, the female Dominican community of Sancti Spiritus and even changed the dedication chosen by its original foundress Doña Teresa Gil – San Salvador –, to the point of almost becoming the new foundress (GALINDO ROMEO 1976, p. 4–5; PÉREZ VIDAL 2008, p. 11); I have also mentioned the tradition pointing out the interventionism of the infanta Berenguela II, lady of Guadalajara, in the refoundation of the Clarisses and also the irrefutable data involving another infanta lady of the city, Doña Isabel, in that same process; for her part, Mayor Guillén was the lady of Alcocer and its surroundings by a privilege granted by Alfonso X, who created a whole new seigniorly for her in parallel with the process of monastic creation. The bond could also be strengthened not only by the foundational memory expressed in the burial but by perpetual liturgical foundations that in several occasions served to connect other women with the monastery: Doña Teresa Alfonso stipulated that the Dominican nuns of San Cebrián de Mazote prayed daily and especially for María de Molina, and asked her in turn to watch over the observance of her requirement.<sup>10</sup>

9. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 54r; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 107; *Santa Clara de Allariz* 1986, p. 15; VILLALBA RUIZ DE TOLEDO 1989, p. 321; TORMO SANZ 1994, p. 452–453.

10. See CASTILLO 1592, f. 54v–56r; MEDRANO 1729, p. 157–158; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 65; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 210–212; NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1994, p. 307; MARTÍN PRIETO 2005, p. 235–236.

### 3. *Female Bonds and Relational Networks*

The female bonds that were involved in the analysed processes could be better envisioned in specific monastic promotions. Did this have anything to do with the new spirituality of mendicant nuns? How did they fit into the problems of authorship and institutional definition that affected, in particular, the dawning Order of Saint Clare? How did they fit into the female religious movement? Why did some monasteries stand out?

#### 3.1. *Foundational Maternity, Authorship and Institutional Identity*

Founding a monastery entailed the materialisation of a specific spiritual and organisational project that could refer or relate to different sources of authority, bearing witness to the issues of religious authorship, identity models and governance links, central matters in the history of consecrated life and deeply embedded in the female difference/gender relationships problems. They achieved a fundamental importance in the context of the evangelical movements of the High Middle Ages, with one of their most problematic aspects in the definition of a female mendicant model. At the same time, a good part of the initiatives studied here had a lot to do with the origin and institutional definition of the Order of Saint Clare. Those were processes that vividly brought up the questions of female authorship and foundational authority and that were mostly based on the transformation of preexisting communities of "beatas" or Damianites, the first institutionalised model related to Saint Clare of Assisi and her life project. The fact that the majority of the women studied here supported with their patrimonies these processes of change and that there is only one reference, otherwise doubtful, to an *ex novo* foundational process is of a great political interest. Sometimes, that change was accompanied by relocation, usually an approach to inhabited nuclei or a settlement within the city walls, and other times there was a real refoundation. Female interventions were mostly ascribed to the phase of Clarist institutionalisation that historiography initiates with Innocent IV in 1243 (GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 121) and that for them actually commenced with Alexander IV in the decade of the 1250s. Several stages can be seen that I will promptly indicate.

In the midst of the foundational panorama, the only opposing remark refers to Queen Berenguela, since she did not institutionalise a preexisting reality in Guadalajara but founded *ex novo* instead, in addition to introducing the way of life Saint Clare led in Assisi. According to chroniclers, the queen wrote to the Holy See asking for «the rule» in 1222 or maybe in 1230 and, with the regulations sent to her, she established a community of radical poverty and enclosure. That is, together with Ugolinian constitutions – that gave life to an incipient Order of the Poor Ladies of Saint Damian –, she would have introduced poverty, the fundamental nucleus of the original charisma, which does not refer so much to the canonical monastic model promoted by the Curia as to the project of Saint Clare; the fact that the queen had direct contact with her, without any mediating ecclesi-

astical authority, and that she did so in order to ask for regulations, would suggest the acknowledgement of her foundational authorship. In any case, the community of Guadalajara was born as a Damianite community and remained poor until the last third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (PÉREZ 1913, p. 37) although we cannot specify if that was on account of a free spiritual option.

The first great period of promotion by the women of the royal circle took place in the decade of the 1250s. It consisted, in all the cases, either in material support for the survival and expansion or in transformation, never in creation *ex novo*. But there were several differences in the religious-institutional physiognomies they fostered that seem to relate to their position. The preserved information attributes to the mistress of Alfonso X, Doña Mayor Guillén, the inaugural initiative. It was peculiar in its context due to its pioneering character and its canonical definition. There was already a female community in the deserted area of San Miguel del Monte, near Alcocer, formed by Damianite nuns or maybe “beatas”. According to tradition, Doña Mayor respected foundational authority and authorship by bringing two disciples of Saint Clare to carry her foundation through. In the opinion of recent scholars, she was trying to obtain canonical acknowledgement as a Damianite monastery. However, the fact that the community came to be called «Santa María of Minoresses of the Order of Saint Francis» indicates the wish for a new institutional ascription: opposing the initial Order of Saint Damian, ruled by Ugolinian constitutions, this denomination alluded to the rule by Innocent IV, a new female Franciscan institutional model created by the papacy that got the saintly woman of Assisi exceedingly upset and that was in force when the foundational process started in 1252. Endorsing these suppositions, in the foundational document of 1260 (ORTEGA 1980, p. 29-30; MARTÍN PRIETO 2005, p. 233-235 and 240-241) Doña Mayor declared that she built a «monastery of Minoresses of the Order of Saint Francis» to honour God, the Virgin Mary and Saint Francis, without mentioning Saint Clare, thus indicating a Franciscan orientation, maybe in tune with Alfonsine political interests, that questions the initial authorship link with the foundress.

The women of the royal family followed a very different orientation since they opted for the Order of Saint Damian and favoured its expansion by promoting the nascent congregation created by the community of Salamanca. The original “beaterio” had become a Damianite monastery dedicated to Saint Mary in 1238, an institutional physiognomy still valid by 1278. In the decade of the 1250s, popes asked for the support of Castilian royalty: in 1257, Alexander IV asked Queen Violante to protect the «monialium inclusarum monasterii Sanctae Mariae» helping them in their necessities and preventing the abuses of laymen; in 1258 he addressed the infanta Berenguela I asking her to continue being «benevolam et gratiosam» to them. More than fostering an expansion he does not refer to, the pope seems to have been concerned about reinforcing the monastery, although both things would have probably gone together. At the same time, the Damianites of Salamanca founded Toro, maybe in 1255 and certainly before 1266-1267. Why were they a foundational cradle?

The community enjoyed its own identity model sanctioned by an early institutional definition. Their authority-authorship connection with the community of Assisi, to which they bore great resemblance in their first spirituality and in their institutionalisation process, and their express wish to relate themselves to Saint Clare and to give significance to that bond, were their characteristic features. Pauperistic commitment was one of their charismatic pillars since their beginnings as a "beaterio" and their first years as Damianites. Tradition recounts they had followed the observances provided by the saintly woman herself to two of them who went to visit her according to some versions, or, according to others, by sending two of her own disciples for that purpose; she also gifted them with several relics, among which several corporals made by her. Those observances are called "rule" by some chronicles that stress the devotion of these nuns to their diffusion by teaching them to other women at the monasteries they founded, which would have turned the cenoby of Salamanca into a foundational epicentre directly connected with the memory of the primitive authorship. But there were also several identity elements of their own and several modifications of the ideal. The most remarkable one was the abandonment of poverty: if up until June 1244 they were "moniales pauperes inclusae", afterwards they became "moniales inclusae". They themselves requested from the papacy this abandonment of poverty, a decision difficult to appraise in which institutional pressures as well as their difficulties to survive could have played a role. The change coincided with the beginning of a direct link with Rome in order to be exempted from episcopal jurisdiction. Another element far removed from Saint Clare, the origin of which cannot be determined, was the internal differentiation between nuns and female converts, documented in 1257.<sup>11</sup>

The religious women of Salamanca showed a clear self-awareness that prompted them to claim their own identity. Their link to Saint Clare seems to have been one of the elements they most wanted to preserve. That was evident in the decade of the 1250s, in a context of difficulties and pressures but also of foundational expansion, in which several clearly Franciscan elements were added to the ratification of their original identity. In the significant date of 1257 they turned to Alexander IV asking to defend their tradition and to have the rule and habit of their original profession unchanged, without scapular and with a cord of their choice, following Saint Clare on that account (VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977b, p. 100; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977c, p. 30-31; CUADRA, MUÑOZ FERNÁNDEZ 1998, p. 285-316). Other aspects of their way of life that were threatened and the pontiff ratified were: the freedom to admit new candidates and the collective character of this admission, as well as a diluted observance of enclosure that allowed them to travel and to enter other monasteries of the order; at the same time, they requested the confirmation of their patrimonial capabilities. As a novel element, popes con-

11. See GONZAGA 1603, p. 888; CASTRO 1976, p. 314-316; RIESCO TERRERO 1977, p. 35; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977a, p. 389, 391 and 393-394; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977c, no. 1-7, 10, 12, 24 and 48-51; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 166.

nected their privileges and indulgences to those of Franciscan friars while fostering Franciscan holidays, an identifying link that was respectful of Saint Clare's project. The direct reference to her name when there is still no canonically defined "Order of Saint Clare" can be glimpsed in the Salmantian foundational expansion. Initiated soon after her canonisation, maybe around 1255-1257, it expedited the symbolical and institutional envisioning of the authorship memory and the female authority bond. Several other characteristic features were the adoption of the Salmantian Damianite model, episcopal exemption (NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1994, p. 305; VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977c, nos. 7, 20, 24-39 and 42) and the lack of patrons, since it was a process of creation that started from a totally autonomous initiative.

Certainly, the support granted by the queen and the infantas of Castile was in tune with the interests of power, but that does not cover the question by itself. The community of Salamanca had the support of the popes from the moment of its institutionalisation. Moreover, the papacy tried to place it under the protection of the monarchy and the local authorities: in 1238 Gregory IX asked Fernando III to help the "beatas" of the church of Santa María because they had decided to embrace the rule of the Damianites and also entrusted them to both city and council; the monarch remained involved in that venture with the pontifical support. However, the situation changed: in the important date of 1257, Alexander IV complained to Alfonso X that his subjects molested them without mentioning any eventual support on behalf of the monarch, in open contrast with the behaviour of Doña Violante, in what looks like a distancing of the incumbent of the crown maybe related to the unrest of the local clergy, especially virulent that year, due to the exemption of the nuns from episcopal jurisdiction (VÁZQUEZ JANEIRO 1977c, nos. 1, 11, 14, 18, 19, 25, 37, 39 and 46); that fact also coincided with the inclination of the new king toward the new project of Minorenes of Doña Mayor Guillén. That is, the decade of the 1250s seems to have implied a turn in the orientation of the monarchs while the women of the family remained in the old Damianite institutional line, preserving the royal tradition and acting in tune with the papacy. Why did they only favour the community of Salamanca among the numerous communities of the order scattered all over Castile? On one hand we should take into account their understanding with power, that is, the fact of enjoying the traditional and ongoing royal and pontifical favour and a special identification with the papacy, which to the best of our knowledge could have been temporary. But, on the other, the existence of personal bonds and fluent communication between these women and the community of Salamanca is also strongly perceived. The nuns tried to grant the continuity and even the intensification of this communication by asking for the queen to be able to enter their enclosure several times a year. Actually, it has been emphasised that it was them who called on «the doors of the queens and princesses of Castile» (GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 167-169) asking for their support.

Also in the significant year of 1257, although independently, Queen Doña Mencía of Portugal acted in Carrión de los Condes upon a Damianite community



equally linked in its origin to Saint Clare: according to the chronicles, at some indefinite date two disciples of the saintly woman, pilgrims to Santiago, had decided to settle in the hermitage of Our Lady del Páramo outside the city walls, starting a very harsh community life. In this case, the intervention of the queen did not only provide support since it also entailed a relocation and an institutional redefinition expressed in the change of dedication: she installed them in a less inhospitable place in the suburbs of the village, at the former Augustine priory of Sancti Spiritus; even though the establishment was still Damianite in nature, the queen bought for them the priory itself and all the adjacent properties, in what seems to imply the transition to a patrimonial model, coinciding with the trend of the time, and also with their express wish to worship Saint Clare after her canonisation, since the nuns wanted to build their church in the honour of God, the Virgin and hers. All of that was backed by Alexander IV that looked for the support of the bishop of Palencia for the new foundation. Again in this case the existence of personal bonds previous to the papal intervention – that plays a remarkably mediating role –, can be perceived: the nuns asked the pontiff to address their benefactress Doña Mencía in order for her to keep her promise to them (GARCÍA BARRIUSO 1986, p. 45; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 210-212; PERAL VILLAFRUELA 1994, p. 97-98), indicating another possible bond that would have been tied after the community's request for help.

The interventions of the decade of the 1250s went on during the second half of the next decade, when the rule written by Urban IV started to be imposed on those who would finally be called nuns of the Order of Saint Clare. In this context, the Damianites of Salamanca wanted to reassert their identity by relocating significant documents, as the Ugolinian way of life of 1245, and sanctioning the free admission of sisters or the type of habit. Nevertheless, the women of the royal family got involved in the change promoted by the pontiffs, which proves there was no personal attachment to the Order of Saint Damian. Maybe the participation in the project of Santiago de Compostela that tradition attributes to Doña Violante fell also within the process of transformation into Poor Clares of some other previous community. For its part, the foundational process of Carrión was completed between 1266 and 1267 (GARCÍA BARRIUSO 1986, p. 49-50), a delay that was accompanied by the abandonment of the Order of Saint Damian and the transition into the Order of Saint Clare, with an increase in the community "numerus" that made necessary an increase in the endowment, which Doña Mencía assumed. In those same years, the infanta Berenguela II had to restore the monastery of Toro after its destruction by the bishop of Coria, a process that would entail an institutional change (LÓPEZ 1912b, p. 57-60; NAVARRO TALEGÓN 1994, p. 307).

The last promotion period comprised the last decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first of the 14<sup>th</sup>. It consisted again in the relocation or refoundation of preexisting communities but showed a higher level of centralisation. The transition from Damianites into Poor Clares is its predominant aspect. The approach to inhabited nuclei and the construction of larger monastic buildings, capable of housing larger communities with huge patrimonies, went in parallel with a rapprochement



to the friars of Saint Francis, who appear related to foundational processes and under the obedience to whom the nuns placed themselves (LÓPEZ 1920, p. 270). But, far from these common traits, different accents are perceived according to each female promoter.

Queen Doña Violante founded Santa Clara de Allariz transforming a previous Damianite community developed outside the city walls. It wasn't exactly a self-mutation since she related the change to another monastery, Santa Clara de Zamora, from where the female masters in the new rule came. Again, the queen got involved in a project directly recalling the female memory of original authorship that offered opportunities for a congregational expansion. The cenoby of Zamora presents several similarities with the one in Salamanca, especially its direct connection with the founding saint and a similar path of institutional evolution. Being a "beaterio" in its origins, some of its members had travelled to Assisi in order to have an interview with Saint Clare and they also came back with relics. But their charismatic definition and institutional evolution were different: tradition does not underline in this case that they had brought with them some "rule" or that they worked to spread the observances of Assisi; furthermore, if the religious women of Salamanca kept true to their Damianite identity until quite late, those of Zamora started their transformation into Urbanist Clarisses earlier (1269), coinciding with their relocation in the suburbs of the city and their moderation of penitential rigour. Its conversion into a Clarist promoting focus seems to have happened late in relation to its processes of institutional definition. It does not offer the vindicating component that was perceived in Salamanca nor the clear autonomous founding initiative that had started giving shape to the Damianite congregation there – although its non-existence cannot either be asserted –, since in the case of Zamora the character of foundational cradle is more conditioned by the leading role played by queens. The fame of sanctity of the cenoby is adduced as the cause for the interest of Doña Violante to have them found Allariz and for the fact that another queen, Isabel of Portugal, chose them a few years later as motherhouse for her foundation of Santa Clara de Coimbra. Otherwise, Santa Clara de Zamora was characterised by a close link to Franciscans that had not been part of the primitive identity of the community of Salamanca and that was also probably related to its founding expansion. Anyway, the weight of Zamora in the foundation of Allariz went beyond sending founding nuns: for instance, the procurator of Santa Clara de Zamora was the intermediary in the acquisition of tenements for the monastery of Orense in the decade of the 1280s. One way or another, Doña Violante kept on giving signs of her personal links with the members of the community she wanted to promote, in this case with the Damianites of Allariz and specifically with their abbess Doña Sancha Eanes, to whom she showed her trust by appointing her as executrix of her will and granting her a legacy.<sup>12</sup>

12. See CASTRO 1976, p. 317-318 and 327; *Santa Clara de Allariz* 1986, p. 13-15; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 134-135; MONTES MOREIRA 1994, p. 215.

The process followed at San Salvador de Guadalajara was very different. Some traditions maintain that the infanta Berenguela II would have transformed the initial Damianite community into a Clarist community between 1274 and 1284, but this transformation is not documented until the beginnings of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and then with different historical actors; if we accept that she intervened, which would not have been strange given her condition of lady of the city, maybe she provided some other kind of support to the nuns for which there is no proof. In the decade of the 1280s the nuns lived in poverty, we do not know if following their own charisma, and they asked Sancho IV for help, something that would speak in favour of a royal origin. The supportive answer of the king would have held Queen María de Molina responsible for them by establishing that they were to have better dwellings built in several houses the queen possessed in the city. Nevertheless, it was her daughter, the infanta Isabel, who fostered a change process based on an institutional modification and the relocation of the building, a process actually accomplished by her governess Doña María Fernández Coronel that started in 1299 and was finished by 1307, once the relocation was complete and their dedication was changed into that of Santa Clara. The queen was barely involved in this case, at least until the last phase of the process, and then only as an intercessor in front of the pope requesting the foundational bull, which arrived in 1312.<sup>13</sup> The peculiar tones of this foundation are tied to the consanguinity links between women and to the female exercise of seigniorial power. As in Allariz, there was not a real self-mutation of the Damianite community, since spiritual foundresses brought from Santa Clara de Toro took part in it. But in this case there is no congregational zeal to be seen, even though the election of the mother-house is significant because it made both female kinship and the mother-daughter bond visible, since one of the founding nuns, the first abbess, was the daughter of Doña María Fernández Coronel. On the other hand, the lady of Toro was María de Molina and her daughter the infanta Isabel was the lady of Guadalajara.

The foundation of Santa Clara de Vitoria shows another particular case. In its origins, the "beatas" approach clearly emphasised the link with the founding saint since, even after becoming Damianites, they embraced as their charismatic base a pauperistic option that seems, in principle, to have been based on mendicancy; moreover, in such an early date as 1247 they placed themselves under obedience to Franciscans. The authority reference was also distinguished by the name of the hermitage next to which they settled: first Saint Damian and later (1255) Saint Clare, after the canonisation of the foundress. In the decade of the 1270s they were already integrated into the Order of Saint Clare: in 1274 Gregory X called them «monialium inclusarum... ordinis Sanctae Clarae» and bestowed on them the authorisation to inherit properties; by the end of the 1280s, Nicholas IV granted them indulgences on Franciscan holidays (RUIZ DE LOIZAGA 1988, p. 153 and 159-160). It was traditionally considered that the endowment of Doña

13. See PÉREZ 1913, p. 37; LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 70; GARCÍA ORO 1988, p. 398-399; TORMO SANZ 1994, p. 448-449 and 452.

Berenguela López de Haro (1296) entailed the adoption of the Urbanist rule and the abandonment of poverty, but these data show that the institutional change happened earlier. Her contribution resulted in the expansion of the community and the improvement of its dwellings, due to both the new building itself and the relocation in a more central area closer to the Franciscan convent (RUIZ DE LOIZAGA 1988, p. 151; URIBE 1994, p. 236). Everything seems to indicate that Doña Berenguela's intervention was in keeping with the policies of Franciscan expansion led by the lords of Biscay, and that she didn't get involved in the charismatic and institutional Clarist problem.

What happened in the case of the Dominican nuns? Apart from their fundamental lack of a female founding saint, their process of institutional definition was not as complex as that of the Clarisses and, within our framework of study, promotions were more chronologically concentrated and obeyed to other interests, the issue of foundational maternity not being decisive. That notwithstanding, it did not comply either with the intentions of the Dominican superiors as it would happen in other historical periods. Data, scarce as they are, point to the fact that one of the monasteries, Santa María de las Dueñas de Zamora, had the sufficient degree of authority to become a foundational cradle. It certainly was, at least, for San Cebrián de Mazote and at the behest of its foundress. Chroniclers suggest two main reasons: the fame of sanctity the monastery had and the fact that a woman of the royal family, the infanta Doña Blanca, who stood out due to her strong religious observance and who enlarged the house in terms of religion, authority and possessions, had been its prioress. The truth is that the foundational wish of Teresa Alfonso empowered these nuns without submitting them to male nor lineage judgement: she left them her whole seignory of San Cebrián de Mazote on the condition that they founded there a monastery in which their same austerity was observed, that is, she established them as autonomous foundresses acknowledging their own spiritual practice and holding the whole community responsible for the whole creating process, in what constitutes, in fact, an infrequent foundational mechanism (CASTILLO 1592, f. 54v; LÓPEZ 1613, p. 237-238). This example makes again apparent the interest of a good part of the women analysed here in acting in connection with preexisting communities, which shows a network of personal and devout-spiritual bonds prior to the foundations themselves or to their institutionalisation processes, or else, bonds based on the acknowledgement of authority.

### 3.2. *Kinship and Service Bonds*

The promotion of female mendicant monasticism aided in reinforcing the links between women and lay society and making them visible, and also created new bonds between those women and the spiritual spaces they promoted. What were its main features?

Blood kinship was of the essence. Female behaviours shared the religious policies of their family groups and were in agreement with them. In general, the blood circles of female promoters who came from the royal and courtly milieu

had been supporting mendicant orders for a while. It was quite visible in the case of the Castilian royal family during the reigns of Fernando III, Alfonso X and Sancho IV. The importance given to their kinsfolk speaks of female blood awareness and it is also apparent in the case of women of noble descent: the lords of Biscay displayed their preference for the Order of Saint Francis, as their two daughters did by getting involved in foundations in Castile, Queen Mencía of Portugal in Carrión and her sister Berenguela López de Haro in Vitoria.

However, women usually favoured female connections and genealogies within their blood groups. Four generations of queens and infantas of Castile succeeded one another in female mendicant promotion during the 13<sup>th</sup> century – specifically of the dawning Order of Saint Clare. The fact that tradition regarded Doña Berenguela as the initiator of this religious policy within the royal family, followed by a chain of women named after her is significant: her granddaughter Berenguela I, or her great granddaughter, Berenguela II. But the clearest case is that of Doña Violante. In her will of 1292 (SANTA CLARA DE ALLARIZ 1986, p. 11-15), the queen mentioned many men and women of her lineage that had ended their lives and patrimonies, God provided, in great humility and saint religion. Among other things, the preference of the queen for Franciscanism refers to her female kinsfolk on her mother side: her maternal aunt was one of the most remarkable Franciscan saints, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, and her mother, the Queen of Aragon Violant of Hungary, had manifested precocious signs of interest in the incipient religious family related to the saint woman of Assisi by founding a community in Lleida. From that perspective, the initial wish expressed by the Castilian queen to be buried with her mother instead of with her husband is also significant. That is, the Damianite-Clarist spiritual inclinations of Doña Violante were not a mere female reflection of the marked interest Alfonso X had in mendicant orders, or of the already existing tradition within the royal family; without minimising the weight of both aspects, the queen felt herself a member of a genealogy of female blood references and precedents that authorised her decisions, especially regarding her final religious option after becoming a widow, and that reinforced her decision-making autonomy and her sense of the self, unmistakably apparent in all her actions. That female link enjoyed several characteristics of its own that separated it from the extended group or its male members: for example, the fact that the female relatives of Castilian royalty promoted Damianite communities – specifically some of them – while male incumbents of the throne were favouring other institutional physiognomies prior to the Urbanist definition of the Order of Saint Clare, a tendency documented especially during the reign of Alfonso X. Maybe the two daughters of the lord of Biscay were also in keeping with this line of behaviour, since both got involved in very similar processes of material promotion and integration into the Urbanist Clarist model of preexisting communities, although their spatial and chronological contexts were certainly different and there seems to be no connection between both cenobies.

There were also kinship bonds between spiritual promoters and the members of the communities they favoured. The creation of a monastery could facilitate

the contact between – and even the coexistence of – female relatives, particularly mothers and daughters, thus providing a form of significance for the mother-daughter link: the first abbess of Santa Clara de Guadalajara after its refoundation was the daughter of its main promoter, Doña María Fernández Coronel; they lived together in the monastery and ended up sharing their burial place; it could have happened the same in San Miguel del Monte since abbess Urraca could be the second daughter of Doña Mayor Guillén and Alfonso X (VILLALBA RUIZ DE TOLEDO 1989, p. 320). On the other hand, the presence of female relatives in the communities was an incentive to female support, or maybe the support itself stimulated that presence. The data are doubtful in that sense, even if chronicle tradition has highlighted them: maybe the possible royal affiliation of Doña Urraca, member of Santa María de Salamanca, favoured the support provided by the women of the royal family; maybe the fact that around 1264 the prioress of Santa María de las Dueñas de Zamora was Doña Blanca, cousin of Sancho IV (CASTILLO 1592, f. 54v), was also related to the alleged royal origin of this monastery and may help explaining why it was chosen as foundational cradle for San Cebrián de Mazote.

In connection with the family milieu, the question of patronage, regarding which they all showed original behaviours, should be taken into account. As a characteristic feature, the female mendicant foundations of this period were not necessarily linked to an exercise of patronage expressly defined, even though tradition has tried to ascertain it: several monasteries have been called “royal” because of the involvement in their material creation of women of the royal family, but that did not entail the same kind of link that may be perceived in those directly promoted by the holders of the crown. It is certainly true that a greater familiarity is documented in these cases, particularly when placing demands and receiving privileges – for example in the case of Guadalajara –, but there is no record of a protective proactive attitude on behalf on those holders or their female royal relatives. Within the royal family, the link established between a foundress and her monastery refers more to a personal issue not necessarily shared by her female relatives, who may not show special or specific links with that kind of foundations. A different matter could have happened among noblewomen for whom the monastery was an element of connection for their descendants – especially the female –, which, at the same time, promoted their memory and placed them in the category of ancestors: the proven daughter of Doña Mayor Guillén and Alfonso X, the Queen of Portugal Doña Beatriz, took under her custody the monastery of San Miguel del Monte after the death of her mother and ordered the making of the urn where her remains lay. The case of María Fernández Coronel in Guadalajara is more illustrative. According to chronicles, since the infanta and the queen had given most of the possessions with which she endowed the foundation to her, she left them both and all the kings who were descended from them as patrons. But this monastery was not a royal patronage and, furthermore, Doña María headed her own female blood genealogy: if the first abbess was her daughter, her niece and a granddaughter followed; she also buried there a son. Significantly enough,

that was not the result of having established a patronage link; since it was her nephew, don Alfonso Fernández Coronel, who did so in 1339. A behaviour that is also perceived among Castilian noblewomen coming from other places and times and that seems to have been particularly female.<sup>14</sup>

Spiritual promotion, in addition to being the consequence of service bonds between women, could have also contributed to make them visible and stronger, although it constituted a late phenomenon – beginnings of the 14<sup>th</sup> century – and limited to Queen María de Molina. Female blood kinship is entwined with it in its most remarkable example, Santa Clara de Guadalajara. Its refoundress, Doña María Fernández Coronel, had been the governess to both Queen María and her daughter, the infanta Isabel. But at the same time she was political councillor and confidant to the queen and that was the reason why the lord of Biscay, Lope Díaz de Haro, the favourite of Sancho IV, managed to get her banished and her possessions confiscated. Finally rehabilitated, she came back to the court and enlarged her patrimony by means of several royal favours in order to start acting as diplomatic agent of the queen in the court of Aragon while she accompanied the infanta, with whom she also lived for some time in Guadalajara before and after her marriage to the Aragonese king (LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 67). This woman, so close to the queen and the infanta, impulsed the refoundation with the support of both of them, especially the second undoubtedly due to her condition of lady of the city. The infanta provided most of the necessary patrimony and mediated in front of higher authorities for the monastery to become a reality in its new urban settlement and with its renewed institutional definition, although it was the queen who interceded in front of the pope in order to grant his sanction to the foundation of «nutrice sua» (BULLARIUM FRANCISCANUM 1898, no. 202; PÉREZ 1913, p. 38-39). Fidelity, service and reward were intertwined with the expression of mutual affection and acknowledgement and were defined in the monastic foundation, that also depicted the ties of maternity and nurturing related to the exercise of power. A project that, on the other hand, empowered Doña María and offered her high levels of social projection by publicly expressing her link with the crown, a similar situation to others documented for the case of a proprietary queen, Isabel the Catholic (GRAÑA CID 2010b, p. 799-820). And also a project through which she expressed her gratitude to the women of the royal family by means of establishing perpetual prayers that manifested both disparity and the female royal preeminence as clear seigniorial references but that, at the same time, contributed to perpetually establish an identity link between disparate women committed to a common goal, monastic foundation: the ties of help and multiple foundational intervention were demonstrated by the fact that the nuns had to pray to God for Queen María and her daughter Isabel as well as for Doña María Fernández Coronel and her sons. Monastic foundation also interweaved female blood ties with those of service and with female seigniorial exercise itself, to the visibility of

14. See PÉREZ 1913, p. 39; CASTRO 1976, p. 320; SALAZAR 1977, p. 373-376; ORTEGA 1980, p. 32; GRAÑA CID 2008, p. 929; GRAÑA CID 2010a, p. 143-144, 272 et seq.

which it contributed: as it has already been shown, the spiritual foundress came from Santa Clara de Toro, among them a daughter of Doña María as first abbess, something that must be connected with the circumstance that Queen Doña María was the lady of Toro and that her daughter, the infanta Isabel, was born in that village and was also the lady of Guadalajara. The fact that during her exile from court, Doña María Fernández Coronel lived in Toro protected by the queen was probably also significant.

Moreover, during the regency of María de Molina it can be perceived how the official policy of mendicant promotion led by kings and shared by the queen got projected onto the women of the court. Doña Teresa Alfonso as well as Doña Teresa Gil, and principally her, reveal in their testaments marked inclinations towards male and female mendicant orders, even if they opted for Dominicans in their female foundations. It is true that they didn't coincide with the queen in this since she didn't found any female mendicant monastery. But she was nevertheless granted an authority position in their creations, be it as testamentary executrix, and consequently to a good extent responsible for the setting off of their foundational project, be it as privileged receiver of the spiritual benefits of monastic prayer. Especially the second case, as documented in the foundation of San Cebrián de Mazote by Doña Teresa Alfonso, presents the queen again as an authority reference and the receiver of the perpetual prayers of the nuns, in what constitutes the evidence of a kinship-hierarchy link. There are no examples of this courtly phenomenology in other queens or in previous periods. Was it a characteristic of the first years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century? Did it have something to do with the fact that Doña María exercised political leadership in her capacity as regent after leaving behind the role of queen consort? Did her personal preferences have a certain influence on the matter? In order to answer those questions, further study is necessary.

#### 4. *Spiritual Sponsorship, Religious Movement and Female Mendicant Promotion*

Did the involvement of these women with mendicant nuns assume original profiles that we may characterise as “matronage”, that is, some kind of sponsorship and link different from those of men by reason of gender? Some of the characteristic features unveiled throughout these pages are: the scarce number of foundations for which they were totally responsible, their tendency to foundational partnership, their identification with the general lines of the religious policies developed by their kinship groups whilst contributing original elements to them, specifically by encouraging female blood ties and by not imposing patronage; the functionality of monastic promotion as an element for the fostering of the self and the empowering of female promoters who tended to connect their foundational impetus with a sort of life autonomy and, on occasion, with seigniorial exercise that could thus find its symbolic fulfilment; acting upon already existing female religious communities rather than creating *ex novo* and concen-



trating mainly on some; likewise, the influence of foundational promotion on the ties between women, for example materialising previous bonds by means of it: personal relationships with the communities that reveal the existence of a fluent communication and a spiritual identification, as well as female blood kinship and service connections with lay society.

A detailed comparison between those female attitudes and those of the male incumbents of the crown and male courtly aristocrats of the time is yet to be done, as well as the appraisal of female political foundations regarding other religious orders. For instance, throughout the period studied here the women of the royal family got more directly and intensely involved in the foundation of female Cistercian monasteries than in the promotion of mendicant monasticism (LAYNA SERRANO 1943, p. 69; FLÓREZ 2002). If we focus our attention on the two more remarkable queens of the period, Doña Violante and Doña María de Molina, the first glance shows several outstanding differences. The first got actively involved in female mendicant development, specifically in that of the incipient Order of Saint Clare, actions that even if they were in tune with the religious policy of her husband Alfonso X and the behaviours of several other women of the royal family, also offered preferential traits of her own and referred to her female bloodline to which she directly made reference in her main foundation, Santa Clara de Alariz, devised as a dwelling space both for life and after death. However, the only female foundational promotion of Doña María de Molina was a Cistercian monastery, Santa María de las Huelgas de Valladolid, where she made arrangements to be buried. There is no record of her foundational participation or material support of female mendicant communities as direct as those of Doña Violante or of the existence of the same kind of personal bond with those religious women. This issue of personal ties reveals precisely an interesting turn: during the 13<sup>th</sup> century the relationships between the royal family and religious women were key, but in the first years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, monastic foundation organised the links already established within the courtly and family milieux. By now, I will simply point out several considerations.

What does this mean regarding the female religious movement that gave birth to mendicant nuns in Castile? The women of the royal and courtly circle only were connected with the sector that would end up originating Clarisses. The female mendicant promotion they led had a typical institutional orientation rather than an institutionalising aim, since it affected already established monasteries in the case of the Clarisses and *ex novo* foundations in the case of Dominican nuns. It was not about transforming "beatas" into nuns, a process only suspected for the case of San Miguel del Monte. The only framework that displayed institutional redefinition, the emerging Order of Saint Clare, offers transition sequences from Damianite nuns into Clarist nuns, that is, from a canonically acknowledged institution to another, instead of a process of institutionalisation of laywomen.

The sector within the Castilian lay religious movement that found in Saint Clare of Assisi its source of inspiration was inclined toward an institutionalising self-mutation or, according to several traditions that are not to be neglected,



played a leading role in processes that were sanctioned by the disciples of the saint themselves. That is how the transition from "beatas", who had appeared next to hermitages outside the city walls, into Damianite nuns happened. The intervention of the women of the royal family and the court occurred later and in connection with a Damianite institutional reality already established and settled in the Castilian milieu. They basically took two different attitudes.

The first one was to enforce and promote that Damianite reality. From the legendary intervention of Queen Berenguela imposing in Castile the way of life of Clare of Assisi in direct connection with the saint, several documented actions show the involvement of the women of the royal family in the fostering of Damianites. Nevertheless, their involvement in that religious reality was specific and sectoral. First, because it was essentially based on material support and protection and did not entail any kind of pressure put on institutional change, although in some cases it was related to the transition from a pauperistic model into a patrimonial one within Damianite observance. Secondly, because it addressed very specific communities: in the case of the royal family only those that already had previous royal support and pontifical favour; thus, among the numerous existing communities they were only related to Santa María de Salamanca in a moment of identity reaffirmation, socio-ecclesiastical conflict and development of a project of congregational expansion in which female promoters didn't get directly involved. For the case of Queen Mencía of Portugal, it was a village close to the place where she exercised her seigniorial power. Another characteristic trait was the fact that the nuns themselves were active in demanding the fulfilment of female support. Their active character indicates that they turned to the women within the power circles for the material support they needed in order to survive and settle in their identity forms; that is, these women were the necessary mediators in order for them to accomplish their aim.

The second documented attitude was the promotion of the Order of Saint Clare and, consequently, the rule composed by pope Urban IV, an attitude that some of the women displaying the previous stance could have also shown. This being proof that their inclinations toward the Damianite way of life didn't obey any institutional preference. Their involvement here was also sectoral, without a generalised zeal for spreading the new rule: they only supported the change in the cases that came to their attention, maybe because at that moment they were in the middle of their founding activity – Carrión –, maybe because it was the predominant institutional reality when they decided to promote those communities. However, it is true that most of the interventions that originated new monastic realities fell within that new institution. In this context and at least at the beginning of the phenomenon, the change was not one fostered by Damianites but only the result of a canonical process we should appraise in terms of an imposition, as the foundational process of Santa Clara de Carrión shows. And even if for the final chronological phase of this study an interest on their part could be suggested, the truth is the sources don't echo in this period any initiative of the nuns as marked as those from the previous phase when there was an effort to promote

the Damianite reality. Why was there a rejection of the new institution, created by the papacy, with the name of Order of Saint Clare? Or was it maybe, instead of rejection, a lack of understanding or identification, at least until later on? A more thorough study is needed in order to answer that.

Several explanatory factors appear when reviewing those behaviours. The intervention of the female promoters studied here was very well tuned with the interests of the papacy and not so much, or not necessarily, with the incumbents of secular political or local ecclesiastical powers. The possible reasons should be further pursued. Next to this connection with the holder of spiritual power, or even above him, the existence of previous links with religious women takes shape, personal bonds – maybe facilitated by a sociological identification (CAVERO DOMÍNGUEZ 1994, p. 263) – that seem to have been the driving force behind their actions, actions based on disparity relationships: female promoters, members of the social and political elites, sometimes seigniors of the territory where the community was settled or its surroundings or relatives of its rulers, met the wish made by those religious women granting them support, especially material support, with a view to their community settlement and in order to guarantee their continuity, which for some cases entailed an institutional change that, nevertheless, doesn't seem the primary objective in general terms. The existence or non-existence of personal bonds appears precisely fundamental and partly explains the sectoral character of these forms of promotion. On the other hand, even though their intervention seems to respond more to a personal commitment to the communities than to their institutional form, among the different regulations composed for the nuns inspired by Saint Clare's spirituality, those promoters opted for those more directly connected with her authorship memory. That would be, together with being in tune with the papacy, one of the main common threads throughout their interventions. The aim to make the Clarist authorship memory visible was demonstrated both by the Damianite impetus and by the specific female communities that drew its attention. But it also showed later around what was by then the Order of Saint Clare, and more evidently so. Both institutes, the Order of Saint Damian and the Order of Saint Clare, without fully respecting the religious project of the saintly woman, since they did not follow her original rule and distorted several basic aspects of her spirituality, were the only ones that could represent her and make her authorship memory visible. It is thus significant that the only female promoter related to a political incumbent during the foundational process, Doña Mayor Guillén, chose a rule far from that reference of authority-authorship.

Regarding Dominican nuns, the panorama was quite different. Although there was some such case, the quantitatively limited female Dominican phenomenon in the thirteenth-century and beginning of the fourteenth-century Castile connected with women belonging to royal and courtly circles wasn't nurtured by a previous religious movement and emerged from *ex novo* initiatives. It is not possible to completely decipher them since, especially the earliest, disappear into the mist of documentary scarcities. Well proven cases indicate the relevance the women of the courtly and family circle of Sancho IV and María de Molina – mostly hers –

had in the female promotion of Dominican nuns. The queen became an authority reference regarding mainly the final fulfilment of these processes, to the point of generating the mobilisation of the women of the court connected to her that had also its effects in the Clarist field, as shown for the foundation of Santa Clara de Guadalajara. The same did not happen in times of Alfonso X, although this monarch got actively involved in the promotion of Dominican nuns. Could that be related to the political hold of Doña María de Molina? Kinship bonds and political-courtly hierarchy could explain both this orientation and the phenomenon of female courtly mobilisation, elements that are similar to some extent for the circle of Isabel the Catholic (GRAÑA CID 2010b, p. 812-817). Would that also be the result of the evolutionary processes occurred during the 13<sup>th</sup> century? Be that as it may, the spontaneous religious mobilisation that since the beginning of the century gave birth to incipient female mendicant communities, particularly those related to Saint Clare, and that looked for the support of the court in a sectoral way in order to settle, was followed by another female mobilisation at a much more limited scale in the last years of the century. Born from this courtly milieu and specifically within the circle of a queen regent holding the power, María de Molina, this new mobilisation was dedicated expressly to the expansion – and not the settlement – of the Dominican model.

For their most part, the women of the royal and courtly circle participated in the insertion of female mendicant monasticism in Castile in a late moment of its history, when it already was an institutional reality, but without getting involved in the formulation of its physiognomies, something apparent for the Damianite-Clarist case where the involvement was personified by the women who formed the communities more than by their institutional models. In any case, the fact that the promotions developed once Saint Clare of Assisi was dead and canonised, thus contributing to foster her memory, is also remarkable. Is this an expression of a specific inclination toward female mendicant spirituality? Maybe they identified not so much with its central contents – since they contributed to the abandonment of the ideal of poverty – but with her, who was one of the main exponents of the new late medieval female spirituality and an unquestionable reference of religious authority for women. And there is no doubt that they felt involved in mendicant spirituality, understood in a general sense, given the close relationships they started with friars, an interesting topic for future research. To a good extent, their contribution to the shaping of a female mendicant model was based on several characteristic aspects: institution, material consolidation of the communities in order to grant their survival and, in close connection to that, fostering the memory of foundational authorship. In their capacities as members of the power spheres, they were in tune with its incumbents but within a dimension of their own; actually, it could be stated that they offered their own model of link to power, particularly close to the papacy and not so much to its political holders, and also specific forms of exercising it, forms we could describe as “matronage” that united seigniorial exercise with material support of women in need who asked for it, charity, and with whom they had established personal bonds. This fact, es-

pecially apparent within the Clarist framework, offers a different dimension for the Dominican case, since it was mostly related to a female political hold with the interests of which it was very well tuned, becoming evident in more central expressions of female seigniorial exercise and service bonds between women; but that, in any case, granted women an autonomy of action and opened authority spaces. In every case the importance of the bonds between women is revealed as the explanatory key.