



Spirituality and Monasticism, East and West

# WOMEN RELIGIOUS CROSSING BETWEEN CLOISTER AND THE WORLD

## NUNNERIES IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS, ca. 1200–1700

Edited by

**MERCEDES PÉREZ VIDAL**

**ARC** HUMANITIES PRESS





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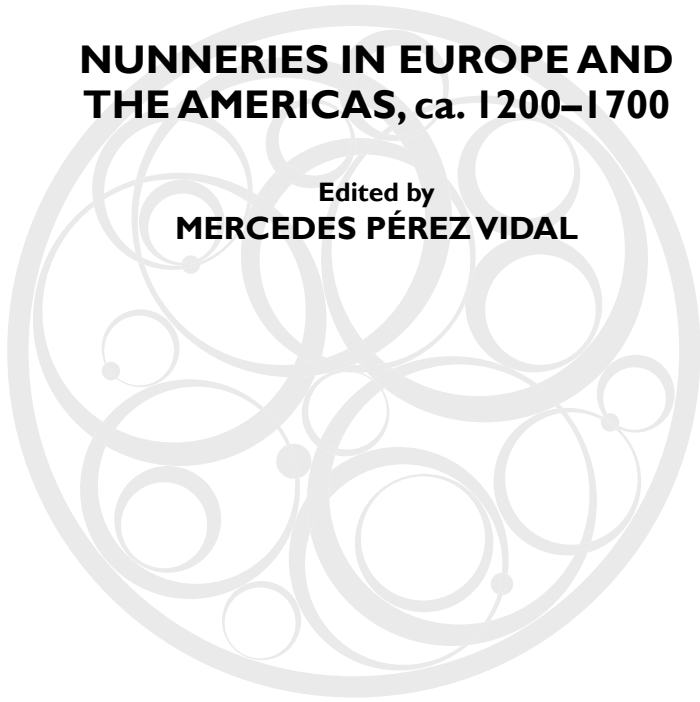
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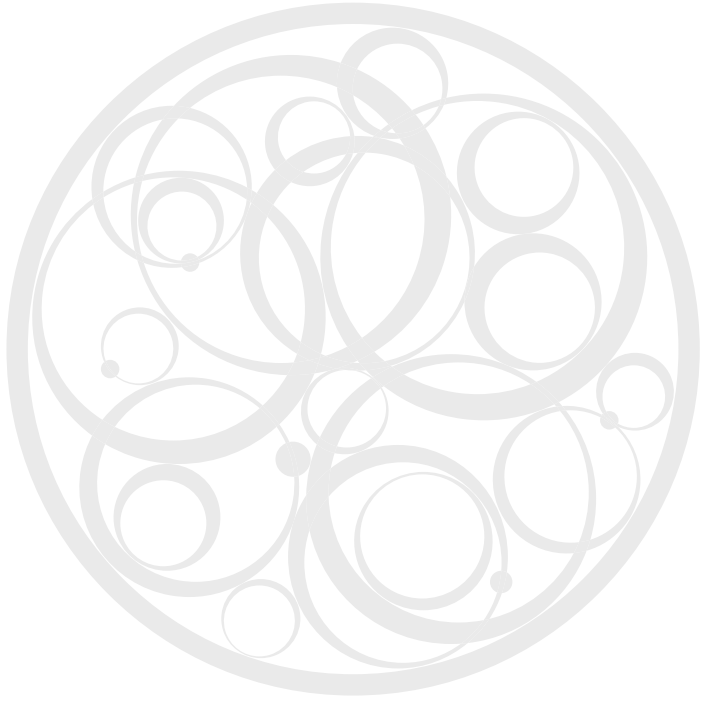
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# INTRODUCTION

MERCEDES PÉREZ VIDAL

**THIS VOLUME IS** the product of a collaborative research program undertaken since 2014 by the *Société d'Études Interdisciplinaires sur les Femmes au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance* (SEIFMAR). This program has focused on various aspects of the relationship between women and the religious in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern era, as well as how this interaction expanded across the Atlantic.

Studies dedicated to the impact of women on the social, intellectual, and religious affairs of their era have grown in popularity over the past few decades. Research on these issues, however, has not progressed in an altogether coherently. On the contrary, it has presented considerable discrepancies in context and geography, as well as in the various aspects, themes, and research angles that this exceptionally broad domain encompasses. Moreover, there has been a profound lack of dialogue between researchers. Evidence of a communication breakdown is threefold: spatial, between different countries, and between the two sides of the Atlantic; temporal, between specialists of different time periods, in particular between medievalists and early-modernists; and lastly what can be called a lack of intra/interdisciplinary communication. The above-mentioned research program was designed to eschew these traditional limitations.

The starting point for this book was the one-day conference *Femmes Cloîtrées, femmes dans le Monde*, held in Paris on July 30, 2015 and organized by Laura Cayrol Bernardo and myself, as co-founding members of SEIFMAR. Laura Cayrol made it possible for this event to take place in the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, and to have the support of the Institut du Genre. The conference focused on female monastic enclosure, on the relationship between religious women and men (and, in a broader sense, on their relationship with the world beyond the cloister). Two of the articles published here (Pérez Vidal and Müller) developed out of papers delivered at that conference, and they have been complemented with original contributions that enlarge the overall picture. Following the research objectives of SEIFMAR, this volume conducts a long-term inquiry regarding the differences and similarities, the continuities and discontinuities in various aspects of the active role of women in monastic and religious life during a long chronological framework (from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century). Such a transhistorical approach highlights the continuities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. This volume also explores the transregionality and the fluidity of transatlantic exchange of models between Europe and America, and the continuities and

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\* I am grateful to Lydia Gulick for revising the English version of this essay, to Jaime Reyes Monroy and Juan Carlos Jiménez Abarca for permission to use the image of the "Traslado de las monjas dominicas a su nuevo convento de Valladolid" on the book cover, and to all the contributors for making this publication possible, despite all the struggles we faced.

connections between several geographical areas. Finally, the interdisciplinary dialogue established between scholars from different backgrounds such as literature, history, and art history allows a more comprehensive approach to seeing religious women (nuns, tertiaries, or *mulieres religiosae*) organizing their life inside their communities and their relationship with the world.

As the volume's title emphasizes, the main issues of this book are two: the transatlantic paradigm in the study of religious women; and the fluidity or permeability of enclosure and the relationship between these monasteries and the social *milieu* of their era. The transatlantic paradigm, which takes Europe and the Americas as one coherent area of study, is deemed by some historians as constituting a field in its own right. It has opened a fruitful discussion on studying the communities and territories on both sides of the Atlantic beyond national or imperial histories. Regarding the second issue, studies from recent decades have focused on documents of practice rather than on normative ones, and therefore have demonstrated the fluidity of female religious communities' relationships with authority and society of their time. In both cases, as we will see in further detail, spatial considerations are a significant element of the analysis, and the common thread of the different studies here presented.

### **The Transatlantic Paradigm in the Study of Women Religious: Overcoming National, Chronological, and Disciplinary Boundaries**

In 1989 Arenal and Schlau published one of the first books devoted to the study of religious women (in this case nuns) from both sides of the Atlantic, focusing in particular on literary production.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, since the 1980s, research on religious women and female monasticism has flourished in both Europe and America. This has overcome the topic's previous neglect, other than a few pioneering works.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we still encounter a lack of dialogue among scholars, a comparative approach between continents, and of interdisciplinary cooperation. Recent attention to the so-called "cultural turn" in Atlantic Studies has led many scholars to analyze the exchange of ideas between the two worlds. The traditional centre/metropole versus periphery/colony dichotomy has been recomposed into a more multipolar interpretative frame. For example, in the particular case of the Spanish Empire, or Catholic Monarchy,<sup>3</sup> historians like Óscar Mazín have pointed out the need to avoid nationalistic approaches and have advocated for a wider perspective that analyzes the close relationship between the territories under the control of the Iberian Crowns.<sup>4</sup> Recent research has reconsidered the national bor-

1 Arenal and Schlau, eds., *Untold Sisters*.

2 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*; Muriel, *Conventos de Monjas en la Nueva España*.

3 Regarding the concept of Spanish Empire, see Hausser and Pietschmann. "Empire." The official title was the Catholic Monarchy, as in 1494 Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon were granted by Pope Alexander VI the privilege to bear the title of Catholic Monarchs.

4 Mazín Gómez, *Una ventana al Mundo Hispánico, Ensayo bibliográfico* (2006) and his subsequent *Ensayo bibliográfico II* (2013). This has been also the aim of the international research network on the Iberian monarchies, *Red Columnaria*: <https://www.um.es/redcolumnaria/>.

ders within these wider political entities, and the geography of the Catholic expansion, and has moved from the traditional unidirectional viewpoint to show how the cultural exchange was actually bi- or even multi-directional.<sup>5</sup> This has resulted in an increasing number of studies on a wide range of topics, including race, gender, and religion,<sup>6</sup> as well as new initiatives and conferences. For example, the colloquium organized by the Center of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles in 2004 and its proceedings entitled *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*<sup>7</sup> showed how gender and religion could be placed at the centre of study into the Atlantic World.<sup>8</sup> Despite this book and other works and international meetings with a similar comparative and transatlantic approach,<sup>9</sup> in most cases the timeframe has encompassed only the Early Modern period.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, most research on the transatlantic paradigm and networks still focus on later periods.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional periodization of history and the organization of university departments by these chronological boundaries have seriously hampered the analysis of continuities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Overcoming these confines is necessary in order to correctly understand certain issues and processes, such as devotional and liturgical practices, visual culture, religious enclosure, or religious reform. The long-term approach in these essays intersect conventionally isolated historical periods, sharing the idea of Jacques Le Goff's "long Moyen Âge."<sup>12</sup> This affects both the European and the American continents, inasmuch as the arrival of Europeans to America is not interpreted as a start date. On the contrary, their arrival implied a continuity of practices that had been developing in the Late Middle Ages. A longer timeframe will allow us to determine to what extent the evolving norms regarding religious life and liturgy (before and after the Council of Trent in 1545–1563) had an impact on different aspects of religious women's lives. Our analysis will focus on the Catholic world, with the Protestant religious communities in both Europe and North America excluded, since the dynamics are different, and the latter are simply post-medieval.

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**5** See the introductory essay by Gaudin and Valenzuela Márquez, "Empires ibéricas," 13–24, available online at <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/358>.

**6** Braun, Hooper, and Vollendorf, eds., *Theorising the Ibero-American Atlantic*; Po-chia Hsia and Palomo, "Religious Identities in the Iberian Worlds."

**7** Kostroun and Vollendorf, eds., *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World*.

**8** Stolcke, "A New World Engendered."

**9** Viforcós Marinas and Paniagua Pérez, eds., *I Congreso internacional del Monacato Femenino*; Ramos Medina, ed., *El Monacato femenino en el Imperio Español*; Dinan and Meyers, eds., *Women and Religion in Old and New Worlds*; Viforcós Marinas and Loreto López, eds., *Historias compartidas*.

**10** For volumes with more contributions on the Middle Ages, see Viforcós Marinas and Campos Sánchez-Bordona, eds., *Fundadores, fundaciones y espacios de vida conventual*; Campos y Fernández de Sevilla, ed., *La clausura femenina en el Mundo Hispánico*.

**11** For instance, the research group: *Grupo de investigación Redes transatlánticas: Relaciones intelectuales y literarias*, <http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/redestransatlanticas/>.

**12** Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*.

We have also had to confront gaps in research. Earlier studies on both sides of the Atlantic had focused largely on economic and institutional aspects of the history of these foundations, whereas the literary and mystical writings of nuns,<sup>13</sup> and to a lesser degree libraries in female monasteries, have enjoyed greater appreciation only more recently.<sup>14</sup> Scholars of Hispanic Studies, Comparative Literature, and Gender Studies have looked at religious women in this transatlantic paradigm and focused mainly on women's writings.<sup>15</sup> We still need to know more about the circulation and exchange of books among different monasteries, nationally and internationally, and on the role of women in these networks. Books were objects in motion with an outstanding cultural impact on monastic life.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, although female monasteries founded in the Americas were clearly heirs of their European counterparts in many aspects of monastic life, their role in transatlantic exchanges deserves further exploration. Particularly, art and architecture have been disregarded in many overviews of female monasticism in these territories.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, art historians have only seldom transcended stylistic and nationalist approaches when studying these female monasteries.<sup>18</sup>

An example of such voids can be found in the two-volume proceedings of a recent conference, held in 2015 in Castellón, Spain, on transatlantic artistic traffic or exchange (*Arte y patrimonio: tráfico transoceánicos*).<sup>19</sup> Women's role features in just two articles. One of them explored the role of Juana de Austria, sister of Felipe II, as collector of exotic artefacts from both the West and East Indies, but without any focus on her monastic foundation of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid.<sup>20</sup> Only one article analyzed the transmission of cultural models and monastic spaces from female monasteries in Spain and Portugal to The Americas. Angel Peña studied the so-called "salas del Belén" or rooms of the crib which existed in both Iberian and American monasteries. Peña analyzed the similarities with European monasteries, as well as the peculiarities of these spaces in female monasteries in Quito. He concludes that, whereas some Spanish monasteries built monumental "salas relicario" (reliquary rooms),<sup>21</sup> the "salas del belén" in Quito monasteries took on a similar role, and both kinds of rooms functioned as a kind of Wunderkammer.<sup>22</sup>

**13** Poutrin, *Le voile et la plume*; Surtz, *Writing Women*; Cirlot and Garí, *La mirada interior*; Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography*; Lavrín and Loreto, eds, *Diálogos espirituales*; Baranda Leturio and Marín Pina, eds., *Letras en la Celda*.

**14** Cátedra, *Liturgia, poesía y teatro*; Pérez Vidal, "Creación, destrucción y dispersión; Suárez González and Baurý, "La culture écrite dans les monastères cisterciens."

**15** Díaz and Kirk, "Theorizing Transatlantic Women's Writing."

**16** Pérez Vidal, "Female Aristocratic Networks."

**17** Lavrín, *Brides of Christ*.

**18** Pérez Vidal, "Arte y liturgia de los monasterios femeninos," 61.

**19** Rodríguez Moya, Fernández Valle, and López Calderón, eds., *Arte y Patrimonio en Iberoamérica and Iberoamérica en perspectiva artística*.

**20** Bosch Moreno, "Juana de Austria."

**21** The most outstanding example is probably the reliquary of las Descalzas Reales. See Bosch Moreno, "Para que el pueblo vea y goce de este santo tesoro."

**22** Peña Martín, "La Sala del Belén."

This is not the only example of a transfer and reinterpretation of particular monastic spaces from Europe to America. Other examples have been analyzed in my contribution to this volume, as well as in other publications. I have addressed art and architecture in relation to liturgy within an Atlantic framework, thereby avoiding previous nationalistic approaches,<sup>23</sup> as well as traditional formalist and stylistic types of analysis.<sup>24</sup> Over the last thirty years, research on female monasteries, in particular German and Italian, have explored how gender within monastic life influenced liturgy and produced a material articulation in the buildings.<sup>25</sup>

In the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere, however, studies on sacred topography and spatial functionality in female monasteries remain scarce, with a few exceptions. One research line in *Spiritual Landscapes*, a multidisciplinary project at the University of Barcelona (2015–2017) on female monasticism,<sup>26</sup> examined the topography of female monasteries, although it only looked at four foundations, all in Iberia. Apart from my own research on Dominican nunneries,<sup>27</sup> space in Cistercian nunneries in the Iberian kingdoms has been explored by *Aragonia Cisterciensis* (2016–2019), and by a new project on the monastery of Lorvão (2021–2024),<sup>28</sup> as well as by some publications.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, this kind of approach is more or less entirely absent in studying the architecture of female monasteries in the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru.<sup>30</sup>

### Religious Women’s Agency inside and outside the Cloister

Liturgy was determined by the spaces in which it was performed: large or small, publicly accessible or enclosed, defined by physical barriers or borders.<sup>31</sup> In the case of nuns, it has been thought that the liturgical spaces were conditioned to a large extent by enclosure and by their reliance on the administration of the sacraments by priests, especially after the monastic and ecclesiastical reforms of the Central Middle Ages. As stated by Duval in this volume, the division of roles then was organized not so much on

**23** Pérez Vidal, “Algunas consideraciones.”

**24** Pérez Vidal, “Arte y liturgia de los monasterios femeninos,” 58–71.

**25** Bruzelius, “Hearing is Believing”; Jäggi, *Frauenklöster im Spätmittelalter*; Hamburger and Schlotheuber, *The Liber ordinarius of Nivelles*.

**26** *Spiritual Landscapes* (HAR2014–52198–P) was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. It has been succeeded by the research project *Paisajes monásticos. Representaciones y virtualizaciones de las realidades espirituales y materiales medievales en el Mediterráneo Occidental (siglos VI–XVI)*, for the period 2019–2022 (PGC2018–095350–B–I00).

**27** Pérez Vidal, “El espacio litúrgico.”

**28** *Livros, rituais e espaço num Mosteiro Cisterciense feminino. Viver, ler e rezar em Lorvão nos séculos XIII a XVI*, for the period 2021–2024 (PTDC/ART–HIS/0739/2020). The principal investigator is Catarina Fernandes Barreira. It is funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia in Portugal.

**29** Carrero Santamaría, “The Creation and Use of Space”; Catalunya, “The Customary of the Royal Convent.”

**30** There are a few exceptions, particularly in Mexico: Ratto, “El convento de San Jerónimo.”

**31** Muschiol, “Gender and Monastic Liturgy,” 806.

the basis of gender, but between clerics and lay people. Women could not be clerics, and were therefore physically segregated from the altar and from the sacramental and pastoral services. Focusing on the particular case of Dominican nuns, Duval analyzes how this greatly conditioned nuns' identity. However, despite the limitations imposed on women's authority by conciliar legislation, there is evidence of women fulfilling ministerial roles during the Central and Late Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup>

Regulations on enclosure grew to be particularly strict over the thirteenth century, starting with those imposed in the early 1220s by the mendicant orders, and ending with the *Periculoso*, a papal decretal of Pope Boniface VIII issued in 1298. Although this marked a gendered difference in the use of spaces, the legislation on enclosure has to be considered critically and in comparison with the reality of each religious community. Its enforcement varied significantly from place to place and enclosure was far from always being observed. Thus, the relationships between convents and their local context were more complex than previously thought. As the contributions of García Fernández and Sutter in this volume discuss, many communities did not live in the degree of isolation that statutes and chronicles seem to indicate. On the contrary, the monastic walls were quite permeable, even after the implementation of the Observant reform and the Council of Trent.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly true in those monasteries ruled by aristocratic and powerful abbesses, who were involved in different religious and social networks, either in late medieval Galicia (García Fernández), or in the Order of Fontevraud (Müller). Many of these "elite" female monasteries worked as bastions of dynastic familial memory and political power (Müller).

Not seldomly, nuns negotiated a more flexible interpretation of enclosure (Pérez Vidal), or they confronted the reformers (García Fernández). This had consequences not only in the nuns' relationship with the outside world, but also inside the cloister. Indeed, as the Apostolic visitations cited in my article in this volume prove, liturgical and theatrical performances continued to be celebrated in many female monasteries in both New Spain and Peru until the eighteenth century.

Traditional periodization with a strict division between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period has not only made it difficult to understand these continuities, but has also led to the attribution of early modern features to the earlier period. For instance, as demonstrated by Müller's article in this volume, Fontevraud's identity as the order in which women lead and men serve, which still persists in contemporary historiography, has no medieval origins. On the contrary, it was abbess Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon (1637–1670) who deliberately manipulated the historical memory of Fontevraud. Medieval sources indicate no ascetic nor ideological submission of men to women; the hierarchy was rather based on social status.

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**32** Bugyis, *The Care of Nuns*.

**33** Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*.

## Gender, Race, and Status among Religious Women

Gender had an impact on women's religious encounter, starting with their religious identity (Duval's contribution in this volume), with the observance of enclosure (García Fernández), and, related to this, with reform movements (Duval, Sutter, Pérez Vidal), with transatlantic exchanges, and also with the ethnic differences established in America (Benoist). However, women's relationship with religion was far from restrictive nor monolithic. On the contrary, the concept of "intersectionality" can be useful:<sup>34</sup> that is to say, gender's relationship with other markers of difference such as status, race, place, religious order, and "gender performativity," as defined by Judith Butler. Gender performativity explains that gender identities were constructed in performance; thus they cannot be understood separately from the "cultural intersections" that produced and maintained gender.<sup>35</sup> All the agents involved and these cultural intersections differed from one nunnery to another, and had consequences in all aspects of monastic life, reflected in the diversity of gendered responses.

Whereas friars were always sent directly from Spain to establish new male convents, no female monastery in New Spain was founded by nuns from Spain until 1665. Some *beatas* and tertiaries were sent by the second quarter of the sixteenth century to instruct religious women of already established foundations (see the contributions of Pérez Vidal and Bieñko in this volume), but no Spanish nun undertook transoceanic trips in the 1500s.<sup>36</sup>

However, some nuns were able to travel across the Atlantic by use of their imagination. Nuns like Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534), María de Ágreda (1602–1665), or Ana María de San Joseph (1581–1632), actually performed transatlantic spiritual journeys without leaving their cloisters.<sup>37</sup> We could link this to the well-documented late medieval tradition of performing virtual pilgrimages to places that were unreachable due to enclosure or other restrictions. We can count numerous examples from monasteries across Europe of nuns who travelled virtually, receiving the same indulgences obtained by pilgrims who actually travelled to Rome or Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

The first Spanish nuns arrived in New Spain in 1620. That year, Jerónima de la Asunción and her sisters from the Poor Clares monastery of Santa Isabel de Toledo stayed in Mexico for a few months before resuming their journey to Manila in the Philippines, where they established a new house. Jerónima's travel companion and later abbess of the Manila convent, Ana de Cristo, recorded their travel experiences in a manuscript,

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**34** This concept was introduced to displace hegemonic and reductive discourses based on the equation women = gender. The term is commonly attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

**35** Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6–7.

**36** Both Pérez Vidal and Bieñko deal in their respective contributions with the foundations of the first *beaterios* or *recogimientos* for religious women in New Spain. For an analysis of the process of transculturation or adaptation of *recogimientos* from Spain to Peru see Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*.

**37** Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*, 186–214; Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*.

**38** Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent*; Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 236–39.

now kept in Toledo, along with a hagiography of Jerónima.<sup>39</sup> In this case, the exchanges were not only transatlantic, but also transpacific.<sup>40</sup> Some years later, in 1665, the first Capuchin foundation in New Spain received nuns from Toledo, and in 1712 five Capuchin nuns from Madrid travelled to Lima in Peru. In this instance, one of the nuns wrote an account of their journey.<sup>41</sup>

The scarcity of direct contact with Spain during the sixteenth century caused, as pointed out by Bieñko, a rapid “creolization” of female monastic communities, marking a gender difference between male and female convents. This means that there was a predominance of *criollas*,<sup>42</sup> that is Spanish descendants, in the nunneries. Until the eighteenth century, in New Spain only *criollas* and some *mestizas* (women of European and indigenous blood), were allowed to profess (take the vows of holy orders) in the onasteries of New Spain. Neither indigenous women nor African women were considered to possess the qualities needed to become nuns (Benoist). Peruvian sixteenth-century convents were slightly more flexible, as they accepted indigenous women as novices, although not as professed nuns.<sup>43</sup> Thus, indigenous women were doubly discriminated against in the spiritual hierarchy established in Spanish America, for both their gender and their ethnicity.<sup>44</sup> The animated controversy surrounding the spiritual nature of indigenous people that took place during the early years of the Spanish conquest reemerged in the eighteenth century with the introduction of a proposal to create a convent exclusively for indigenous noble women (see Bieñko in this volume). The first convent of this type was the Corpus Christi in Mexico City, established in 1724, followed by another foundation in Antequera (now Oaxaca) and Valladolid (now Morelia) in 1737.<sup>45</sup> Paradoxically, as Mónica Díaz has argued, eighteenth-century indigenous nuns employed some of the stereotypes from colonial ethnic discourse in order to define themselves in clear opposition to Spanish nuns. Their purpose was to assert themselves as both indigenous and noble, claiming ethnic independence.<sup>46</sup>

The *casta* system established in early modern Spanish America was, however, much more fluid than the later classification based on race, taken as a fixed biological marker, which became widespread in the nineteenth century. In addition to the indigenous peo-

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39 Owens, *Nuns Navigating the Spanish Empire*.

40 On this emerging field see, for instance Lee, ed., *Western Visions of the Far East*.

41 María Rosa, *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*, ed. Owens.

42 Originally the term *criollo* referred to enslaved people of African ancestry born in America. Its meaning expanded later to cover Spaniards born in the colonies, and it was frequently used exclusively with solely this meaning in the final decades of the Hispanic dominion. For an analysis of the complexity of the terms *creole* and Creolization, see Gundaker, “Discussion: Creolization, Complexity, and Time.”

43 Burns, *Colonial Habits*, 125.

44 The first studies devoted to female monasteries in America focused on those founded by white—either Spanish or *creole*—women.

45 Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*; Hernández de Olarte, “Controversia en torno a la fundación de conventos.”

46 Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, 41 and 109.



ples, by the seventeenth century Afro-descendants also constituted a significant part of the population in colonial Mexico and Peru. The majority were enslaved women and entered some convents as servants. However, very few Afro-descendant women were accepted as nuns, let alone classified as *beatas* (blessed) due to their extraordinary and exemplary life, a first step towards sanctity. This was however the case of the two Afro-descendant women studied by Benoist in this volume: Esperanza de San Alberto, who entered San José de Puebla as a servant and professed before her death, and Estefanía de San Joseph, who became a *beata* of the Franciscan Order in Lima. The lives of both women were recorded. However, as analyzed by Benoist, the biographers attempted to “whiten” both Esperanza and Estefanía by stressing their exceptionality. The biographers also used both women’s lives with the clear purpose of glorifying their *criollo* convents and orders.<sup>47</sup>

### **Cultural Exchange and Objects in Motion through Transatlantic Networks**

Although nuns did not travel between the two continents during the sixteenth century, intense cultural interaction did operate through different networks and different agents.<sup>48</sup> Among these agents we should include religious women, lay patrons and patronesses, but also religious men, whose role in Atlantic cultural transmission was significant, especially in the years just after the Spanish conquest. As discussed in my article in this volume, Cardinal Cisneros’ religious reform was introduced in the Americas by Spanish friars like the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga (1468–1548) or the Dominican Bernardo de Alburquerque (1558–1579). This led, for instance, to the dedication to the *Madre de Dios* of some of the first female monasteries in New Spain, in particular in Mexico City and Oaxaca. Both Zumárraga and Alburquerque were bishops. We might note here that, in both the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, many female monasteries had been under episcopal jurisdiction since their origin and were quite independent from their respective religious orders (Pérez Vidal).

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship on the role of women’s networks in building and performing women’s power in the premodern world has also considered the role of books, together with other artefacts such as relics, images, or artistic objects. They were objects in motion and circulated through different types of networks: female networks, networks based on kinship, and also those of the religious orders.<sup>49</sup> These networks operated at a local, national, and international level. This international exchange and circulation, in this case transatlantic, of books and other artefacts, provides a necessary

**47** For a study of New World hagiographies as tools of *criollo* pride, see Rubial García, *La Santidad Controvertida*.

**48** On representation and networks in creating an “imperial space” see “Empires ibériques. De la péninsule au global,” ed. Guillaume Gaudin and Jaime Valenzuela Márquez, a special issue of *Diasporas* 25 (2015), <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/352>.

**49** See for instance the contributions in the recently published volume Dumitrescu, Hardie, and O’Loughlin Bérat, eds., *Relations of Power*. Also see Armstrong-Partida, Guerson, and Wessell Lightfoot, eds., *Women and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*.

counterpoint to nation-biased narratives. Our collection here will allow a more nuanced definition of multidirectional processes such as religious and liturgical reforms carried out at different times, cultural and artistic exchanges linked to these reforms, as well as a more refined definition of gendered boundaries, like monastic enclosure.

In her article in this volume, Doris Bieñko analyzes the presence of books on European religious women or even female saints in New Spain's nunneries and their reception among *creole* religious women. As the case of St. Gertrude the Great (1256–1302) shows, the lives of some of these saints were reinterpreted in New Spain with different political, religious, and propagandistic purposes.<sup>50</sup> Devotion to St. Gertrude was widespread across the territories of the Catholic Monarchy from the early sixteenth century, made even more popular in the Counter Reformation as her works were translated and printed. Her life also had an impact on many nuns' writings; for example, she served as a model for St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), who became the paradigm for nuns' autobiographies.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, more studies on the circulation of books among different female monasteries are needed. Scholarship on the transmission of and trade in books between Europe and America has mainly focused on male religious houses as agents and consumers.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, mainly due to their dispersal and loss, liturgical manuscripts and fragments have not received the same amount of attention as devotional writings.<sup>52</sup> Other than lavishly illuminated manuscripts they have been largely neglected by philologists, historians, and art historians. Musicologists have paid attention to these sources in recent years, but the imbalance between different territories and religious orders is significant.<sup>53</sup> Finally, a gendered analysis of manuscripts as a whole in relationship to monastic spaces in America has yet to be undertaken.

Bieñko's article in this volume shows how images (present in imported books) inspired visions, while nuns' visions, described in their autobiographical writings, helped to develop new iconographies, as we find in the depictions of St. Gertrude the Great. There was therefore a close, two-way relationship between images and visions.<sup>54</sup>

Bieñko's article also provides evidence of the circulation of artistic objects from Spain to America. An example of this is the request made by Sr. María de Jesús Tomellín (ca. 1579–1637) to her sister living in Seville for an image of the infant Jesus made by

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**50** See Bilinkoff and Greer, eds., *Colonial Saints*.

**51** For instance, in his monograph on Dutch printed books in New Spain, César Manrique mentions only the convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns of San José and Santa Teresa in Puebla. Manrique, *El libro flamenco para lectores novohispanos*. On female monasteries we can mention the paper presented by Beatriz Ferrús Antón, "Miradas transoceánicas a la tradición literaria conventual de los siglos XVII y XVIII," at the international congress, *Transocéanos: Cultura y mundos ibéricos en los siglos XVI–XVIII*, held in Barcelona on May 9–10, 2019.

**52** The transmission of liturgical books from Europe to America has been also analyzed in the aforementioned congress (*Transocéanos*) by Dominiki Jurczak: "Il Libro liturgico come prodotto d'esportazione europeo: l'importanza dei testi liturgici nella formazione della cultura in America."

**53** Lledías and Muriel, *La música en las instituciones femeninas novohispanas*; Pérez Vidal, "Creación, destrucción y dispersión."

**54** Sanmartín Bastida, "En torno al arte y las visionarias."

the “best artisan.” Once the image arrived at the convent in Puebla, it was named “*Niño Gachupín*” due to its Spanish origin. This recorded example reveals the role of Mexican nuns in commissioning these devotional images from the Metropolis. From the end of the sixteenth century, Seville became the main centre for the production of sculptures to export to the Americas. Although not mentioned in Bieńko’s article, the “best artisan” was at the moment Juan Martínez Montañés (1568–1649). Some of his sculptures were in fact sent to America, such as the so-called “*Niño Cautivo*” from the Cathedral of Mexico City, a production that was continued by his disciple, Juan de Mesa y Velasco (1583–1627).<sup>55</sup> However, due to the increasing demand from Spain and the Americas, many of these images were mass-produced through high-quality lead casts of wood sculptures by Martínez Montañés, Mesa, and others. Diego de Oliver, who called himself “*maestro baciador de niños de plomo*” was one of the most successful artisans producing these casts and was based in Seville from 1612. In 1619, Oliver sent a total of twenty-six images to America,<sup>56</sup> some of which are still preserved in female monasteries. They were the focus of nuns’ devotions, showing a continuity in these practices between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, as well as transatlantic cultural transmission. Images of the Infant Christ used in personal devotions and in liturgical performances were described in nuns’ visions and autobiographies during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of these images still exist, mainly from German nunneries, such as the Christ Child from Walsrode, ca. 1500,<sup>57</sup> together with cribs, like the one from the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne, ca. 1340–1350, or a South Netherlandish fifteenth-century crib now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.<sup>58</sup> Whereas medieval images of the Christ Child from Spanish female monasteries are unknown, those made between the sixteenth and eighteenth century are quite numerous. Furthermore, a late fifteenth-century crib from Santo Domingo de Toledo has been also preserved.<sup>59</sup>

Such artistic objects and images were a means of transferring culture across the Atlantic, in both directions. Although less known, several examples prove that Spanish nuns were commissioning or acquiring artworks from America, such as the so-called *imágenes de caña* or maize imagery. These images were a syncretic product<sup>60</sup> obtained through the amalgamation of native religion and manufacturing techniques with Catholic beliefs and European imagery.<sup>61</sup> Due to this sacred symbolism, but also its light weight, parts of the maize plant were used around Lake Pátzcuaro to produce sculp-

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**55** Amador Marrero and Pérez Morales, “Un debate sempiterno.

**56** Palomero Páramo, “El mercado escultórico entre Sevilla y Nueva España,” 110–11; Marcos Villán, “Modelos compartidos.”

**57** Knüvener, “Christusknabe.”

**58** LeZotte, “Cradling Power.”

**59** Pérez Vidal, “Descendit de caelis,” 86–87.

**60** Pedro Germano Leal (“Hybridism, Purity and Syncretism”) has argued for using “syncretism” instead of “hybridism.” The latter has etymologically racial connotations and can lead to errors, like assuming that only two cultures were involved in the process of creating these artefacts.

**61** Amador Marrero, “Imaginería ligera novohispana,” 41–48 and 67–73.

tures representing deities.<sup>62</sup> Together with these pre-Hispanic precedents, lightweight sculptures produced in New Spain also had European precedents, such as late medieval sculptures made of wood, skin, and other materials to add realism, like the so-called Cristo de Burgos. These syncretic images were well appreciated in the mother country, as attested by chroniclers like Jerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604) and Agustín de Vetancurt (1620–1700).<sup>63</sup> Their weight made them particularly valued for processional purposes. So, many belonged to Confraternities of the Vera Cruz (True Cross) both in New Spain and Spain, but they were also commissioned or donated to female monasteries.<sup>64</sup> A head, now at the Marés Museum in Barcelona, was made in New Spain and was part of an image of Christ from Santa Isabel de los Reyes de Toledo.<sup>65</sup> Other images are preserved in las Descalzas Reales (Madrid), San José de Ávila, Porta Coeli in Valladolid, Santa María de Jesús in Sevilla, and beyond. Although these images have been studied by Amador Marrero, an analysis of their function in relation to nuns' devotions and liturgy has yet to be undertaken.

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The contributions in this volume have underlined how cross-boundary research on religious women can greatly contribute to surpassing the theoretical and methodological limitations of this large field. The contributions overcome anachronistic epistemological boundaries and bridge conventionally isolated sub-fields, historical periods, and geographical areas. In this way, this volume not only enhances our global understanding of female monasticism, but it also aims at better integrating the history of religious women into cultural history at a global scale. It should contribute to animating current debates on the role of women in international religious and political networks, as well as in cultural transfer. Finally, this volume is an invitation to continue dialogue among international scholars, to open new horizons, and to raise new research questions that will inspire future scholarship.

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**62** Brito Benítez, "Symbolism and Use of Maize."

**63** Amador Marrero, "Imaginería ligera novohispana," 41–45, 98–126 and 139.

**64** Another example of an "artistic syncretic product" from female monasteries, combining medieval Euro-Christian and Mesoamerican notions of the sacred were the so-called crowned-nuns portraits. James Córdova has shown how the agency of nuns and their patrons was fundamental to their production. They made use of pictorial traditions and normative gender signs to create artworks with a clear meaning in the context of eighteenth-century Bourbon monastic reforms. Córdova, *The Art of Professing in Bourbon Mexico*.

**65** <http://www.bcn.cat/museumares/interactiu/escultura/pas10.html>; Amador Marrero, "Imaginería ligera novohispana," 320–21.

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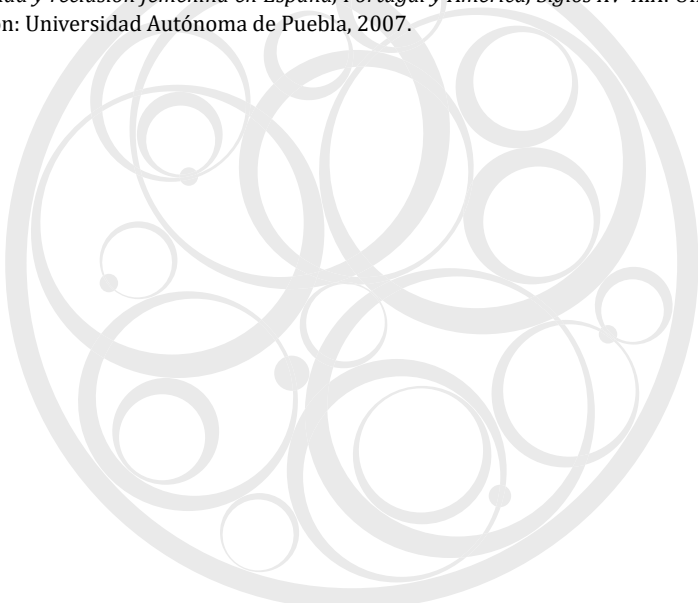
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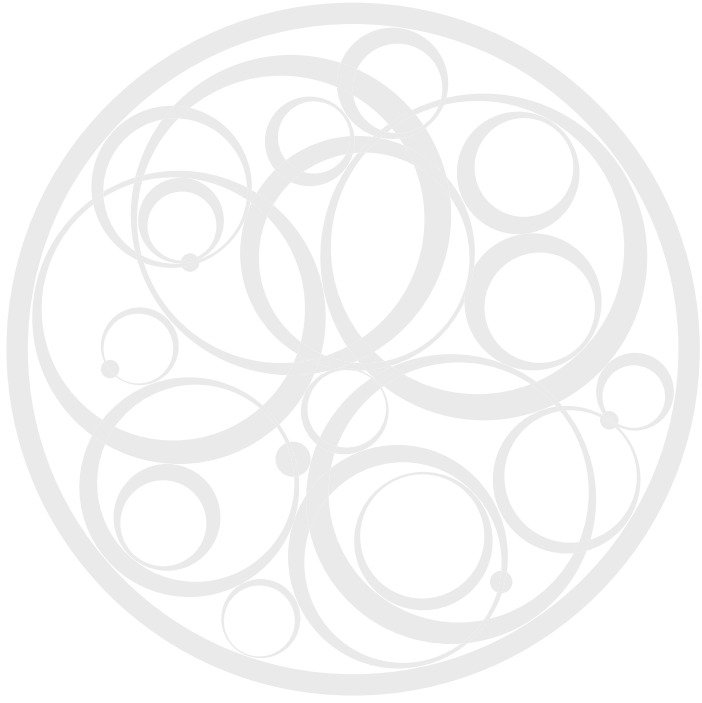
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## Chapter I

# FEMALE DOMINICAN IDENTITIES (1200–1500)

SYLVIE DUVAL\*

AFTER A LONG period during which the most prestigious and perfect religious model was that of the monk, the Gregorian reform was an attempt to renew the pastoral mission of the Church, as well as to restore its independence from lay powers. Reformers, and above all the papacy from Gregory VII (1073–1085) onwards, put the sacerdotal function and the figure of the cleric at the centre of the ecclesiastical institution. Whereas the monk had its female counterpart in the nun, the figure of the priest was exclusively male and could not be adapted to women. As a result, male ecclesiastical models evolved significantly during the later Middle Ages: the role of the parish priest was redefined, new mendicant orders were invented, and a new gendered theological knowledge, taken from the universities,<sup>1</sup> was promoted. Reciprocally, the female religious model did not—at least officially—evolve. In order to be considered as “religious persons” women had still to enter a monastery and become nuns.

Through this re-evaluation of the clerical model, the Church redefined the relationship between clerics and lay people, as demonstrated by conciliar decisions from the Gregorian reform onwards.<sup>2</sup> Lay people became more directly connected to the clerics, who had to administer to them the holy sacraments such as communion and absolution regularly. As a consequence, the religious obligations of the laity increased; simultaneously, believers became more demanding of their priests,<sup>3</sup> of the preachers they listened

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1 See Stabler Miller, “Mirror of the Scholarly (Masculine) Soul.” On the use of gender in medieval church history, see Lees, ed., *Medieval Masculinities*; Bennett and Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*.

2 On the evolution of the relationship between clerics and lay people, see Vauchez, “Les laïcs au Moyen-Âge entre ecclésiologie et histoire,” and his *Les laïcs au Moyen Âge*.

3 The Pataria, a movement of lay people who, in the archbishopric of Milan in the end of the eleventh

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**Sylvie Duval** is Marie Curie fellow at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. She received her PhD in History in 2012 (from the Universities of Lyon and Florence) with a dissertation, subsequently published, entitled “Comme des anges sur terre. Les moniales dominicaines et les débuts de la réforme observante” (2015). She has been a member of the École française in Rome and a fellow of the Fondation Thiers in Paris. She currently teaches Medieval History at the University of Milan. Among her publications are *La beata Chiara conduttrice* (2016) and *Women and Wealth in Medieval Pisa* (2018).

to, and, in the end, of their own faith and religious knowledge. This means that even if the Gregorian reform tended to exclude women from ecclesiastical institutions, it also made it possible for lay people,<sup>4</sup> women as well as men, to feel more concerned about religious matters. Consequently, women as lay people did take part in the “revival” of the faith<sup>5</sup> that occurred at this time, and to building a new relationship between churchmen and lay people. This is why the “religious movements” highlighted by Herbert Grundmann involved both men and women: we should indeed bear in mind that the meaningful socio-cultural categories of that time were not only the difference between sexes and gendered models, but also the distinction between clerics and lay people.<sup>6</sup> Women, who could not be clerics, were by definition “lay.”<sup>7</sup>

The history of Dominican women enables us to better understand the evolution of the place of women within the Church at the end of the Middle Ages. It sheds light on the particular relationship between a category of clerics explicitly devoted to the spiritual care of lay people (the Dominican friars) and some groups of religious women who were gradually placed under their spiritual authority.

Two bulls officially enabled women to be part of the Order of Preachers (the “Dominicans”), or at least to be associated with it. On February 6, 1267, Pope Clement IV issued the bull *Affectu sincero*. This set down the conditions under which some nuns, officially called *Moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura et instituta Fratrum Praedicatorum viventes/degentes*, were placed under the spiritual government of the Order of Preachers.<sup>8</sup> On June 26, 1405, the bull *Sedis apostolicae*, issued by Pope Innocent VII, officially recognized the existence of a Dominican “order of penance,” submitted *in spiritualibus* to the Order of Preachers; it promulgated for these lay men and women a particular rule, contained within the text of the bull.<sup>9</sup>

These two bulls must be interpreted differently, because they are the result of two different processes and contexts: firstly, that of the assignment of the *cura monialium* (the care of nuns) to male orders, which was promoted by the papacy during the thirteenth century through *Affectu sincero*; and secondly that of the beginning of the Observant reform as the context for *Sedis apostolice*. These two “moments” shed light on the evolution of the place and role of religious women within the Order of Preachers.

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century struggled against simoniac and married priests, is emblematic of this phenomenon. See Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Age*.

4 Grundmann in his famous study, *Religious Movements*, sees the Gregorian reform as a key moment for the development of the lay religious movements.

5 Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Age*.

6 See Lett, “Les régimes de genre.”

7 Let me emphasize here that women, even if professed nuns, were not clerics, even if they were considered as *religiosae personae* and benefitted from special ecclesiastical privileges.

8 *Bullarium Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, ed. Ripoll (hereafter *BOP*), 1:481.

9 *BOP*, 2:473. On the rule of the penitents, see Wehrli-Johns, “L’Osservanza dei domenicani”; also Lehmijoki-Gardner, “Writing Religious Rules as an Interactive Process.”

This essay questions the widespread idea, put forward by Herbert Grundmann,<sup>10</sup> that Dominicans (like other medieval religious orders) were apparently reluctant to integrate women within their order, and offers new perspectives to the history of religious women during the later Middle Ages.

### ***Affectu sincero*, 1267**

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Dominic of Caleruega did not create any order or category of nuns that would become officially associated to the Order of Preachers. One can have no doubt, however, about Dominic's concern for religious women. His involvement in the foundation or re-foundation of various female communities (Prouille in 1206/7; San Sisto in Rome in 1221; Madrid ca. 1220) shows clearly that he considered female religious life as an indispensable element of Christian society, and as a valuable spiritual help for "active" male clerics.<sup>11</sup> But, as a cleric of his era, educated under the principles of the Gregorian reform, he believed that female religious communities could only be monastic. He insisted above all on the necessity of enclosure and did not introduce new ideas about the religious mission of women. Women's communities had therefore to be submitted to the spiritual government of clerics, such as the Dominicans, Cistercians, the canons regular, or secular clerics.<sup>12</sup> The other great "mendicant" founder of this same century, Francis (although not a cleric), had a comparable attitude towards religious women, since he never officially associated female communities to his own order.<sup>13</sup>

By the middle of the thirteenth century, some members of the Order of Preachers claimed however that Dominic had founded a "female branch" for his order.<sup>14</sup> This invented tradition was meant to justify the association of female communities to the Order, in a context that had greatly changed since Dominic's death in 1221. This interpretation was supported by the nuns of those monasteries founded by Dominic (Prouille, San Sisto of Rome) who did not want the friars who were taking care of their spiritual and temporal life to abandon them<sup>15</sup> and who were seeking papal approval

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**10** See Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 90.

**11** See Cariboni, "Domenico e la vita religiosa femminile."

**12** On the first years of the Prouille community, when the sisters were under the *cura* of various clerics, see Vicaire, "Prouille fut-il un couvent double?"

**13** The Damianites, and later the Clarissan Order ("Poor Clares"), were far more "creations" of the papacy than the Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans). In her rule, Clare respects the strict papal norms about female monastic enclosure. On the genesis of the Order of St. Clare, see Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato*, and Andenna: "Dalla *Religio pauperum dominarum*."

**14** This is particularly so of Humbert of Romans, Master General from 1254 to 1263. He asserts in his sermons that Dominic did create a female branch to his Order. See Cariboni, "Problemi d'identità," 169.

**15** On the conflict between the Friar Preachers and the nuns, see Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, chapter 5; de Fontette, *Les religieuses à l'âge classique du droit canon*, 90ff.; Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, chapter 1. See also Frank, "Die Dominikarinnen." For Frank, the process of regularizing the

for their “incorporation” into the Order of Preachers.<sup>16</sup> However, many other members of the Order did not want the nuns to be incorporated: the *cura* of numerous religious women would prevent the friars from fulfilling their main preaching, so they believed.<sup>17</sup>

From the 1220s the “female religious movement” had become increasingly important and new female religious communities were spreading in all countries. From Gregory IX (1227–1241) onwards, the papacy managed to find legal and practical ways to supervise and control such communities. As a result, the need for clerics to take on the care for the nuns’ souls increased: female communities were more numerous, and the need for them to be supervised by clerics grew too, according to the way the papacy looked at religious women. The “old” Benedictine model of the previous centuries, which left the nuns’ monasteries governed by powerful abbesses, more or less independent from male government, was not promoted for the numerous new female communities during the thirteenth century. The new mendicant orders, along with Cistercian monks, had to accept the spiritual charge over these numerous female souls.

How difficult was this task? The organization of female Cistercian monasteries suggests that the male involvement remained limited: male abbots rarely ended up controlling the nuns’ way of life.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the bull *Affectu sincero* that regulated the terms of the association between “Dominican nuns” and Friar Preachers suggests that the number of friars implied in the *cura monialium* was not so great.

The controversy between those who did not want the nuns to be part of the Order of Preachers and those who claimed that the Preachers had to care for them was solved in 1267 (after a first attempt in 1246).<sup>19</sup> The bull *Affectu sincero* enabled the female communities to be associated with the Order of Preachers in a very flexible way. Their complete “incorporation” into the Order was no longer proposed (even if, as we will see, many possibilities remained open). According to the bull, the friars bore certain legal duties: they were merely obliged to control the observance of the constitutions in the female communities once a year (*officio correctionis et reformationis*). Nuns had to follow the rule of St. Augustine (as the friars did), to which some Constitutions were added,

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Dominican nuns did not allow them to be freed from male domination (“Männerherrschaft”), which is why he described their union to the Dominican Order as an “Anschluss an einen Männerorden” (125).

**16** The concept of *incorporatio* could have been a key problem in the conflict. The final bull of 1267 does not use this term, which had been used in some earlier bulls regarding the nuns, and it is clear that the solution adopted consciously avoided any possibility of “full incorporation” of women within the Order. See also Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*.

**17** This was especially the case in the German provinces of the Order where numerous female communities were founded. On this topic, see the letters of Jordan of Saxony, second Master General of the Order, to Diana degli Andalò, prioress of a “Dominican” monastery in Bologna: *Beati Iordani de Saxonia Epistulae*, ed. Walz.

**18** See Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*, chapter 6.

**19** *BOP*, 2:26. The content of this bull, promulgated by Innocent IV, is very close to that of *Affectu sincero*, and perhaps more precise. This bull does not contain however the new official denomination of Dominican nuns. It was promulgated before Humbert composed the new rule for all Dominican nuns and had it approved by the General Chapter in Valenciennes (1259). It was reconfirmed by Nicholas IV in 1289.

written especially for the Dominican nuns by the Order's Master General, Humbert of Romans, in 1259 (*instituta fratrum praedicatorum*).<sup>20</sup> Preachers were made responsible for the spiritual care of nuns, but the bull allowed them to appoint chaplains whenever this was deemed necessary. Finally, friars were not obliged to reside in the nuns' monasteries, and they were not responsible for the temporal care of the female communities. Considering this, the care of nuns was a rather light burden on the Order: nuns were officially placed under the spiritual care of the Dominicans and they had to observe the Dominican constitutions. That is why all Dominican nuns, from 1267 onwards, were canonically called *moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura et instituta fratrum praedicatorum viventes* (nuns of the Order of St. Augustine, living under the care and the constitutions of the Friar Preachers) and not, for example, *moniales ordinis praedicatorum* (nuns of the Order of Preachers).

The bull of 1267 did not lead the friars to abandon those early monasteries in which they had been present since the beginnings of the Order. It allowed them instead to adapt their *cura* to the specificities of the various communities and contexts. That is why we find a great variety of Dominican nunneries at the end of the Middle Ages, even if all Dominican nuns had officially the same canonical title and status.

The small community of friars that took care for the nuns of Prouille did not leave the monastery,<sup>21</sup> even if the 1267 bull permitted them to do so. On the contrary, the prestigious community of Prouille gave birth to other monasteries, built on the same model. The "Prouillan" communities were great monasteries often founded by kings or queens; they were permanently supervised by a small community of friars who lived in a nearby convent attached to the nunnery. In this kind of monastery, typical of kingdoms like France, Aragon, and Sicily,<sup>22</sup> friars were responsible for both the spiritual and temporal care of the female community: far more than the obligations contained in the bull *Affectu sincero*.

The great majority of the other Dominican convents however had no male community attached to them, and the friars who held the spiritual care of the nuns usually came from the nearest house and shared their task with secular chaplains. Since the small communities of *moniales ordinis sancti Augustini etc....* were numerous in certain provinces of the Order (mainly in the Germanic and north-Italian provinces), it could happen that some of them, even if officially under the spiritual care of the Dominican friars, in reality had no relationship with the Friar Preachers. A solution to this problem was found in the province of Teutonia (Germany) where most of the Dominican monaster-

<sup>20</sup> See *Constitutiones Sororum*, ed. Mothon.

<sup>21</sup> About Prouille see Peytavie, "Construction de deux lieux de la mémoire dominicaine"; Tugwell, "For Whom Was Prouille Founded?"

<sup>22</sup> The main monasteries of this type were the French ones like Rouen (founded in 1261 by King Louis IX) and Poissy (founded by King Philip IV in 1304); in Aragon Saint-Agnes founded by queen Blanche in 1299; in the kingdom of Sicily and the Angevin territories, the monastery of Notre-Dame of Nazareth, founded in Aix-en-Provence in 1292 by King Charles II. These monasteries, founded with the help of some nuns from Prouille, gave birth later to other communities based on the same model (as in Naples with the monastery of San Sebastiano). This was also the case of the only Dominican English monastery, Dartford (near London).

ies were not “Prouillan.” There, the provincial, or sometimes even the Master General of the Order, appointed special vicars to supervise the nuns’ convents. This was the case, for example, of Master Eckhart who, in 1313, was appointed vicar for the nunneries of Strasbourg.<sup>23</sup> Vicars were responsible for the spiritual guidance of the nuns (sermons, spiritual education),<sup>24</sup> but not the daily spiritual tasks (masses, sacraments) which were, as in the other provinces of the Order, the duty of secular chaplains. Being a vicar for nunneries or the prior of a Prouillan monastery could even launch a prestigious career in the Order.<sup>25</sup>

Such a “flexible” approach to spiritual direction did not necessarily need official approval. Dominican friars indeed took spiritual care of other religious women, besides the nuns whose spiritual guidance was officially committed to them. Penitents, beguines, and even nuns from other religious orders, especially Cistercian nuns,<sup>26</sup> had spiritual links with the Friar Preachers. Undoubtedly Friar Preachers were greatly involved in the spiritual care of religious women in the Late Middle Ages, even if “Dominican nuns” were not canonically “incorporated” into their Order.<sup>27</sup>

The canonical status of Dominican nuns is best understood as part of the papal politics of the *cura monialium*, which aimed to set up a large clerical network to control female communities, but which did not give women (or only marginally so) new religious missions and identities. Officially, all religious women had to lead, more or less, the same enclosed life, as confirmed by the famous *Periculoso* decretal in 1298.<sup>28</sup> Historians of female religious life in the Middle Ages should see “religious orders” as mainly traditional male structures. When Humbert of Romans, Master General of the Order of Preachers, wrote the nuns’ Constitutions in 1259, he followed the scheme of the constitutions of the friars, but he did not include in this text the articles relating to preaching activities, nor the need for education and intellectual training. As a result, the Constitutions for Dominican nuns are just a “standard” rule for enclosed religious women, and do not contain the characteristic features of the Order of Preachers.

**23** On the link between Master Eckhart and religious women, see de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Age*, 303–16. See also Fassler et al., *Liturgical Life and Latin Learning*, 69–70.

**24** See Hamburger, “La bibliothèque d’Unterlinden.” The role of Johannes Meyer, vicar of several observant nunneries during the mid-fifteenth century, must be pointed out. Among other works for nuns, he wrote an adaptation of Humbert of Romans’ *De officiis* for religious women; see Johannes Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris.

**25** See Coulet, “Un couvent royal.” For the province of Teutonia, where for some years the friars who were responsible for the *cura* of female communities claimed to be part of these monasteries, see Creytens, “Les convers des moniales dominicaines,” 37.

**26** Cistercian nuns had been linked to the Friar Preachers since the beginnings of their Order. This is the case in particular of St. Lutgardis of Aywières (d. 1246), a friend of Master General Jordan of Saxony. Her *Vita* was written by another Dominican friar, Thomas of Cantimpré. I thank Claire Rousseau (Maison Seilhan, Toulouse) for this information. On the links between mendicant friars and Cistercian nunneries in the diocese of Liege, see Bertrand, *Commerce avec Dame Pauvreté*, 506–15.

**27** See further, Duval, “Les Dominicains et les femmes.”

**28** See Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*.



The distinctive features of the recently established male orders could not be adapted to religious women. Women were not allowed to preach, and even if they could read and write some spiritual works if they wanted to, they were not (officially) considered as potential spiritual guides for Christian people. Neither could they lead a life of poverty as Franciscan friars did. Even if Clare of Assisi obtained the privilege of poverty and wrote herself a rule which was deeply inspired by the Franciscan ideal (1253), Pope Urban IV imposed upon Clarissan nuns a new rule in 1263 which got rid of most of the originality of the rule written by Clare. The process which led to the regularization of the Poor Clares is surprisingly similar to the one leading to the formalization of the Dominican nuns: the same involvement of popes, the same “deal” with the friars, who were not obliged to reside in most of the Clarissan monasteries,<sup>29</sup> and, then, the same traditional monastic life for all nuns. Unlike the Dominican nuns however, the Clarissan nuns benefited from the official creation of a new order and of the canonization of their foundress.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the life of Dominican and Clarissan nuns was not very different from that of Cistercian nuns, who were in some regions more numerous than the “mendicant” nuns.<sup>31</sup> Clarissan nuns, Dominican nuns, Cistercian nuns: at the end of the thirteenth century, these denominations refer almost exclusively to the identity of the male clerics who were officially in charge of the souls of the nuns, and not to significant differences between these three “female orders.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Sedis Apostolice, 1405**

We all know, however, that during the Late Middle Ages innovation in religious life was carried out by women as much as by men. During the whole period with which we are dealing, *mulieres religiosae*, beguines, penitents, and anchoresses were numerous, even if they did not benefit from an officially recognized and approved canonical status. They were largely tolerated, and some of them exerted a real spiritual authority upon lay people and even upon some clerics.

In medieval cities, a great number of penitents, mainly women, existed, with different local names (e.g., *mantellate*, *pinzochere*).<sup>33</sup> Penitents were lay people who chose to lead a religious life without any monastic vows (unlike the beguines). Their life was relatively independent from clerical control, but it was recognized as a religious one by

**29** Except in Assisi and other powerful communities, whose prestigious history looks like that of the “Prouillan” monasteries. See Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato*.

**30** See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, 63–73.

**31** The reason why Dominican, Clarissan, or Cistercian nuns are more or less present in a particular area is probably due to various local (social, political, and historical) features that determined how the *cura monialium* was locally “distributed.” See Freed, “Urban Development.” On the case of the Champagne region, see Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*.

**32** “Women’s *vita religiosa* was always regulated only when joined to male houses, in coalition with monastic orders. The women’s religious movement could thus only be incorporated into ecclesiastical rules by joining it with an existing male order.” From Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 90. See also Duval, “Pour une relecture.”

**33** See Benvenuti Papi, *In castro poenitentiae*; Elm, “*Vita regularis sine regula*.”

lay people and even by the secular authorities.<sup>34</sup> Since 1289 (through the bull *Supra montem*),<sup>35</sup> these penitents fell under the Order of Friars Minor but, in practice, many of them were spiritually directed by other religious, mainly Dominican friars.

When the reforming movement of the Observance began at the end of the fourteenth century, spreading across almost all religious orders, the situation of the penitents evolved. All the mendicant orders created “third orders” of penitents officially associated to them, with specific rules and constitutions; these associations received papal approval.<sup>36</sup> Dominican penitents were officially recognized as part of the Order of Preachers in 1405 (the bull *Sedis apostolicae*) thanks to the efforts of Thomas of Siena, a disciple of St. Catherine.<sup>37</sup>

The linking of penitents to the Order of Preachers placed these lay people under the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars (with parish rights exempted), and gave them some specific constitutions to follow (under the “rule” written and approved by Thomas of Siena). Moreover, those who chose to live together (most often women) soon became “regular tertiaries”: they lived in convents under the control of Dominican friars.

The Observance can be seen as a general reassessment of religious orders, and as a reaffirmation of their responsibility (and influence) over various religious persons, particularly over religious women.<sup>38</sup> Forms of religious life that were not officially controlled by a regular order, such as beguines or anchoresses, began to disappear, or at least their members began to diminish significantly.

The Observant reform spread in Dominican nunneries too. The female reforming movement, carried out by nuns as well as by friars, led to stricter rules of enclosure, and to stricter control of female communities, thanks to a wider use of vicars<sup>39</sup> and, from

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**34** As a result, in particular in some Italian cities, some of these “semi-religious” persons gained an exceptional status with regard to taxes and military service. See Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, chapter 4.

**35** On the effect of the bull *Supra montem* upon Dominican penitents, see Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, and his *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence*.

**36** The Augustine penitents or tertiaries were regularized by papal bulls in 1399 (women) and one in 1470 (men), the Dominicans by ones in 1405, the Servites by ones in 1424, and the Carmelite by ones in 1476. See Boaga, “Tiers-Ordres séculiers.”

**37** *BOP*, 1:481.

**38** On the Observance, see Mixson and Roest, eds., *A Companion to Observant Reform*, and Duval, Morvan, and Viallet, eds., “Les Observances régulières.”

**39** Vicars are explicitly mentioned in the *Ordinationes* composed in 1397 by Raymond of Capua for the Observant nuns: “Volo, ordino et decerno quod quilibet provincialis in provincia sua, quia merita fratrum et conditiones melius cognoscit, infra quindenam a notitia presentium pro quolibet monasterio sororum nostrarum vel pro pluribus ubi commode fieri poterit, deputet et assignet unum confessorem principalem seu vicarium de ordine fratrum immaculati nominis et honeste conversationis, zelatorem animarum et sue religionis, qui huiusmodi pefatam clausuram monasterii sibi comittendi infra mensem a notitia commissionis sibi facte ad expensas ipsius monasterii reformari faciat, claves custodiat, introitum et exitum secundum formam superius et in ipsis sororum constitutionibus expressam diligenter respiciat [...]” Quoted in Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, 572–73.

the 1450s onwards, thanks to the creation of the “Congregations of Observance.”<sup>40</sup> The Observance led friars to reinforce their control upon female communities, both nuns and tertiaries. The bull *Affectu sincero* was not modified, but local documents and the decisions of General Chapters<sup>41</sup> show that Dominican friars paid greater attention to the religious women who were committed to them. But did this also lead to a reaffirmation of the “Dominican identity” of religious women who were associated to the Order? The fact is that friars were more present in nuns’ monasteries. Some female communities that were officially under the spiritual care of Friar Preachers, but did not want to submit to closer control of their discipline and spiritual life chose to leave the Dominican Order (and passed under the control of local bishops).<sup>42</sup> The emphasis put on the specific liturgy of various orders, in particular within the Dominican Order, during the fifteenth century can be understood as an attempt by both nuns and male reformers to reaffirm a specific identity for Dominican nuns.<sup>43</sup>

Some attempts were made by Dominican women to create a new type of community: that was the case, for example, of the blessed Colomba of Rieti (d. 1501), an Italian Dominican tertiary who founded a community of religious women in Perugia, and who actively participated in the spiritual life of the city.<sup>44</sup> However the authorities of the Order soon instructed Dominican tertiaries to lead a life that resembled that of enclosed nuns as much as possible.<sup>45</sup>

We could point at the same phenomenon in the case of Clarissan nuns. In the Franciscan Order, Observance took various forms and spread little by little through different congregations.<sup>46</sup> In Italy and in France some nuns believed that the moment had come to return to the rule of St. Clare and to abandon that of Urban IV. Above all, they wished to return to the practice of Holy Poverty cherished by their spiritual mother. Their attempt, however, succeeded only partially. The main male observant leaders<sup>47</sup> did not

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**40** The friars who governed these congregations showed great concern for the reform of the female monasteries. Secular authorities were called upon whenever they wanted a Dominican female monastery to be reformed. The first observant Dominican congregation was the Lombard one (see Fasoli, *Perseveranti nella regolare osservanza*, 55–62; see also Mortier, *Histoire des maîtres généraux*, vol. 4 covering 1400–1486).

**41** See Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre* for the case of the Tuscan observant monasteries; for the General Chapters, see *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Reichert, vol. 3 covering 1380–1498. See in particular, the decisions of the General Chapters of the late fifteenth century (that is, when the Observant friars became powerful within the Order).

**42** See the cases of some German monasteries in Barthelmé, *La réforme dominicaine*, 60–64.

**43** Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*.

**44** Casagrande and Menestò, eds., *Una santa, una città*.

**45** *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Reichert, vol. 3 for 1380–1498, 424 (Ferrara 1498).

**46** See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, chapter 4. On the use of the rule of St. Clare, see also Andenna, “Francescanesimo di corte.”

**47** For John of Capistran, strict enclosure had to be considered as the most important thing for observant nuns, even if this could raise problems for the practice of Holy Poverty. See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, 184.

consider the rule of St. Clare as suitable for the observant nuns, because its strictness on poverty could threaten the respect for strict enclosure. However, some Clarissan women did manage to return to the rule of St. Clare (the Colettines), but they slightly modified it in order to prevent the nuns, even the *converses*, to leave their monastery to collect alms.<sup>48</sup> Male reformers of orders (i.e., Dominican, Franciscan, Benedictine) insisted that the only way for women to achieve a real religious life was to live in a strictly enclosed monastery.

### **Beyond the Canonical Framework: Is there a Dominican Identity for Women?**

If there was a Dominican identity for women during the Middle Ages it lay beyond the canonical framework. In other words: if some women, or female communities, claimed to be “Dominican women,” their belonging to the Dominican tradition lay not solely in their canonical association to the friars, but rather in their own will to achieve some of the typical ideals of the Dominican movement.

Here we can start from the most famous Dominican woman of the Middle Ages, Catherine of Siena. Catherine was a penitent woman (a *mantellata*), belonging to a little community in Siena that was linked to the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars from the local house of San Domenico. As a penitent, she was not *stricto sensu* a member of the Order of Preachers since, as we have noted, penitents were only officially associated with the Order in 1405, twenty-five years after Catherine died. However, her Dominican identity cannot be denied. This link was obvious for Dominican friars who were contemporaries of Catherine: otherwise, they would not have considered it necessary to control her orthodoxy during their general chapter of 1374 in Florence, and they would not have asked Raymond of Capua to follow her and to be her main confessor. Moreover, Catherine was identified by lay people as a “mantellata,” that is as a pious woman who wore the characteristic black coat of the Order of Preachers.<sup>49</sup>

The case of Catherine shows that medieval religious orders attracted many more individuals to their sphere of influence than those who were canonically part of them.<sup>50</sup> The official creation of third orders in the fifteenth century “regularized” a lot of different semi-religious conditions, not just the “penitents” as defined in the bull *Supra montem* of 1289. By the end of the Middle Ages, there were many different kinds of lay persons related (officially and/or in practice) to the religious orders: oblates,<sup>51</sup> recluses living near the monasteries,<sup>52</sup> various communities of pious persons who were spiritually linked to communities or single preachers. Consequently, the religious categories as

<sup>48</sup> Lopez, *Culture et sainteté*, 222.

<sup>49</sup> See Vauchez, *Catherine de Sienne*.

<sup>50</sup> See Bouter, ed., *Les mouvances laïques*.

<sup>51</sup> See de Miramon, *Les “donnés” au Moyen Age*.

<sup>52</sup> Italian recluses often lived next to major monasteries, as was the case for example of two Pisan *beate*, Maria and Gherardesca, linked to the Camaldolese in the early thirteenth century: see Caby, “La sainteté féminine camaldule.”

described in the papal bulls should be understood as an ideal (regulated) representation of a complex reality and not as a description of this reality.

If one tries to better understand the complexity of the medieval religious world, one has to use different sources where the “official” categories built by the canonists are not used (or only marginally so). The language of lay people such as poets, novelists, notaries, merchants, or ordinary people writing their wills sheds a different light on how the “religious life” was in reality lived and perceived in medieval societies. Lay people clearly identified some female communities (nuns and penitents) as linked to the Preachers, whether these communities were officially committed to the Order or not. I wrote above that “nuns of the Order of St. Dominic” did not exist. This expression however can be easily found in notarial documents, where the nuns whose Dominican identity was universally recognized get commonly described as *moniales ordinis Sancti Dominici*.<sup>53</sup> Notaries indeed, especially the humbler ones, reproduced terms in use, and not those of the papal bulls. The lay perception of religious identity did not necessarily correspond to the ecclesiastical one. Some communities of *Moniales ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura etc...* were not considered to be “Dominican,” whereas others, like those of penitents and even some beguines, were considered to be linked to the Friar Preachers.

The difference between lay perception and canonical documents can be explained by different facts. First, by the effective practice of the spiritual *cura* by the friars themselves. The *Affectu sincero* bull, as we noted, was flexible: friars were allowed to delegate the spiritual tasks they had to fulfill towards the nuns, but it did not prevent them taking an active part in the spiritual care of other religious women who were not canonically associated to their order. That is why some beguines could be considered as religious women linked to the Dominicans in the towns where friars were particularly involved in their spiritual *cura*, for instance in Paris.<sup>54</sup>

Second, female communities could be remarkable enough in the eyes of lay people to have their own denomination, with no need to refer to the male order to which they were officially linked. This was the case for communities that already existed before they were affiliated to the Order of Preachers,<sup>55</sup> or even for communities that had always been linked to them but were perceived as independent. We can cite the expression *moniales ordinis Sancte Marie de Pruliano* which occurs in the notarial documents of the Languedoc, not only referring to the nuns of Prouille, but also to those of St. Marie of Prouille of Montpellier, a Dominican monastery founded in 1288 by the Prouille community.<sup>56</sup> Obviously, this phenomenon occurred not only for the Dominican monasteries, but also for other female communities.

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**53** For example, the Pisan monastery of San Domenico, in Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Opera del Duomo, n° 1302, fol. 525v (not. Giuliano Scarsi, year 1419).

**54** Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*.

**55** For the interesting example of the female communities linked to the Friar Preachers in Milan, who were called (among other names) “domine albe” (White Ladies), see Alberzoni, *Francescanesimo a Milano nel Duecento*, 152–53 and Duval, “Vierges et dames blanches.”

**56** See Primi, “Le Prouillan montpelliérain.”

Finally, we should take the perception of the religious women themselves into account. Did they consider themselves as “Dominican women”? The answer lies in documents written by these very religious women. These sources are not rare, at least in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>57</sup> Medieval Italian nuns themselves wrote many of the documents that are still preserved in the archives of their communities.<sup>58</sup> Some documents about penitents survive: in Italy, penitents wrote their wills or had them written down by local notaries.<sup>59</sup> Literary documents can also be used, including necrologies,<sup>60</sup> chronicles,<sup>61</sup> and *Vitae* written within the communities.<sup>62</sup> These documents usually reveal different aspects of the female Dominican identity. Most of the women who were committed to the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars did perceive themselves to be part of the Order, and they were often proud of this affiliation (e.g., they did not want to be cut off from that *cura*). What is more, some nuns who were not officially affiliated to the Dominican Order, but who followed the Dominican constitutions of 1259 considered themselves as Dominican, as was the case of the convent of St. Gallen during the observant period.<sup>63</sup> Dominican penitents too, even before the official association of the “Order of Penance” to the Friar Preachers in 1405, affirmed in their wills that they belonged to the local Dominican community.<sup>64</sup> This Dominican identity however was not an exclusive one. Dominican nuns or penitents indeed could be related to other orders by particular links of friendship or devotion, as was case of the observant nuns of San Domenico of Pisa who maintained a relationship with the Bridgettine<sup>65</sup> community of the Paradiso in Florence.<sup>66</sup>

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**57** See the trilogy by Blanton, O'Mara, Stoop, eds., *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue, The Kansas City Dialogue, and The Antwerp Dialogue*; and Fassler et al., *Liturgical Life and Latin Learning*.

**58** See Duval, “Scrivere, contare, gestire.”

**59** Rava, “Eremita in città.”

**60** For the necrology of the Venetian monastery of the Corpus Christi, see Bornstein: *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent*.

**61** See Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, and Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*.

**62** See Duval, *La Beata Chiara conduttrice*.

**63** See Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*, 124–29. Huijbers introduces the *Chronicle* and the *Schwesternbuch* of St. Gallen, written by some nuns of the community during the second half of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century.

**64** As was the case in Venice, in Pisa and in Siena. For Siena, see Clark Thurber, “Female Reclusion in Siena.” For Venice and Pisa, see Duval, “Done de San Domenego,” 397, and Duval “Caterina da Siena,” 261–80.

**65** The case of the Order of St. Bridget (*Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*), officially approved in 1370, is very interesting: it was founded as a double order for both clerics and enclosed nuns. St. Bridget's rule however was never applied in its original form. A few years after the foundation of the first monasteries in Europe, the Papacy suppressed the “double” communities. See Cnatingius: *Studies in the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden*, I, 22ff.

**66** Piattoli, “Un capitolo di storia dell'arte,” 4.

Moreover, the archival documents from San Domenico's show that the Pisan nuns regularly spent about the same amount of money to celebrate the feast of St. Bridget as they did for that of St. Dominic.<sup>67</sup>

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Religious identity for women is a complex topic since the medieval canonical framework did not permit women their own religious mission—only that of being a cloistered nun. Many religious women, however, managed to gain a distinct religious identity, at least in the eyes of lay society. The gap between the canonical framework and the “socio-religious” identity of women should remind us that medieval religious orders were gendered (male) juridical structures, to which women could only be imperfectly associated. In order to understand female religious life as it was in reality, we have to consider and integrate a variety of historical sources, which can refer to different identities of religious women: canonical, social, or self-perceived ones. Such an approach can result in confusing answers to questions such as: which women can really be considered as “Dominican”? Those who were officially linked with the Order or those who perceived themselves as Dominican? The apparent contradictions can be meaningful. Religious women indeed could fall, at the same time, both within and without the official canonical framework.

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**67** It appears under expenses for food and candles, and for the priests who celebrated the masses (Archivio di Marco, Florence, Fondo del monastero San Domenico, n° 4, “Libro di entrate e uscite 1430–1480” under the expenses for the summer months, since the feast of St. Dominic is on August 8, and the nuns celebrated St. Bridget's feast on July 23). See also Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, 473. For further information about the links between the Bridgettines and the Dominican nuns in Pisa, see Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art*.

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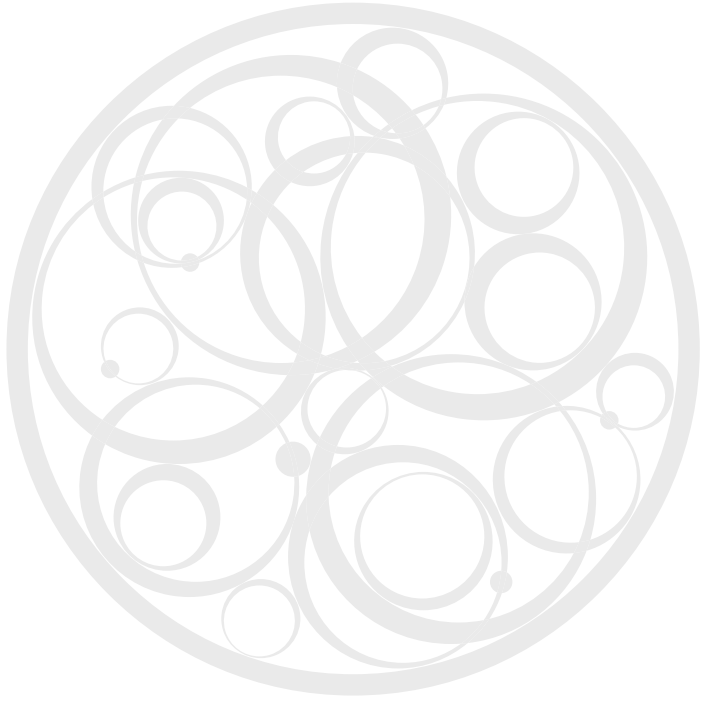
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## Chapter 2

# IN TOUCH WITH THE OUTSIDE: THE ECONOMIC EXCHANGES OF THE OBSERVANT DOMINICAN CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE IN ST. GALLEN

CLAUDIA SUTTER\*

MONASTERIES AND CONVENTS were—and still are—not only a place of worship isolated from the material world, but also organizations dealing with secular, worldly matters.<sup>1</sup> Everyday goods like food and beverage had to make their way inside their walls; other goods had to leave the monasteries and convents in exchange. Any possessions outside the walls had to be administered; therefore, every religious household needed management. These considerations apply to religious communities throughout the Middle Ages as well as today and are valid as much for Franciscans on divine mission<sup>2</sup> as for Benedictine monks running a school.<sup>3</sup>

These considerations become more interesting when thinking of *nuns* because they depend more on others than monks (e.g., for pastoral care from outside). They become even more interesting when thinking of *observant* convents, because one of the consequences of accepting observance is strict enclosure.<sup>4</sup> How could an observant convent

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“s. p.” (sine pagina) is used when there is no contemporary pagination in the manuscripts. For all dating issues: Grotefend, *Taschenbuch der Zeitrechnung*, esp. 30–110 for determining the saints’ days, and esp. 130–35 and 144–213 for determining the weekdays.

1 See, for example, Gleba, *Klosterleben im Mittelalter*, 99–107.

2 The Franciscans, mainly settled in cities, practised a particularly personal way of pastoral care: Frank, “Franziskaner,” 32.

3 In the Benedictine monastery in Einsiedeln for example a school was established in the tenth century: Salzgeber, “Einsiedeln,” 538–40.

4 Esser, “Dominikaner,” 133. See also, for instance, Uffmann, “Inside and Outside the Convent Walls,” and Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*.

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**Claudia Sutter** (claudia.sutter.stein.86@gmail.com) has studied at the Universities of Zürich, Neuchâtel, and Bern in Switzerland. She holds an MA in History and an MA in French Literature and Linguistics (both 2013) from the University of Zürich. She is completing her PhD in history at the University of Zürich with a project that aims to present the late medieval rent-roll of the Dominican convent of St. Catherine in St. Gallen in a digital edition. She previously worked in the Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde in St. Gallen and is currently working on digital editions of the legal sources for the city of Schaffhausen from 1416 to 1535/40 for the Law Sources Foundation of the Swiss Lawyers Society (SSRQ).

manage its possessions without—at first sight, at least, and by definition—any help from outside their walls? Research on administrative and financial aspects<sup>5</sup> of convents is rare.<sup>6</sup> Many case studies focus on architectural and artistic, spiritual, or educational aspects, or describe a convent's history in general, without any specific focus.<sup>7</sup> But how did nuns in observant convents administer their possessions outside the enclosure without leaving it? How did their management work—with paper, parchment, and ink—apparently without any external support? The striking contradiction between complete seclusion and permanent contact with the world beyond the enclosure is intriguing.

This article focuses on organizational and financial aspects of observant convents in the Late Middle Ages. It tries to reconstruct the—almost daily—economic contact between the convent of St. Catherine (Kloster St. Katharinen) in St. Gallen in north-eastern Switzerland with the outside world. After setting the background to the city and the convent, we will explain how the economic exchanges functioned, our sources and documentation. We will exemplify the processes involved through two case studies, tracing the trade in oats and wine over twenty years. Near the end we will present a few rather surprising objects that could be part of these exchanges.

### St. Catherine's: A Convent for the City and its Citizens

The history of St. Gallen began around 612, when St. Gallus brought Christianity to the region from Ireland (where he was probably born) and where he ended his life as a hermit in the forest. About a century later, Otmar founded a monastery at the place where Gallus' cell stood and he placed it under the Rule of St. Benedict. Since those days the monastery—as well as the developing city surrounding it—has borne the name of St. Gallus.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, a few women wished to live a life devoted to God, living, working, and praying together.<sup>9</sup> Two citizens of St. Gallen enabled the lay sisters to realize their dream by donating a piece of land outside the city walls.<sup>10</sup> A charter dating from June 30, 1228 is extant.<sup>11</sup> This is the first evidence of the citizens' connection with the sisters, which only intensified during the following three centu-

**5** Where it exists it has tended to focus on the convents' business partners or on an order's male branch.

**6** There are only a few active researchers in the German-speaking area, for instance Gleba and Eberhardt, *Summa summarum. Spätmittelalterliche Wirtschaftsnachrichten*, and Rösener, "Household and Prayer." See also Köppel, *Von der Äbtissin zu den gnädigen Herren*. More recently we have Rückert, "Die Rechnung der Schaffnerin Barbara von Speyer." For secondary literature concerning St. Catherine's see n. 18 below.

**7** Miscellanies such as Flachenecker and Tandeci, eds., *Editionswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 2009*, or Bériou and Chiffolleau, eds., *Économie et religion*, and countless monographs.

**8** Sonderegger, "Sankt Gallen (Gemeinde). 1. Früh- und Hochmittelalter."

**9** Bless-Grabher, "Kanton St. Gallen," 591–95, and Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 739–40.

**10** For an illustration, see Reeb and Guggenheimer, *Kloster St. Katharinen*, 2.

**11** Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen [hereinafter StadtASG], Altes Stadtarchiv [hereafter Altes StadtA], Tr. C. 10a. For the critical edition: Clavadetscher, ed., *Chartularium Sangalense*, no. 1152.

ries. In 1376 the convent as a whole—having officially adopted the Constitutions of St. Dominic in 1368<sup>12</sup>—gained the civil rights of the city.<sup>13</sup> The sisters had always lived in close connection to the city; as the suburb called Irervorstadt grew ever larger, it came to surround the nunnery. In 1418, after a fire had destroyed almost the entire city, the newly built city wall incorporated this suburb.<sup>14</sup> The personal connections between the citizens and the nuns are even more remarkable: Most of the nuns came from the city's upper class,<sup>15</sup> including at least the final four prioresses.<sup>16</sup> The legal, geographical, and personal connections between the city and the convent remained very close through till the Protestant Reformation<sup>17</sup> and were partly responsible for the convent's success on many levels.<sup>18</sup>

The transition from a Dominican convent to an observant one was a long process. From 1459 the nuns took their vow of personal poverty more seriously, and in 1482 they chose strict enclosure. Three years later, the nuns covered a barred window—the only means for them to see their relatives—with a metal plate.<sup>19</sup> This step made any direct communication between the nuns and strangers impossible.

### Generating and Documenting Economic Exchanges

Monasteries and convents were autonomous entities at a financial and organizational level.<sup>20</sup> Regular income had to be generated. One means of doing so was ownership of a plot of land—ideally that could be agriculturally worked.

There were two ways how a plot could come into the convent's possession: a donation by a benefactor,<sup>21</sup> or purchase by the sisters—either on the seller's initiative or the sisters'. We have already seen an example of a donation made to the sisters. The convent

**12** Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 742.

**13** Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 743. A few authors talk about 1377, for example Bless-Grabher and Sonderegger, eds., *Die Stadtbücher des 14. bis frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, 390.

**14** Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 62–63.

**15** Rickenbacher, "Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen," 61.

**16** Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 775–79.

**17** When St. Gallen adopted the Protestant Reformation in 1527, the convent's proximity to the city sealed its fate: the Protestant city could not accept any Catholic institution on its ground. After lengthy disputes, an effective religious life had become impossible by 1528. Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 143–67; Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 759–62.

**18** A selection of secondary literature on St. Catherine's: for its earliest history: Bless-Grabher, "Kanton St. Gallen," 591–95; for its existence in St. Gallen until the Protestant Reformation: Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen"; and Vogler, *Geschichte des Dominikanerinnen-Klosters St. Katharina*; and Eberhard et al., eds., *St. Katharinen*; for its end at the Protestant Reformation: the four-part article Vogler, "Das Dominikanerinnen-Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen."

**19** Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 744–45. Recently, Sutter, "'Item in dem [14] LVIII iar'", 18–27.

**20** Elm, "Orden I," 317.

**21** In addition to gifts like books, clothes, and similar, every prospective nun had to bring a dowry, which consisted often of a piece of land, or of a financial interest in a piece of land or a house. Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 754–56.



Figure 2.1: Sale of half a vineyard by the abbot and the Benedictine monastery in Stein am Rhein to the convent of St. Catherine in St. Gallen. Charter dated February 5, 1466. StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Rheintal, B. 13r-v.

bought the second half of a vineyard in February 1466; the first half had already been in their possession. The seller—the abbot and the Benedictine monastery in Stein am Rhein<sup>22</sup>—sealed the charter. Once this charter—and any other charter as well—was in the sisters’ hands, the work was not over: the charter had to be stored in a way that it could be quickly retrieved in the convent’s archive. For this purpose, a numbering system was invented, where a unique number (or “signature”) was assigned to each possession. The number was marked on the charter’s verso together with a summary of the charter’s content [Fig. 2.1].<sup>23</sup>

**22** Waldvogel, “Stein am Rhein.”

**23** The contemporary note is “Wie vns apt Jos Krum sin tail an dem wingarten, dem Kriesser, ze kofen het gen” (How abbot Jos Krumm sold us his part of the vineyard Griesser), together with the contemporary signature “XXXIII.” The other notes were added later.



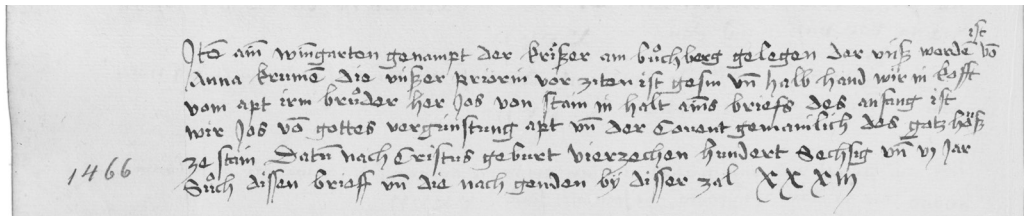


Figure 2.2: Entry in St. Catherine's rent-roll concerning the half vineyard called Griesser bought in 1466. KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. Lv (contemporary) | fol. 52v (later). <http://e-codices.ch/de/kaw/Urbar/52v/>.

It is one thing to store the charters systematically; but it is better to have the main information systematically copied in a book. This method became increasingly important with the increasing number of charters stored in the archive. In the 1480s, the convent of St. Catherine started a book—a so-called rent-roll—where every possession outside their walls was listed and updated. Generally, one page was assigned to one possession; on this page, all the charters<sup>24</sup> relating to this property were listed chronologically.<sup>25</sup> Thanks to the rent-roll, the prioress knew which farms, vineyards, and claims on houses they held.<sup>26</sup> The half of the vineyard the convent bought in 1466 has its own entry, where the number assigned to this possession—the vineyards at Buechberg—is noted as well:

Item ainn winngarten, genampt der Krißer, am Bûchberg gelegen, der vnß worden ist von Anna Krumen, die vnßer priorin vor ziten ist gesin, vnd halb hand wir in kofft vom apt, irm brüder, her Ios von Stain, in halt ainns briefs, des anfang ist: "Wir Ios, von Gottes vergünstung apt, vnd der couent gemainlich des gotzhäß ze Stain." Datum nach Cristus geburt vierzechen hundert sechsich vnd VI iar. Sûch dissen brieff vnd die nach genden by disser zal: XXXIII.<sup>27</sup>

[Item, a vineyard called Griesser at Buechberg came into our possession from Anna Krumm, who was our prioress in those times,<sup>28</sup> and we have bought half of it from the abbot, her brother, Jos of Stein,<sup>29</sup> of which we have a charter, whose beginning is: "We, Jos, by the grace of God abbot, and the convent as a whole of the monastery in Stein am Rhein."<sup>30</sup> Given in the fourteen hundred sixty and sixth year after Christ's birth. Search this charter and the following ones at this number: XXXIII.] [Fig. 2.2].

**24** Whether every single possession was listed in the rent-roll and every single charter was recorded remains to be examined.

**25** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar) for the manuscript and <http://e-codices.ch/de/searchresult/list/one/kaw/Urbar> for high-quality images of it. A critical edition of St. Catherine's rent-roll is part of the present author's doctorate.

**26** For the farms in the convent's possession in the 1480s: Sonderegger, "Das erste Zinsbuch," 125. For the convent's farms and the vineyards held in the 1480s: Sutter, "Das Konventsbuch als Quelle," 49.

**27** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. Lv (contemporary) | fol. 52v (later), lines 3–8.

**28** From 1459 until 1476. Bless-Grabher, "St. Gallen," 775.

**29** Jos or Jodokus Krumm was the abbot of St. Georgen in Stein am Rhein from 1460 until 1490. Waldvogel, "Stein am Rhein," 1560.

**30** Waldvogel, "Stein am Rhein."

As mentioned before, convents were organizations which dealt with secular affairs. This is most clear in the convent's role as a landlord. The nuns were—for various reasons—unable to work the farms and their properties themselves. They rented their farms and vineyards to tenant farmers for an annual fee. The nature and the amount of those rents would vary according to the size and the location of the farm; in general, different kinds of cereals and money had to be paid. Winegrowers leasing vineyards from the convent had to deliver a proportion of the wine they had produced during the year.<sup>31</sup> Many inhabitants of St. Gallen owed the convent annual rents in cash: the convent gave homeowners credit; in return, they had to pay an annual amount of money to the convent.<sup>32</sup>

As a landowner, it was not enough to know which possessions were leased to whom under which conditions; the landlord had to check that these conditions were being fulfilled, particularly that the tenant farmers and homeowners were paying their rents. For this purpose, an account register was used. Every delivery of produce and every payment in cash was listed in a handy fashion.<sup>33</sup> A few pages were assigned to each property; deliveries and payments were listed chronologically.<sup>34</sup> The farm Landquart for instance was one of the first farms that came into the convent's possession. Based on the number<sup>35</sup> and quality of the charters concerning Landquart, this must have been one of the most important farms in the convent's holdings. The first page concerning Landquart in the oldest account register<sup>36</sup> begins with the rents demanded by the convent, followed by other information concerning the farm. After a gap, the tenant farmer's debts were listed:

Item den holf<sup>37</sup> zû Lanquart, buwt yetz Kûnly Wirt, vnd sol vnß noch gelten vom LXXXI iar II malter fâsen, vnd III malter haber minder I viertel haber. Wir hand im gelichen I malter fâsen an sant Pauls tag.<sup>38</sup>

[Item, the farm in Landquart, cultivated now by Konrad Wirt [senior], and he owes us from 1481 2 *Malter* [approx. 249 kg] of spelt,<sup>39</sup> and 3 *Malter* [approx. 504 kg] of

**31** Generally, the landlord paid half of the costs, while the leaseholder had to pay the other half. In parallel, the leaseholder had to pay half of the wine produced during the year.

**32** Not only homeowners in St. Gallen asked the convent of St. Catherine for loans, some cities did as well.

**33** Further study is needed to see if a nun or a lay sister accepted the deliveries and who made the entries in the account registers. See further below.

**34** Irregularities in the chronological order—in combination with other factors—demonstrate that the account registers were secondary.

**35** From the first charter, dating from 1275, until the Protestant Reformation in 1527 sixteen charters remain (those charters concerning Landquart and other farms excluded): StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 1–c. 16.

**36** StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482. Three account registers are extant, documenting the convent's economic exchanges before the Protestant Reformation (StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, Bd. 483, Bd. 484), but there must have been more, now lost.

**37** Scribal error: the "l" is redundant, the word is *hof*.

**38** StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. Ir (contemporary) | pag. 3 (later), lines 11–13.

**39** The original term *Fesen* signifies the chaff of the grains with the grain of any cereal within it, but it is generally understood as the chaff of the spelt plus the grain inside. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1881), 1069–70.

vff 31st

vñ mte fise vñ mte hab' vñ mte hie vñ klobe wort 1 aker der  
 zehend ist vñ ij mte fessen die vor mals sint gange vff dem  
 mayter hoff gehoret ics vns och zu also dz es werdet vñ mte  
 fessen jarelchs. zins vns wie hand de luterist in die pfund ge  
 die ij mte fessen die vns vor mals sint gange vff de hutterhof  
 also hand wie dinc tusch getrosse mit vntunstrut nuns hege vñ  
 sant galle mit sanc ralte vñ ist dz in gesehryde i vñ vñ  
 dinc vñ des gelich in dz jar zit bndh zu vñ vñ i doe ortung  
 Ent mā magdalena v lxxxv jar

Ite den hof zu languart burd vier hündi wort und  
 sol vns noch geleit do lxxx jar ij mte fise vñ ij mte habet  
 mnder ij ff hab' wie hand in de liege jarte fise an sat pauls tag

Ite er hat geben dem lxxxij 1 aker und vñ mte hie  
 me geben ij ff habet do ma winnet me vñ klobe wort  
 me ij mte vñ mte ff fise an sant othmaris abend me bracht  
 künrat vñ mte vñ vñ ff fassen am samstag nach sant  
 othmaris tag me ij mte vff habet am mantag vor wachnacht  
 me vñ mte vff fise

Item wie hand gerechnet mit dem wiet am samstag  
 nach dem vñ tag in lxxxij jar vñ klob vñ schuldis by de  
 toen ij mte fise vñ vñ mte vñ ff hab'

Item

Item er hat geben an der fastnacht ij mte mte ff  
 hab' in lxxxij jar bracht er solb me ij mte hie  
 gab er deis wull me ij mte mte ff hab' bracht er am  
 künrat vor der güte wunden

Figure 2.3: First page concerning the farm in Landquart in St. Catherine's oldest extant account register. StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. 1r (contemporary) | pag. 3 (later).

oats,<sup>40</sup> minus 1 *Viertel* [approx. 11 kg] of oats. We lent him 1 *Malter* [approx. 124 kg] of spelt on St. Paul's Day.<sup>41</sup>

The last sentence of the transcribed paragraph has been crossed out. This means that the tenant farmer paid back the one *Malter* of spelt that the convent had lent him. The following entries concern the tenant farmer's later deliveries [Fig. 2.3].

The conditions set for the rents were fixed in specific charters. The convent gave a sealed charter to the tenant farmer, where the nature and amount of the rents were fixed as well as any other important points;<sup>42</sup> the tenant farmer provided the convent a sealed charter as well, where he officially accepted the conditions of the rent.<sup>43</sup> One of the conditions was that the deliveries in natural produce and the payments in cash had to be brought "without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns, in the already named convent [St. Catherine in St. Gallen] in their [the nuns'] care and charge."<sup>44</sup> The dated entries in the account registers prove that these conditions were fulfilled and that the tenant farmers were bringing the rents in produce and payments in cash to the convent.

As we saw at the beginning of this section, one of the convent's means for generating regular income was land ownership, with tenant farmers cultivating this land regularly bringing rents to the nuns. Another possibility was to sell the tenant farmers' rents or what the nuns produced on their own. Additional—but irregular—sources of income were anniversaries and gifts. The following table gives an overview of St. Catherine's sources of revenue:

Fees				Sales of Produce			Emoluments from Anniversaries	Gifts
Food & Drink	Basic Commodities	Services	Money	Cereals	Wine	Linen		

Table 2.4: Sources of revenue of the convent of St. Catherine.

For the quantities: 1 *Malter* = 4 *Mütt* = 16 *Viertel* (see Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 35). 1 *Marktviertel* in St. Gallen was approx. 19.44 litres (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 38). The weight of spelt is approx. 0.4 kg per litre (see [https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen\\_Getreide\\_2018\\_D\\_2018-03-15\\_.pdf](https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen_Getreide_2018_D_2018-03-15_.pdf)). So, the calculation is  $(2 \times 16 \times 1 \text{ Viertel}) \times 19.44 \text{ litres} \times 0.4 \text{ kg/l} = 248.9 \text{ kg}$ .

**40** The weight of oats is approx. 0.54 kg per litre volume (see "Hafer" on page 6 of [https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen\\_Getreide\\_2018\\_D\\_2018-03-15\\_.pdf](https://villiger-eichmuehle.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Uebnahmebedingungen_Getreide_2018_D_2018-03-15_.pdf)). So, the calculation is  $(3 \times 16 \times 1 \text{ Viertel}) \times 19.44 \text{ litres} \times 0.54 \text{ kg/l} = 503.8 \text{ kg}$ .

**41** Probably Thursday, January 25, 1481.

**42** The German term is *Lehenbrief*.

**43** The German term is *Lehenrevers* or *Lehenreversbrief*.

**44** "on alle vffzüg vnd widerrede, vnd gånntzlich öne allen iren [für die Nonnen] schaden für alle haftunge, intråg, irung vnd sachen ze rechtem zins geben vnd antwurten gen sant Gallen in dz vorbemelt closter zû iren [...] handen vnd gewalt." StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12. Of course, reality could differ from the written requirements. See, for instance, Sonderegger, "... der Zins ist abgelon ..."

In the next two sections, we will examine the trade in two kinds of foods over twenty years: oats and wine. They generated income in two ways for the convent: first as rental income in kind, but then the oats coming from the Landquart farm were also partly sold, and the wine—coming from the Griesser vineyard at Buechberg and many others—was also partially sold.

## Oats

One of the most important cereals during the Middle Ages was oats. In Alpine Europe it grew during the summer and was not consumed as bread but as porridge.<sup>45</sup> As a sign of its importance, oats were generally part of the rent tenant farmers had to pay the convent.

The convent's tenant farmers in Landquart had to pay—at least since 1479<sup>46</sup>—8 *Malter* of oats by Martinmas each year.<sup>47</sup> In other words, they had to deliver before November 11 every year around 1.3 tons of oats. Landquart seems to have been the most important of the farms the convent possessed: in an inventory from 1484, Landquart is top.<sup>48</sup> But it was not the only farm delivering oats to the convent; but where these large quantities of oats were stored? There is no trace of the convent's cereals being stored outside the nunnery;<sup>49</sup> so we must assume that the oats in total were stored inside. The two sources—a charter and the rent-roll—are both normative sources: the nuns were owed eight *Malter* of oats, but did the tenant farmers in fact deliver this amount? Here we turn to another type of sources: The descriptive sources, namely the account registers, present the reality, not the contractual one. The following extract is taken from the oldest extant account register and shows how deliveries were recorded:

Item wir hand gerechnet mit dem Wirt an sant Thomas tag ze winächt im LXXXVII, vnd belaib vns schuldig IIIII viertel fesen vnd VIII malter XIII viertel haber. Gen VI malter haber XIII viertel an sant Anthonius abent im LXXXVIII. Item me het er gen II malter haber vnd IIIII viertel fesen, furt er vns daran, vnd ist der zechend vnd alle ding verrechnet am samstag vor sant Michels tag im LXXXVIII.<sup>50</sup>

[Item, we calculated with [Konrad] Wirt [senior] on St. Thomas's Day [Friday, December 21] in 1487, and he owes us 4.5 *Viertel* [approx. 35 kg] of spelt, and 8 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* [approx. 1491 kg] of oats. He gave us 6 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* [approx. 1155 kg] of oats on St. Anthony's Eve [Wednesday, January 16] in 1488. Item, he gave us 2 *Malter* [approx. 504 kg] of oats and 4.5 *Viertel* [approx. 35 kg] of spelt, he did transport services for it, and the tithe, and everything is taken into account on the Saturday before Michaelmas [Saturday, September 27] in 1488.]

45 Jacomet, "Hafer."

46 This was set in the oldest extant *Lehenbrief*: StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12.

47 "Es ist ain hoff gelegen ze Lanckwatt, vnd also genant, vß vnd von dem hoff iegklichs iårs, besunder vff sant Martis tag [...] söllent die mayer ze rechtem zins geben vnd antwurten [...] acht malter haber, als gütz, vngeuärliches, wolberaites korns sant Galler mesß [...]." KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. VIr (contemporary) | fol. 8r (later), lines 1–5.

48 For the inventory as a whole: KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 36r (later), line 7–s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 38r (later), line 4.

49 Other natural produce could be partly stored outside the convent; see further below.

50 StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. IIv (contemporary) | pag. 6 (later), lines 14–19.

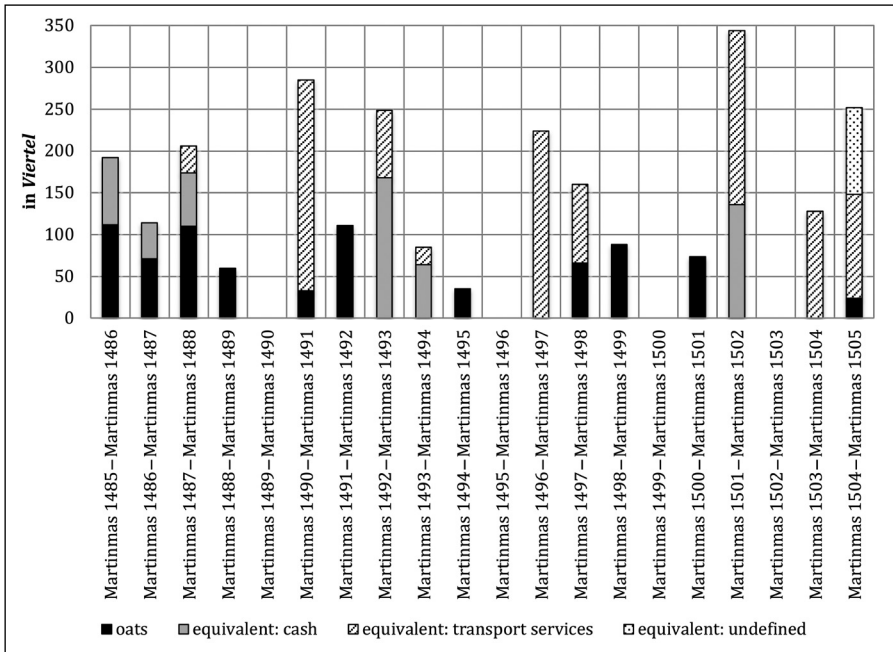


Table 2.5: Annual payment of oats by the tenant farmers of Landquart to the convent of St. Catherine, 1485 to 1505: only 30 percent of this amount was actually delivered.

By analyzing the data in the account registers, the picture changes fundamentally [Table 2.5]. Instead of the 128 *Viertel* due, the tenant farmers of Landquart delivered only around 40 *Viertel* of oats per year on average. The rest of the rents were paid in equivalents. The most popular equivalent was transport services (45 percent); cash (21 percent), and undefined equivalents (just 4 percent) were less frequent. In other words, less than a third of the oats were actually delivered by the tenant farmers of Landquart.

It seems that the tenant farmers of Landquart preferred to provide transport services to delivering oats. Perhaps this is partly due to its geographical situation: Landquart lies on a gentle slope near Lake Konstanz, around two kilometres away. In the village of Steinach, on the shore of Lake Konstanz, the convent possessed a vineyard.<sup>51</sup> The wine produced there was regularly transported by the tenant farmers of Landquart. The wine barrels were transferred to ports on Lake Konstanz where they were traded and then loaded onto boats. The tenant farmers also supported the vineyard in Steinach in other ways. For instance, in December 1494, they brought wooden sticks which were needed to raise the vines.

If the tenant farmers of Landquart substituted transport services for cereals, it was not unique; we know of other farmers who specialized in transport services.<sup>52</sup>

51 This vineyard has not yet been located; see further below.

52 For instance, Zwahlen, "Das Textil- und Transportgewerbe."

Contractually, the rents in oats had to be brought “without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns.”<sup>53</sup> Once every tenant farmer had delivered his particular amount of oats into the nunnery, it was used for different purposes: by the nuns and the lay sisters, as well as the male and female servants,<sup>54</sup> who consumed every day oats as porridge.<sup>55</sup> Beside human consumption, oats were given to horses, pigs, and hens; the remainder was sold. We know this from calculations made by the bursaress who specialized in cereals (*Kornmeisterin*).<sup>56</sup> At the end of every financial year,<sup>57</sup> generally in the autumn, this nun separately listed the amount of each type of cereal by use.<sup>58</sup> For instance during the last financial year examined here, which ran from Wednesday, November 13, 1504 until Wednesday, November 12, 1505, 39 percent of the total oats was consumed by humans, 7 percent by horses, 6 percent by hens, and 1 percent by pigs, while 47 percent was sold.<sup>59</sup>

During this financial year, the convent hit its maximum of fifty-three nuns and lay sisters.<sup>60</sup> Assuming that there were five additional people living in the nunnery—servants, boarders, and the priest—they consumed together 4619 kg of oats per year, which makes 12.5 kg per day; or slightly more than 200 g per day per person. If we include workers temporarily employed in the nunnery, the average daily consumption of oats would further decrease.

**53** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch II.10 (Urbar), fol. VIr (contemporary) | fol. 8r (later), lines 1–5.

**54** Additionally, the nuns accepted female boarders, usually a relative of a nun, who would live in the guesthouse. Any workers who were temporarily employed in the convent had to be fed: food was part of the salary. See, for instance, Rippmann, “Sein Brot verdienen.” A priest lived and worked in the convent as well.

**55** The original expression is *muß mel*.

**56** The original name is *Kornmeisterin*. According to the *Book of Duties of the Sisters of the Order of Preachers (Das Amtbuch or Das Buch der Ämter)*, by Johannes Meyer a bursaress must be responsible for all of the convent’s economic exchanges. Meyer, *Das Amtbuch*, ed. DeMaris, esp. 185–90 for the German edition and 381–85 for the English translation. At St. Catherine’s, the bursaress apparently was responsible for every financial transaction except the cereals, which was the task of the *Kornmeisterin*.

**57** The financial year differed from the calendar year. In addition, the *Schaffnerin’s* (bursaress) financial year was not congruent with that of the *Kornmeisterin* (bursaress specialized in cereals).

**58** *Kernen*: for personal consumption, or for sale. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1895), 465–67. *Fesen*: for personal consumption, or for sale. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1881), 1069–70. Oats: for personal consumption, for sale, for horses, for pigs, for hens. Antiquarische Gesellschaft, ed., *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (1885), 930–32.

**59** Breakdown of the 1124 *Marktviertel* (100 percent):

- a) for personal consumption: 27.5 *Malter* (39.1 percent),
- b) for sale: 33 *Malter* 4 *Viertel* (47.3 percent),
- c) for horses: 5 *Malter* 2.5 *Viertel* (7.4 percent),
- d) for pigs: 8 *Viertel* (0.7 percent),
- e) for hens: 3 *Malter* 13.5 *Viertel* (5.5 percent).

KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 105r (later), lines 14–26.

**60** Rickenbacher, “Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen,” 30–60.

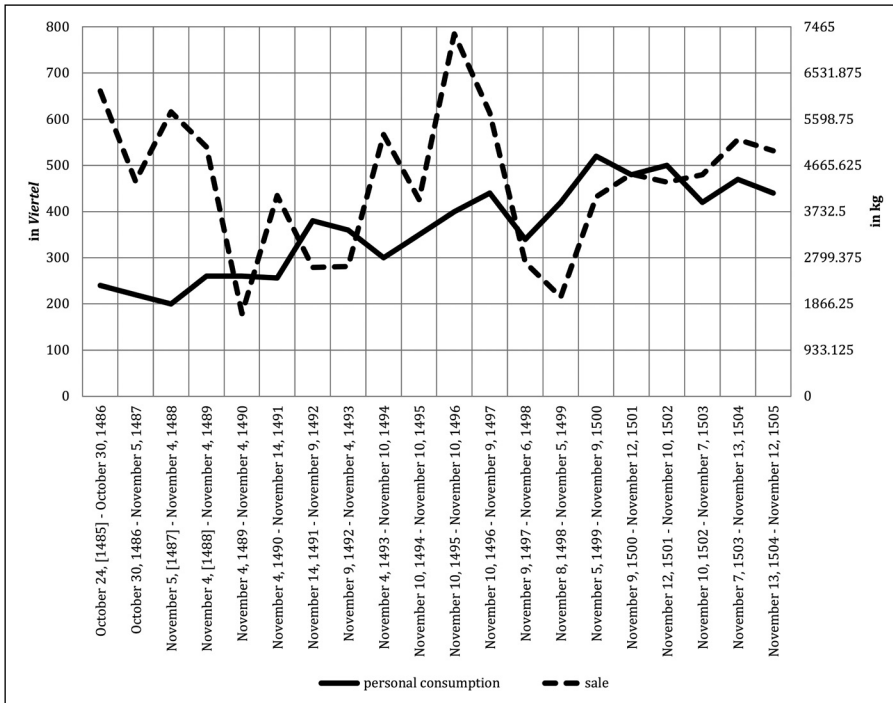


Table 2.6: Personal consumption and sale of oats at St. Catherine's over twenty financial years, 1484 to 1505.

For a comparison, we can do the same calculation for the hens: they consumed 646 kg of oats per year, or 1.8 kg per day. The situation changed every financial year [Table 2.6]: the quantity of oats consumed by humans was generally increasing, while the amount of oats sold varied each year. We have seen how deliveries of oats were extremely irregular, in terms of timing and quantity. This must be one reason for this fluctuation in sales. Another reason could be demand; we can assume that the convent sold the oats on the local market in St. Gallen. Since 1170 the city had the right to a market,<sup>61</sup> and the nuns had the right to sell what they didn't themselves need: "[I]f the monastery has a surplus of anything such as grain or wine to sell, [the bursaress] must sell it at the proper time, but this must be done unobtrusively, with great circumspection and discretion, through the agency of intimate friends of the monastery."<sup>62</sup> Who these "intimate friends of the monastery" were, in what quantities, and in what place they sold the oats—as well as the other cereals—warrants further study.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 382.

<sup>63</sup> We can suppose that lay sisters, male and female servants living in the nunnery—but outside the enclosure—played a role.



## Wine

Grapes and the techniques of winemaking were introduced into Alpine Europe in the first century CE.<sup>64</sup> During the Early Middle Ages wine was still reserved for the upper class, but by the Late Middle Ages, it had become a drink across most social classes;<sup>65</sup> in areas where wine was produced it was part of the daily diet.<sup>66</sup> For the nuns, wine played not only a significant role in the refectory, but also in the church: wine represents Christ's blood, and as such it has always been used during Holy Communion.<sup>67</sup> Next to its nutritional and liturgical importance, wine had—in general—an economic significance which cannot be underestimated.

The wine trade was highly lucrative in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so lords promoted the cultivation of grapes. As vineyards grew in number as well as size, some lords—especially monasteries and convents,<sup>68</sup> cities, and hospitals<sup>69</sup>—were unable to cultivate the land themselves. The nuns of St. Catherine's could not cultivate their vineyards themselves for religious, personal, and logistical reasons: they had their religious duties inside the enclosure, they were too few, and were distant from the vineyards.<sup>70</sup> So the nuns leased the vineyards to local farmers who worked the land for them. The expenses—fertilizer, new plants, and suchlike—and the revenues were equally shared between the two parties.<sup>71</sup> Generally the nuns bore half of the costs and in return got half of the wine produced.<sup>72</sup> As we have seen earlier, deliveries had to be brought “without protest, without any disadvantage, loss, or damage to the nuns, in the already named convent [St. Catherine in St. Gallen] in their [the nuns'] care and charge.”<sup>73</sup> This means that the winegrowers had to bring hundreds of litres of wine to the nunnery—which they in fact did.

The bursar made an inventory every year—generally in January—of the wine which was stored in the nunnery's caves and wrote it down in the convent's chronicle.<sup>74</sup> From the early 1490s, she even noted the amounts of red and white wine separately.

**64** Flutsch, “Weinbau. 1. Archäologie.”

**65** Rösener, *Bauern im Mittelalter*, 113.

**66** Simon-Muscheid, “Wein, Weinbauern und Weintrinker,” 202.

**67** Reifenberg, “Wein, Weintrauben, Weinstock. I. Liturgisch”; Janowski, “Wein. II. Biblisch.”

**68** Matheus, “Wein, -bau, -handel. A. Allgemein. Mittel- und Westeuropa,” 2116.

**69** More recently Sonderegger, “The Financing Strategy of a Major Urban Hospital.”

**70** Also, many vineyard jobs had to be done by men. For work in the vineyards see, for instance, Wunderer, *Weinbau und Weinbereitung*, 43–122.

**71** Zangger, “Teilbau.”

**72** In consequence, the amount of wine delivered differed from year to year; in contrast to the tenant farmers—who had to pay the same amount of natural produce every year—the winegrowers' deliveries were not predictable.

**73** StadtASG, ÄmterA, Schaffneramt im Thurgau, c. 12. See also above.

**74** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch) for the manuscript and <http://e-codices.ch/de/searchresult/list/one/kaw/konventsbuch> for high-quality images. A critical edition of the convent's chronicle has recently been published: Willing, ed., *Das Konventsbuch und das Schwesternbuch aus St. Katharina*.

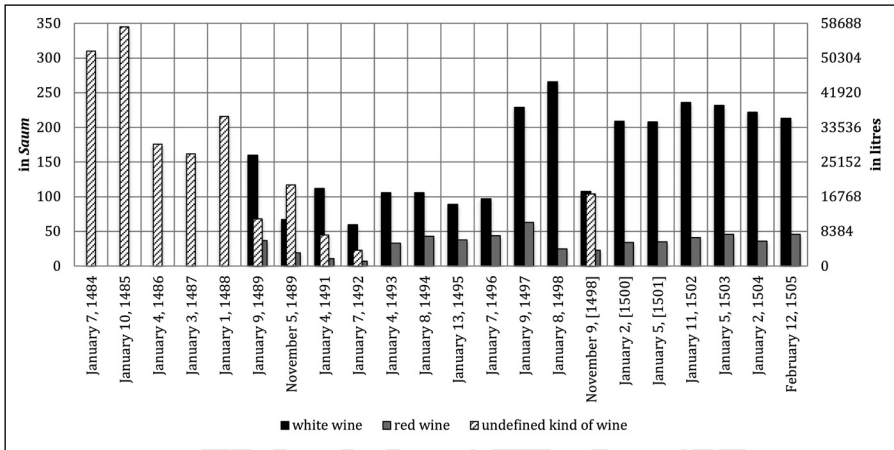


Table 2.7: Amount of wine stored by St. Catherine's over twenty financial years, 1484 to 1505.

Table 2.7 shows the bursar's inventories of wine stored from 1484 until 1505. The graph shows two things clearly: firstly, the amount of stored wine varied wildly. This is due to the amount of wine delivered by the winegrowers, which was dependent on the year's production. Vines depend on the climate<sup>75</sup> and meteorological phenomena like hail, frost, variation in temperature, wind, solar irradiation, amount of rain, and so on.<sup>76</sup> In 1490 for instance, a stream washed away a wall which was supposed to protect a vineyard in Steinach.<sup>77</sup> Probably not just the wall but also a part of the vineyard itself got destroyed. Consequently, this vineyard's leaseholder was unable to deliver any wine in autumn 1490. A year later, the Swiss Rhine valley suffered from local political unrests.<sup>78</sup> We can expect that the convent's vineyards there were affected. The second observation is that the amount of stored white wine was higher by far than the amount of stored red wine. It is said that white wine has been preferred to red wine for centuries;<sup>79</sup> this information supports that truism.

In the context of the convent and its sources, a third point can be seen from table 2.7: on January 7, 1484 the nuns had stored 310 *Saum* of red and white wine;<sup>80</sup> in today's units, this equals 51,981 litres.<sup>81</sup> The same day, the bursar counted the wine barrels

<sup>75</sup> For the difference between "climate" and "weather": Hupfer and Kuttler, eds., *Witterung und Klima*, 4–5.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson and Robinson, *Der Weinatlas*, 24–25.

<sup>77</sup> KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 62v (later), lines 18–21.

<sup>78</sup> Tremp, "Rorschacher Klosterbruch."

<sup>79</sup> Simon-Muscheid, "Wein, Weinbauern und Weintrinker," 208.

<sup>80</sup> KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), line 12.

<sup>81</sup> 1 *Saum* = 4 *Eimer* = 128 *Mass* (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 43). 1 *Stadtmass* in St. Gallen was

standing in the nunnery's caves; she noted the number of wine barrels and their capacity, and calculated the totals:<sup>82</sup>

Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)	Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)	Number of wine barrels	Capacity (in litres)
3	3018	2	1509	1	587
1	1761	1	1341	10	503
1	2348	1	1174	2	335
3	1844	2	1006	2	210
4	1677	5	838	5	168
1	1593	2	671	3	84
				2	42
<b>Total barrels</b>	51				
<b>Total capacity</b>	47,905 <sup>83</sup>				

Table 2.8: Inventory of the convent's wine barrels by the bursaress, January 1484.

Comparing the two totals—the stored wine and the capacity of the barrels—the quantity of stored wine is bigger than the total capacity of the barrels, which is implausible. A closer look at the sources may solve this problem: the convent's wine was partly stored outside the nunnery:

... vnd in vnsers lieben brüders kerr, Vlrich Varnbülers, VII som, vnd in des Iäglis kerr X som, aim Bûchberg.<sup>84</sup>

[... and in our dear brother's<sup>85</sup> cave, Ulrich Varnbüler's,<sup>86</sup> 7 Saum [approx. 1174 litres], and in Jägli's cave 10 Saum [approx. 1677 litres] at Buechberg.]

The deliveries in wine are only one part of the story; the other part is the selling of the wine and the revenue generated. As we saw in table 2.4, the convent sold cereals, linen, and wine. It earned most of the money from wine; but at the same time, this source

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equivalent to 1.31 litres (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 45). So, the calculation is  $(310 \times 128 \times 1 \text{ Stadtmass}) \times 1.31 \text{ litres} = 51,980.8 \text{ litres}$ .

**82** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), lines 16–28. In January 1507, the bursaress made another inventory: KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 110r (later), lines 6–13.

**83** The manuscript says “CCLXXVI som” (= 276 *Saum* = 46,230 litres), but the calculation's correct sum is “CCLXXXVI som” (= 286 *Saum* = 47,905 litres).

**84** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 30v (later), lines 12–15.

**85** The text is written by Angela Varnbüler, prioress of St. Catherine's from 1467 until 1509. Bless-Grabher, “St. Gallen,” 775–77.

**86** Ulrich Varnbüler, the city's mayor, was the prioress Angela Varnbüler's brother. Krauer, “Varnbüler, Ulrich.”

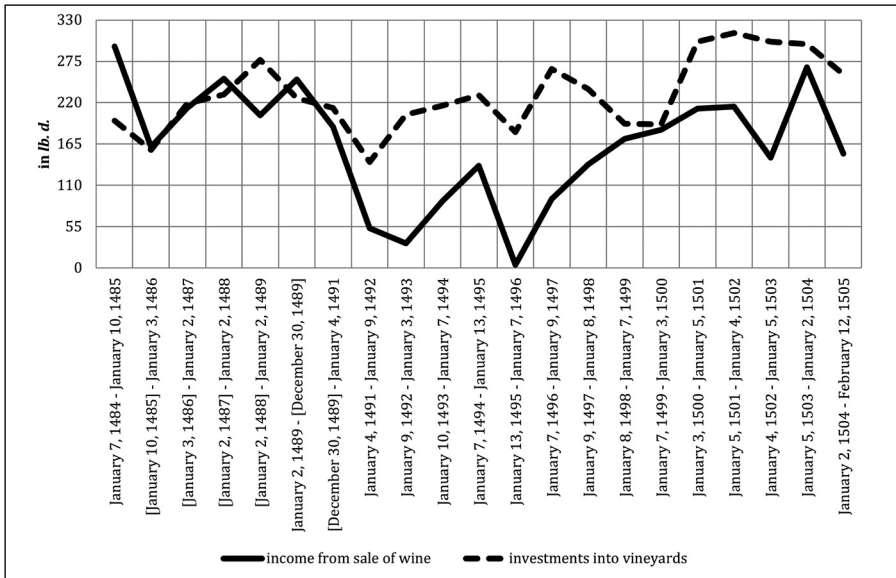


Table 2.9: Income to St. Catherine's from sale of wine, and investments into their vineyards, 1484 to 1505.

of revenue was the most variable.<sup>87</sup> The variation was due to the amount of wine sold as well as its price. Thanks to the bursar, we know the yearly revenues generated through wine selling. But she didn't only list these revenues, but also the investments in the vineyards.<sup>88</sup> Table 2.9 shows the revenues from wine selling in comparison to the investments done.

The *Amtbuch* or *Das Buch der Ämter* by Johannes Meyer has already been cited: "[I]f the monastery has a surplus of anything such as grain or wine to sell, [the bursar] must sell it at the proper time, but this must be done unobtrusively, with great circumspection and discretion, through the agency of intimate friends of the monastery."<sup>89</sup> We know neither who sold the wine for the nuns, nor where it was sold, nor for which price, nor in what amounts. We can assume that the wine was sold in the city of St. Gallen as it had the market privilege since 1170;<sup>90</sup> the other questions need further study. We do know about the investments in the vineyards thanks to the prioress: every time maintenance work was done, she noted it in the convent's chronicle. When the stream in 1490 washed away a wall which was supposed to protect a vineyard in Steinach, that

<sup>87</sup> Sutter, "Quelle für Wirtschafts- und Regionalgeschichte."

<sup>88</sup> The original terms in the bursar's yearly calculations are *von win ingnun* and *vber den win gangen*.

<sup>89</sup> Meyer, *Das Amtbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 382.

<sup>90</sup> Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 18.

same year a wall was built.<sup>91</sup> A year later, a dam or a weir was made with oak trees, and the new wall had to be repaired.<sup>92</sup> In 1493, the wine press in Steinach was moved and reconstructed; the shingles for the roof, the nails, the wood, the workers' salaries and their food had to be paid.<sup>93</sup>

A comparison of these two quantities—revenues and investments—shows their relation. If the investments were higher than the revenues on a long-term basis, the wine business was losing money which, at first sight, seems to be the case. But there is no sign that the prioresses of St. Catherine's considered giving up this source of revenue. The solution may lie in wine's two other roles—as basic foodstuff and its fundamental role in their liturgical life. For every eucharistic celebration wine was needed, so the convent would have been forced to buy wine from traders and would have been dependent on them. By possessing their own vineyards, the nuns were able to keep a large degree of independence.

### Some Surprises

Oats and wine were far from St. Catherine's only sources of revenue (see table 2.4 above). As we saw earlier, tenant farmers had to pay annual rents. They generally had to pay a certain amount of oats, spelt,<sup>94</sup> chickens, eggs, and cash; winegrowers had to pay a certain percentage of the wine they had produced; and homeowners had to pay a certain amount of money. We have also learned that rents could partly be substituted by another kind of charge. Having this possibility of substitution, many unexpected things made their way into the nunnery.

Tenant farmers did not only deliver oats and spelt, but also rice. From the early 1510s, several tenant farmers delivered this relatively new and precious product.<sup>95</sup> On October 9, 1511, the Reutlinger family brought the nuns approx. 9.2 kg of rice.<sup>96</sup> About ten years later, on November 27, 1521, Stefan Spengler even delivered approx. 25.4 kg.<sup>97</sup> The value of rice apparently increased a little, as in 1511 1 *Pfund* cost 3.5 *d.* and in 1521 4.5 *d.*<sup>98</sup>

**91** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 62v (later), lines 18–21.

**92** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 66r (later), lines 5–8.

**93** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 70v (later), lines 29–36.

**94** *Fesen and Kernen*. See nn. 39 and 58 above.

**95** Schmidt, "Reis."

**96** "Item me het sy vnß gen XVI lb. riß, kost I lb. IIIH d., an sant Dyonisius tag." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. IIÍ IIv (contemporary) | pag. 606 (later), lines 1–2. 1 *Pfund* in St. Gallen was 578 grams (Dubler, *Masse und Gewichte*, 52). So the calculation is  $16 \times 0.578 \text{ kg} = 9.248 \text{ kg}$ .

**97** "Item Stefa Spengler het gen XLIIII lb. ris, kost I lb. IIIH d., tüt XVII ß., gab er am mitwoch nach sant Cünrats tag im XXI iar." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. XXXIIv (contemporary) | pag. 52 (later), lines 24–25.

**98** 1 *Pfund* (*lb.*) = 20 *Schilling* (*ß.*) = 240 *Pfennig* (*d.*). Schmutz, "Pfund (Währung)"; Fedel, "Schilling"; Schmutz and Zäch, "Pfennig".

The Stahel family, homeowners in St. Gallen, had to pay the sisters 7 *ß.* each year. It seems that they had problems delivering even this little amount of money in cash. They substituted metalwork for money; apparently, father Stahel worked as a blacksmith. In the 1490s, he delivered to the convent—among other things—a number of axes, a shovel, a hook, and a special knife.<sup>99</sup> The Fläschner family, also homeowners in St. Gallen, owed the convent 4 *lb.* per year. Apparently, father Fläschner worked as a nailer, since during the 1490s, he delivered the convent thousands of different kinds of nails.<sup>100</sup>

We learned that tenant farmers could provide transport services; in parallel, homeowners could provide services, too. The Fluri family for instance, who owed the convent 5 *lb.* 6 *ß.* per year, prepared a bath for several people in the nunnery's vicinity,<sup>101</sup> if none of the nuns could benefit personally of this service, who were these people and where did they take their bath?

Lastly, we see records of gifts. In 1508, the nuns listed the wonderfully coloured windows they had in their cloister.<sup>102</sup> Most of these windows were paid by the nun's relatives:

Item I fenster het vns gen vnser liebi müter, die von Yestetten, mit sant Anna. Item vnser lieber bruder Iacob Muntprat I fenster mit sant Iacob. Item vnser lieber bruder Hans von Vlm I fenster mit sant Mateus. Item Hans Schönou, vnser lieber bruder, I fenster mit sant Johannes Baptisten.<sup>103</sup>

[Item, one window was given to us by our dear mother, the von Jestetten, with St. Anna. Item, our dear brother Jakob Muntprat [gave us] one window with St. James. Item, our dear brother Hans von Ulm [gave us] one window with St. Matthew. Item, Hans Schönau, our dear brother, [gave us] one window with St. John the Baptist.]<sup>104</sup>

**99** "Item daran het er vns gemachet ain ax, kost IIII d., vor sant Vallentinus tag. Item me II d., machet er ain gehenckt, nach sant Matias tag im XCV. Item me III d. von aim gertter, vor fasnacht im LXXXV. [...] Item me het er geschmidet nach pfingsten, kost II d., vnd ainen haggen, nach sant Peters tag, kost III d. [...] Me vns gemachet ain gehenckt, kost VI d., vnd ain schufel, kost III *ß.* IIII d., ze ostren im LXXXVI. Me het er gemachet ainen gertter vnd gehenckt, kost V d., nach ostren. [...] Me het er ain ax gemachet im advent, kost IIII d. Me het er ain ax gemachet, kost VII d., ain sant Dorotea tag." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. XXXVIIIr (contemporary) | pag. 67 (later), lines 6–17.

**100** "Item er het vns gen fier tusid tachnagel, kost I tusid III *ß.* I d., vnd hundert latta nagel, kost XXI d., namend wir in der apas wochen im LXXXVIII. Me II latta nagel, kost I XXI d., vnd L schirm nagel, kost IX d., och da. Me tusid tachnagel in der apas wuchen. Me zwai tusig tachnagel in sant Peter vnd Pals octav. Me C lata nagel, nam Vrsel aim. Me vns gen VII tach nagel an sant Germanus tag. Item me vns C schirm nagel, kostend XVI d., an sant Laurentzen abend. [...] Me vns gen II latta nagel, kostend C II *ß.*, nomend wir an sant Augustinus abend. Me L latta nagel, am mitwoch dar nach." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CCXIIIv (contemporary) | pag. 428 (later), lines 5–14.

**101** "Item me het er gen V *ß.* d., badet Vrsel vnd Rudolf daran vor pfingsten. [...] Item me het der Fluri gen XI d., badet Vrsel daran nach ostren. Item me het er gen XV *ß.* d., badet her Hanrich daran." StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CXVIIIr (contemporary) | pag. 233 (later), lines 14–26.

**102** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 116r (later), line 5–fol. 116v (later), line 13.

**103** KlosterA St. Katharina Wil, Arch I.15 (Konventsbuch), s. p. (contemporary) | fol. 116v, lines 10–13.

**104** Barbara von Jestetten entered St. Catherine's in 1500; her mother was Anna von Jestetten. Jakob Muntprat was Elisabeth Muntprat's brother; Elisabeth entered St. Catherine's in 1472. Hans von Ulm was Elisabeth von Ulm's brother; Elisabeth was from at least 1476 a nun in St. Catherine's.

## Conclusions

Convents were autonomous entities both economically and organizationally.<sup>105</sup> This was true for non-observant convents as well as for observant ones. We have seen that the nuns did—even when living in strict enclosure—take care of their convent’s legal, administrative, and economic affairs. We have tried to show some intriguing research questions about how the nuns managed the convent’s possessions and its economic exchanges.<sup>106</sup>

We can try to answer one question partially. We know that the nuns took their vow of personal poverty seriously since 1459.<sup>107</sup> The wording of entries in the account registers show their active involvement (our emphasis):

Item *wir* hand gerechnet mit dem Wirt an sant Thomas tag ze winächt im LXXXVII, vnd belaib *vns* schuldig IIIII viertel fesen vnd VIII malter XIII viertel haber.<sup>108</sup>

[Item, *we* calculated with [Konrad] Wirt [senior] on St. Thomas’s Day in 1487, and he owes us 4.5 *Viertel* of spelt, and 8 *Malter* 14 *Viertel* of oats.]

We know of only one single passage where the formulation of the entry states who did the calculation:

Item schwóster Magdalen hett gerechnet mit der Flesschsnerin ain sant Appolonia tag im LXXXVIII ...<sup>109</sup>

[Item, Sr. Magdalene calculated with Mrs. Fläschner on St. Apollonia’s Day in 1498 ...]

There is a possible explanation for Sr. Magdalene being able to calculate with Mrs. Fläschner: she was probably the convent’s turnkeeper.<sup>110</sup> “The constitutions of the sisters of the Order of Preachers say that there should be a turn at an appropriate place in the monastery through which things can be passed in and out as required [...],<sup>111</sup> and the turnkeeper was the nun taking care of the turn. It is easy to imagine two women doing calculations through the turn, but inconceivable how tons of cereals and wine and anything else could have passed through this little hole. Another intriguing detail worth further examination.

Retracing the economic exchanges between the convent and the world surrounding it opens small windows into the world inside the enclosure. Did observant Dominican nuns stay in touch with the outside? Yes, almost daily, thanks to their economic exchanges.

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Hans von Schönau was probably Elisabeth von Schönau’s brother; she entered St. Catherine’s in 1484. Rickenbacher, “Das Kloster St. Katharina in St. Gallen,” 30–60.

**105** Elm, “Orden I,” 317.

**106** Part of the author’s doctorate involves the reconstruction of the convent’s management.

**107** Bless-Grabher, “St. Gallen,” 774. Recently Sutter, “Item in dem [14]LVIII iar,” 18–23.

**108** StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 482, fol. IIv (contemporary) | pag. 6 (later), lines 14–16.

**109** StadtASG, Altes StadtA, Bd. 483, fol. CCXIIIv (contemporary) | pag. 428 (later), lines 1–2.

**110** The German term is *Raderin*. Her duties are listed in Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 213–34 (German edition), and 408–25 (English translation).

**111** Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris, 408.

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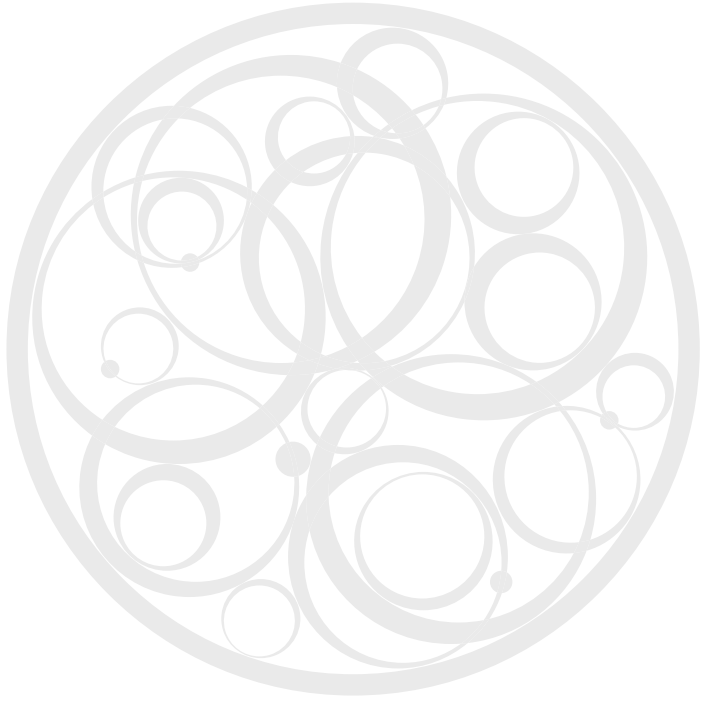


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## Chapter 3

# BEYOND THE WALL: POWER, PARTIES, AND SEX IN LATE MEDIEVAL GALICIAN NUNNERIES

MIGUEL GARCÍA-FERNÁNDEZ\*

**MARRY OR BECOME** a nun? There were few other options for medieval women who otherwise risked marginalizing themselves in the eyes of medieval European society. If marriage meant staying in society did taking vows mean leaving it? Recent research has shown the major role nuns played beyond the walls of their nunneries. In fact, nuns' social and economic involvement could be even more prominent than that of many married women.<sup>1</sup> Although this paper analyzes nuns beyond the monastic walls—which *a priori* should imply isolation and enclosure—we should recognize the social networks of married women, which did not mean “lay seclusion” but a large number of socio-economic, religious, and cultural relationships and activities. The collective imaginary of medieval society, misogynistic or at least patriarchal in nature, can be observed in legal, ecclesiastical, and literary rhetoric and in iconographic representations. I wish to argue here that sources, particularly documents showing legal practice, such as wills, sale and purchase agreements, donations, lawsuits, show wide spaces for female agency.<sup>2</sup> Despite ecclesiastical authorities insisting on separating nuns and the secular world through enclosure, were nuns truly isolated? Sources tell us the opposite. In fact, documents inform us about the interaction of nuns and their institutions with their surroundings.

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1 See the classic work by Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, and more recent books such as Burton and Stöber, eds, *Women in the Medieval Monastic World*, which has an extensive bibliography. For Galicia, see the reference work: Rodríguez Núñez, *Los conventos femeninos en Galicia*. For work on the role of nuns in medieval Galicia: Fernández Fernández, *O mosteiro feminino de San Miguel de Bóveda*; Pallares and Portela, “Las señoras en el claustro”; García-Fernández, “La proyección del monasterio femenino de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives”; and García-Fernández, “¿Libertinaje o libertad?”

2 Some initial findings are in García-Fernández, “Vivir y morir en femenino.”

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**Miguel García-Fernández** has specialized in Medieval and Early Modern History and is currently completing his PhD at the University of Santiago de Compostela. He received a doctoral fellowship at the University of Santiago de Compostela (2012–2016), a fellowship with the *Corpus Documentale Latinum Gallaeciae* (2017–2019), and worked in research support at the Instituto da Lingua Galega (2019–2020). In 2020 he joined the Instituto de Estudios Gallegos Padre Sarmiento (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas). His research focuses on the social history of women, particularly in medieval Galicia, the social history of power and the Galician documentary heritage.

I will show how nuns crossed the monastic wall, as well as how they helped other people to gain access to the convent. Nuns' involvement in late medieval Galician society is an undeniable reality. Despite their "historiographic oblivion," medieval nuns' social and economic functions were well reflected in the documents of their nunneries.<sup>3</sup> This is evident in the criticisms made by those (mostly men, it cannot be forgotten) in favour of monastic reform, which spread across all religious orders at the end of the fourteenth century and during the following century. The later and better known phase in this long process in Spain was instigated by the Catholic Monarchs at the end of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth. The aim of the reform was to force monks and nuns to obey the precepts of their monastic rules strictly.<sup>4</sup>

Although I do not intend to analyze monastic reform in Galicia,<sup>5</sup> I will consider various documents written for this purpose. After several earlier attempts, the great reformer of convent life in Galicia was Friar Rodrigo de Valencia, prior of San Benito de Valladolid. Protected by the Papacy and the Catholic Monarchs, Friar Rodrigo visited the convents which he wished to reform and he achieved his goals. In the case of the reform of the Benedictine nuns, it consisted in closing nunneries where one, two, or three nuns lived, and bring them together in a single convent, that of San Paio de Antealtares.<sup>6</sup> In 1499 this medieval male monastery in Santiago de Compostela was converted into a nunnery.

To achieve their aim, the reformers collected information to use against abbesses in Galicia. They sought to prove that the nuns had not respected the Rule of St. Benedict, that they had managed the monastic estate poorly, and that they had led dissolute lives.

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**3** A few short overviews of nunneries in Galicia exist, like Martínez, "Los monasterios de monjas en Galicia"; Fernández de Viana y Vieites, "El monacato femenino en Galicia"; two articles by López Morán, "El monacato femenino gallego en la Alta Edad Media (La Coruña y Pontevedra)," and "El monacato femenino gallego en la Alta Edad Media (Lugo y (Orense)"; Pérez Rodríguez, *Mosteiros de Galicia*, 127–67, and bibliography at 317–30; or Pérez Rodríguez, *Los monasterios del reino*, 2:1067–144. Employing the history of art, see Moure Pena, "Monasterios benedictinos femeninos en Galicia."

**4** See the contributions of Duval and Pérez Vidal in this volume.

**5** On this general reform and with information and documents related to Galicia, see García Oro, *La reforma de los religiosos españoles*; García Oro and Portela Silva, *Los monasterios de la Corona de Castilla*; and by the same authors, *Los monasterios de la Corona de Castilla* and their "La monarquía y los monasterios gallegos en el siglo XVI." On the reform of Benedictine convent life in Galicia, see the synthesis by Colombás, *Las Señoras de San Payo*, 27–80. Equally important are the works by Ernesto Zaragoza Pascual where he has published material and sources on the reform in Galician monasteries. Some of them will be used in this essay.

**6** The nunneries which disappeared as independent institutions were: San Miguel das Negradas (Lugo), San Xiao de Lobios (Ourense), San Miguel de Eiré (Lugo), San Pedro de Vilanova de Dozón (Pontevedra), San Fiz de Cangas (Lugo), San Xoán da Cova (Lugo), Santo Estevo de Chouzán (Lugo), Santa María de Pesqueiras (Lugo), San Pedro de Ansemil (Pontevedra), Santo André de Órrea (Pontevedra), San Salvador de Albeos (Pontevedra), San Pedro de Lobás (Ourense), San Pedro de Ramirás (Ourense), and San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives (Ourense). This appears in a document given by Queen Juana I: Zaragoza Pascual, "Documentos inéditos sobre la reforma de algunos monasterios benedictinos gallegos y castellanos," 677, doc. 8.

This was intended to discredit them from holding their posts.<sup>7</sup> I believe that it is possible to gain factual information about Galician nuns and their practices in the Late Middle Ages thanks to the legal proceedings held against abbesses. However, the documents distort part of the female monastic reality by emphasizing negative aspects. Discrediting the abbesses in order to take control of their convents and emphasizing every mistake and violation of a norm offers a biased view of reality. Where reformers saw only debauchery, I believe we can see the wide margins of female freedom which existed in medieval monastic life.

Galician abbesses were powerful, resolute women who had important contacts among the nobility and with the people who lived near their nunneries. For this reason some of them confronted the reformers by barricading themselves into their convents, at least initially.<sup>8</sup> Others fled and were accused of defiance.<sup>9</sup> Still others died before the reform ended, so their convents were easily incorporated into San Paio de Antealtares.<sup>10</sup> Some of the nuns became enclosed in San Paio de Antealtares, but continued to resist. In fact, some of these nuns escaped from the convent in Santiago de Compostela for one night and returned to their previous convents,<sup>11</sup> from where they continued to disregard the reform. There was also an attempt to plot with the head of Santiago's Royal Hospital so that he could help the nuns remain in their convents until their death.<sup>12</sup> Finally, although a number of nuns litigated in ecclesiastical courts for years, they eventually reached agreement that after their death their small nunneries

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**7** A general approach to the accusations made against these nuns can be seen in the inquisitorial visitations that some of the abbesses, nuns, and witnesses had to undergo: Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 369–71, doc. 7; and by the same author, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 574–75, doc. 4.

**8** That is what the abess of Trives did. When the reformers arrived at the convent, ten or twelve armed men approached them and it is said that they hit the abbot, hit the prior's head with a stick, and the governor with stones: Archivo General de Simancas, Registro General del Sello, Leg. 149901, 274.

**9** This is what doña Inés de Sanabria, abbess of San Pedro de Lobás, was accused of by the reformers. She had fled when the reforming friar Rodrigo de Valencia visited her convent. Friar Rodrigo said that "she could not be found and he did not know a house or a place where that abbess could be": Zaragoza Pascual, "Reforma de los monasterios de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil," 92–93, docs. 3–4; 98–101, doc. 9; 104–110, docs. 12–14. But doña Inés defended herself and appealed against the sentence pronounced against her. Her defence was that "she absented herself for fear of you [the reformer], so that you could not catch her as you did with other abbesses and nuns who are in San Paio [de Antealtares]": Zaragoza Pascual, "Reforma de los monasterios de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil," 111–12, doc. 16.

**10** This happened with the convents of Vilanova de Dozón and Ansemil, both of which were in doña Isabel de Ulloa's hands, who died during the reform: Zaragoza Pascual "Reforma de los monasterios de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil," 116–24, docs. 19–20.

**11** Among them the abbesses of Ramirás, Albeos, Lobios, Eiré, and Lobás: García Oro, *La reforma de los religiosos españoles*, 56 and 538, doc. 443.

**12** This was the case of the abbesses of Cova, Albeos, Ramirás, Lobios, and Eiré; see Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 383–86, doc. 20.

would fall under the Benedictine cloister, San Paio de Antealtares.<sup>13</sup> In conclusion, the reformers destroyed the nuns' sociability by moving them away from their convents and by imposing enclosure inside the walls of San Paio de Antealtares. This new reality put an end to the Benedictine nuns' previous lifestyle.

### Power and Status inside and outside the Cloister

Most Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in medieval Galicia had aristocratic founders. Monastic life offered men and especially for women the opportunity to hold a prominent position in medieval society. Beyond devotion and the protective role of monasteries, especially for widows, their transformation into corridors of power turned this vocation into an excellent resource for the aristocracy, who could thereby control a large number of material resources and strengthen their own power and authority. In this light, the birth of many nunneries was an expression of their founders' power and a mechanism through which the founders attempted to keep their memory alive and create a vocation for themselves and their descendants.<sup>14</sup> The founders' voice was heard inside the monastic walls for many centuries,<sup>15</sup> as we will see later. This explains why it was usual for the abbesses of these convents to belong to the founding families, or at least to aristocratic ones.<sup>16</sup> This granted them a privileged position both inside and outside the convent, expressed their own social status and that of the monastic community. In fact, some of these women, like doña Guntroda Suárez, founder of the San Pedro de Vilanova de Dozón convent, were called *domine atque abbatisse*, with all the symbolism meaning that being called a lady implied.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the title *Ona* used by the abbesses of San Pedro de Ramirás seems to derive from the honorific *miona*,

**13** Between 1511 and 1528 abbesses started making pacts with San Paio. The last one to do so was doña Inés de Quiroga, abbess of Sobrado de Trives, who finally resigned in 1528 in exchange for a life pension: Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 361–62.

**14** In 1138 Vermudo Pérez de Traba founded the convent of Santa María de las Dueñas for his daughter doña Urraca Vermúdez. He considered the possibility that other women from his family would enter the convent, although they should always be under the rule of the abbess: "Hoc autem tali statuimus ut si ab aliqua gentis meae faemina ad sanctitatis huius ordinem et habitum sanctimonialium venire voluerit: statim ibi recipiatur eo tenore et pactione seruata: ut nullum habeat in eodem monasterio iure haeretario dominium nisi licentia et voluntate abbatissae quae aliis praefuerit": Archivo de la Real Academia Gallega, Depósito 4, Subsección: P Caixa 8, *Tombo das Cascas*, fol. 27r.

**15** On aristocratic patronage of Cistercian nunneries in Castile, see Baurý, *Les religieuses de Castille*, 41–111.

**16** Even at the end of the Middle Ages, nunneries were headed by women from aristocratic families. For example, the abbess of San Xoán da Cova was doña Juana de Lemos, so reformers were afraid to enter, for fear of doña Mayor, the abbess's mother, who was sister of the Earl of Monterrei: Pérez Rodríguez, *Mosteiros de Galicia*, 143.

**17** Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 49, doc. 24.



whose origin is the Latin expression *mea domina*.<sup>18</sup> Because of their social origin, their leadership inside the community, and their role as heads of a noble institution, abbesses were genuine *dominae* and they were seen as such by other people.

Women from the founding family had great power from the outside over convents. This was the case of Santa María de Ferreira de Pantón, a convent where several women were given the title of *domina*. The first was doña Fronilde, who was the (re) founder when Ferreira became a Cistercian nunnery. She was followed as *domina* by her daughter, doña Guiomar, then by a woman called doña Marina Fernández (a doña Guiomar's daughter?), as well as by women from another noble lineage connected to Ferreira de Pantón, the Castro family: doña Milia (widow of Fernán Gutiérrez de Castro, and *custos et domina* in Ferreira), her daughter-in-law, doña Mencía González, wife of Andrés Fernández de Castro, and finally doña Mencía's daughter, also called doña Milia, wife of Martín Gil de Riba de Vizela. These women constituted two lineages of female power cast from outside into the cloister and which placed them at a level above the nuns themselves, lasting from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries. We can also see the importance that some *parentibus* or *heredum* continued to have in other convents like San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, despite the separation that the Gregorian reform attempted to impose between clerics and lay people.<sup>19</sup>

The patrons' power was a determining factor in the social relations among influential nuns, and could be beneficial or controversial, depending on whether the convent's power was strengthened or limited. A type of "controversial relationship" arose due to abusive practices on the part of patrons, for example appropriation of income and property or intervention in appointments. The nuns and religious authorities would then resist their lay patron's intervention inside the convent. This worsened in the later Middle Ages when the economic crisis led many aristocrats not only to demand their patronage rights, but also to increase their interventionism inside convents through the practice of *encomienda*. Under this practice, the convent sought a patron, generally a noble person, who would benefit from some income or rights in return for helping the institution. However, many of these noblemen eventually became problematic by insinuating themselves into the monastic estate. The San Miguel de Eiré convent suffered from these problems. This is why in 1419 the king addressed Vasco Gómez das Seixas to ask him to return to the abbess doña Aldara Fernández and the nuns from Eiré some properties which he had usurped by holding them "in the *encomienda* system against the nuns' will."<sup>20</sup> So, the intervention of lay people in nunneries was a fact. Often it was simple abuse, but sometimes they claimed rights that they considered to be their own. For example, in the late fifteenth century doña Inés de Sanabria was appointed as abbess of San Pedro de Lobás by Fernando de Camba, after the previous abbess had suffered

<sup>18</sup> Azevedo Maia, "Ona, un arcaísmo galego portugués."

<sup>19</sup> Pallares and Portela, "Las señoras en el claustro," 176–77; D'Emilio, "Widows and Communities," 228–34.

<sup>20</sup> Archivo Histórico Universitario, Santiago de Compostela, *Sección Apeos*, Leg. 57, n° 24.

a mental illness and had left.<sup>21</sup> Even the reformers who tried to isolate nuns from laymen and instructed the abbess to not allow any man or woman into the convent made an exception for don Fernando de Camba visiting his daughter. However, he must enter alone and could not have lunch, drink, or sleep inside the convent.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, many nunneries were born out of expressions of power of men and women who, from inside and outside these institutions, exploited them to strengthen their position in medieval society. For these people, nunneries were places of great importance, not just for seclusion, but also where you could live and socialize from a position of power. The nuns' social status was above all defined by the power relationships between convents and the founding families.

Women's—and men's—integration into medieval society depended on the position that their families had in the social hierarchy, so it is significant that many nuns, especially abbesses, originally had close ties with the local nobility and aristocracy. This made the existence of a twofold set of social relations around the convents where they lived possible. Wide horizontal social relations with relatives and peers belonging to the same level in the social hierarchy, as well as vertical relations with other religious women, peasants, people who depended on convents, ecclesiastical authorities, and the monarchy. Even the nuns from a lower social class took part in these dynamic social relationships, but for them they was not “power relationships.” At most, belonging to an ecclesiastical order gave them some prestige or authority over the people from their social class.

Family ties did not break when women entered a monastic community; on the contrary, they were perpetuated in a profitable way, especially for those who had engaged their daughters, sisters, or mothers in the management of properties, income, and monastic rights.<sup>23</sup> Power was a key element in the connection between nuns and their families outside the cloister. Many abbesses came to power thanks to their relatives' influence, who in return received land charters, income, and rights over monasteries.<sup>24</sup> This was evident to the reformers of the Late Middle Ages, who accused several

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**21** Zaragoza Pascual, “Reforma de los monasterios de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil,” 105–6, doc. 12. The last prioress in Pesqueiras, doña Inés de Guitián, testified that after having become a Benedictine nun in Lobios convent, she finally achieved her position as a prioress thanks to the Earl of Lemos: Zaragoza Pascual, “Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras,” 371, doc. 7.

**22** Zaragoza Pascual, “Reforma de los monasterios de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil,” 89, doc. 2.

**23** It is no surprise, therefore, that the abbess of Lobios, doña Constanza Vázquez de Somoza, gave her brother three silver cups and some money in order to become abbess, as apparently other people were also attempting to gain control of the nunnery. It is significant that the cups had been lent by “her relatives and friends.” That is to say, everyone realised how important it would be to have a woman from the family or a friend running a nunnery. Zaragoza Pascual, “Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras,” 373, doc. 8.

**24** For example, in 1341, doña Elvira Fernández, abbess in Trives, gave a land charter to her nephew Vasco Rodríguez: Martínez Sáez, “El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives,” 2:303–4, doc. 151. The closeness of the abbesses' relatives can also be observed when seeing some of them appear as witnesses in monastic documents. In 1264, the prioress of Trives, doña Sancha Pérez, sold some properties to the bishop of Lugo with the abbess's consent, and a knight named F. Martin,

abbesses of taking advantage of their powerful position to benefit those people with whom they had friendship or family ties, as well as of wasting the wealth and income of their monasteries.

This misuse of power is confirmed by some witnesses who were called to testify in the lawsuits against Galician abbesses. The nun Mencía de Figueredo testified against doña Beatriz Cabeza de Vaca, abbess of Albeos, in 1499. According to Mencía, doña Beatriz had given her daughter a dowry of goods, money, and land charters from convent properties located both in its demesne lands and in Portugal. All this was in return for a small rent which the married couple never paid. The nun even reported that she had been dishonoured by the abbess's son-in-law for not agreeing with what was going on. She also said that the abbess had given her son-in-law a barrel, bread, and wine and had also paid for her daughter's and her son-in-law's clothes as well as clothing for the people who served them, all at the house's expense.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, nunneries could benefit from the protection and security provided by nuns' relatives. In 1282, doña Urraca Pérez, abbess of Sobrado de Trives, made her will, in which she asked Gonzalo Yáñez de Robreda, "my relative and my friend, to protect and defend the monastery for the love of God, for restraint, and for the debt which he has with me."<sup>26</sup>

Family relationships also occurred inside the community, since different women from the same family could live together in the convent. For example, in 1226 doña Urraca Gómez, abbess of Vilanova de Dozón, made her will and left her niece Sancha Fernandez, also a nun, a rural property "si perseveraverit in ordine" (provided that she remained in the order).<sup>27</sup> Power was a factor in the social relations among nuns, especially if we bear in mind some nuns expected to succeed the women of their family in certain posts, particularly the post as abbess.

These relationships among family members inside and outside the cloister were encouraged by their mutual interest in holding and exerting power. However, we also

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doña Marina Rodríguez's nephew, is a signed witness after the nuns, but before the clergymen in Sobrado: Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 2:87–88, doc. 43. This also happened in other convents. In 1459, Lopo Pérez, doña María López's nephew, abbess of Ferreira de Pantón, is the first witness in a land charter: Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Santa María de Ferreira*, 237–38, doc. 190. More evidence of the perpetuation of family ties among nuns and their secular relatives can be seen in the will of doña Teresa Suárez, abbess of Ramirás, who named her nephew Lourenzo Anes as legatee of her last will and testament: Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Santa María de Ferreira*, 446, doc. 248.

**25** Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 570–71, doc. 2. This testimony was confirmed by other later witnesses, one of whom states that he gave a favourable contract to his son-in-law which included everything that the convent had in Portugal, apart from another one in favour of a certain Fernando de Fuengas for a rent of fifty maravedíes, when he should have asked for five hundred maravedíes: Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 588, doc. 13.

**26** Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 2:115, doc. 57.

**27** Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 68, doc. 45.

must consider the vertical relationships, both ascending and descending, in which nuns and their monasteries participated, in order to understand power as a factor in social relations. Once again, these relationships took place within the cloister but also beyond the monastic walls.

To a great extent, monasteries reflected the hierarchical and social differences that existed in the Middle Ages. The monastic community was organized according to an internal hierarchy headed by the abbess's power and authority.<sup>28</sup> Her privileged social origin and the post she held were two important factors in understanding her powerful position in the network of social relationships within the nunnery and those generated around the institution that she ran. The same can be said about prioresses, second in the hierarchy, many of whom later became the abbess. The other nuns in the monastic community and the men and women who worked and lived under the nuns' orders and protection were under their authority and power. Among them were a great number of clergymen, men who were appointed to their posts by the nuns and who acted at the service of and dependent upon the abbess.<sup>29</sup> These male clerics were significant agents in the external profile of monasteries, particularly in the cure of souls and in the management of wealth.<sup>30</sup> The nuns' internal relationships are therefore conditioned by power. However, did internal hierarchy imply the nuns' absolute submissiveness to the abbess? Some documents show disagreement among nuns and during the reform of Galician monasteries some nuns testified against their abbesses.<sup>31</sup> Personal revenge, differing opinions, external pressure, envy, whatever the case, these documents can confirm female opposition to the abbesses' power, as well as the existence of tension in nuns' relationships within the monastic walls.

Let us now turn to life beyond the wall and focus on the vertical relationships which derived from the nuns' economic and jurisdictional use of power.

Although nunneries in medieval Galicia were less numerous and mostly smaller than male monasteries, they were still noble institutions with their own estates from which the nuns obtained not only income but also the socio-economic basis behind their power. They exercised this institutional power from inside the cloister towards the out-

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**28** In the Sobrado de Trives case, the monastic staff consisted of the abbess, the prioress, the nuns—the maximum number it reached was seventeen in 1273—, chaplains, clergymen, scribes, and people with specific jobs like cooks. Other men and women were added to these, the abbess's or the nuns' servants, like those mentioned in doña Urraca Pérez's will: "I send all the salaries to the young men and women who served in the convent." Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 1:141–55. For San Pedro de Ramirás, see Lucas Álvarez and Lucas Domínguez, *San Pedro de Ramirás*, 17–39.

**29** In 1409 the abbess and the Vilanova de Dozón nunnery appointed clergyman Fernán Pérez as chaplain of their Santo Andrés chapel, at least until he "achieved another church and benefit or a better chaplaincy." Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 186–87, doc. 180.

**30** Pallares and Portela, "Las señoras en el claustro," 179–82.

**31** At Albeos, a nun named Mencía de Figueredo was especially critical of her abbess: Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 568–72, doc. 2.

side and over men and women who had to recognize the nuns' feudal status and declare themselves their vassals.<sup>32</sup>

Running and managing a convent implied stepping outside the daily religious reality within it. Exercising feudal power was an epitome of the social relationships at work, which from the historian's point of view is reflected in the production of extra-mural documents. In the case of agreements reached with people in their locality, it is difficult to imagine that the nuns did not personally speak to them before reaching an agreement. They may have reached agreements using notaries—many of them clergymen—who would act as agents of the nuns' "indirect social relationships." However, on other occasions it was necessary for them to cross the walls themselves. This is why nuns are mentioned in documents as being outside the cloister. Going out undoubtedly implied socializing, intended as a "direct relationship" with the people around them: people to whom they leased property in exchange for rent, from whom they bought and sold land, or against whom they brought lawsuits. In the fifteenth century, doña María de Souto-maior, abbess of Santa María de Tomiño, had even crossed between Galicia and Portugal and was in Ponte da Lima. While there, a squire showed her the lease which doña Guiomar Álvarez, a previous abbess of Tomiño, had signed concerning the estate the convent held in Portugal.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding, the lease had been signed inside the convent in Galicia, "being all [the nuns] together with the bell tolling [...] as was customary for us."

What do the sources tell about who the nuns socialized with, directly or indirectly, in their exercise of power? In relation to power relationships with social inferiors, where the nuns were in a higher or privileged position, we find a large number of charters, especially *foros* (in Galician, or *fueros* in Castilian, being longterm feudal contracts) which were useful in establishing social, economic, and power relationships between the nuns and the men and women nearby. In fact, these charters are the most numerous monastic documents preserved, and were the basis of monastic property management.<sup>34</sup> The nuns, as managers of the convent's estate, usually transferred the usufruct of their properties to peasants, often for several generations, in exchange for rent in coin and/or in kind. Besides, the peasants or *foreros* very often had to recognize the nuns' authority and power by considering themselves their vassals and by paying some symbolic taxes, apart from the rent, in homage to their status.<sup>35</sup> So, we can say that the nuns' economic power derived from a "relationship of pre-eminence."

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**32** A study of the economic, social, and power relationships of a particular nunnery and its environment can be seen in Fernández Fernández, *O mosteiro feminino de San Miguel de Bóveda*, 39–96. Also, García-Fernández, "La proyección del monasterio femenino de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives."

**33** Iglesias Almeida, "El monasterio de Santa María de Tomiño," 99–101, doc. 3.

**34** In the case of Sobrado de Trives, one of the largest and richest documentary collections in a nunnery, 67 percent of the documents, or 276 in total, are *foros*: Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 1:216. The *foros* are also a majority in Ramirás: Lucas Álvarez and Lucas Domínguez, *San Pedro de Ramirás*, 101–47. Elsewhere, almost all the documents preserved by small convents are *foros*.

**35** In the documents of Ferreira de Pantón, abbesses grant *foros* to men and women asking them repeatedly "to be obedient and submissive vassals of that convent." Fernández de Viana y Vieites,

To have the power to give peasants the usufruct of their lands, the wealth of their convents had obviously been built on property given by their founders, donations from men and women from all social groups or testamentary dispositions.<sup>36</sup> Even if given exclusively for religious reasons, the receipt of these estates confirmed the nuns' status, or at least their power to mediate between God and people, which was the root of the deep relationships between nunneries and the people who lived beyond the wall.

However, not only did the nuns manage their inheritance, but they themselves acted to grow it or reorganize it; they participated in purchases or sales, exchanges, and so on.<sup>37</sup> This active role forced them to deal directly with their economic and social neighbours.

Contrary to the vow of poverty, medieval nuns retained personal and real property of their own. They received inheritances, they held charters over land, sold and bought property, and, at the end of their lives, they could even allocate their estate in their own will.<sup>38</sup> This explains why everything we have stated about the management of the monastic estate equally applies to the management of individual estates, which could also be important for convents. This helps us understand some references to lawsuits like that which was brought against nun Urraca Eriz in the first half of the thirteenth century by Maior Fernández, abbess of Vilanova de Dozón, and Maior Sánchez, prioress of Chouzán: "super Orracam Eriz, sanctimoniale, et hereditatem suam."<sup>39</sup> The lawsuit led to the questioning of over thirty witnesses, both lay and ecclesiastical people, among whom more than ten nuns and even the brother of the nun whose estate was in dispute, "miles A. Eriz." We can deduce that Urraca Eriz was a nun from a good family whose estate was coveted by two of the convents where she had lived.

Being landowners or managers of the monastic estate and of their own, these were women with economic power. Beyond that nuns were feudal ladies, and by royal grant they had jurisdictional power over specific territories, the *coutos*, whose inhabitants were exclusively their vassals: "quod nullus, neque miles, neque alius homo, habeat vassallum in cautis vestris" (that no-one, neither knight nor any other man, may have

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*Colección diplomática del monasterio de Santa María de Ferreira*, for example (from the first quarter of the fifteenth century alone), docs. 109, 113, 114, 120, 126, 132, 136, 140, 146, etc. This formula appears, identically or similarly, in most *foros* of this and other convents throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

**36** Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 1:236–43.

**37** See Martínez Sáez, "El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives," 1:235–36 for sale and purchase agreements; examples of land exchanges (243); and agreements like that established with clergyman Juan Domínguez in 1271 about the inheritance of his sister, Urraca Domínguez (244).

**38** Documents throughout the Middle Ages show that nuns managed personal estates with the consent of the abbess, so community property overlaps with private property. In 1265, for example, the nun doña Maior Fernández asked the abbess in Santo Andrés de Órrea to sell her brother some properties which she had inherited from her mother: López Morán, "El monacato femenino gallego en la Alta Edad Media (La Coruña y Pontevedra)," 159–60.

**39** Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 73–76, doc. 50.

a vassal on your *coutos*.)<sup>40</sup> With the concession of such *coutos*, territories protected by royal immunities, the “relationship of pre-eminence” only increased. Moreover, their privileged situation as feudal ladies could lead nuns to take advantage of the weakest, just like other lords.<sup>41</sup>

Their power and the “relationship of pre-eminence” that derived from the exercise of their status were achieved thanks to the nuns’ relationships with both ecclesiastical authorities and the monarchy. This “institutional relationship” with their social superiors, where the nuns were lower in status, meant the nuns tried to gain royal or pontifical privileges, which apart from religious questions and donations of properties, contributed to strengthening the power of nunneries over their surroundings. Gaining *coutos*, tributes, or rights and their protection all increased their local standing.<sup>42</sup> Convents were in constant interaction with these superior powers, but they also participated in horizontal “institutional relationships”—sometimes controversially—with other monasteries. Some nunneries even depended on monasteries, although it is difficult to determine the degree of dependence.<sup>43</sup>

Not only did the nuns receive privileges as a favour, but they actively sought them and litigated over rights they considered their own but which were disputed. In 1230, the abbot of Oseira judged a lawsuit related to tributes between Maior Sánchez, prioress of Chouzán, and the clergyman Marín Rodríguez.<sup>44</sup> We know of lawsuits involving other nunneries like the one from 1259 in which the nuns of Ramirás turned to the bishop of Ourense concerning patronage rights over churches, and five documents from 1287 in which abbess doña Sancha Rodríguez defended the feudal rights of the nuns of Sobrado de Trives.<sup>45</sup> In 1274, once more the abbess of Ramirás took legal action over certain rights and she did not hesitate to stand up to one of the foremost monasteries of medieval Galicia, San Salvador de Celanova.<sup>46</sup> In 1301, King Fernando IV helped the nuns of Ramirás by taking their side in a lawsuit that the abbess had brought against the Concejo de Milmanda, which had prevented the nuns from appointing a judge and a notary for

**40** Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 53–54, doc. 30.

**41** In 1411 don Juan Rodríguez, archdeacon in Dozón, reprimanded the abbess of Eiré, doña Elvira Díaz, because she charged her vassals more taxes than she should: López Morán, “El monacato femenino gallego en la Alta Edad Media (La Coruña y Pontevedra),” 65.

**42** In 1260, for example, Pope Alexander IV gave his protection to the convent of Sobrado de Trives and confirmed its rights and privileges, whether from ecclesiastical or civil authorities. And in 1286, King Sancho IV confirmed the privilege granted by King Alfonso IX of León in which he had awarded the *couto* to the Sobrado de Trives convent: Martínez Sáez, “El monasterio de San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives,” 2:31, doc. 39; 2:130, doc. 65.

**43** Such was the case of Santo Estevo de Chouzán in its earliest years, on which Santa María de Oseira depended, or that of San Salvador de Ferreira de Pantón, on which Santa María de Meira depended: Pérez Rodríguez, *Los monasterios del reino*, 2:1083–89.

**44** Pichel Gotérrez, *Fundación e primeiros séculos do mosteiro bieito de Santo Estevo de Chouzán*, 139–41, docs. 24–25.

**45** Pallares and Portela, “Las señoras en el claustro,” 183–85.

**46** Lucas Álvarez and Lucas Domínguez, *San Pedro de Ramirás*, 394–96, doc. 197.

the inhabitants of their *couto*.<sup>47</sup> These examples show the nuns' struggle to defend their rights and their close relations with authorities and people around them when exercising their power.

As ladies with lands and vassals, nuns socialized widely: with their notaries, their dependants, their neighbours, and with the authorities, who strengthened and legitimized their power inside medieval society. This power was cast beyond the cloister, but it was exercised from within the convent, which became, from the twelfth century onwards, a visible expression of their social pre-eminence. In fact, nuns encouraged the construction of beautiful Romanesque churches and the embellishment of certain monastic walls which, as documents show, were not an impenetrable border, but permeable walls which gave nuns a privileged position in their relationship with the outside.<sup>48</sup> This backdrop of power—and the nuns were powerful women—is key when studying the nuns' social relationships in the Middle Ages.

In summary, although the nuns' existence and their role in medieval society must be understood in the context of the religiosity of the times, the nuns held an important position in society thanks to their access to landed property and the exercise of feudal power. Landed possessions and feudal power show how the exercise of power, both economic and legal, were one of the main factors in the social relations of these women, both inside and outside the cloister. Inside the cloister because the women would have needed to communicate in order to make decisions together, which meant speaking to each other and to clergymen from other monasteries. And outside the cloister because the decisions made affected the relationships which they kept with men and women beyond the walls and because their power was strengthened thanks to the privileges given by ecclesiastical authorities and by the monarchy.

One might wonder if the reformers' wish to impose enclosure, apart from a religious impetus, might have had the aspect that, once implemented, it would allow them (men) then to manage the nuns' economic and feudal power. By limiting their social relationships and exerting more control over them, clergymen and the nuns' notaries would have been prime beneficiaries. Limiting the abbesses' and nuns' relationships was synonymous with limiting their power and consequently, their independence.<sup>49</sup> Their direct or personal relationships were limited, but not completely cancelled. It is hard to imagine nunneries as isolated entities even after the changes applied at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Social contact still existed, but nuns became more distant from those men and women over whom they exercised power, as reformers questioned and limited their relationships. A new way of life opened, but the nuns were reluctant to relinquish power and the social relationships bound up with their exercise of power.

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<sup>47</sup> Lucas Álvarez and Lucas Domínguez, *San Pedro de Ramirás*, 452–54, doc. 255.

<sup>48</sup> Moure Pena, "Monasterios benedictinos femeninos en Galicia."

<sup>49</sup> Accusations against the nuns' dissolute life and bad management as a prior step to removing them from their posts and even to taking over their convents had been used previously, for example to close down the San Miguel de Bóveda monastery as an independent convent and place it under the monastery of San Clodio do Ribeiro: Fernández Fernández, *O mosteiro feminino de San Miguel de Bóveda*, 97–104; 189–94, docs. 44–45; 205–9, doc. 53.



## Nuns beyond the Monastic Walls

Nuns could leave the cloister on business, as we have seen. They still kept in touch with people and with landed property and were likely to have used these outings to make decisions on the management of the monastic estate and to exercise the power which would lead them again out of their convents. In the trial against the abbess of Albeos, Gregorio de Sexemil testified that he had once seen the abbess outside the nunnery accompanied by a nun and her butler on their way to Celanova and another time on their way to Ourense and he had heard her say that “she was going there on business related to her nunneries.”<sup>50</sup> Were such outings exceptional or habitual?

The fact that nuns could cross the threshold of the convent seems to have been common in medieval Galicia. Nuns walked along medieval paths for several reasons, and not only to manage the monastic estate.

On some occasions, these religious women left the convents where they had professed their faith and never returned. They changed institutions and sometimes even their order, as Abbess doña Beatriz Cabeza de Vaca stated. She professed in the Dominican nunnery of San Pedro Mártir in Mayorga (Valladolid) and then went to the Dominican nunnery of Belvís in Santiago de Compostela with an aunt. Her aunt, who was the prioress there, asked her if she wished to become the prioress of Santa María de Conxo, a Benedictine convent. Doña Beatriz accepted and, although she never received a dispensation, a Dominican friar absolved her with an assumed authorization from the bishop of Ávila in return for some money. After the death of the abbess of Albeos, doña Beatriz moved into this convent in the diocese of Tui, paying four silver marks for the title of abbess, although they had asked for five.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious that doña Beatriz travelled considerably and managed to obtain important posts in different convents thanks to her family and money.

Urraca Eriz’s presence outside the cloister is also documented with the change of institution. In fact, some witnesses declared having seen her in different places and having heard her complaints. Clergyman I. Petri said that while he was in *Vilaiusti*, Urraca Eriz arrived, “cum ira abbatisse de Vilanova, et dixit ita: ‘ego sum infelix et perdo animam, quia non vado ad Iouzan, unde sum soror, ubi feci professionem.’” This quotation not only gives us an insight into a medieval nun’s voice and feelings, the witness also declared that another clergyman arrived with two horses and together they went to Vilanova convent. Doña Urraca was also seen in *Requeixu*, where the layman P. Pelagii de Lama, “audivit ei dicere quod volebat ire ad monasterium de Iouzan ut habitaret ibi.”<sup>52</sup>

Sancha Rodríguez, abbess of Lobás, must have felt unhappy too. According to statements made by Arias Mosquera in 1499, Sancha left her nunnery voluntarily and

**50** Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 576, doc. 5. She was also seen in Celanova by a witness called Gregorio Rodríguez: Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 577, doc. 6.

**51** Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 567–68, doc.1.

**52** Fernández de Viana y Vieites, *Colección diplomática do mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova*, 74, doc. 50.

returned to the house of her mother and relatives, leaving her convent headless, until a local aristocrat named Fernando de Caba gave her position to the abbess doña Inés de Sanabria.<sup>53</sup>

Let us turn now to a type of outing that demonstrates the nuns' active social involvement with their milieu and which reflects that their lives consisted in more than just praying and managing property. They were also women who participated in parties and pastimes.

Documents demonstrate that Doña Beatriz Cabeza de Vaca was an abbess who enjoyed attending local celebrations. A nun from her San Salvador de Albeos convent stated in 1499 that she witnessed her attending weddings, baptisms, and inaugural masses, i.e., masses that newly consecrated priests celebrated for the first time, and that her daughter and her son-in-law often accompanied her, and a nun or a servant at other times, "and that she always ate and drank there when she went with all of them."<sup>54</sup> Other witnesses confirm her "festive social contacts." An unknown witness declared that he saw the abbess going to fairs and markets in Melgaço (Portugal). García de Peñalta's statements about doña Beatriz's amusements were more explicit. He stated that he had heard many people assert that in some weddings the abbess had "friends" and that she seemed to have men willing to put their "member" at her disposal: "se ayudaba bien del rabo" (she made good use of their members). He also affirmed that he himself had seen the abbess eating and drinking in a wedding like the other people; she ate meat and was not wearing the nun's habit, but a sleeveless dress. He even affirmed that she seemed to be exposing her breast: "sus pechos y tetas descubiertas" (her breast and nipples exposed). According to the priest Juan Vázquez, Doña Beatriz did not wear the black habit of a Benedictine nun; she attended "weddings, baptisms, and parties smartly dressed."

Not only did nuns leave their convents to attend celebrations, but it also seems that on some occasions the parties were held inside the monastic walls. This was claimed by some witnesses in the trial against the abbess of Albeos herself.<sup>55</sup> This abbess celebrated her daughter Francisca's wedding in the convent. Moreover, the celebration was not discreet, since "she celebrated it with drums in the convent and with a lot of people who had been invited" and there they were even given "loaves of bread and money, as was usual in this kingdom of Galicia when such weddings were held." Fernando Martínez states that he attended the wedding and saw the abbess give her daughter money, clothes, and trousseau from the convent. He says the dowry amounted to about fifteen or sixteen thousand maravedíes. He also mentions a property she had purchased for her daughter and provides more information about the wedding of doña Beatriz's daughter: "some of the guests had lunch in the cloister and some others in the church." Clearly the convent walls no more kept the nuns in as kept outsiders out.

Apparently, her daughter's wedding was not exceptional. According to Mencía Figueredo, her convent fellow, she had seen the abbess having lunch quite often with her

<sup>53</sup> Zaragoza Pascual "Reforma de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil," 105–6, doc. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 572, doc. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 568–89, docs. 2–13.

daughter and her son-in-law, with several clergymen, and with many other secular people. "They [the nuns] never had lunch in the nunnery, but dined together in the abbess's chambers for a year," since the refectory and the bedroom had collapsed because of the abbess's lack of attention. Juan Vázquez also stated that the nuns in Albeos ate and drank with their friends and stayed with them inside and outside the convent with full knowledge of the abbess. He knew this because "he had seen it many times."

Doña Beatriz's case does not seem to have been unique.<sup>56</sup> One of the witnesses who testified in the trial against doña Inés de Guitián, prioress of Pesqueiras, admitted to having seen her in "weddings, markets, parties, and baptisms outside the convent." Even there she did not give the impression of leading the sober or secluded life expected of a nun, but she took an active part in the celebration. The prioress participated in games and she even played nickname games at those parties where she behaved like other secular people. The same witness, Vasco de Marçaas, also stated that he had seen the prioress eating meat, wearing colourful clothes, and wearing a cloak as if she were a lay woman, that is, she wore it to weddings and parties. In addition to this, she did not keep to the cloister or the vow of silence.

The prioress admitted to "having attended weddings and baptisms and sometimes having had lunch there, although other times she went back to her convent for lunch." Doña Inés also stated that she lived alone in the nunnery, but sometimes secular and ecclesiastical people ate at her table. Regarding the vow of silence, she did not deny that they had not remained silent as they did not know that they had to because they had not been taught to.

Finally, the case of doña Constanza Vázquez de Somoza corroborates what we have seen so far: nuns' presence outside their nunneries including attending various celebrations.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the abbess of Lobios insists on presenting herself as a virtuous nun who "maintained Saint Benedict's order, who 'could read' and lead the nuns' religiosity as well as or even better than her predecessors did," although she could not sing because she was ill. She also states that she managed the convent income, dressed and fed the nuns and the other people who lived there, to whom she also paid their salaries, and also did not deny that "she went to weddings, baptisms, and inaugural masses many times, like her predecessors did." Furthermore, she says that she sometimes took chaplains or other nuns with her and that she sometimes ate there, but other times she did not. Aldonza Rodríguez, a nun in the nunnery, confirmed this: "this abbess sometimes attended weddings with other people but without nuns and at times she took some nuns, sometimes she sat and had lunch in those weddings, but other times she did not." She also mentions doña Constanza's active involvement in these celebrations, since "she sang and danced like other secular people did in those weddings."

It seems that socializing with their associates was commonplace for these nuns and did not seem contrary to their religious life. They seem aware that certain attitudes and

<sup>56</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 365-72, docs. 5 and 7.

<sup>57</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 373-76, docs. 8 and 9.

behaviour in their daily life broke rules, but they felt the rules were not being broken if they left the convent to go to ceremonies related to religious celebrations like baptisms or weddings. Enclosure, or isolation from the world, seems to have been alien to the experience of Benedictine nuns, at least before the Late Middle Ages. This is why it was not exceptional to see them outside the cloister, attending various celebrations and taking part in receptions, the most profane part of these parties, in which they were likely to socialize with other men and women.

The reformers were not just worried because the nuns associated with secular people outside their convents, but due to the clothes they wore. The fact that everyone recognized that the nuns did not observe the monastic Rule upset the reformers, who were also worried about the impression the nuns made, especially when they left their nunneries. Nuns should dress appropriately. As Benedictine nuns, called *touquinegras*, they should wear their black wimples, a habit dyed in black.

In the case of the abbess of Albeos, nun Mencía de Figuerado did confirm that “she wore a black habit on celebration days and when she went out.” However, this seemed to happen only when she left the cloister, as “she did not wear it on the other days.” Mencía also mentions that when the abbess arrived from Castille at the Santa María de Belvís convent in Santiago de Compostela, where she first lived, the future abbess of Albeos wore yellow clothes. So, breaking the rules on religious clothing occurred not only in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>58</sup> However, other witnesses do not remember seeing her with her habit outside the nunnery. Only priest Juan Vázquez says that “she was wearing a black veil, but she dressed up when she went to weddings, baptisms, and festivities.”<sup>59</sup>

On balance, and tempering the information provided by witnesses in the reform trials, it seems that the lives of Galician Benedictine nuns did not mean enclosure, silence, or sobriety in food or clothing, at least at the end of the Middle Ages. The nuns wandered abroad, sometimes without their habits, and not only to go from one convent to another so as to manage their estate or the convent’s estate, but also to enjoy themselves with other women and men. Life took place beyond the walls and nuns also celebrated life as part of medieval society.

### **Nuns and Sex: Rumour or Fact?**

Sex should have been alien to any religious woman,<sup>60</sup> at least once she joined a nunnery.<sup>61</sup> However, the nuns’ deep social relationships that we have seen, and the existence of emotional ties to people around them must have allowed potential “affective–sexual relationships.” Although it is difficult to reconstruct the nuns’ feelings, the reformers’ docu-

**58** Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 570.

**59** Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 584.

**60** Most ecclesiastical regulations throughout the Middle Ages emphasized the importance of keeping the vow of chastity. Constant reiteration, which we see in Galician synods, implies that the religious failed to comply. See Martínez Domínguez, *Os clérigos na Idade Media*, 25–69.

**61** We need to be wary about children borne by monks and nuns, since some men and women entered monasteries after having been widowed or after reaching an agreement even when their

ments at the end of the Middle Ages prove sexual practice on the part of abbesses, implying that lay people could cross the monastic walls. Since the public was said to be aware of many of these relationships, the division created by the nunnery's walls did not mean that those who lived outside remained absolutely ignorant as to the realities and events happening inside. This explains why not only abbesses testified about their sex life, but also the nuns who lived with them inside the nunnery, some clergymen who crossed the monastic wall, and also other people who lived outside but who knew the people involved or had heard a repeated rumour. Were their statements true or false? While it is possible that some statements were based on fact, not necessarily all were true.

A series of statements given between the end of 1498 and January 1499 reveal information about three Galician nuns: the abbess of Lobios, the prioress of Pesqueiras, and the abbess of Albeos.<sup>62</sup>

Under questioning, the abbess of Lobios, Doña Constanza Vázquez de Somoza, admitted that "she had committed some sins so far, but she had already confessed them to the prelate that she had earlier and to the confessors with whom she had made her confession and that she had been absolved and given a penance for them and she had fulfilled it." This explains why she mentioned that if they wanted her to testify about her alleged transgressions before a notary instead of testifying before a confessor, she preferred to seek a lawyer's legal advice and would testify only if he advised her to do so.

She answered another question by saying that she had never had "a friend," either a clergyman or secular man, but when she was asked if she had any children, she replied that "she had already said what she had to say on that matter." Was this one of her transgressions? Well, she stated that she did not supply her sons or daughters with income or money from the convent.

It is remarkable that doña Constanza testified that she "had heard somebody say that some of the nuns who were in the convent had friends, but she had never consented to it." She also said that "she had never seen them have or give birth to sons or daughters, and that she had heard that those friends were clergymen." So here the abbess admitted to possible affective–sexual relationships in her convent.

Doña Constanza seems to conceal the particulars. For this reason, the statements made by Aldonza Rodríguez, a nun in the Lobios convent, are of interest. This woman knew the abbess well, as she describes having spent between seven or eight years with her. She offers sensible answers and, unlike what happened with other abbesses, the nun seems to support doña Constanza.

Aldonza stated having heard from some people, "whose names she does not remember," that the abbess "had had friends and that she had had children with them, but she

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spouses were still living. Consequently, many of these men and women had had children before they took their vows.

**62** Statements about the abbess of Lobios are to be found in Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 373–76, docs. 8–9; on Pesqueiras priory: Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 365–72, docs. 5 and 7; and on the abbess of Albeos in Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos," 568–89, docs. 2–13.

had not seen them and she did not know how many they were." She expanded her statement by saying that she had heard that an Archpriest had had children with doña Constanza and that they were in the convent and people said they were his. Aldonza admitted that some nights the Archpriest had entered the convent with other people, but she "did not know what he came for and what they did." Then there is her reference to the fact that "she saw someone giving clothes to two girls who were in the nunnery," who may have been the abbess's daughters.

The sex life of the abbess of Lobios had also surfaced in the lawsuit against Friar Fernando de Castelo, abbot of San Vicente del Pino, in Monforte de Lemos in 1498.<sup>63</sup> Friar Juan de Monforte, prior of San Pedro de Valverde, stated that he "had heard his servants say that the abbot slept with the abbess of Lobios and with the convent butler's wife."<sup>64</sup> He even said that the abbess had visited the Monforte monastery once and she had slept there, although at other times it was the abbot who went to the Lobios convent.<sup>65</sup> As we can see, the monastic walls were pervious and abbesses and abbots had opportunities to maintain sexual relationships both inside and outside the walls of their own monasteries or of others.

Doña Inés de Guitián was the last prioress of Pesqueiras and was similarly questioned. Among other irregularities, the prioress's sex life became an incentive to proceed against her. One of the witnesses was Vasco de Marçaas, a squire, who knew her well, having seen and talked to her many times. According to the squire's evidence, the prioress had an affair with her chaplain, Juan Rodríguez. He even stated that she had had a son and a daughter with her "friend," and he had seen them many times in the nunnery. She was pregnant "by her chaplain" when she moved to the convent in Santiago. The witness, who knew the abbess and the chaplain's children directly, had obtained this information from the chaplain himself. But proof that doña Inés was a mother strengthened when de Marçaas said that he "had heard" that Pero Gato had had a son or a daughter with her and everybody knew about it in the convent.

Doña Inés testified some days later. She stated flatly that she "had not had any friends or relationships with any men" before entering the Pesqueiras convent. However, when she was meant to answer the tenth question, namely "if she had had friends publicly or secretly after having been appointed prioress, and if they were religious men, friars or secular, married or single, and if she had had children with them and how many," the prioress asked to obtain advice from a lawyer and said that she would declare only what the lawyer advised her to declare. If doña Inés was reluctant to reveal information about her sex life, silence was certainly best. If it was true that the convent's neighbours were aware of her sexual past and her children, as Vasco de Marçaas had claimed, it would be difficult to hide the truth from the reformers. However, she was reluctant to incriminate herself, risk being banished from her convent, and her social networks and standing destroyed. Doña Inés stated rather that she had never given charters of land to "friends, sons, daughters, relatives, or any other people" in such a way that could harm the nunnery.

<sup>63</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra el abad de Samos y Monforte."

<sup>64</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra el abad de Samos y Monforte," 429, doc. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Zaragoza Pascual, "Proceso de reforma contra el abad de Samos y Monforte," 450, doc. 10.

The statements related to doña Beatriz Cabeza de Vaca, abbess of Albeos, describe an intense affective–sexual sociability with men in her milieu. Mencía de Figueredo, nun in the same convent, states that doña Beatriz had given birth to a son and a daughter before becoming an abbess. Her best documented daughter was the previously mentioned Francisca, who married Juan Rodríguez Pedregáns. Gregorio Rodríguez, related to Juan, was in fact one of the witnesses and not only did he confirm doña Beatriz's motherhood, but he also spoke about a certain Cristóbal Vaca, who was the abbess's son according to some people, or her nephew according to others.

It was said that the abbess of Albeos had “a bad reputation” due to her relationship with two clergymen and chaplains of the convent, Pero Vázquez and Vasco das Seixas. In fact, nun Mencía claimed that Vasco had injured Pero in the head and his hand. The statements made by other witnesses give the reason behind this attack: Doña Beatriz had affairs with both clergymen. One day the abbess was in bed with Pero when Vasco arrived. Vasco attacked and stabbed the abbess's other lover. The witnesses seem to be reliable and to have first-hand knowledge of the story. In fact, Gregorio de Sexemil claimed to have heard it from Pero Vázquez himself and to have helped mediate. Juan García de Novoa also stated that he saw both clergymen injured the following morning when he visited the convent. De Novoa also asserted that Vasco removed the abbess's clothes; the abbess then complained to the abbot of Crecente, a mile away, who replied that he would rather she were not such a “puta carcavera” (alley whore).

Fernando Martínez made it clear that jealousy was the reason for this attack when he stated that both clergymen “stabbed each other for her love.” This was also confirmed by clergyman Juan Vázquez, who declared that Vasco had struck and hurt Pero when he found him in her bed and that he had done it “for love of the abbess.” He added that the abbess had run away that night, but Juan said that he had convinced the abbess and Vasco to be “friends” again.

The relationship between the abbess and the clergyman Vasco appears complex, as many witnesses stated that he mistreated her. Not only did the nun Mencía, an eyewitness, confirm it, but also people far away, like Gregorio Rodríguez. He asserted that Lope Torto, the squire and servant of the count of Camiña had told him that “Vasco das Seixas punished that abbess and sometimes whipped her because he was jealous of others.”

Statements made by Vasco das Seixas himself have survived; he revealed that he had known the abbess for about fifteen years. The clergyman affirmed that doña Beatriz had given birth several times and he had even observed some dishonest people in the monastery, and the abbess had offered them food and drink at the monastery's expense. He confirmed that their relationship had lasted “six or seven years,” but they had not had sexual relations for the last five. He also described the encounter with Pero Vázquez: he “went into the bedroom where she was sleeping and he found her with Pero Vázquez, a clergyman.” In addition to admitting to the fight with the abbess's lover, he admitted that “he sometimes hurt the abbess,” but he said that it was “to punish her immoral behaviour,” but said nothing of jealousy being a motive.

Other names are mentioned as “friends” and lovers of the abbess and even as fathers of her children. Mencía de Figueredo said that she had given birth to a daughter whose father was Juan das Costas, a clergyman of San Xoan de Albeos, but she had died.

This information was confirmed by clergymen Juan Vázquez and Vasco das Seixas, and by the layman Gonzalo Ferreiro, who declared that she had given birth to that girl when she was the prioress of the nunnery.

The married layman Juan Ferreiro also appears as one of her possible lovers. We have evidence from Gonzalo Ferrero, Juan's son. Gonzalo said he had heard that his father had a relationship with the abbess and "his father and mother had frequent quarrels about it, but his aforesaid father always denied having slept with that damned abbess." Was this gossip or fact?

Reference to this abbess's sex life concludes with nun Mencias's assertion that the abbess "had been pregnant and given birth two other times."

According to these various witnesses, doña Beatriz Cabeza de Vaca had had sex and even children both before and after becoming the abbess of Albeos. Not only laymen but clergymen appear among her "amigos y enamorados" (friends and lovers), as Juan García de Novoa calls them. Her behaviour seemed to have been followed by other nuns, as Mencía de Figueredo stated that a prioress in the convent had given birth twice with the abbess's knowledge and consent.

Nuns' constant contact with their chaplains, confessors, and other clergymen explains the existence of affective–sexual relationships between them. The opportunities were numerous and this explains why, in 1498, reformers had asked the abbess of San Pedro de Lobás not to engage a man called Alonso Fernández as chaplain, but to seek another chaplain "who is over forty or fifty years old and who is honest." Was Alonso an attractive young man who might socialize excessively with nuns? The reformers also ordered the abbess not to let any men or women into the convent. They also instructed the nuns to not exit the convent, except to visit the orchard, which was located next to the nunnery wall. They could not converse with any men or women, except in the abbess's presence and with her permission. They recommended other methods using walls and locks as an attempt to isolate nuns.<sup>66</sup> By limiting the nuns' social contacts, the reformers would also restrict illicit sexual behaviour.

The detail with which witnesses mention names and describe events seems to demonstrate that we are facing true facts. It is possible that the witnesses who testified—nuns, clergymen, or laymen—may have been chosen by reformers because they were jealous of or had argued with the abbesses who were being prosecuted. However, I believe that the witnesses testified to daily realities which were not necessarily considered as unacceptable in the heart of a medieval society which did not set the nuns apart but integrated them into it; nuns maintained a deep sociability in their economic, familial, social, religious, and affective environment. This kind of sociability conflicted with the Benedictine rule, but often nuns scarcely knew it.<sup>67</sup> If we add lack of spirituality,

<sup>66</sup> Zaragoza Pascual "Reforma de Lobás, Dozón y Ansemil," 89–91, doc. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Doña Inés de Guitián, prioress of Pesqueiras, stated that "she had never seen nor read the Rule until she had entered San Paio [de Antealtares] convent," and she also said she lived in the same way as other abbesses and prioresses of the order did: Zaragoza Pascual, "Procesos de reforma contra la abadesa de Lobios y la priora de Pesqueiras," 371, doc. 7. Mencía de Figueredo also stated that "at that time I did not know what the Rule of Saint Benedict was or what it was like" and after



the isolation of some small rural monastic institution, barely supervised by ecclesiastical authorities throughout the Middle Ages, we can hypothesize that we should not be surprised if Galician abbesses and nuns had wide margins of freedom. We should not be surprised if nuns broke their vows of silence, poverty, or chastity.

The evidence so far of these nuns' sex life has been based on documents from reformers, but we have other less biased evidence of limited significance.<sup>68</sup>

Let us now highlight the existence of many dispensations for illegitimacy, *super defectu natalium* or *de illegitimis*, granted by the papal Curia between 1449 and 1533.<sup>69</sup> We still possess about 1,408 dispensations which show the existence of illicit or extramarital sexual relationships solely from the dioceses of Galicia. This number amounts to 15.6 percent of the total number granted across the Iberian Peninsula, and Galician dioceses are among the top twenty for the number of dispensations. In terms of mothers, most of them, namely 1,204 (82.5 percent) were single women; 158 (11.2 percent) were married women with children by a man other than their husbands; but only 22 (1.5 percent) were nuns.<sup>70</sup> We are interested in the following:

	Lugo	Mondoñedo	Ourense	Santiago	Tui	TOTAL
Benedictine abess	0	0	0	0	1	1
Nun	2	0	0	1	0	3
Cistercian nun	0	0	1	0	0	1
Franciscan nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Dominican nun	0	0	0	2	0	2
Augustinian nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Benedictine nun	2	0	2	1	1	6
Poor Clare nun	0	0	4	0	1	5
Religious woman	1	0	1	0	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 3.1: Illegitimacy dispensations granted to nuns, by Galician diocese, by the Papal Curia between 1449 and 1533.

The greater number of nunneries in the dioceses of Ourense, Santiago, and Lugo account for the greater number of children given birth to by nuns. We should stress that there is only one Benedictine abess—an abess in Tui—so table does not record any of

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the prior told her what the rule entailed, she said “she did not have or keep anything about it”: Zaragoza Pascual, “Proceso de reforma contra la abadesa de San Salvador de Albeos,” 569, doc. 2.

**68** In a letter of 1523 we find a reference to a “*vir* [man], Andrés, son of Inés de Quiroga, the abess of Sobrado de Trives”: Zaragoza Pascual, “Noticias sueltas sobre la reforma de algunos monasterios benedictinos,” 211, doc. 5.

**69** Aznar Gil, “Hijos ilegítimos en Galicia.”

**70** We should add eight whose condition is unknown (2 from Lugo, 1 in Mondoñedo, 2 in Ourense, 2 in Santiago and 1 in Tui): Aznar Gil, “Hijos ilegítimos en Galicia,” 412–13.

the children mentioned in the lawsuits of 1499. However, we should emphasize that Benedictine nuns are the most highly represented, with a total of six cases.

The following chart lists who the mother and father of the children who asked for papal dispensation were:

	Lugo	Mondoñedo	Ourense	Santiago	Tui	TOTAL
Clergyman + Benedictine nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Married man + Benedictine nun	0	0	0	0	1	1
Member of a military order + Poor Clare	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cistercian monk + Cistercian nun	0	0	1	0	0	1
Cistercian monk + Benedictine nun	0	0	1	0	0	1
Presbyter + nun	1	0	0	0	0	1
Presbyter + Dominican nun	0	0	0	2	0	2
Presbyter + Augustinian nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Presbyter + Benedictine nun	1	0	1	0	0	2
Carmelite presbyter + nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Augustinian presbyter + Poor Clare	0	0	1	0	0	1
Religious man + Religious woman	1	0	1	0	0	2
Franciscan religious + Poor Clare nun	0	0	1	0	0	1
Religious of the Order of Penance + Poor Clare	0	0	1	0	0	1
Single man + Benedictine Abbess	0	0	0	0	1	1
Single man + Franciscan nun	0	0	0	1	0	1
Single man + Nun	1	0	0	0	0	1
Single man + Benedictine nun	1	0	0	0	0	1
Single man + Poor Clare	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 3.2: Details of the mother and father of children from nuns who asked for illegitimacy dispensation between 1449 and 1533, by Galician diocese.

The table presents a wide variety of situations: the children borne with single men are just five, only one is the result of a relationship with a married man, and most of the nuns' children were born after a sexual relationship with churchmen, either monks or priests.<sup>71</sup> But they demonstrate relationships between nun and men, both inside and outside the convent.

<sup>71</sup> Aznar Gil, "Hijos ilegítimos en Galicia," 418–20.

This data supports the possibilities of what was said by witnesses in the trials against Galician abbesses. But this data may underestimate this issue. Sexual intercourse might not end in pregnancy and pregnancies might end in abortions. Moreover, not all the children of nuns asked for dispensations for illegitimacy.<sup>72</sup> Clearly we cannot make a general assessment about how widespread sexual relationships were among nuns. But sex was a natural consequence of, and perhaps also a reason for, the nuns' relationships with men in their vicinity, both laymen and ecclesiastics.

## Conclusions

In the eyes of a layman, beyond the convent wall there lived a group of women who, despite devoting themselves to pray for everybody's souls and lead a contemplative life, invested great importance in their daily lives to a wide range of relationships, both within the convent and permeating its walls. In the eyes of the nuns, beyond the wall there were not only the material bases they had to manage so as to be able to subsist and to devote themselves to a life of prayer, but also the world with which they could not stop interacting and with which they did not want to stop being in touch. Their families and the authorities they needed to defend them were out there, and also their neighbours, friends, and properties.

As we have seen, the aristocratic origin of a considerable number of abbesses in medieval Galicia and the feudal character of these institutions are key in understanding how power lay at the heart of social relationships inside and outside the cloister. Beyond the exercise of economic and jurisdictional power which took them out of the cloister, there were also other personal and profane reasons which resulted in the nuns' presence beyond the wall. These religious women were part of society and this is especially evident if we consider their presence at celebrations such as weddings and baptisms. Festivities were a reality in the life of medieval women and men. According to our sources, they featured too in the social life of medieval nuns.

Affective–sexual relationships developed too, perhaps the result of their wide relationships with men in their milieu. The existing closeness between the convent chaplains and clergymen and the nuns seems to have given rise to sexual relationships, and sometimes to the birth of children. Rumour and evidence both show that these relationships could also arise between nuns and laymen, which once again proves the fragility of the monastic walls as a physical border between nuns and the world.

Power, parties, and sex are causes and consequences of the nuns' sociability. However, it is important to mention that while "power sociability" has been recorded across a wide number of documents, nuns' affective–sexual relationships and their participation in celebrations are recorded more exceptionally, often through gossip and thanks to the processes of reform initiated to dismiss abbesses. Moreover, this kind of sociability

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**72** Note that just eight out of the 108 dispensations given in Galicia were for women: Aznar Gil, "Hijos ilegítimos en Galicia," 422. Did nuns only have sons and no daughters? The examples which we have studied show that this is not true. We have noted the case of Francisca, daughter of the abbess of Albeos.

was more complex. Depending on the person or group with whom nuns and their convents interacted, we can distinguish between upward, horizontal, and downward-facing relationships. Their social contact could be direct or personal on the part of the nuns themselves; and indirect, such as through notaries, based on the exchange and the drawing up of documents.

It is unquestionable that many nuns' social relationships favoured their full integration as women and as feudal ladies into medieval society. These relationships also explain the close links which compelled men and women who lived near the convents to support them and even physically fight the reformers, as happened in San Salvador de Sobrado de Trives<sup>73</sup> during the monastic reform started in Galicia by the Catholic Monarchs. It also explains why members of the nobility helped abbesses who escaped from the cloister in San Paio de Antealtares to return to their convents.<sup>74</sup> These are testimony to deep and successful relationships of Galician nuns throughout the Middle Ages. When reformers attacked these nuns' way of life and especially their social relationships, the strength of these century-old ties between religious women and their environment surfaced.

Although ecclesiastical rhetoric speaks repeatedly of the necessity of nuns' seclusion and enclosure, the documents preserved about some nunneries in Galicia in the Late Middle Ages prove that the enclosure favoured by ecclesiastical authorities was one desired only by them, and was far from reality. The nuns cast their influence and relationships beyond the monastic wall while on other occasions they let others through the walls to approach them. There was great permeability in the monastic wall, and this is a reflection, cause, and consequence of the social life of medieval nuns. That is why it has proved interesting to study the power they wielded, the celebrations they attended, and their affective–sexual relationships, among other aspects of their sociability. Nuns were part of medieval society, a society of men and women in constant flux and interaction.

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**73** Apart from this episode, according to which ten or twelve armed men hit the reformers (Archivo General de Simancas, Registro General del Sello, Leg. 149901, 274), some months later friar Rodrigo de Valencia tried to visit the convent at Sobrado de Trives again in order to implement the reform, but he did not achieve it “because there were a lot of armed people in the convent who were in favour of the abbess.” Colombás, *Las Señoras de San Payo*, 35.

**74** “Those abbesses with the support from the Countess of Camiña and other people have entered the convents and eat and distribute its rents”: García Oro, *La reforma de los religiosos españoles*, 56 and 538, doc. 443.

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## Chapter 4

# REFORM AND RENEWAL IN THE DOMINICAN NUNNERIES OF SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

MERCEDES PÉREZ VIDAL\*

REFORM AND RENEWAL have been continuous and cyclical throughout church history. Some argue it was an idealistic and maybe utopian aspiration—*ecclesia semper reformanda*—with a vague and unspecific meaning of these words and their synonyms.<sup>1</sup> Each reform movement was distinct and contingent on the time and place and deserves detailed individual analysis.

Compared with the Franciscans the lack of study into reforms of the female branch of the Dominican Order is particularly striking, especially for Spain and its colonial dominions in the Americas. Past research has superficially offered a vision of false homogeneity. However, the agents involved and the features and consequences across monastic life—art, architecture, liturgy, etc.—varied from one nunnery to another and from one place to other, and presents a complex picture. Moreover, the importance of Observance and reform movements within the religious orders and in relation to art and architecture has not been taken into consideration until recently, not only with Dominican nuns, and not only in the Spanish territories.<sup>2</sup> The present article intends to offer an introduction to these questions, namely the Observant reform and subsequent reformists

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1 Gerhard Ladner's account of the rhetoric of reform in the early Church Fathers has been revised by scholars who have noted the lack of a clear definition of reform and other related vocabulary. On these issues, see Vargas, *Taming a Brood of Vipers*, 16–22 and also his "Administrative Change."

2 The Franciscan Observance in Italy and its repercussions for art was an exception, and the bibliography is vast. Recently, Denise Zaru has analyzed the contribution of Dominican Observance in Venice to changes in the religious image: Zaru, *Art and Observance in Renaissance Venice*. For Spain see Lucía Gómez-Chacón, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*. For Portugal see Cardoso, "Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries."

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**Mercedes Pérez Vidal** is Scientific Researcher at the University of Oviedo in Spain (PCTI 2018–2022, Principality of Asturias, project SV-PA-21-AYUD/2021/57166). She received her PhD in Art History in 2013 from the University of Oviedo, with a dissertation on the Dominican female monasteries of medieval Castile. Her research focuses on the cultural history and art history of female monasteries, specifically the relation of art and architecture to liturgy; nuns' libraries and manuscript production; and the networks of cultural transfer between the Iberian Peninsula and other territories. She has been a postdoctoral fellow at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico (2014–2015), and MCSA fellow at the University of Padua (2015–2017), and the Heinrich Heine Universität in Düsseldorf (2017–2019). Among her recent publications are the monograph, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de Dominicas en Castilla*, and her article "Female Aristocratic Networks," in *Relations of Power*, ed. Dumitrescu, Hardie, and O'Loughlin Bérat (2021).

movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, including those in the wake of the Council of Trent, for Dominican nunneries in Castile and Latin America, placing them in a broader context.

### The Reform of Dominican Nunneries in Castile: Origins, Agents, and Impacts

The reform of Dominican nunneries in Castile started earlier than hitherto thought.<sup>3</sup> The Western Schism (1378–1418) has been blamed for the apparent delay in the introduction of the Observant reform in Castile as Castile fell under the obedience of the Avignonese papacy.<sup>4</sup> However, for the Dominicans we must bear in mind that Portugal, under the obedience of the pope of Rome, not Avignon, also belonged to the “Province of Spain” of the Order of Preachers before 1418 and introduced Observant reforms. Friar Vicente de Lisboa, Provincial of Spain, founded the first observant nunnery and male convent in Portugal: São Salvador of Lisbon (1392) and São Domingo of Bemfica (1399) respectively. The Portuguese observant convents joined together under a reform-minded vicar and continued so till 1418, when the new Province of Portugal was officially created.<sup>5</sup> We should not forget the relationship between the queen of Portugal, Felipa (Philippa) de Lancaster (1387–1415), and Catalina (Catherine) de Lancaster (1373–1418), queen of Castile, her stepsister. As Diana Lucía has pointed out, their relationship may have favoured an earlier introduction of Observant reform in Castile, even before the Council of Constance in 1414–1418.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, by the fifteenth century some women, including prioresses and patronesses, fostered reform in their nunneries. Kinship and family ties were key to this process, since it impacted on the legitimization of lineages. According to the *Libro Becerro* of Sancti Spiritus de Toro, Leonor Sánchez de Castilla, illegitimate daughter of the *infante* Sancho de Castilla, and prioress of Santi Spiritus de Toro (from ca. 1411 to 1444) reformed the spiritual life of this nunnery.<sup>7</sup> No extant medieval documents prove her role as reformer, but an interesting miscellany volume copied in 1421 and dedicated to her could be understood in the context of Observant reform.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, according

**3** Pérez Vidal, “La Reforma de los monasterios de dominicas”; Lucía Gómez-Chacón, “Religiosidad femenina y reforma dominicana.”

**4** Recent studies have shown that several attempts were made to reorganize the Order from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, contradicting the alleged decline of the Dominicans during this century: Vargas, *Taming a Brood of Vipers*, and his “Administrative Change”; Mixson and Roest, eds., *A Companion to Observant Reform*.

**5** Luis Sousa, *Segunda Parte da Historia de S. Domingos*, book 1, chapter 2, fols. 10–11; book 2, chapter 1, fols. 83–86 and book 3, chapter 1, fol. 199; Hernández Martín, “La reforma dominicana.”

**6** Lucía Gómez-Chacón, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, 57–58.

**7** Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereinafter AHN), Clero, Libros, 18314: *Libro de Becerro*. Leonor entered first Sancti Spiritus in Benavente where she made her profession in 1393, and she subsequently moved to Toro.

**8** Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 21626. It includes translations of Guillaume Perault and Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* by the bishop of Burgos, Pablo de Santa María: Conde, “De nuevo



to Diana Lucía, Leonor Sánchez de Castilla would have been probably one of the ideologues behind the iconographic program of Beatriz of Portugal's tomb, together with the former queen herself. The sepulchre's decoration includes one of the first depictions in Castile of St. Catherine of Siena, and this could have implied an earlier devotion to St. Catherine here than previously thought, probably through the circulation of hagiographical texts about St. Catherine produced by Tommaso da Siena.<sup>9</sup>

Books played a major role in the introduction or implementation of Observant reform and their exchange between different communities was crucial for processes of reform. Queen Leonor de Albuquerque, stepsister of her namesake prioress of Toro, donated in 1418 to Santa María in Medina del Campo her houses adjoining this nunnery.<sup>10</sup> But, more or less at this very moment she wrote a letter to her cousin, María de Castilla, prioress of Santo Domingo in Toledo, with a request to borrow an Ordinary of the Mass in the vernacular to make a copy. This copy was most likely intended as a gift for the Santa María in Medina del Campo.<sup>11</sup> The Ordinary was a fundamental text, as any modification had to be approved by a General Chapter, like the Constitutions, so as to ensure liturgical uniformity across the Order.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, copying manuscripts to facilitate their transfer among nunneries implied a "liturgical migration," a phenomenon that has been mainly analyzed in relation to the enforcement of reform.<sup>13</sup> In this case, and probably in others in Castile, this liturgical migration was probably determined by royal patronage and ties of kinship between these noblewomen and particular nunneries.<sup>14</sup>

We must mention here the outstanding example of Constanza de Castilla and her relative, Catalina de Castilla, prioresses of Madrid and Toledo respectively. Both, but especially Constanza, played a major role in the legitimation of her lineage, following the Iberian tradition of the *infantas*, which was continued by the *señoras* during the Late Middle Ages [Fig. 4.1]. In addition to the rebuilding or enlargement of several parts of the nunnery, such as the church in 1442, the refectory, the dormitory, and perhaps the main cloister, Constanza transformed the church's apse into a funerary chapel for her

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sobre una traducción desconocida." I am grateful to Silvia Bara Bancel for bringing this to my attention. See also Pérez Vidal "Female Aristocratic Networks", 122–24.

**9** Diana Lucía, "Religiosidad femenina y reforma," 629–30 and 634–36. Tommaso da Siena claimed to have sent copies to territories belonging to the Avignonese obedience, including Castile. Nevertheless, due to lack of manuscripts known from Castile, Catalonia, and the British Isles, Hamburger and Signori judged the success of Tommaso da Siena to be limited, and these texts only arrived with the printing press: *Catherine of Siena*, 7 and 11.

**10** She kept for herself some dependencies where she lived for five years, until she took her vows as a nun: López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 28r.

**11** Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 230; Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 104–5.

**12** Creytens, "L'ordinaire des Frères prêcheurs."

**13** Muschiol, "Migrating Nuns-Migrating Liturgy?"

**14** Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 230; Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 113–15.



Figure 4.1: Tomb of Constanza de Castilla. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 50242  
 [Reproduced courtesy of Fernando Velasco Mora, MAN, under licence cc-BY-SA-4.0]

grandfather, King Pedro I, and other members of the Castilla family.<sup>15</sup> In the same way, and at the same time, her relative Catalina de Castilla, prioress of Santo Domingo de Toledo, ordered considerable repairs in the choir.<sup>16</sup> Among these repairs were the renovation of the tombstones of some outstanding prioresses, like Juana de la Espina and Teresa de Ayala, but also those of her father and uncle, Diego and Sancho, both illegitimate sons of Pedro I, whose remains had been transferred to the nunnery by herself and queen Catalina de Lancaster.<sup>17</sup>

The powerful Constanza was certainly a charismatic prioress but something of a contradiction: despite her evident devotion and observance, she also obtained special licences from prelates of the Order to conduct a life more like the *infantas* or *señoras* than an observant nun.<sup>18</sup> For instance, like other queens and noblewomen, she was permitted to live separately from the community, in her own lodgings around a secondary cloister, and she was allowed to leave the nunnery, when necessary, to visit her relatives

**15** Eguren, *Memoria histórico-descriptiva del Monasterio de Santo Domingo*, 21.

**16** Martínez Caviro, *Conventos de Toledo*, 106.

**17** Hernando del Castillo, *Segunda parte de la Historial General de Sancto Domingo*, chapter 7, fol. 159.

**18** A survey of Hispanic customs concerning the *Infantado* is available in Cayrol Bernardo, “*De infantas, domnae y Deo Votae.*” The *señoras* can be understood as continuing this custom. They had great power and authority over the abbess or prioress, oversaw the administration of their nunnery, acted as intermediaries between the patrons and the nunnery, and played a prominent role in preserving the memory of their lineage.

or to address personal issues at the royal court.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, between 1449 and 1451 she was entrusted by Pope Nicholas V with the foundation of a new nunnery *sub regulari observantia* called Mater Dei.<sup>20</sup> It seems that there was no contradiction in that historical moment between observance and aristocratic women living in their own lodgings in a convent. We can cite more examples: Queen Beatriz of Portugal, who retired to Sancti Spiritus de Toro in her widowhood, or Beatriz de Manrique, wife of Pedro Fernández de Velasco, Count of Haro. Beatriz and Pedro supported and fostered the Franciscan observance in Castile. When widowed, Beatriz retired to the Poor Clares nunnery of Medina del Pomar. There, she built a house in the orchard to lodge some laywomen who came with her, as well as other pious women who could live at the nunnery without taking vows.<sup>21</sup> This custom continued in Spain even after the Council of Trent, as several studies have proved. Cloistered nuns were indeed closely involved in the secular world, and their influence transcended the cloister walls.<sup>22</sup>

The Provincial of Spain, Luis de Valladolid (1419–1423), who granted Constanza de Castilla so many privileges, also encouraged reform. Indeed, on February 5, 1418 Martin V authorized him to found six monasteries and four nunneries, although it seems only Scala Coeli by Álvaro de Córdoba was ever completed. All these attempts of reform were a consequence of the Council of Constance, at which Martin V was elected and Álvaro de Córdoba, Luis de Valladolid, and Juan de Torquemada all participated. Torquemada pursued the reform of the Dominicans in Castile in the 1460s, albeit with a clearly different accent, one where Thomism had significant weight.<sup>23</sup> Torquemada reformed Santa María Sopra Minerva in Rome as well as San Pablo de Valladolid, commissioning a now lost cycle of frescoes, based on Torquemada's *Meditationes*, in the former as well as the rebuilding of the convent and church of the second.<sup>24</sup> The Congregation of the Observance was established in 1467 with the approval of a Master General and its first chapter was held at San Pablo de Valladolid in 1477.<sup>25</sup>

The Catholic Monarchs and Cisneros whipped up reform with the appointment of reformers at the end of the fifteenth century. But they had to often face strong opposition from particular religious communities, as we know of conflicts from some documents, even if chronicles kept this quiet.<sup>26</sup> They are documented for Dominican nunner-

**19** All these privileges were collected in a book: *Libro de las licencias y gracias*, unfol., in Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 7296.

**20** The pope issued two bulls, the first on July 5, 1449 and the second on May 18, 1451: Rome, Archivo General dell'Ordine dei Predicatori, Serie XIV, Fondo Libri, *Liber KKK*, fol. 574r; Archive of Santo Domingo de Toledo, doc. 1713; Madrid, AHN, Clero, Pergaminos, 1365/15.

**21** Pereda, "Liturgy as Women's Language," 2:974–88. She also encouraged the foundation of three communities of Franciscan women religious: Rucquoi, "Los franciscanos en el reino de Castilla," 79.

**22** Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun*; Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*.

**23** Binder, "El cardenal Juan de Torquemada."

**24** Bourgeois, *Reconstructing the Lost Frescoes*; Beltrán de Heredia, "Colección de documentos inéditos," 213.

**25** Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la Reforma de la Provincia de España*, 160.

**26** In Castile these conflicts are well documented in some monasteries, like San Esteban de

ies in Castile at Caleruega, Quejana, and San Cebrián de Mazote and perhaps elsewhere. In 1486 the reformer Alfonso de San Cebrián required the support of the civil authorities to stem disorders and impose reform on San Cebrián de Mazote and others.<sup>27</sup> Trouble occurred too at Caleruega, where some unreformed nuns, who had previously abandoned the nunnery, wanted to return and expel the reformed nuns, as we can read in a letter of August 1, 1479 from Queen Isabel.<sup>28</sup> Finally, a memorandum sent to the Consejo Real refers to both the reformers' abuses in Quejana and the nuns' resistance with the support of their patron Pedro López de Ayala.<sup>29</sup> Queen Isabel also took part in the reform of this nunnery, on the request of María de Ayala, Countess of Valencia de Don Juan. The reform process was probably not completed until the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

As we have seen, friars were not the only people in charge of introducing observance, but some women—both nuns and patronesses—also fostered it. We might also note that some nunneries were reformed even before the monasteries in the same cities, as happened in Zamora in 1478 and Salamanca in 1482.<sup>31</sup> So women's role as agents in these processes needs to be revised.<sup>32</sup>

Even if the Catholic Monarchs and Cardinal Cisneros were far from being the only reforming agents, their power could prevail over Dominican friars. For instance, they supported the Beata di Piedrahita, a famous Dominican reformer whose spirituality was strongly influenced by Savonarolan piety, against the opposition of his Order.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the influence of the Cisnerian Reforms reached America, by means of some friars, like fray Juan de Zumárraga and the Dominican fray Bernardo de Alburquerque. In the New World, conflicts between reformers and unreformed friars continued during the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

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Salamanca: Nieva Ocampo "La creación de la Observancia regular."

**27** Archivo General de Simancas, Registro General del Sello, IV, fol. 122, cited in Nieva Ocampo, "La creación de la Observancia regular," 96.

**28** Archivo General de Simancas, 1757 (Registro General del Sello, III, 248, fol. 81), cited in González González, *Real Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Caleruega*, 152.

**29** Portilla Vitoria, *Vertientes cantábricas del Noroeste Alavés*, 767.

**30** María de Ayala appointed Queen Isabel her executor (in her will of July 4, 1496), commissioning her with the reform of Quejana: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Pergaminos, 3524/2; Archivo del monasterio de San Juan Bautista de Quejana, Apart. B, leg.1, no. 5.

**31** Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la Reforma de la Provincia de España*, 16. Liber KKK, fol. 574r; Salamanca, Archive of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación, *Noticia de la fundación del Convento de Santa María de la Ciudad de Salamanca* (1698), fol. 2r.

**32** The complexity of these processes has been recently clarified in the case of Observant Dominican nunneries in North and Central Italy: Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*. See also Diana Lucía, "Religiosidad femenina y reforma."

**33** Sastre Varas, "Proceso de la beata de Piedrahita," *Archivo Dominicano* 11 (1990): 359–402 and second part with the same title in *Archivo Dominicano* 12 (1991): 337–86; Sanmartín Bastida, *La representación de las místicas*.

**34** Ulloa, *Los Predicadores divididos*, 85–141.

## Cisneros, Bishops, and Patronesses in the First Nunneries in the New World

The Franciscan fray Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico, a man formed by the Cisnerian reform, introduced remarkable developments in the New World.<sup>35</sup> Among other initiatives, he urged the foundation of the first nunnery in New Spain, facing opposition from the crown. During the 1530s and 1540s the Spanish Monarchs did not consider the foundation of nunneries necessary in mission territories but favoured instead the creation of schools for girls for the training of aristocratic native women (the daughters of *caciques*, or indigineous chiefs).<sup>36</sup> Between 1531 and 1536, ten such houses were founded in the Mexico valley. The first were Texcoco and Huejotzingo, established by Pedro de Gante in 1528, and a third was created in Mexico in 1531. Interestingly, whereas the conversion of *beaterios* (houses of pious but unordained women) into nunneries or houses of regular tertiaries was encouraged in Spain, this was not seen as a necessity in America.<sup>37</sup>

Both the episcopacy and the secular elite, people like viceroy Mendoza and friar Juan de Zumárraga, fostered the establishment of convents of cloistered, regular nuns. Juan de Zumárraga arrived in New Spain on December 6, 1528, and, as other bishops, he viewed *beatas* with suspicion, and had strong confrontations, even threatening them with excommunication if they did not observe enclosure. In 1537 he proposed “un monasterio encerrado de buenas paredes altas y convenientes aposentos” (a monastery enclosed with good high walls and suitable rooms), that is to say, of enclosed nuns, as being more appropriate for the natives: “nos parece que sería mejor monjas encerradas, por la condición y costumbres de estos naturales.”<sup>38</sup> He required “indian” women and *mestizas* (mixed American and European) to be separated inside the cloister, and encouraged nuns from Spain to join this foundation. However, Spanish nuns did not come, only *beatas* during the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup> In 1529 and 1530 the Empress Isabel issued royal decrees ordering the provincial of the Franciscan Order to recruit five *beatas* from Salamanca and Seville to be sent to New Spain.<sup>40</sup> Agustín Vetancourt reported the arrival of three religious women from Santa Isabel de Salamanca to Mexico.<sup>41</sup>

**35** Regarding Zumárraga, see García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga*; Carreño, *Don fray Juan de Zumárraga*; Greenleaf, *Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition*, 26-41.

**36** Maybe inspired by the girls' schools founded by Cisneros in the early sixteenth century in Alcalá de Henares and Toledo for educating young women: Graña Cid, “Mujeres y educación en la pre-reforma castellana,” 121-22.

**37** Muriel, *La sociedad Novohispana*.

**38** *Carta de los Ilustrísimos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oaxaca y Guatemala sobre la ida al Concilio General, y piden sobre distintos puntos, así de Diezmos, como otros para la buena planta y permanencia de la fe de este Nuevo Mundo* (November 30, 1537) in García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga* (1881), 93-94.

**39** See Doris Bieñko's article in this volume.

**40** Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, 28-32.

**41** Vetancourt, *Teatro Mexicano*, part 2, 343.

The new foundation, at that time dedicated to the Madre de Dios, is mentioned for the first time in the will of Zumárraga in 1547. However, recent research has shown that it was rather in transition between an original *beaterio-recogimiento* and a Conceptionist nunnery that was only officially established in 1578. The change was a more complex and longer process than had been considered before.<sup>42</sup> As often happened, the institution's history was subsequently rewritten and in the mid-eighteenth century its origin as house for "indian" noblewomen was denied.<sup>43</sup>

I consider the dedication of the nunnery—Madre de Dios—significant and perhaps linked with the influence of Cisneros' reform on Zumárraga. Cisneros had a great devotion for the Immaculate Conception. He was a great supporter of the Order of the Immaculate Conception (Conceptionists) from the beginning of the sixteenth century and he founded several convents, such as the Madre de Dios de Illescas (Toledo). He also created a chapel with the same dedication—the Immaculate Conception or the Madre de Dios—in the archbishop's palace in Toledo, and he established a confraternity "de la Purísima Concepción."<sup>44</sup> While such a dedication was not exclusive to Cisneros nor to the Franciscans, it does seem to have been a very popular dedication for observant or reformed nunneries in the Iberian Peninsula between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Queen Eleanor of Viseu, founded in 1509 the nunnery of Madre de Deus in Lisbon, a community of Colettine Poor Clares.<sup>46</sup> We find also many Dominican nunneries with this dedication, despite the *maculist* stance of the Order (i.e., opposed to the doctrine of the immaculate conception), which at that point was not universally adopted by Dominican friars. As we have mentioned before, Constanza de Castilla undertook the foundation of a nunnery called Mater Dei between 1449 and 1451, and a previous *beaterio* in Toledo, dedicated to Santa Catalina and also supported by Cardinal Cisneros, became the nunnery of Madre de Dios in 1486.<sup>47</sup> In 1495, the Catholic Monarchs and Cisneros entrusted the foundress of this Toledan house, María Gómez de Silva, with the reform of Santo Domingo de Toledo, and Santo Domingo de Madrid.<sup>48</sup>

42 The bull of confirmation, issued by Pius V, arrived only in 1586: Barreto Ávila, "Beatas medievales educando princesas nahuas," 37–39.

43 Previously, the chroniclers of the Franciscan Order, like Agustín Vetancourt, had simplified the process of foundation, anticipating it to 1530, when four *beatas* who had been living until then in the house of the conquistador Andrés de Tapia made his profession before Zumárraga, noting also that they were then under the trust of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady: Agustín Vetancourt, *Teatro Mexicano*, part 2, 26–28.

44 García Oro, *La iglesia de Toledo*, 99–100.

45 Many had previously been *beaterios* dedicated to Santa Catalina, and changed dedication when they were transformed into nunneries.

46 Curvelo, ed., *Casa Perfeitissima*.

47 In this year, the *beatas* were authorized by Pope Innocent VIII to profess as nuns "veladas y encerradas": López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 281r.

48 Serrano Rodríguez, "Piedad, nobleza y reforma," 224.

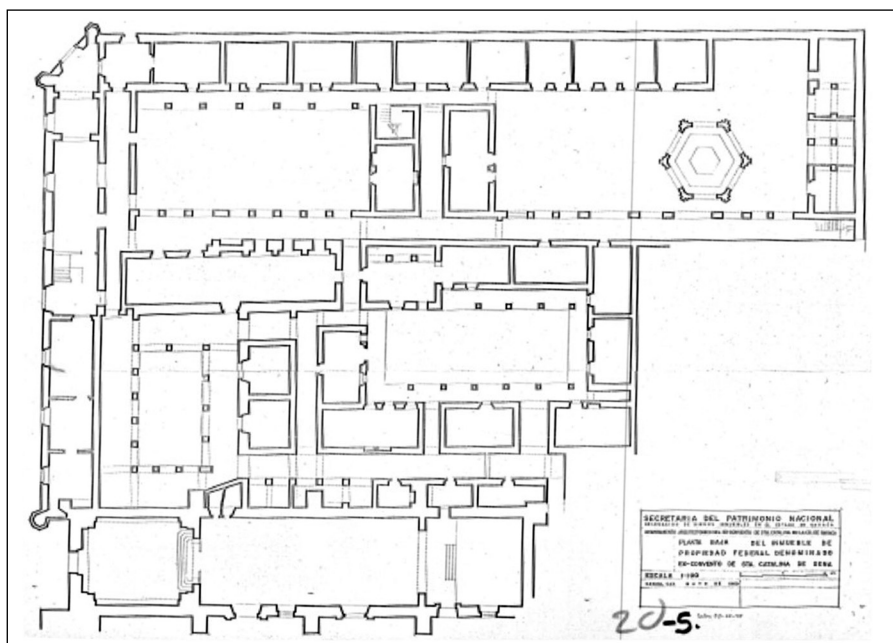


Figure 4.2: Plan of Santa Catalina de Siena, Oaxaca. By Vicente Medel y Ortiz Lajous, from the Dirección de sitios y monumentos, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Mexico. Reproduced courtesy of CONACULTA.

The second nunnery founded in New Spain had the dedication “Santa Catalina de la Madre de Dios in Oaxaca.” Its founder was the bishop of Antequera (now Oaxaca), the Dominican Bernardo de Alburquerque (1558–1579), who had been friar of San Esteban in Salamanca [Fig. 4.2].<sup>49</sup>

In a pattern seen elsewhere, it started in 1571 as a family foundation for two nieces of the prelate, plus other religious women, who were lodged in some houses allocated for this purpose by the bishop Alburquerque (“que para ello tenía deputadas”).<sup>50</sup> It is striking that some Franciscan nuns from Mexico were sent to Oaxaca, although the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina de Siena and Santa Ana in Puebla had been already founded in 1568.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it was not uncommon for nuns belonging to a different order to be appointed to instruct or reform newly founded nunneries, both in Peru and New Spain. This had occurred previously in Spain but it was certainly more frequent in the New World. However, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards,

<sup>49</sup> Martínez Sola, *El obispo fray Bernardo de Alburquerque*.

<sup>50</sup> Oaxaca, Biblioteca Burgoa, 24727: *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio de monjas intitulado de Sancta Catharina de Sena*. This is a copy of the original book, preserved at the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Históricas in Querétaro.

<sup>51</sup> Amerlinck de Corsi and Ramos Medina, *Conventos de monjas*, 153–56.

religious women would be sent from Europe.<sup>52</sup> Returning to Oaxaca, once the nunnery got over its teething problems, and the necessary papal approval was obtained in 1577,<sup>53</sup> the bishop granted it specific constitutions, which, were substantially those of the Dominicans, under whose jurisdiction they were.<sup>54</sup> In the same way, the Dominican nunnery of Santa María de Gracia de Guadalajara was founded in 1588 by the Dominican bishop Domingo de Alzola, with Dominican nuns from Puebla, and it was under episcopal jurisdiction.<sup>55</sup>

In the viceroyalty of Peru, nunneries had a similar origin, many of them originating from earlier *beaterios* founded by widows or women who could not afford a dowry.<sup>56</sup> The first nunnery in Lima, la Encarnación, was originally a female orphanage founded by Leonor de Portocarrero and her daughter Mencía de Sosa. It was subsequently transformed into a *beaterio*—Nuestra Señora de los Remedios— and later into a nunnery (1561) of Augustinian canonesses, under the jurisdiction of the bishop (Jerónimo de Loaysa).<sup>57</sup> Dominican nuns in Cuzco were also under episcopal jurisdiction and quite independent from their order. After her son's death, Lucía de Padilla founded Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Arequipa, the second Dominican nunnery in Arequipa, on August 1, 1599. It subsequently moved to Cuzco with the approval and support of the bishop Don Antonio de la Raya. An anonymous Dominican nun reported that the nuns of Arequipa did not seem to have asked the friars' permission for their relocation, nor were they received by them upon their arrival in Cuzco [Fig. 4.3].<sup>58</sup>

As we will now see, chapter 9 of the decree *De regularibus et monialibus* of the Council of Trent established that nunneries established under episcopal jurisdiction were to be governed by bishops and were ultimately dependent on the Apostolic See. However, it did recognize the existence of other nunneries under the jurisdiction of the male

**52** This happened for instance with the Capuchin nuns. The first house of these nuns in Mexico received nuns from Toledo in 1665, and five Capuchin nuns from Madrid were sent in 1712 to Lima. The latter journey is one of few travel narratives written by women and for other women, and one of the first accounts of women religious travelling to the New World: María Rosa, *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*, ed. Owens. Regarding this and the cultural influence of Spanish nuns in America see the article of Doris Bieňko in this volume.

**53** Papal letter of Gregory XIII authorizing the foundation of the nunnery (March 1, 1577): Oaxaca, Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova, Fondo incorporado.

**54** *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio*. Davila Padilla referred the foundation in his chronicle as well as Martínez Sola in her study on the prelate. Nevertheless, both relied exclusively on the *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio*. Dávila Padilla, *Historia de la fundación y discurso de la Provincia de Santiago*, 300–303; Martínez Sola, *El obispo fray Bernardo de Albuquerque*, 388–404.

**55** Two other Dominican nunneries were founded in Mexico in the sixteenth century: Santa Catalina de Siena in Mexico in 1593 and Santa Catalina de Valladolid in 1595.

**56** Martín, *Daughters of the Conquistadores*; Burns, *Colonial Habits*; Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*.

**57** Leiva Viacava, "En torno al primer monasterio limeño"; Vinatea Recoba. "Ficción y realidad."

**58** Burns, *Colonial Habits*, 83; Pérez Vidal, "Arte y patrimonio de las dominicas."





Figure 4.3: Cycle of paintings with scenes from the life of St. Catherine of Siena. Santa Catalina de Siena, Cuzco. Ca. 1650. Photo: Mercedes Pérez Vidal.

branch of their order.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Arequipa, the independence of these Dominican nuns from the Order of Preachers is clear.

### The Council of Trent and its Impact in America

The Council of Trent legislated on regular religious in its twenty-fifth and final session. The Decree *De regularibus et monialibus* consisted of twenty-one chapters. Six of them made specific reference to nuns (chaps. 5, 7, 9, 10, 17, and 18), on top of the general prescriptions for regulars that we find in the rest of the chapters.<sup>60</sup>

However, as is well known, the implementation and enforcement of the Tridentine decrees varied from place to place, depending on different factors. The support provided by the respective princes and rulers was one of them. For instance, Cosimo de' Medici was somewhat in disagreement with the Tridentine interpretation of enclosure, as he had previously issued, in 1545, a decree, *Reformatio monasteriorum*, more concerned with financial and patrimonial control over nunneries.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, in Spain, these disciplin-

<sup>59</sup> López de Ayala, trans., *El sacrosanto y ecuménico concilio de Trento*, 370.

<sup>60</sup> López de Ayala, trans., *El sacrosanto y ecuménico concilio de Trento*, 360–453.

<sup>61</sup> Evangelisti, “We Do not Have It.”

ary measures posed little novelty, as they continued the line of reforms that began a century earlier and the prevailing policy of Philip II. By a royal decree issued on July 12, 1564, he urged compliance with the Tridentine decrees in all territories under his sovereignty.<sup>62</sup>

Previous historians have argued that the New World was ignored by the Council of Trent and the Spanish crown did little to implement the Tridentine decrees in America. On the contrary, some bishops, like Alonso de Montúfar and Pedro Moya de Contreras in New Spain or Jerónimo de Loaysa, Toribio de Mogrovejo in Peru, were credited with the introduction of these reforms through the provincial councils they convened.<sup>63</sup> Recent studies have shown the different agents involved in these processes and how complicated change could be. Not only metropolitan bishops but the regular clergy, viceroys, and the Spanish Crown all played an active role.<sup>64</sup> The interest of the crown—and in particular Philip II—in the ecclesiastical reforms in America is exemplified in *De la Gobernación* (ca. 1568), a book written by Juan de Ovando (1514–1575) who was responsible for the visitation and reform of the *Consejo de Indias*. It was a paraphrase of the Council of Trent, intending to provide, after assessing the state of the church in America, a basis for provincial councils to be held in the New World.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru showed major differences, due to their differing circumstances. The relationship between the secular and regular clergy, the bishops, and the viceroys and the Spanish crown differed significantly. In New Spain, the secular and regular clergy were clearly in opposition to each other, on the one hand, likewise the bishops and viceroys due to the support the viceroys offered to the mendicants. In the Viceroyalty of Peru, things were quite different, due in large part to its great size. The regular clergy never gained the same importance and influence as in New Spain, and the opposition between viceroys and bishops was less marked.<sup>66</sup> We need further research to offer more nuanced interpretations than previous scholarship and clarify some understudied issues, like the impact of these reforms on nunneries.<sup>67</sup>

In both New Spain and Peru, the first two provincial councils echoed the Tridentine decrees, but only the third was effective and successful, resulting in a legislative corpus that was in force until almost the nineteenth century. The first provincial council of New Spain was celebrated in 1555, when the Council of Trent was still happening, and the second was held in 1565, both being convened by Alonso de Montúfar.<sup>68</sup> In Peru, the

**62** Rodríguez de Ceballos, “Liturgia y configuración del espacio,” 45.

**63** Lundberg, “Unification and Conflict”; Poole, *Pedro Moya de Contreras*; Viforcós Marinas, “Las reformas disciplinares de Trento,” 525.

**64** Martínez López-Cano and Cervantes Bello, eds., *Reformas y resistencias en la Iglesia Novohispana*.

**65** Pérez Puente, “La Reforma regia para el gobierno eclesiástico de las Indias.”

**66** A comparative analysis taking a specific dispute about *diezmos* is in Mazín, “Catedrales versus órdenes religiosas.”

**67** Some exceptions already exist: Viforcós Marinas, “Las reformas disciplinares de Trento”; Salazar de Garza, “Repercusiones arquitectónicas”; Loreto López, “Los conventos de mujeres en Puebla.”

**68** The acts of the first three provincial councils of Mexico were finally published together in 2004, as well as a collection of studies devoted to them: Martínez López-Cano, ed., *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*; Martínez López-Cano and Cervantes Bello, *Los Concilios provinciales en Nueva España*.

first provincial council was celebrated in 1551–1552, and although it had neither pontifical nor royal approval it laid the groundwork for subsequent councils. The second provincial council was convened by Jerónimo de Loaysa and held in 1567 and 1568. Despite its achievements, its provisions quickly fell into abeyance and had nothing to say specifically about nuns. This lack of interest in female monasticism by the two first provincial councils in both Peru and Mexico is easily understandable when we remember there was then only one female foundation in the Viceroyalty of Peru—La Encarnación in Lima—, plus the Madre de Dios, in Mexico City.

The third iterations in both Peru and New Spain did then establish rules for nuns. The third provincial council of Peru was organized by Toribio de Mogrovejo in 1582, and that for Mexico three years later and convened by Pedro Moya de Contreras.<sup>69</sup> The rules adopted by both constituted the basic regulatory body that governed religious life until the nineteenth century. Researchers have focused on the impact of both these councils on mission in the New World, and on the reform of the clergy, but, with a few exceptions, they have ignored female monasticism. However, the third council of Mexico devoted chapter (*título*) 13 of the third book, including twenty-one points to nuns,<sup>70</sup> and the council of Lima devoted four entire chapters to nuns (23 to 26).<sup>71</sup>

### Disputes between the Regular and Secular Clergy

Jurisdiction over nunneries was, in addition to doctrine and tithes (*diezmos*), a major source of friction between the regular and secular clergy, leading in some cases to heated conflicts.<sup>72</sup>

As mentioned above, Trent encouraged the foundation of nunneries under episcopal jurisdiction, but allowing some to be under their respective orders' control. The provincial councils in New Spain and Peru were quite vague in regulating the relationships between episcopal authority and the nunneries. Thus, the heterogeneity of the Middle Ages persisted after Trent. Custom played an important role and led to a flexible interpretation of the life and rights within convents until the second half of the eighteenth century. Whereas some nunneries were founded by bishops—who frequently provided them with specific constitutions<sup>73</sup>—, in other cases episcopal protection was sought by the nuns themselves to escape the friars' control. Conversely, some nunneries sought

**69** Vargas Ugarte, *Concilios limenses*; Martínez López-Cano, *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*.

**70** “De los regulares y las monjas, in Concilio III Provincial Mexicano celebrado en México el año 1585. Aprobación del concilio confirmación del sínodo provincial de México Sixto V, para futura memoria”: Martínez López-Cano, *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*, 178–89.

**71** Viforcós Marinas, “Las reformas disciplinares de Trento.”

**72** As happened for instance in the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina in Quito where jurisdiction over the nunnery was claimed by the friars on the one hand, supported by the Lope Antonio de Munive, president of the *audiencia* in Quito, and by the bishop on the other hand: Viforcós Marinas, “Las reformas disciplinares de Trento,” 530.

**73** For instance, Bishop Bernardo de Alburquerque in Oaxaca, or Fray Agustín de Coruña in San Agustín de Popayán in 1578: Viforcós Marinas, “Las reformas disciplinares,” 532.

to avoid the bishops' jurisdiction in favour of Dominican friars.<sup>74</sup> This only changed through individual intervention by some energetic bishops, like the reformist Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, Bishop of Puebla (1639–1656).<sup>75</sup> He placed all the nuns in Puebla, with the exception of the Poor Clares, under his jurisdiction; he ordered the revision and a new publication of rules and constitutions for all the convents in the Calzadas district.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, he also founded the Dominican nunnery of Santa Inés de Montepulciano, and he wrote specific ordinations and constitutions for it, as well as for the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina di Siena.<sup>77</sup> So even here, Dominican nuns did not follow the constitutions of their own order, but those given by their episcopal prelate.

### Embracing or Imposing Enclosure

The observance of enclosure was an issue inextricably linked to all reform movements during the late medieval centuries, although the results achieved in this regard had not been satisfactory. The Council of Trent legislated on enclosure in an ambiguous and hasty way, leading to considerable controversy in subsequent years regarding the interpretation of those provisions. Clarification of the issue and the adoption of clear and strong measures was the work of Pius V in the constitutions *Circa pastoralis* (May 29, 1566) and *Decori et honestati* (January 24, 1570). In some cases, this meant building physical barriers, as happened in Santo Domingo de Toledo. In this nunnery, probably in the wake of the *Circa pastoralis*, prioress Ana de Duque started in 1566 the rebuilding of the church with a solid wall between it and the nuns' choir [Fig. 4.4]. A similar wall was built in the Dominican nunnery of Medina del Campo. On both walls we can see the coat of arms of Philip II.<sup>78</sup>

However, the implementation of these measures varied from place to place, depending on several factors, and we can distinguish, as Creytens pointed out, "open nunneries" and "closed nunneries," not only before Trent but even after it.<sup>79</sup> In many cases, nuns sought to overcome the increasing constraints of enclosure by negotiating a more flexible interpretation of the rules and maintain their earlier religious practices. Before and after Trent nuns would leave their convents, and outsiders of both sexes were allowed inside the enclosure.<sup>80</sup> Not only priests entered to celebrate masses and processions

<sup>74</sup> Regarding jurisdictional heterogeneity in Dominican nunneries in medieval Castile see Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 62–67.

<sup>75</sup> Álvarez de Toledo, *Politics and Reform in Spain and Viceregal Mexico*.

<sup>76</sup> Loreto López, "Conventos de mujeres en Puebla," 415.

<sup>77</sup> Palafox y Mendoza, *Ordenanzas y Constituciones*. Salazar de Garza, "Repercusiones arquitectónicas," 131–32.

<sup>78</sup> Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 243–45.

<sup>79</sup> Creytens, "La riforma dei monasteri femminili dopo i Decreti Tridentini," 1:46–49.

<sup>80</sup> Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*. As this author has shown, there was a tension between religious reform and the traditional independence and power of Spanish nuns. See also Pérez Vidal, "De linnage mui't' alt."



Figure 4.4: Santo Domingo el Real, Toledo. Wall between the church and nuns' choir, with the arms of Philip II of Spain. Reproduced courtesy of José María Moreno Santiago.



Figure 4.5: Chapter House. Cycle of paintings with penitent saints, Chapter House. Santa Catalina de Siena, Cusco. End of the eighteenth century. Photo: Mercedes Pérez Vidal.

but also some seculars, for certain occasions.<sup>81</sup> Although the reinforcement of enclosure seems to have been closely related to the growth of rituals, paraliturgies, and plays by nuns inside the cloister, reformers and ecclesiastical authorities tried to control this development, especially the performance of profane plays and the presence of lay audiences. Santo Domingo de Toledo had a remarkable chapel of musical nuns but, at certain feastdays—Easter, Christmas, the Assumption of Our Lady, or Corpus Christi—, some lay singers and dancers were hired by the nunnery.<sup>82</sup> In Santo Domingo de Madrid we have documentary evidence of the lay audience participating in plays performed in the nunnery’s church at least in 1562 and before.<sup>83</sup>

**81** Patrons and patronesses and lay people at some feastdays, as happened for instance in Santa María de Medina del Campo, where this was justified as it was a pre-Tridentine “uso antiguo”: López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 29r.

**82** Galán Vera, Martínez Gil, and Peñas Serrano, “La música en los conventos dominicos,” 266.

**83** As we can read in the ordinations for the chapel given by Diego de Castilla, dean of Toledo, on June 2, 1562: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 7297: *Cuaderno de los títulos y ordenaciones de la Capilla del señor Rey Don Pedro*, unfol.

In many cases, apostolic visits provides us with interesting information regarding such performances. For instance, in Mexico, Bishop Payo Enriquez de Rivera forbade the representation of comedies at Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in the wake of his visit there in 1673.<sup>84</sup> In the same way, Melchor de Liñán y Cisneros, who was successively bishop of Popayán (1667–1671), archbishop of La Plata (Charcas) (1675–1676), and Lima (1678–1708), also tried to stop theatrical and profane music performances in female cloisters.<sup>85</sup> Antonio de León, Bishop of Arequipa (1677–1711), banned in 1684 all kinds of performances in both monasteries and nunneries.<sup>86</sup> Finally, the dean and canony of Valladolid (Morelia, Michoacán) addressed a letter to the prioress of the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina on October 30, 1737, urging the observance of enclosure. In particular, he banned performances and receptions anywhere other than in parlours, and he regulated the entry of men into the nunnery.<sup>87</sup> Such details are important for the study of liturgical, paraliturgical, and theatrical performance, but also for art historians, as they help us understand the functionality and meaning of monastic spaces.

Another important question concerning enclosure was the so-called *vida particular*. Since the Middle Ages, some nuns lived in their own cells, even sharing them with girls, corrodians, or some relatives. Subsequent reform movements tried to end this practice and encouraged return to “common life,” but they rarely succeeded. As we will see in the following section, this had consequences for the layout of nunneries. In New Spain only the reforms fostered by Fabián y Fuero and Lorenzana in the last third of the eighteenth century tried firmly, even violently, to end this practice, by building spaces for the common life inside the nunneries.<sup>88</sup>

### Art and Reform: The Role of Women

Whereas the impact of reforms imposed by friars or bishops on monastic architecture is well known, the role of women in this, as well as the likely impact of monastic reform on visual arts have not been properly studied in these territories.<sup>89</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, the chapter house of Santa Catalina de Siena in Cuzco was decorated, probably by Tadeo Escalante, with a cycle of painting in which penitent saints occupied a prominent place. Although the meaning of such a program and its relation to the functionality of the chapter house must still be deciphered, its relationship with the late eighteenth century Bourbon reforms and a return to the austerity of the early order seems clear [Fig. 4.5].<sup>90</sup>

**84** Pérez Puente, Oropeza Tena, and Saldaña Solís, *Autos de las visitas del arzobispo fray Payo Enriquez*, 38–39.

**85** Vargas Ugarte, “Un archivo de música en la ciudad de Cuzco.”

**86** *Constituciones sinodales*, chap. 20.

**87** Sigaut, “Azucenas entre espinas,” 202. In this case, it is worth noting the support and control exerted by the cathedral canons over this nunnery, which was clearly depicted in a painting commemorating the nuns’ move to their new convent on May 3, 1738.

**88** Salazar de Garza, “Repercusiones arquitectónicas”; Zahino Peñafort, *El cardenal Lorenzana*.

**89** Regarding Spain see Diana Lucía, “Religiosidad femenina y reforma.”

**90** Pérez Vidal, “Arte y patrimonio de las dominicas.”

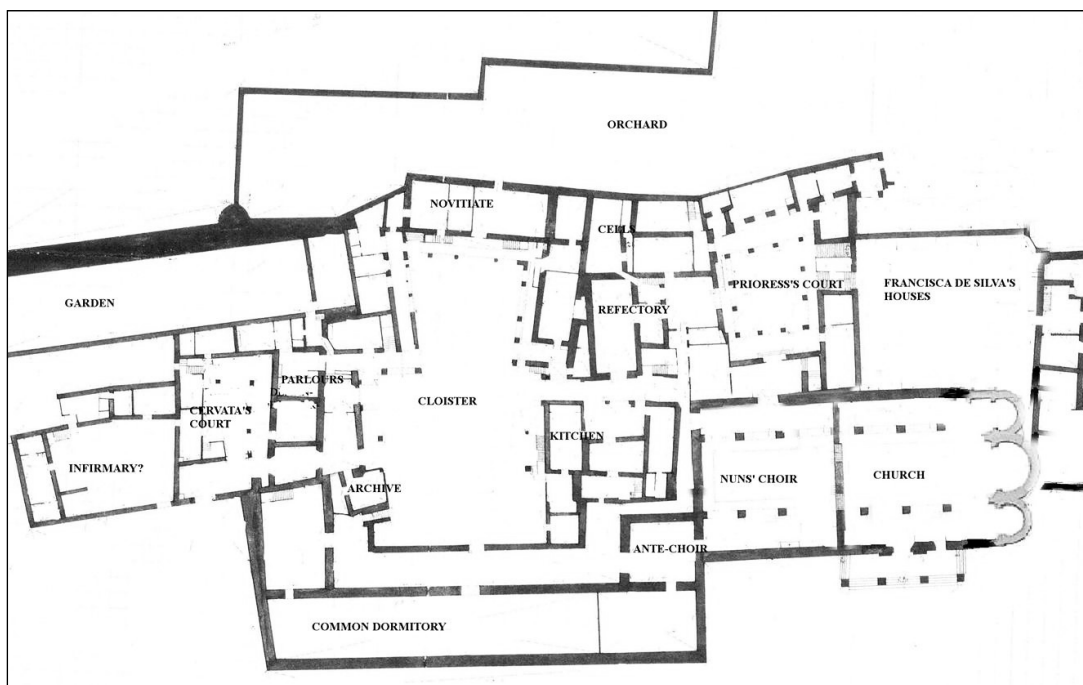


Figure 4.6: Plan of Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Author's reconstruction based on the ground plan of the Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, 1881.

As we have just seen, Observant reform advocated a return to common dormitories. A large dormitory and refectory were built in Santo Domingo de Toledo at the beginning of the sixteenth century,<sup>91</sup> but it was apparently only in use for a few years, since by the end of this century some cells were being repaired, and others of large dimensions were being built.<sup>92</sup> In New Spain, this practice flourished between 1640 and 1760, when many individual cells—paid by individual nuns and their relatives—were built inside nunneries, and reformist bishops even encouraged it. This was the case with the Archbishop of Mexico, fray Payo Enríquez de Rivera, who in 1672 ordered new administrative measures to better manage increasingly crowded convents. They encouraged and approved something that had become common practice: the multiplication of family spaces, where the presence of girls and laywomen was frequent.<sup>93</sup> This led to chaotic,

<sup>91</sup> The common dormitory was built between 1507 and 1508, and in 1522 the nuns had already been transferred to it, as a letter to the Master General of the Order shows, in which they pleaded not to be forced to accept young girls, as they had no more individual cells: Toledo, Archive of Santo Domingo, doc. 571: *Exposición y súplica de la comunidad de Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo*.

<sup>92</sup> Subsequent repairs are recorded in the books of the nunnery, through till the eighteenth century: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 15144: *Gasto General de maravedís*.

<sup>93</sup> Lavrín, "Ecclesiastical Reform of Nunneries in New Spain"; Gonzalbo, *Las mujeres en la Nueva España*.



unplanned growth of monastic enclosures, as happened for instance in San Jerónimo in Mexico, whose area for private cells grew exorbitantly in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>94</sup> Although it has been not properly considered by Latin American scholars, this had been commonplace in medieval Spanish nunneries, a good example being Toledo [Fig. 4.6].<sup>95</sup> These practices were resumed or continued through till the nineteenth century. We must just remember, for instance, the cell built by Manuel Tolsá ca. 1803 for the Marques de Selva Nevada in the nunnery of Regina Coeli, in Mexico.<sup>96</sup> We have seen some nuns were quite rebellious and ignore prelates and councils repeatedly banning these and other practices.

Commissioning works of art was another way nuns expressed power and independence. Although the third Mexican council established that nuns and abbesses could not rent property or build their own without the consent of their superior, we know of nuns disobeying, like Sor María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio (1695–1756). As Cristina Ratto has recently pointed out, she probably took part in designing the decorative program of the nun's choir in her convent.<sup>97</sup> As the previous example of Constanza de Castilla shows, a powerful prioress could play a prominent role in shaping the devotional and liturgical practices in her nunnery. Known as “the other Mexican muse” she was one of the most important unsung women writers of Mexico's colonial past. She wrote prolifically and stands alongside Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the celebrated seventeenth-century Mexican poet, playwright, and nun, as a colonial woman writer who was published during her own lifetime. Her writings include constitutions for her convent, spiritual guidebooks for nuns, and four mystical theological treatises. Moreover, Sor María Anna managed to get her nunnery a direct dependence of the Holy See, with privileges “that were usually only granted to a consecrated abbess.” For instance, her biographer narrated with astonishment how she was authorized to wear a cope in the Divine Office on solemn festivities.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusions

The complexity and variety of the different reform movements and their impact in female nunneries, and specifically in Dominican nunneries, in Spain and the Americas, deserve more studies. However, this article has shown that many assumptions of traditional historiography need revising. First, we must pay closer attention to regional and local circumstances, since these determined the success or otherwise of the attempted reforms. Second, we must acknowledge the different agents involved—bishops and secular clergy, Dominican friars and nuns, secular patronesses and patrons, the Spanish Monarchs, and so on—, and the different weight they had in each territory and each nunnery. Only then can we provide a broader, comparative picture.

**94** Ratto, “El convento de San Jerónimo.”

**95** Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*.

**96** Muriel and Grobet, *Fundaciones neoclásicas*.

**97** Ratto, “La glorificación de María como Madre de Dios.”

**98** Bellido, *Vida de la V.M.R.M María Anna Águeda*, 95–96.

The reform of Dominican nunneries in Spain started earlier than previously thought, with the first attempts at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and different agents and forces were involved. Accordingly, we must reassess the role of women, both nuns and patronesses, not only in Spain but also, later, in the New World. A gendered approach—absent so far in both Spain and Latin America—is needed to study these processes of reform, as well as in the consequences of reforms in art and architecture.

The *uniformitas* that the Dominicans aspired to was not achieved through their late medieval reforms, nor in the wake of the Council of Trent, but a great diversity persisted during the Early Modern period, particularly in the distant territories of the Spanish Empire.

Bishops influenced by Cisneros's reforms founded the first nunneries in New Spain. Episcopal jurisdiction over nunneries was reinforced by Trent and by the provincial councils in America, especially the third provincial councils in Mexico and Peru. However, the interpretation of the Tridentine decrees varied widely from place to place, and custom remained important. Many nunneries were placed under episcopal jurisdiction, something that was not unusual during the Middle Ages, but seems to have been far more frequent in early modern America. Nevertheless, some nunneries rejected bishops' control, and even managed to become direct dependences of the Holy See. In many cases, nuns and prioresses played a key role in finding a particular solution, often facing strong opposition.

Lastly, although this was not a central issue either for late medieval reformers or the Council of Trent, their reforms had consequences for architecture—building walls, barriers, new spaces, and new uses of older spaces—as well as in the visual arts. Nuns developed rituals and performances, and they commissioned artworks and paintings, often breaking official prohibitions. In these ways, they expressed their own personality and creativity but both art and liturgy were used as a vehicle of power.

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## Chapter 5

# TRANSATLANTIC CIRCULATION OF OBJECTS, BOOKS, AND IDEAS IN MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MEXICAN NUNNERIES

DORIS BIEŃKO DE PERALTA

IN THE LATE sixteenth century, Agustina de Santa Clara, a Dominican nun from the convent of Puebla de los Ángeles in New Spain, claimed that she had a vision of Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582). While she was in ecstasy, the Carmelite future saint appeared to Agustina “in a very green and delightful meadow where there were lots of herons, among which she had seen Mother Teresa of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to know exactly how this nun had heard of Teresa. Perhaps news had arrived via some printed book or manuscript, or through word of mouth; or perhaps through some contact with the Carmelite friars, who had been present in Puebla since 1586. We could even hypothesize that she had heard about Teresa through the priest Juan Plata, the Dominicans’ confessor, who came from Toledo to New Spain in 1585.<sup>2</sup>

Agustina’s visions are unusual in content because we know no other mention of Teresa of Ávila being associated with “a green meadow with herons,” but this may be because it is such an early depiction of Teresa.<sup>3</sup> This may be why we do not find typical features of the Carmelite saint in Agustina’s visions (for example, the transverberation scene with the angel piercing her heart with an arrow). It is almost certain that images showing Teresa of Ávila were unknown at that time in New Spain.<sup>4</sup> What is more, we know this may not be an orthodox source, because of Agustina’s persecution in 1598 as a heretical *alumbada* (illuminated mystic). Nevertheless, her vision of “Mother Teresa”

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**1** Inquisition trial of Agustina de Santa Clara, 1598: Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación, Inquisición, vol. 180, exp. 2, fol. 213.

**2** The inquisition trials of Agustina de Santa Clara and her confessor Juan Plata have been analyzed by Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados*, 3:637–91.

**3** This vision is probably an allusion to Paradise. The heron was a symbol of perfection since “perfect males are like the heron”: Francisco Marcuello, *Primera parte de la historia natural* (1617), 102. I would like to thank Mayela Flores Enríquez for this reference.

**4** Bieńko de Peralta, “Madre y Escritora.”

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**Doris Bieńko de Peralta** (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico) gained her PhD in 2015 in History and Ethnohistory from the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico. After a period as assistant professor of medieval history at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (2001–2004), she then became professor of colonial history there. She is active in various scholarly societies: the Grupo de Estudios sobre la Mujer en España y las Américas (pre-1800) (GEMELA), the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), and the Sociedad Mexicana de Bibliófilos (CONDUMEX).

indicates that references to the future saint in the *creole* imagination appeared very early, even before her beatification in 1614.

This example offers a glimpse of just how fluid the spread of representations and practices was in the Spanish empire at that time. Thanks to the circulation of people, artistic objects, books, and ideas, the inhabitants of the viceroyalty were intensely involved in the culture of the empire; and the nunneries, although subject to the vow of strict enclosure, were also deeply engaged in transatlantic communication.<sup>5</sup> These forms of communication have special importance if we take into account the specific features of female monastic foundations. It is worth bearing in mind here that, during the sixteenth century and through till the mid-seventeenth, no nunnery in Mexico was founded directly by nuns from Spain.

The first female monastery in New Spain and the Americas, La Concepción, was founded in Mexico City around 1540 and it had its origins in a *beaterio* called Madre de Dios run by various secular women who had not taken permanent vows.<sup>6</sup> Its creation came about thanks to the petitions of fray Juan de Zumárraga (1468–1548), bishop and later archbishop of Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Between 1531 and 1536, various retreat houses were founded in Mexico City and in nearby villages in the hope of evangelizing the indigenous girls and providing a Christian education to the daughters of “Indian” nobility, so called “cacique Indians.”<sup>8</sup> Setting up schools of primary education for indigenous girls soon failed, since, according to the words of Zumárraga himself, the indigenous men refused to marry the graduates. This was because the Christian, Spanish form of education the young women received “taught them to be idle, and they thought little of their husbands nor did they want to serve them”; this contrasted with native ideals under which women should “provide for” their husbands.<sup>9</sup> So, the Mexico City retreat house under the tutelage of secular women gradually turned into a convent of the Order of the Immaculate Conception. Although the first profession of vows in this convent occurred in 1541, the official confirmation of its founding was only issued by Pope Gregory XIII until 1578.<sup>10</sup>

Later monasteries were founded in the same manner, or were started by nuns from other Mexican convents, even if they came from another religious order. For example, in Mexico City Conceptionist nuns founded both Hieronymite and Discalced Carmelite con-

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**5** For the relevance of these cultural contacts, see Rodríguez Moya, Fernández Valle, and López Calderón, eds., *Arte y Patrimonio en Iberoamérica*. Also see comparative studies from a transatlantic perspective: Vollendorf and Wray, “Gender in the Atlantic World” and Díaz and Kirk, “Theorizing Transatlantic Women’s Writing.”

**6** The foundation of this convent is traditionally designated as 1540: Amerlinck de Corsi and Ramos Medina, *Conventos de monjas*, 31–32. Also Martínez Cuesta, “Las monjas en la América Colonial,” 575–76.

**7** Amerlinck de Corsi, “Los primeros beaterios novohispanos.” See also Pérez Vidal’s article in this volume.

**8** Barreto Ávila, “Beatas medievales educando princesas nahuas,” 37–38.

**9** Juan de Zumárraga, “Carta de 2 de junio de 1544,” in García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan Zumárraga* (1947), 176.

**10** Amerlinck de Corsi and Ramos Medina, *Conventos de monjas*, 32. See also the article by Pérez Vidal in this volume.

vents in 1585 and 1615 in turn. Although initially the intention of such institutions was to provide an education for indigenous girls, they were soon transformed into a shelter for the daughters of conquistadors. Only Spanish women, *creoles*, and a few *mestizas* professed as nuns during the first two centuries after the Spanish conquest.<sup>11</sup> The *mestiza* descendants of Emperor Moctezuma took their vows in the Conceptionist convent in Mexico City.

By contrast, during the first two centuries of the colonial era, indigenous women were excluded from participating in convent life as professed nuns; they could only enter those institutions as servants. We know of one exception. An “Indian” from the nobility, Luisa de Tapia, granddaughter of El Conín, an Otomi chief who helped the Spanish in the conquest, founded the Santa Clara Convent of Querétaro (1607) and entered as a black-veiled nun. She even went on to become abbess of a convent where both *creole* and Spanish women could profess.<sup>12</sup> Aside from that exception, it was not until 1724 that the first convent for “Indian” nobility was founded in Mexico City, following the First Rule of St. Clare. More convents were then founded in Antequera (now Oaxaca) and Valladolid (now Morelia).

Despite restricting the possibility of being a nun to women of Spanish origin, in the first century after the conquest numerous convents were founded. By the mid-seventeenth century in New Spain, five religious orders—Conceptionist, Dominican, Poor Clare (Franciscan), Hieronymite, and Discalced Carmelite—had founded twenty-nine convents, all of them originating from a *beaterio* or some pre-existing house in New Spain.<sup>13</sup> Professed nuns from Spain had almost no influence on the foundation of Mexican female monasteries before the mid-seventeenth century.

It was not until 1665 that Spanish Capuchin nuns from Toledo arrived in Mexico for the first time.<sup>14</sup> However, there was one previous episode of contact with Iberian nuns. In 1620, Jerónima de la Asunción (1555–1630), from the reformed branch of the Poor Clares, passed through Mexican territory with her sisters, making a stopover during her trip; her purpose was to found a convent in the Philippines.<sup>15</sup> Her opinion of the nuns of New Spain was not entirely favourable. We know this because on the way from the port of Veracruz to Mexico City, the Spanish nuns intentionally avoided staying at the monastery of their order in Puebla, where their *creole* sisters had prepared a recep-

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**11** The exclusion of indigenous women from religious life has been analyzed by Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, 33–40.

**12** It is worth noting that Luisa de Tapia, who, together with her father, had the right to choose three *capellanas* to enter the convent without a dowry, imposed the condition that these be Spanish and not indigenous: Ramírez Montes, *Niñas, doncellas, vírgenes eternas*, 53–55.

**13** By the end of the colonial era in New Spain, fifty-eight convents had been founded. So, by the mid-seventeenth century, half already existed. Aside from the previously mentioned orders, Capuchin, Augustinian Recollect, Bridgettine, and Order of Mary convents were founded at later dates.

**14** In the mid-eighteenth century, nuns arrived directly from Spain to Mexico: the Bridgettine Order in 1743 and the Order of Mary in 1753. In total, only three orders sent professed nuns from Spain to New Spain to found convents.

**15** Bieñko de Peralta, “Los impresos novohispanos,” 216–19.

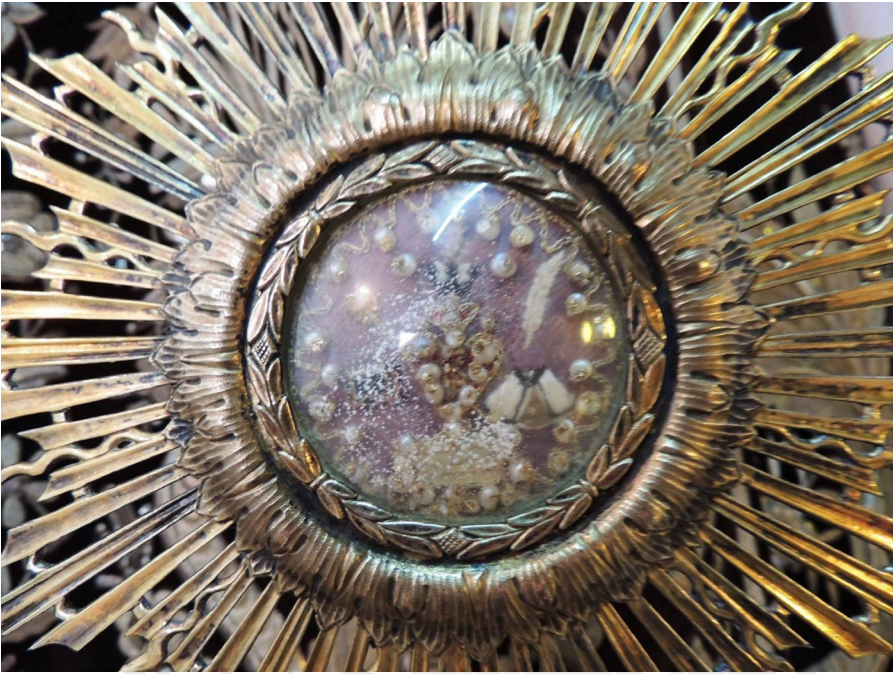


Figure 5.1: Reliquary containing a piece of St. Teresa's flesh. Private Collection of the Carmelite Nunnery, Puebla, Mexico. Unless otherwise indicated, all images in this chapter are reproduced courtesy of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City.

tion for them.<sup>16</sup> After arriving at the capital, Jerónima and her nuns chose to stay in the monastery of Santa Isabel for half a year, even though there were two other Capuchin monasteries there (Santa Clara and San Juan de la Penitencia). This decision might be explained by the assumption that the nuns from the convent of Santa Isabel were more austere, while the others were considered “spoiled” or “relaxed.” That opinion reflects the Spaniards’ longstanding belief that the climate of New Spain largely determined the characteristics of all its inhabitants, including those of European ancestry. Before leaving New Spain to continue their journey to the Philippines, Jerónima and her nuns spent a mere three days in each of the other two monasteries, an unobvious signal, if we read between the lines, of the attitude of the Spaniards towards the *creoles*.<sup>17</sup>

Almost half a century later, Capuchin nuns from Toledo, who arrived in the Americas in 1665, also sometimes complained about the Iberian Spaniards in the New World and their descendants, the *creole*, in their letters to Spain.<sup>18</sup> Apart from these two examples, there is no other evidence in the sixteenth or seventeenth century of any direct contact

<sup>16</sup> Letona, *Perfecta religiosa*, fol. 29v.

<sup>17</sup> Letona, *Perfecta religiosa*, fol. 41r.

<sup>18</sup> Alba González, “Presencia de América en Toledo,” 191–94.

between *creole* and Spanish nuns. And of course, we may assume there was some friction and antagonism between them.

The situation was very different in the male orders. Here the first friars were always sent directly from Spain to implement foundations. Furthermore, *creole* friars could travel to Spain as representatives of their order. In male communities there was constant exchange with the arrival of new friars from Europe. Disputes over leadership arose between Spaniards and *creoles*, and the authorities had to implement “alternating” or rotation of offices between the two groups.<sup>19</sup> This situation did not occur in women’s communities: nuns were almost entirely *creole*, and only a few Spaniards who came to the New World with their families ever took the vow. Due to the large number of *creole* nuns no opposing factions between *creoles* and Spaniards formed.

These peculiarities—the absence of a direct link with Spanish nunneries and the lack of any transatlantic intermingling—hindered the transmission and reproduction of charisma and specific practices of various orders. Although the lack of direct contact with Spain caused a rapid creolization of female monastic communities, multiple ties with Europe remained. This was due to the circulation of printed books, manuscripts, images, and relics, as well as oral transmission which often involved preachers or friars from the nuns’ own order. Various sources provide samples of this deep interaction.

The Carmelite nuns of Puebla, whose convent was founded in 1604, still possess a small piece of St. Teresa’s flesh, a relic that arrived from Spain in 1615 [Fig. 5.1], even before her canonization (in 1622). Aside from the evident devotional aspect, because it had to do with a relic of the order’s reformer and a future saint, possessing it legitimized their own order while offering a link to its female branch in Spain. According to chronicles it was sent by their Propositus General, Fr. José de Jesús María.

Some of the nuns experienced visions from the moment they contemplated this relic. The Carmelite chronicler, Agustín de la Madre de Dios, affirms that this piece of flesh was from St. Teresa’s heart; this is how he described those experiences:

It is this heart that is like a window to the sky, since because of it one contemplates and distinguishes things of glory. One should also notice that these representations or visions, images, or figures, that in this part of the heart of glorious Teresa so many good and religious witnesses saw, were not like those of a paintbrush that can be seen in painting but were of bas relief as if printed with a seal, and it is certain that with a seal they were imprinted, and that it was Christ’s seal.<sup>20</sup>

Occasionally the reliquary was shared with other nunneries in Puebla, a situation described by the Conceptionist nun, Agustina de Santa Teresa, who wrote that in 1632 they had an opportunity to contemplate St. Teresa’s flesh.<sup>21</sup>

Around that time, the convent of the Discalced Carmelites in Mexico City also had access to another relic with the “flesh of Our Holy Mother Teresa de Jesús,” thanks to viceroyn doña María Ana Riederer de Paar, Marchioness of Guadalcazar. The relic

<sup>19</sup> Rubial García, “Votos pactados,” 53–55.

<sup>20</sup> Agustín de la Madre de Dios, *Tesoro Escondido*, ed. Báez Macías, 316.

<sup>21</sup> Archivo Segreto Vaticano, Congregazione dei Riti, Processus, vol. 46: Agustina de Santa Teresa, *Vida de la venerable madre María de Jesús ...*, fols. 182 and 193.

was also considered to have miraculous qualities. On one occasion, one of the convent founders, Sister Inés de la Cruz, became gravely ill. Her *creole* companion, Mariana de la Encarnación, stole a tiny part of the relic of St. Teresa's flesh and put it in a drink she served to the sick nun. The effect was almost immediate. Inés fell asleep "for about four or five Creeds" and then woke up completely cured.<sup>22</sup>

More evidence of transatlantic ties and the circulation of artistic objects from Spain to Mexico before the mid-seventeenth century involves our aforementioned Conceptionist nuns in Puebla. One of them, María de Jesús Tomellín (ca. 1582–1637), requested from her sister, doña Isabel de Campos Tomellín, who was living in Seville, an image of the infant Jesus, elaborated by the "best artisan." While the sculpture was being made in Spain, the nun performed various spiritual exercises in her Puebla convent, "asking Our Lord God that the image be very perfect and devout."<sup>23</sup> Once the small sculpture arrived, it was placed in the arms of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and nicknamed "Niño Gachupín" due to its peninsular origin.

Sometimes communication with Spain was even less conventional. Fray Agustín de Vetancurt states that Sr. Luisa de Santa Catalina (ca. 1594–1642), from the Poor Clares convent of Puebla, had "spiritual meetings" with her Spanish contemporary, the famous nun of Carrión, Abbess Luisa de Ascensión (1565–1635).<sup>24</sup> Communication by spirit and by bilocation was then considered possible, strange though it seems today.<sup>25</sup> Similar beliefs are reflected in the chronicles of the Carmelite nuns of Puebla. Their convent, founded in 1604 out of a *beaterio*, was the first female Carmelite house in the Americas. In the manuscripts of the first generation of nuns, it is said that they could not wear the coif properly, because they lacked the knowledge how it was done. According to chronicles, the situation required the intervention of the spirit of St. Teresa of Ávila, who appeared to Ana de San Alberto, Carmelite prioress of Caravaca in Spain, and suggested that she send a sample of a coif to the nuns of Puebla. On the first journey the object was lost, but the Spanish nuns sent a coif a second time, along with a letter describing the apparition.<sup>26</sup> This last anecdote illustrates the daily problems *creole* women communities faced in their attempt to accurately recreate Western monastic models.

While general regulations of individual behaviour and communal organization were outlined in the Rule and the Constitutions of the Order, many aspects of daily life, like the coif, were not detailed enough, and this led to misunderstandings. In areas which lacked written regulations, the *creoles* often inserted their own customs. The *creole* nuns reproduced practices learned in their families, like the tradition of drinking chocolate or atole

<sup>22</sup> Mariana de la Encarnación, *Relación de la fundación del Convento antiguo*, ed. Ramírez and Llanos, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Archivo Segreto Vaticano, Congregazione dei Riti, Processus, 131, vol. 50: Testimony of Isabel de San Matías, 1691.

<sup>24</sup> Agustín de Vetancurt, "Menologio franciscano de los varones más señalados," in *Crónica* (1697), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Tar, "Flying through the Empire."

<sup>26</sup> Agustín de la Madre de Dios, *Tesoro Escondido*, ed. Báez Macías, 315. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 153–54.

(cornmeal), something criticized by the small number of Spaniards in the Mexican nunneries.<sup>27</sup>

Exceptions were made. For example, the Discalced Carmelites could not have enslaved women due to the austere nature of their Rule; but with the permission of the bishop, the Carmelites of Puebla were allowed to have a couple of female “black slaves” brought directly from Africa.<sup>28</sup> A similar situation happened in a Discalced Carmelite convent in Mexico City where, in 1636, a black enslaved woman called Lucrecia was bought. In addition, the nuns had a male slave.<sup>29</sup> While in some orders, like the Conceptionists or the Hieronymites, nuns were allowed personal enslaved servants, the most austere orders should not have copied that custom. In the case of the Carmelites, evidence indicates that the enslaved people belonged to the community. Perhaps for that reason the authorities did not consider it as contravening the rule. Female monasteries were partially a reflection of their society and could not fully escape its influence. Despite these local circumstances, the *creole* nuns were self-proclaimed heiresses of the Spanish communities.

In the absence of direct interaction, cultural transmission of Western European models of monastic life had to be through letters, printed books and manuscripts, objects and images that were brought or reproduced from the Old World, and the advice of people who had had contact with Spanish nuns. The role of monks and priests, as a source of information about Iberian religious women must have undoubtedly been significant. But we know about influence from elsewhere, for example from the viceregal court. The previously mentioned Marchioness of Guadalcázar, doña María Ana Riederer de Paar, since the time she lived in Spain, was fond of the Carmelite Order and had even spent time with Spanish nuns. When she arrived in Mexico City, she supported the Conceptionist religious women who were in the process of founding a Carmelite convent. The marchioness helped its creation in 1615; she attended the ceremony of the taking of habits, and she became an assiduous visitor, particularly because it was very close to the viceregal palace. She even took on the role of prioress during the first months because, as the *creole* nuns confirmed, she had direct experience of Spanish Carmelite life: “The marchioness came in every third day to act as prioress, examining our clothes, coif, habits, and the bedding, because she had been in one of our Spanish Carmelite convents before.”<sup>30</sup>

Few means of communication leave traces in sources. For this reason I shall focus on the most tangible aspect of this transatlantic dialogue: the presence of books about European nuns in New Spain’s nunneries and their reception among *creole* religious

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**27** Mariana de la Encarnación, *Relación de la fundación del Convento antiguo*, ed. Ramírez and Llanos, 20. Alba González, “Presencia de América en Toledo,” 191. Ramos Medina, *Místicas y descalzas*, 274. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 190.

**28** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 308–21.

**29** Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación, Indiferente Virreinal, exp. 4, caja 6267: *Libro de gasto de las carmelitas descalzas del convento de San José de la ciudad de México 1635–1664*, fol. 43. I am grateful for this information provided by Silvia Patricia Olgún Rodríguez.

**30** Mariana de la Encarnación, *Relación de la fundación del Convento antiguo*, ed. Ramírez and Llanos, 123.

women. We can see their influence in their writings, the oldest of which are from the first half of the seventeenth century. From these manuscripts we know that *creole* nuns were devoted to women like St. Teresa, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Clare of Assisi, St. Lutgarde, or Juana de la Cruz, who was also known as St. Juana, despite never being canonized.<sup>31</sup>

Let me focus on nuns as writers whose printed works circulated during that time in New Spain. St. Teresa of Jesus, better known as Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), was the most influential model for Spanish and *creole* nuns. The dissemination of her works in print (from the first publication in 1588) presumably made her the more influential, later reinforced by her growing popularity, thanks to her early beatification (1614) and swift canonization (1622). The great promotion of St. Teresa can be partly explained by the fact that, until then, the Spanish Empire did not have a holy woman of Spanish origin, except for some martyrs from Early Christianity or from the initial Muslim presence on the peninsula. Her popularity was such that there was even an attempt to proclaim her as patroness of Spain, alongside the apostle St. James, an idea that, at the time, caused great controversy.<sup>32</sup>

The dissemination of Teresa's works in Europe and in Latin America was related to the spread of Carmelite reform. But Teresa of Ávila became a model for nuns broadly, beyond simply the Carmelite sphere. Teresa's writings, among them her *Life*, were circulated and read, both in print and in manuscript copies. Female readers from Mexico, as we learn from their memoirs, were directly inspired by her writings to found the first American Carmelite convent.<sup>33</sup>

In nuns' manuscripts from the seventeenth century, not just among Carmelites, St. Teresa is often referred to as a model writer, reformer, and mystic. We find many allusions to her in descriptions of nuns' visions, in which she is represented with a book, quill-pen, and ink reservoir in the act of writing her own books, or a "book of the lives" of the very same colonial nuns, almost as if the saint were their secretary. An example is the visions of María de Jesús Tomellín (ca. 1582–1637), a Conceptionist nun, told by her friend, Agustina de Santa Teresa (ca. 1601–1668).<sup>34</sup> These depictions lend legitimacy to the practices of colonial nuns. The image of Teresa as writer is also found in colonial paintings, almost as frequently as the scene of transverberation, sometimes even combining two scenes into one, as in an anonymous colonial-era picture from the Carmelite nuns' private collection [Fig. 5.2].

Thanks to the profuse circulation of her books in the Iberian world, the Teresian ideal quickly became an important marker for women writers. The nuns and lay *beatas* incorporated her experiences into their own lives, and took Teresa's writings as a stylistic ideal. This shows that the spread of autobiographical writings in New Spain, in the first half of the seventeenth century, was stimulated by the circulation of Teresa's writ-

31 Bieńko de Peralta, "Voces del claustro," 166–72.

32 Rowe, *Saint and Nation*, 77–106.

33 Bieńko de Peralta, "Madre y Escritora," 103.

34 Agustina de Santa Teresa, "Vida de la venerable madre María de Jesús," fols. 198–99. Also Bieńko de Peralta, "Madre y Escritora," 113.



Figure 5.2: Anonymous, *Transverberation (or Ecstasy or Piercing) of St. Teresa*. Oil on canvas, eighteenth century. Private Collection, Carmelite Nunnery, Puebla, Mexico.

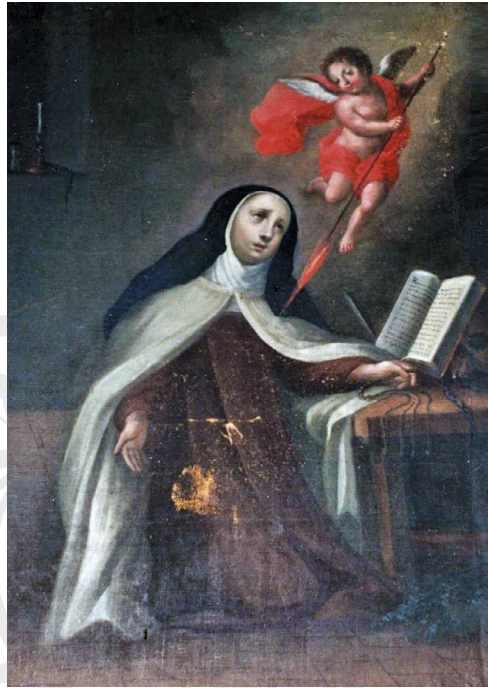


Figure 5.3: Anonymous, *St. Gertrude Nursing the Baby Jesus* (detail). Oil on canvas, eighteenth century. Parish of Soledad, Mexico City.

Figure 5.4: Juan de Villegas and Pedro Rafael Salazar, *St. Gertrude Nursing the Baby Jesus* (detail). Oil on canvas, eighteenth century. Parish of San Martín Texmelucan, Puebla, Mexico.



Figure 5.5: Possibly Andres Lagarto, *Nun's Shield Showing the Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Francis, St. Gertrude, and St. Catherine*. Watercolour on vellum, tortoiseshell frame, early seventeenth century. Private Collection, Puebla, Mexico.

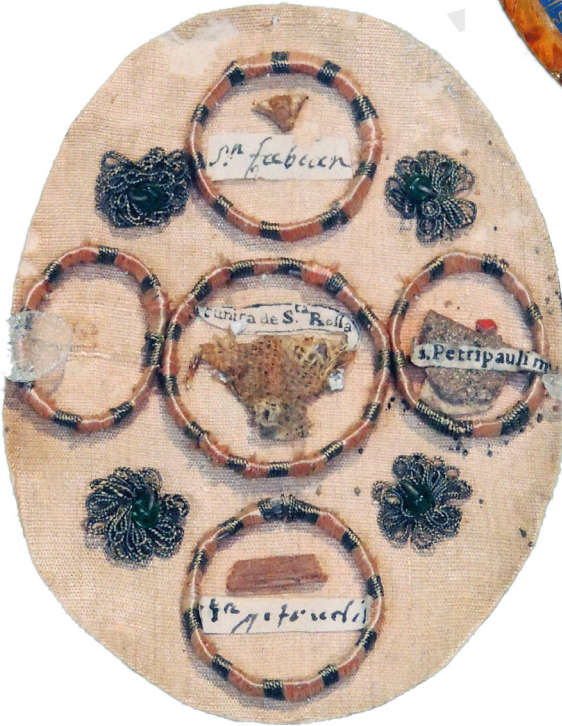


Figure 5.6: Reliquary of saints Fabiana (top), Perpetua, Rosa de Lima, and Gertrude (bottom). Probably eighteenth century. Museo de Arte Religioso Ex Convento de Santa Mónica, Puebla, Mexico.



Figure 5.7: Miguel Cabrera, *St. Gertrude (Santa Gertrudis)*. Oil on canvas, 1763, 43½ × 34¾ inches (110 × 88 cm). Gift of Laura and Daniel D. Boeckman in honour of Dr. William Rudolph, Dallas Museum of Art, 2006.37.

ings. However, hers was not the only autobiographical work widely referenced in New Spain at that time.

Another important model for colonial nuns was St. Gertrude the Great, also known as Gertrude of Helfta, a German Benedictine nun from the thirteenth century. The first Spanish translation of Gertrude's writings came to light at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>35</sup> Although little known in Northern Europe at that time, she became important in Spain due to links with Teresa of Ávila. In the prologue to the Spanish edition of Gertrude's works, Teresa is mentioned several times. In one reference, Teresa is strongly linked to Gertrude because of their shared experience of transverberation. References to Teresa in Gertrude's book helped to remove suspicions of heterodoxy from Teresa's reputation and accelerate her canonization. Echoes of their association survived in eighteenth-century colonial paintings in which they appear together.<sup>36</sup>

Gertrude of Helfta was reinvented in Spain and its colonies as the counterpoint of Martin Luther, simply because Spanish biographers inaccurately assigned both of them the same birthplace (Eisleben in the Harz mountains of Saxony). In addition, she got conflated with Gertrude of Hackeborn, which was reflected in her being representing as the ideal abbess and a sister of St. Mechtilde of Hackeborn.<sup>37</sup>

In New Spain the popular belief in the sanctity of Gertrude was so great that preachers of the time regarded her as second only to the Virgin Mary. Some went so far as to claim that, if Jesus had not been born from the Virgin Mary, God would have chosen Gertrude to be Jesus' mother. For this reason, we find depictions of the German nun nursing the Baby Jesus [Figs 5.3 and 5.4]. In the sources we find descriptions in which Gertrude becomes pregnant for a few days and she gives birth to Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

From a very early date, Gertrude was widely known among the Carmelites, the Conceptionists, and the Hieronymites.<sup>39</sup> We even have an image of her dating from the second decade of the seventeenth century [Fig. 5.5]. It is an example of an "imagen de pecho," or alternatively a "nun's shield" (a circular plaque worn on the chest by some Mexican female orders), possibly painted by Andrés Lagarto and belonging to Francisca de los Reyes according to the inscription on the back.<sup>40</sup> Gertrude, clothed in a black Benedictine habit, appears together with the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine, St. Francis, and St. Joseph. She is holding a shepherd's crook and a palm, and inside her heart we can see the Baby Jesus, an allusion to her mystical pregnancy.

Gertrude's reappropriation by the colonial nuns is present in both heterodox and orthodox imaginations. We know this from inquisitorial inquiries from 1615 against Juana de Espíritu Santo, a Carmelite novice from Puebla. She was denounced because of

**35** For a discussion about the Spanish translation and circulation of Gertrude's writings, see Carvalho, *Gertrudes de Helfta e Espanha*.

**36** Rubial García and Bieñko de Peralta, "La más amada de Cristo," 7–10.

**37** Carvalho, *Gertrudes de Helfta e Espanha*, 38. Rubial García and Bieñko de Peralta, "Santa Gertrudis la Magna," 111–12.

**38** Rubial García and Bieñko de Peralta, "La más amada de Cristo," 22–26.

**39** Rubial García and Bieñko de Peralta, "Santa Gertrudis la Magna," 120–23.

**40** Tovar de Teresa, *Un rescate de la fantasía*, 176–77.

her frequent visions and ecstasies. In one of them, she experienced a mystical marriage with Jesus; St. Gertrude and St. Teresa were her godmothers. The German nun placed several rings onto Juana's fingers, a symbol of matrimony.<sup>41</sup> This description clearly links Teresa and Gertrude, as we have just seen in various paintings and documents.

At around the same period, we find yet another mention of Gertrude in the autobiography of Sor María Magdalena Lorravaquio (1575–1636), a Hieronymite nun from the San Jerónimo monastery in Mexico City. In one of her numerous visions, she saw “the glorious Saint Gertrude” as a celestial intercessor attempting to obtain forgiveness for the sinners of the world.<sup>42</sup> Also, among Conceptionist nuns, her role as mediator and model was stressed. We can see this in writings concerning the previously mentioned María de Jesús Tomellín from Puebla. In these documents she encourages other nuns to read Gertrude's works.<sup>43</sup> Documentation from the same convent tells us that the nuns there possessed a relic of St. Gertrude. We also know the nuns celebrated St. Gertrude and St. Teresa on the same day.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the collection of the Museo Exconvento de Santa Mónica in Puebla contains a deteriorated reliquary with the relics of St. Gertrude together with other saints: Fabiana, Perpetua, and Rosa de Lima [Fig. 5.6]. This may be the very same relic mentioned in those documents.

While Teresa was a contemporary model for *creole* nuns, the works of St. Gertrude were an important tie to the medieval intellectual heritage. In colonial paintings Gertrude, like Teresa, was frequently represented as a mystical writer [Fig. 5.7]. These two saints became influential models for *creole* nuns writing their own memoirs.

Other lesser-known models exist too. One of these was Ana María de San Joseph, whose autobiography was first printed in Salamanca in 1632 and reprinted in New Spain a mere three years later [Fig. 5.8].<sup>45</sup> The exemplar preserved in the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia has a marginal note that confirms its conventual provenance; it belonged to Carmelite nuns, probably from Mexico City [Fig. 5.9]. An abbreviated version of the same book was reissued again in Mexico in 1641.<sup>46</sup> So, in addition to the circulation of images and books in the New World originating from Spain, sometimes European books were quickly reprinted in New Spain and incorporated into conventual library collections.

We might ask ourselves, why would this book in particular be reprinted in New Spain? Some of Ana María's visions were of special interest to *creole* readers. On various

41 Inquisition trial of Juana de Espíritu Santo, 1615: Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación, Inquisición, vol. 310, exp. 2, fols. 54–86.

42 Austin, University of Texas, Benson Latin American Collection, MS G 94: María Magdalena Lorravaquio, *Libro en que se contiene la vida de la madre María Magdalena ...*, fol. 54.

43 Agustina de Santa Teresa, “Vida de la venerable madre María de Jesús,” fol. 183r.

44 Agustina de Santa Teresa, “Vida de la venerable madre María de Jesús,” fol. 183v.

45 Niño, *A la serenissima infanta sor Margarita de la Cruz....* The first Mexican edition with the same title was printed by Bernardo Calderón in 1635.

46 The second Mexican edition: Ana María de San Joseph, *Vida de la venerable virgen* (Mexico City: Francisco Robledo, 1641).

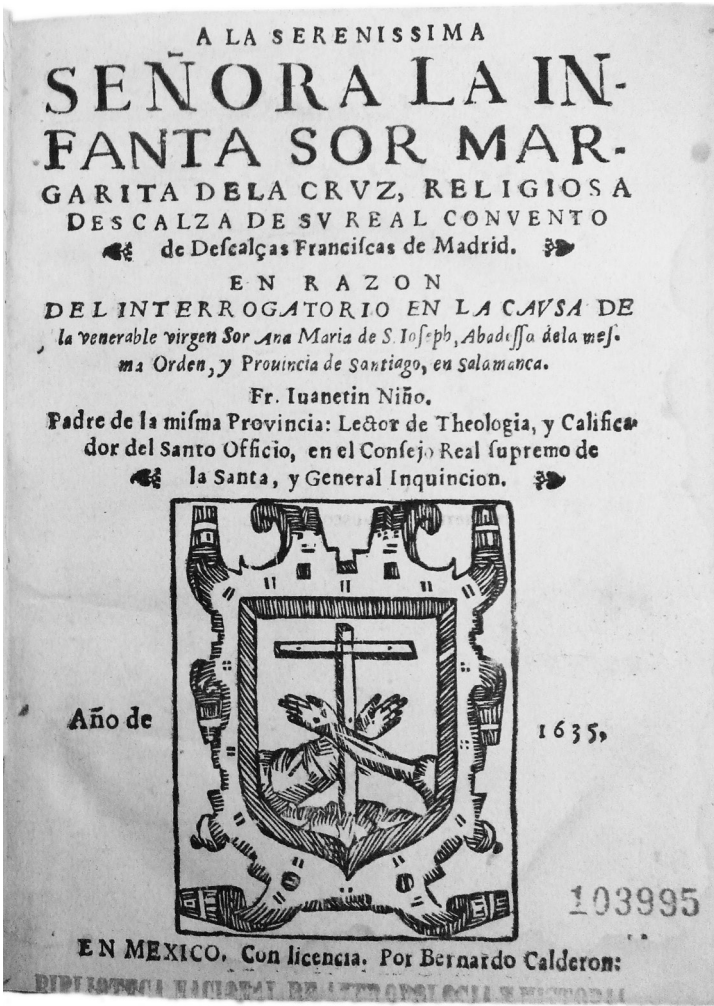


Figure 5.8: Title page of Juanetín Niño, *A la serenissima infanta sor Margarita de la Cruz, religiosa descalza en su Real Convento de Descalzas Franciscanas de Madrid. En razón del interrogatorio en causa de la venerable virgen sor Ana María de San Joseph, abadesa de la misma orden y provincia de Santiago* (Salamanca: Jacinto Taberniel, 1632).

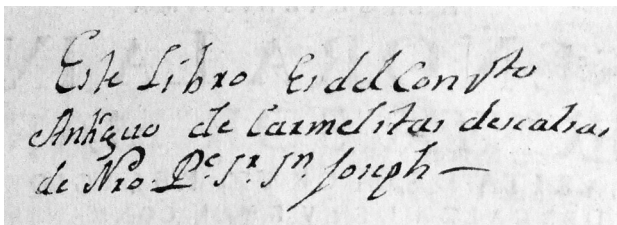


Figure 5.9: Handwritten annotation on verso of title page, “Este Libro Es del Convento Antiquo de Carmelitas descalzas de Nuestro Padre Señor San Joseph.” From Juanetín Niño, *A la serenissima infanta...* (Salamanca: Jacinto Taberniel, 1632). Images courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City.

occasions she relates her spiritual journeys to Japan and to the West Indies. An angel accompanies her as she baptizes and teaches catechism to the indigenous peoples:

Sometimes I found myself among a crowd of Indians from different nations, with Christian doctrine in hand, and they were kneeling while they listened to it .... One time, among many, this saintly angel took me to some Indian lands, and he gave me a glass in the form of a goblet, and it had oil that overflowed; and with his finger that he wet there, he made the sign of the cross on foreheads, and then he made me kneel, and I taught them the Christian doctrine; this happened to me a few times.<sup>47</sup>

These are some of the earliest accounts of spiritual journeys to the West Indies; other Spanish nuns like Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534), Luisa de la Ascensión (1565–1635), and María de Agreda (1602–1665) describe similar experiences.<sup>48</sup> Their narrative exploits reflect the general religious concern of the time, and the desire these women had to participate in missionary enterprises.

To summarize, I would like to highlight the principal characteristics of printed autobiographies circulating in New Spain. All of the authors were nuns, abbesses, or prioresses who were considered exemplary. Some were canonized and many others were expected to be beatified. Their *Lives* were considered to be models for religious women. The presence of these ideals allowed individual female writers to legitimize their own autobiographical efforts. Their influence is confirmed by the presence of books found in nuns' libraries, and also in the *creole* nuns' own manuscripts, and in their visionary experiences.

Thanks to this transatlantic dialogue involving books, objects, and images, the inhabitants of Mexican nunneries were able not only to participate in but also to reappropriate the culture of Imperial Spain.

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47 Ana María de San Joseph, *Vida de la venerable virgen*, 82 and 103.

48 Tar, "Flying through the Empire." Also Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*, 186–214.

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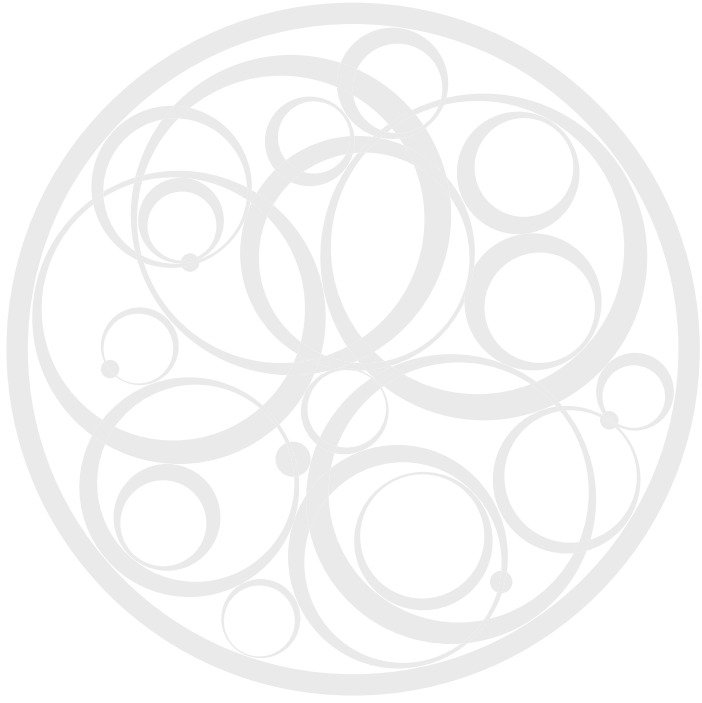
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## Chapter 6

# ESTEFANIA DE SAN JOSEPH AND ESPERANZA DE SAN ALBERTO: THE DUAL DISCOURSE IN THE LIVES OF TWO EXEMPLARY AFRO-WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN EARLY MODERN SPANISH-AMERICA

VALÉRIE BENOIST

IN 1650 THE Franciscan Diego de Córdoba y Salinas made the unconventional decision to include the spiritual biography of an Afro-Franciscan *beata* named Estefania de San Joseph into his chronicle about the Franciscans of colonial Peru.<sup>1</sup> A few decades later, in 1703, José Gómez de la Parra, a prominent theologian from Puebla in colonial Mexico made a similar choice when incorporating the spiritual life of an Afro-Mexican nun known as Esperanza de San Alberto into the chronicle of the San José convent. Very few Afro-women professed in colonial Spanish-America during the Early Modern period. Indeed, in the Ibero-Atlantic world, people generally associated Afro-individuals with the Devil and they thought that women of African ancestry lacked the necessary moral attributes to undertake a religious vocation. So it is surprising that Estefania and Esperanza became known for their Catholic exemplarity and even more intriguing that highly respected clergy members chose them as the subjects of religious biographies since such portrayals were usually reserved for saintly figures such as Teresa of Avila and Rosa of Lima.<sup>2</sup>

Until now, few scholars have examined the rare discourse about exemplary Afro-Catholic women in the early modern Ibero-Atlantic world.<sup>3</sup> Alice Wood, who has studied

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1 A *beata* was a lay pious woman who took informal religious vows: Van Deusen, *The Souls of Purgatory*, 194.

2 St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) was a prominent Spanish Carmelite who, together with John of the Cross, is considered the founder of the Discalced Carmelites. She was canonized in 1622. For more information on her works and life, please consult Slade, “St. Teresa of Avila as a Social Reformer.” St. Rose of Lima (1586–1617) was a lay member of the Dominican Order and the first person born in the Americas to be canonized. She was canonized in 1671. To learn more about her, see Graziano, “Santa Rosa de Lima” and Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*.

3 There were only a handful of Afro-religious women whose spiritual lives were recorded in the

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**Valérie Benoist** is a professor at Grinnell College in Iowa where she teaches for the Spanish Department as well as for the Latin American Studies Concentration. Her research focuses on the representation of racial and gender identities in colonial Latin American literature. She has published on nuns' writing as well as historiographies written by indigenous peoples. Her most recent publications have been on the representation of blackness in colonial literature. She is currently examining the discourse about religious exemplarity and sanctity in the biographies about early-modern Afro-Spanish and Latin American nuns.

Estefania's life, maintains that her spiritual biography demonstrates that "even under restrictive conditions"<sup>4</sup> Afro-women such as Estefania could stand as "so exemplary and such a credit to the Franciscan order"<sup>5</sup> In two remarkable chapters about Esperanza, Joan Cameron Bristol argues that Esperanza's biographer used a discourse of "exceptionalism" to introduce her as an exemplary black religious figure.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, while further analyzing this discourse of "exceptionalism," I have identified the presence of a language of whitening in Esperanza's spiritual biography.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the whitening accompanying Esperanza's description was also present in Estefania's, and that both characterizations were tightly connected to their biographers' projects to glorify their *criollo* convents and orders.<sup>8</sup> As part of that project, when presenting Estefania and Esperanza, Gómez de la Parra and Córdoba y Salinas portrayed them as exceptional women and as models of religious exemplarity that exemplified the success of the New World and their respective orders and convents in their spiritual enterprises. They characterized Estefania and Esperanza as exceptional Afro-women who God chose to embody the specific saintly virtues of charity, self-sacrifice, and humility; however, the two biographers also adopted a dual discourse in the semiotic construction of their subjects and whitened them as they established their evolution towards religious exemplarity.

Estefania and Esperanza were both born in slavery, both had ample contact with conventual life, and both eventually took on religious habits despite their *casta*.<sup>9</sup> Even more surprisingly, the two Afro-women gained considerable fame for their Catholic exemplarity during their lives, so much so that prominent members of their religious communities recorded their deaths as showing evidence of their possible sanctity. Esperanza was born in what is now known as Guinea-Bissau.<sup>10</sup> She was baptized immediately after arriving to Veracruz where Doña Fajardo purchased her. When her mistress joined the Convent of Discalced Carmelites of San José in Puebla near the end of her life, Esperanza accompanied her as her servant. As was often done, upon her death Doña Fajardo

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Ibero-Atlantic world during the early modern period. Apart from Estefania and Esperanza, we can also find an Afro-Peruvian mystic by the name of Ursula de Jesús as well as an Afro-Iberian tertiary nun called Teresa Chicaba. For information on Ursula, see Van Deusen, *The Souls* and Wood, "Religious Women of Color"; for Teresa Chicaba, see Ferrús Antón, "Sor Teresa"; Fra Molinero, "La primera escritora afrohispanica"; and Maeso, *Sor Chikaba*.

4 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 292.

5 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 292.

6 Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*, 23–62; Bristol, "Although I am Black I am Beautiful."

7 Benoist, "Esperanza de San Alberto"; Benoist, "El 'blanqueamiento' de dos escogidas negras de Dios."

8 During the rest of this analysis I will refer to Juana Esperanza as Esperanza, her shorter name.

9 In the early modern period, the concept of race was much more conceived as *casta*. See Hill, "Caste Theater and Poetry" and Hill, *Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America*. *Casta* was more fluid and was articulated in terms of "lineage" and "calidad" rather than as a fixed biological marker as it would become during the nineteenth century. See Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 6.

10 When examining the "facts" that have been attached to Esperanza's life, such as her birthplace, it is important to remember that what we know about her comes from her biographers' construction.

donated her slave to the convent. Esperanza lived there for more than sixty years, during which time she worked as a servant performing domestic duties in the kitchen and the infirmary.<sup>11</sup> However, unlike most conventual Afro-Catholic servants, Esperanza's exemplary observance of the convent's rules eventually led her to become a nun in 1678. Esperanza accepted doing so at the time of her death, and so in 1678, when Esperanza thought she was about to die, she called the bishop of Santa Cruz to profess. Esperanza died a year later in 1679. Upon her death, her convent gave her a sumptuous funeral that the whole city attended, including the highest members of Puebla's elite.<sup>12</sup>

Like Esperanza, Estefania was born a slave and eventually became a highly respected religious model. Estefania was born in 1561 in Cuzco, colonial Peru, from an enslaved Afro-mother and a Spanish father. After her owner emancipated her mother and her upon dying, Estefania's mother became a *donada* and joined the convent of Santa Clara where Ursula would later profess. Estefania, in turn, became a *beata* and vowed to live a holy life.<sup>13</sup> As a *beata*, Estefania was a lay member of the Franciscans and lived according to religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to God. Although she resided outside the convent, she wore a religious habit and was supervised by a male spiritual advisor. She spent a large amount of her time living a religious life of prayers, humility, and penance and dedicating herself to charitable work for the poor and the sick. To support herself and the four orphans she adopted, she also worked as a housekeeper and sewed pillows.<sup>14</sup> Throughout her life she gained high recognition as an exemplary religious woman.<sup>15</sup>

By the seventeenth century, Afro enslaved people such as Estefania and Esperanza played a vital economic role in all of the Spanish colonies but they were particularly predominant in colonial Mexico and colonial Peru. The concentration of enslaved workers in these two regions was mainly dictated by labour needs, especially after the decline in the Amerindian population. By 1640 there were close to one hundred thousand Afro-descendants living in slavery in Peru, constituting ten to fifteen percent of the total population. In Lima the presence of Afro-Peruvians was even stronger, so much so that by the 1590s Lima was half black and would remain as such for most of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> In those cities slaves were vital to the economy and the production of goods and services. They predominated in metalworking, clothing, and constructions supplies as well as in most crafts except silversmithing and printing.<sup>17</sup> In these urban centers many Afro-Peruvian women worked performing domestic chores in households, convents, and hospitals.

Similarly, by 1640, colonial Mexico was home to the second-largest population of enslaved Africans in the Americas, only second to colonial Brazil. During the mid-seven-

11 Lavrin, "Female Religious," 169–70.

12 Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 308–20.

13 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 189–91; Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 294.

14 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 289–93.

15 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 293.

16 Klein and Vinson, *African Slavery in Latin America*, 26.

17 Klein and Vinson, *African Slavery in Latin America*, 26.

teenth century, the number of enslaved people declined due to the Spanish Crown's prohibition on purchasing slaves from the Portuguese after the Crowns of Spain and Portugal separated. And yet, by 1810 the free Afro-population of Mexico was still approximately 624,000 or ten percent of the total population.<sup>18</sup> Urban enslaved workers could work as domestic servants or also as *jornaleros* (day labourers who negotiated their work for people other than their masters but received a percentage of their earnings). Like in colonial Peru, many Afro-Mexican urban women worked as personal servants in nunneries and monasteries or were in charge of general domestic chores.<sup>19</sup>

During Esperanza's and Estefania's lifetime *criollos* and Spaniards usually associated blackness with evilness, sinfulness, and ugliness and set it in opposition to whiteness, the symbol of purity and sanctity.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence of that binary, Spaniards and *criollos* commonly defined Afro-descendants in opposition to Spaniards and perceived them as morally inferior beings characterized by debased moral traits.<sup>21</sup> Many of the period's biblical scholars believed that blacks stemmed from a curse and that the colour of their skin and their slavery was God's punishment to Ham for exposing Noah's nakedness.<sup>22</sup> A different explanation proposed that black skin was God's curse on Cain for slaying Abel.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, because Afro-men and women were coupled with slavery and were not legally identified as a republic of their own, by the turn of the seventeenth century it became easy for the colonial institutions to identify Afro-descendants as impure in their genealogy with no limit on how far back their "stain" went.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence of this negative construction of blackness, convents had regulations establishing that Afro-women could not take the vow and *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) was necessary to profess in Spain and its colonies.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, sometimes convents played an important empowering role for some Afro-*donadas* and *beatas*. Indeed, when wealthy women entered the convent, they often took with them an enslaved woman. Convents were dual spheres for these Afro-women: on the one hand, they replicated the outside world's social hierarchy and placed slaves

**18** Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 1; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 221; Proctor, "Slave Rebellion and Liberty."

**19** Klein and Vinson, *African Slavery in Latin America*, 30; Proctor, "Slave Rebellion and Liberty," 31; Velázquez Gutiérrez, *Mujeres de origen africano en la capital novohispana*, 64 and 130.

**20** Gómez, "El estigma africano," 149; Rowe, "Visualizing Black Sanctity," 57. Also worth noting, before the sixteenth century, blacks were not always considered pagans and infidels who were genealogically impure. For more information on the transformation of their genealogy and its connection to purity of blood I recommend consulting Martínez, *Genealogical Fiction*, in particular 157–58.

**21** Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 7; Rowe, "Visualizing Black Sanctity," 57.

**22** That explanation was based on a reading of Genesis 9:21–28. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 11; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 158.

**23** Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 11.

**24** Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 221.

**25** "Limpieza de sangre" referred to the concept of "purity of blood." In the Covarrubias 1611 dictionary, "limpio" is defined as "old Christian, free of Jewish or Muslim blood" (my translation, fol. 525r–v). Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 167.

and free Afro-women at the bottom of the convent hierarchy. Inside the convent, Afro-enslaved and free Afro-women were servants, and they performed most of the hard manual tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and attending orchards.<sup>26</sup> Enslaved women given to a convent as part of a will were more vulnerable than free black servants because the convent could decide to sell them at any time.<sup>27</sup> However, at the same time convents could offer positive aspects for these women by functioning as a unique access to spiritual life.<sup>28</sup> They introduced Afro-women to a textual community that incorporated knowledge about the Bible and the Christian interpretative tradition.<sup>29</sup> The regular conventual *predicatio* involved reading out aloud a written text or a reflection about a religious topic and discussion and interpretation of the text, which allowed these women to become familiar with the fundamental aspects of Christian doctrine and to acquire knowledge about the forms of thinking and reasoning of Western Christian cultures.<sup>30</sup> With Christianity, Afro-women learned to develop new literary practices. These practices, which people gained through writing or their knowledge of writing, allowed them to form social connections with other individuals with the same knowledge and similar social identities and ideologies.<sup>31</sup> Thanks to that knowledge and the spiritual community formed around convents Afro-women like Estefania and Esperanza became known for their exceptional religiosity.

In marked contrast to Spanish and *criolla* nuns and women mystics whose lives or *vidas* were often included in the chronicles of convents and orders, rarely were the lives of Afro-*donadas* or *beatas* incorporated.<sup>32</sup> In the exceptional instances when the religious lives of these women were documented, like the two instances examined in this chapter, male ecclesiastical figures generally wrote about them and not the women themselves. In their texts, the men addressed a lay audience and not just female members of the religious community.<sup>33</sup> Because of this wider audience, when representing their religious subject, biographers tended to underscore the compliance of their subject to church rules.<sup>34</sup> The male writers' motivations varied, from revealing an extraordinary spiritual experience to the reader to associating their names with a possible candidate for sainthood.<sup>35</sup>

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**26** Burns, *Colonial Habits*, 115.

**27** Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 167.

**28** Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 167.

**29** Jouve Martín, *Esclavos de la ciudad*, 58.

**30** Jouve Martín, *Esclavos de la ciudad*, 62–68.

**31** Barton cited in Jouve Martín, *Esclavos de la ciudad*, 80.

**32** *Vidas* were spiritual autobiographies that nuns had to write as a means of confession to their confessors, and as such they were commissioned, many times against the will of the nuns themselves, and the nuns' writings were scrutinized by the confessors.

**33** Dienfendorff, "Discerning Spirits," 246.

**34** Ferrús Antón, "Sor Teresa," 188.

**35** Vollendorf, *A New History of Inquisitional Spain*, 120.

Analyzing the discourse present in Estefania's and Esperanza's biographies also requires understanding the problematic question of the authorship of these chronicles of convents and orders. The biographers who wrote the religious lives of women usually departed from the nun's own writings when those existed or used other nuns' written records about them kept in conventual archives and they sometimes supplemented them with interviews with the nun herself. But as they wrote the religious biographies, the biographers considerably modified the nuns' text. They would start by reorganizing the biographical information in a chronological manner, then present a series of anecdotes to underline the virtues of the nuns, and finish with the narration of the death of their subject, insisting on the miracles that accompanied it. The whole writing process revealed the unequal power of the women vis-à-vis their male biographers since the lives, dictations, and writings that the women produced became the raw product for a male writer to adapt and modify, deciding what to keep and what to remove.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, these chronicles often had a bigger agenda than simply presenting the story of a particular convent or order. The chronicles were usually written with the main aim to underscore the exemplary nature of the convent and/or its order as a whole.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, like hagiographies, they also served as means of expressing *criollo* identity and were meant to counter European prejudices of colonial inferiority.<sup>38</sup> That is, *criollos* who considered the New World, and not Spain, as their home used this genre to exalt the merits of other members of their communities, presenting the virtues of one of its members as a synecdoche of the virtues of the whole *criollo* community.<sup>39</sup> As part of this purpose, it was crucial for *criollo* biographers to construct their conventual subjects in the most exemplary fashion. Writers needed to celebrate the triumph of Catholicism in the colonies and, in particular, underline the crucial role of their respective religious orders in the New World.

That objective is particularly clear in Esperanza's biography when Gómez de la Parra concludes by emphasizing that God brought her to the Carmelite convent in Puebla to enhance its Garden of Eden:

Siendo, pues todos los conventos de la Sagrada Reforma, frondosos y fecundos huertos, de todo género de plantas y árboles, cuantas son las virtudes que ejercitan en ellas las Carmelitas descalzas, habiendo traído la Divina Majestad a Esperanza, desde la gentilidad a esta Nueva España, la condujo a este fertil jardín, plantado en la América, para que no le faltase el exquisito árbol indiano del ébano negro, a quien Calepino apellida árbol peregrino, y que tan solamente se da en las Indias.<sup>40</sup>

**36** Franco, *Las conspiradoras*, transl. Córdoba, 37-42.

**37** Hampe Martínez, *Santidad e Identidad Criolla*, 115; Jouve Martín, "En olor de santidad," 183; Myers, "Redeemer of America," 259.

**38** As Celia Cussen reminds us, hagiographies were also missionizing tools (*Black Saint of the Americas*, 107). Also as Elisa Sampson and Vera Tudela have demonstrated, the hagiographies of the New World incorporated the spiritual journeys of their subjects with the real trans-Atlantic voyages that the women undertook and as such mixed the genre of the hagiography with the genre of the travel narrative (*Colonial Angels*, 1-13). For a study of New World hagiographies as tools of *criollo* pride, see Rubial García, *La Santidad Controvertida*.

**39** Morgan *Spanish American Saints*, 4.

**40** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 321.



[Since all the convents of the Sacred Reform are leafy and fertile orchards with all kinds of plants and trees, such as the virtues that the Discalced Carmelites exercise, having brought his Divine Majesty Esperanza, from gentility to New Spain, He led her to this fertile garden, planted in America, so that the exquisite black ebony from the Indies, that Calepino calls pilgrim tree, and that only grown in the Indies, would not be missing.]<sup>41</sup>

By characterizing Esperanza as a treasure brought to New Spain to complete its Garden of Eden, Gómez de la Parra was underlining that New Spain was a land chosen by God. Furthermore, by adding that divine favour had brought Esperanza to the convent of the Discalced Carmelites of Puebla, the biography was celebrating the particular success of the Carmelites of colonial Mexico in the dissemination of Christianity.

While Estefania's biographer did not make as strong and specific a reference to her role as a missionizing tool for her order in Peru, he very much insisted on her celestial qualities, her connection with Lima and the convent of Santa Clara, and her identification as a saintly Afro-Peruvian figure. In the first paragraph of the biography he describes her as chosen by God with such heavenly qualities that she resembled a "seraph"<sup>42</sup> surrounded by God's love. He then establishes that she was born in Cuzco, but that God brought her to Lima and in particular to the convent of Santa Clara where she professed.<sup>43</sup> And then, Córdoba y Salinas explains that don Pedro of Toledo and his wife, the viceroys of colonial Peru, visited Estefania while she was attending to the sick and requested her blessing:

señor mío, Excelencia no es el Virrey? ¿pues cómo visita a una mulata como yo? .... Notando la fuerza de la virtud que obró semejantes acciones, dando a una humilde mujer, y que había sido esclava, para hablar a personas tan vanas con tanto valor y cortesía, y a ellos a que reconociendo la santidad ... la besasen la mano y pidiesen su bendición.<sup>44</sup>

[my Sir, is his excellence not the Viceroy? Then how is it possible that he visits a mulatta such as me? .... Because they noted the strength of the virtue that created such actions, giving to such a humble woman, and one who had been a slave, to speak to such high persons with such courage and courtesy, and they, who recognized sanctity ... kissed her hand and asked for her blessing]

As the above quotation illustrates, despite her condition as an Afro-Peruvian, the viceroy of Peru and his wife identified Estefania as a saintly woman who could intercede in their favour before God. As such, Córdoba y Salinas was implicitly positioning an Afro-member of Peruvian colonial society closer to God than two Spaniards of high society, and therefore cleverly refuting notions of colonial spiritual inferiority.

In Esperanza's biography, Gómez de la Parra incorporates a similar reference when he explains that the Marchioness of Mancera insisted on meeting Esperanza when she visited her convent and asked her to pray to God on her behalf every day: "Después de larga conversación, le pidió su Excelencia encarecidamente que todos los días les rezase una Ave María y que la encomendase a Dios, a lo cual respondió Esperanza: *Todos los*

41 All the translations of Spanish quotations into English are mine.

42 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 949.

43 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 950.

44 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 952.

*días, Señora Excelentísima, le rezaré*".<sup>45</sup> [After the very long conversation, her excellence earnestly asked her to pray one Ave Maria for them every day and to entrust them to God, to which Esperanza answered: I will pray to Him every day, your Most High Excellence]. In both spiritual accounts, the biographers used a similar discourse to establish that God had chosen Afro-members from their colonial community, therefore underlining the spiritual success of the colonies.

To emphasize that Estefania and Esperanza had saintly attributes, the two biographers introduced the incorruptibility of their Afro-subjects' bodies after their deaths. Such a *topos* was quite common in hagiographies and was meant to serve as a sign that the deceased was still living in heaven. Some of the most recurrent elements to showcase miracles associated with the saint's body after death were "flexible limbs, soft flesh and the absence of foul odors".<sup>46</sup> Both Gómez de la Parra and Córdoba y Salinas include these features when presenting the death of their subjects. Córdoba y Salinas writes that although Estefania had died more than thirty hours before her funeral, her hands were still soft and her fingers flexible, and he maintains that no bad smell surrounded her body.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Gómez de la Parra describes Esperanza's body as one that looked like the body of a twenty-year-old girl and not that of an old woman. Furthermore, he affirms that the room where Esperanza was lying did not have the foul smells that usually accompany corpses.<sup>48</sup>

When addressing the exemplary nature of their subjects, both biographers introduce their blackness as well as their slavery as central elements of their exceptional service to God. In the title of his section about Esperanza Gómez de la Parra makes Esperanza's *casta* clear by introducing her as "La Hermana Esperanza de San Alberto, la Morena"<sup>49</sup> and describing her in the first paragraph of the biography as a black slave who shined through her saintly example.<sup>50</sup> Similarly in the first section of Estefania's biography, Córdoba y Salinas establishes that despite being *parda* and daughter of a black slave, Estefania lived a heavenly life.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly when presenting the saintly qualities of their Afro-subjects both men used their slave identity as evidence of their service to God by entwining their identities as slaves and God's servants. As Alice Wood has pointed out, the references to charitable caring along with the Christian humility and self-sacrifice that accompanied them were much more acute in the hagiographies of colonial Afro-saints than their *criollos* counterparts.<sup>52</sup> Following that pattern, both Córdoba y Salinas and Gómez de la Parra describe their subjects as women who spent a consider-

45 Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 315.

46 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 294.

47 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 953.

48 Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 318.

49 Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 308.

50 Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 308.

51 Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 949. The nomenclature that the colonial society created was complex and included *pardos*, which were the equivalent of *mulatos* in parts of South America.

52 Wood, "Religious Women of Color," 291.

able part of their time taking care of the needs of others at the cost of their own. When listing their subjects' virtues they both underscore how much Estefania and Esperanza attended to the sick and the poor. Gómez de la Parra lists charity as one of Esperanza's greatest virtues as well as her long nights attending to the sick.<sup>53</sup> Similarly Córdoba y Salinas dedicates an entire paragraph to Estefania's charitable work healing the sick.<sup>54</sup>

Although in their chronicles both men present their subjects as colonial Afro-women who embodied saintly attributes, at the same time they accompany that characterization with a discourse that whitens their Afro-protagonists as they evolved towards sanctity. The whitening process is present in both biographies, but it is much more acute in Esperanza's biography.<sup>55</sup> Indeed in order to obtain a truly exemplary state as a nun, Gómez de la Parra presents Esperanza as needing to disconnect from her black body. The first step towards that transformation can be found when Esperanza refuses to eat as a sign of true love for God. In the seventeenth century, fasting was a common practice to achieve higher spiritual consciousness with God through the "diminishment" or "erasure" of the body.<sup>56</sup> The ways in which the text describes the effects of the fasting on her body are worth noting: "En algunas ocasiones, solía estar muy mala, tanto que lo llegaban a conocer las religiosas, por verla tan descolorida, que parecía mulata, y jamás se quejaba" (Sometimes, she would get so ill, so much that the nuns would realize, when seeing her so pale, so much that she looked like a mulata, and she never complained).<sup>57</sup> The use of the word *mulata* carries strong implications since according to the Covarrubias dictionary from 1611 a "mulato" was the descendant of a white father and a black mother or vice versa.<sup>58</sup> The inference is therefore that by fasting Esperanza looked less dark and could have passed for a person with some white ancestry. More specifically, by associating the action of fasting—intended to bring the subject closer to God—with the transformation of the colour of the body from black to "mulata," the text suggests that in order to get closer to God Esperanza had to distance herself from her black body.

Esperanza's decision to only accept taking her vows at the time of her death accentuates the message that she herself may have perceived her black body as an impediment to becoming a nun. Three years before her death, two Carmelites, who had come from Spain and visited the convent, approached the prelate and encouraged her to convince Esperanza to take her vows "porque habiendo observado tantos años, con tanta perfección, las obligaciones de religiosa, por ser negra no ha de perder tantas indulgencias, como tenemos concedidas a los que profesamos"<sup>59</sup> [because having observed during so many years, with such perfection, the obligations of a nun, she should not lose the mul-

**53** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 311–12.

**54** Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 951.

**55** I have studied this whitening process in two other articles: Benoist, "Esperanza de San Alberto"; Benoist, "El 'blanqueamiento' de dos escogidas negras de Dios."

**56** Eich, "The Body as a Conventual Space of Resistance," 206–7.

**57** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 314.

**58** "Mulato," in Covarrubias' *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (1611), fol. 558r.

**59** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 316–17.

tuple privileges we concede to those who profess, due to her black skin]. After the prelate failed to convince her, a year later a prominent religious figure in the community named don Diego de Malpartida made another attempt:

Mas ni de una ni de otra manera la pudo convencer a que profesara, diciendo y repitiendo Esperanza: Señor, no me atrevo ni me hallo con ánimo para hacer los votos de la profesión. Y tan solamente pudo conseguir el señor Deán que a la hora de la muerte pidiese el hábito y la profesión, y como lo prometió, así lo hizo.<sup>60</sup>

[But he was not able to convince her one way or another, saying and repeating Esperanza: Sir, I do not dare nor do I find the impetus to profess. And the only thing that the Dean was able to get from her was that, at her time of death, she would profess and take the habit, and as she promised, so she did.]

Even though the passage does not specifically identify her skin colour as Esperanza's main reason for her refusal, considering the mistreatment she received from other nuns in the convent because of her identity as an Afro-Mexican nun, her description as *mulata* when fasting, and the remark from the Carmelite visitors that Esperanza should not let her blackness stop her from becoming a nun, it is likely that her reluctance was at least partially the result of societal perceptions. By accepting to become a nun precisely at the moment of abandoning her black body at death, Esperanza seemed to be communicating the message that she would only be able to become a true nun upon dissociating entirely from her black body, a process previously started through her fasting.

The idea that Afro-individuals could reach a white state through conversion was not completely new at the turn of the eighteenth century. The belief had its origin in a Latin legend where two twin brothers transplanted the leg of a black person onto the body of a white patient. The legend was part of the *Golden Legend* that the Archbishop of Genoa Jacobus of Voragine (1230–1298) had compiled. In the legend of the brothers Cosmos and Damian (who later became saints), after the thigh of an Ethiopian man was transplanted onto a white man, the thigh turned white.<sup>61</sup> In the Early Modern period, for some theologians this legend of the leg had become a metaphor for the whitening process of blacks after their conversion.<sup>62</sup> For them, it represented that baptism had the miraculous power to whiten not only the souls of blacks but also their bodies.<sup>63</sup> In his treaty on slavery, for example, Alonso de Sandoval affirmed that through conversion blacks could free themselves from the stain of their sin, cause of their black skin, and that as such blacks could become white in their heavenly life.<sup>64</sup>

While the whitening process is not as accentuated in Cordoba y Salinas' biography, it is also subtly present. Indeed, as the biographer presents Estefania's body during her funeral, he emphasizes the candles that accompanied her into her final journey

**60** Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 317.

**61** For the complete story, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 582–84.

**62** Fracchia, "La problematización del blanqueamiento visual," 71–73.

**63** Fracchia, "Depicting the Iberian African," 62. For information about the representation of the black leg in Western art during the fifteenth century, see Devisse and Mollat, "The African Transposed."

**64** Brewer-García, "Negro, pero blanco de alma," 9; Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation*, 84. See Sandoval, "Naturaleza, policía sagrada y profana" in *Un Tratado sobre la esclavitud*, trans. Vila Vilar.

and describes them as follows: “que con mucha cera blanca encendida acompañaron el cuerpo con veneraciones de mujer santa”<sup>65</sup> [which with much white lit wax accompanied the body with the venerations of a saintly woman]. In this final description, like in Esperanza’s, the *criollo* theologian adopts a discourse that Sandoval had already introduced with the metaphor of Christianity as the flame that could purify and whiten the soul of Africans.<sup>66</sup> In Córdoba’s biography, the candles become a symbol of Estefania’s religious evolution. By underlining that many white candles accompanied Estefania’s black body as she joined heaven as a saint, Córdoba was proposing that Christianity whitened her black body as she reached the heavens. This juxtaposition of the black body of saints with light was not uncommon in the representation of black saints of that era. For example, the sculptures of the Ethiopian saints Elesbaan and Ephigenia in the church of Avila combined the blackness of their bodies with “radiant lights” from God.<sup>67</sup>

So, while particularly rich as sources on two of very few Afro-women of the Ibero-Atlantic world who were considered Catholic models in the early modern world, Estefania’s and Esperanza’s biographies also reveal the priorities and attitudes of the *criollo* male biographers who wrote them. Both biographers focused on the blackness and slavery of their subjects as central elements of their exemplarity, but they introduced them more as proof that God had chosen their *criollo* communities than as statements about the religious potential of Afro-communities. Indeed, both Córdoba y Salinas and Gómez de la Parra not only underlined the exceptional nature of their Afro-subjects, but they also adopted a dual discourse when writing about the exemplarity of their Afro-subjects. While they characterized Estefania and Esperanza as Afro-women with saintly attributes, they also represented them as Afro-women who had gone through a process of whitening as they approached a higher state. Because the Spanish Crown and Church sought control over the Afro-populations in colonial Spanish-America, the conventional discourse associated with Afro-Latin Americans was that of inferiority to justify their marginal position. It is hence likely that Córdoba y Salinas and Gómez de la Parra felt that they had to replicate that discourse in order to authorize their writings to their *criollo* readers. Whitening their subjects allowed them to more safely postulate their Afro-subjects as exceptional Afro-Catholic figures while at the same time avoiding the possible danger of having readers perceive them as a threat to the racial hierarchies of the Iberian colonial world.<sup>68</sup>

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**65** Córdoba y Salinas, *Corónica*, 952.

**66** Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation*, 87.

**67** Rowe interprets this combination of light and darkness as evidence that blackness and light were not viewed as being in opposition to each other. While I agree with that interpretation as a possible one, I also find it problematic that in order to be presented as legitimate saints, Afro-saints had to be associated with lightness and whiteness: Rowe, “Visualizing Black Sanctity,” 77–80.

**68** Indeed, by the seventeenth century in colonial Mexico and Peru the Afro-populations were high enough to be perceived as possibly dangerous to the white colonial hegemony. Sometimes helped by indigenous populations, Afro-populations had organized rebellions against the Spaniards and the *criollos* such as the revolts in Mexico in 1609, 1611, 1612, and 1670: see Fracchia, “Depicting the Iberian African,” 58.

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## LE MONACHISME BOURBONNIEN ET LA FABRICATION DE L'AUTORITÉ AU FÉMININ À FONTEVRAUD AU XVII<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE

ANNALENA MÜLLER\*

VERS L'AN 1645, Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon (1637–1670),<sup>1</sup> abbesse du vénérable ordre de Fontevraud, envoya deux de ses moines au monastère de Sainte-Trinité de Vendôme. Ces hommes avaient pour ordre de détruire une lettre qui compromettait la réputation du fondateur de Fontevraud, Robert d'Arbrissel (ca. 1045–1116). Au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, la pratique du syneisaktisme<sup>2</sup> de Robert avait fait scandale et l'adoption de cette forme hérétique d'ascèse sexuelle dans les premiers temps de Fontevraud avait durablement entaché l'histoire de l'ordre. Cinq cents ans après les faits, Jeanne-Baptiste cherchait à obtenir la canonisation de Robert et donc voulait effacer cette part d'ombre de toutes les mémoires. Par conséquent, la lettre à Sainte-Trinité, qui relatait ce scan-

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1 Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon, née en 1608, était la fille d'Henri IV et de sa maîtresse Charlotte des Essarts. Avant son arrivée à Fontevraud, Jeanne-Baptiste vivait à Chelles, où sa sœur cadette Marie Henriette était abbesse. En 1625, Jeanne-Baptiste a été nommée coadjutrice, i.e. le bras droit et successeur désignée de l'abbesse de Fontevraud d'alors, Louise de Lavedan, à laquelle elle succéda sur le siège abbatial en 1637.

2 Le syneisaktisme, ou mariage spirituel, trouve son origine dans les mouvements ascétiques des premiers Chrétiens et peut être décrite comme une "cohabitation des deux sexes dans des conditions de strictes abstinences, [les membres des deux sexes] partageant la même chambre, parfois le même lit, mais se comportant malgré tout comme frère et sœur." Cette forme d'ascétisme sexuel fit scandale dès les tous premiers temps de sa pratique et au moins six conciles du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle la condamnèrent comme hérésie. Logiquement, la reprise de cette pratique du syneisaktisme par Robert provoqua de sévères oppositions au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et durant le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, le simple souvenir du syneisaktisme était devenu inacceptable: Bailey, *Sexual Relations in Christian Thought*, 33 et Clark, "John Chrysostom and the 'Subintroductae,'" 173.

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**Annalena Müller** holds a PhD in European history from Yale University (2014). She is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Université de Fribourg, Switzerland. Her work centres on the political and economic influence of female monastics in late medieval and early modern Europe. A recipient of the Ambizione Grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation, her current project engages with monasteries as feudal agents in late medieval France, Switzerland, and southern Germany. She is the author of *From the Cloister to the State: Fontevraud and the Making of Bourbon France (1642–1100)* (2021).

dale, devait disparaître. Au final, à cause de la négligence ou de la mauvaise volonté des envoyés, le document visé a échappé à la destruction et est conservé aujourd'hui à la Bibliothèque Municipale de Vendôme.<sup>3</sup>

Même si l'abbesse échoua à laver la réputation de Robert, qui fut béatifié mais jamais canonisé, Jeanne-Baptiste réussit à remodeler un autre aspect du passé de Fontevraud: durant son abbatiat, l'identité de Fontevraud comme l'ordre où les femmes dirigent et les hommes servent, a été forgée.

L'idée d'une abbesse toute-puissante de Fontevraud dirigeant une communauté mixte a longtemps nourri l'imagination des érudits anciens. Jules Michelet (1798–1874) a été le premier à avancer, dans le deuxième volume de son *Histoire de la France* (1833), que le XII<sup>e</sup> siècle avait vu une montée en puissance des femmes. Il appuyait son raisonnement sur le rôle de plus en plus important accordé à Marie dans la vie religieuse, qui a fait du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle une période où "Dieu changea de sexe, pour ainsi dire, [et] la Vierge devint le dieu du monde."<sup>4</sup> Michelet considérait que cette évolution globale se reflétait dans la structure organisationnelle de Fontevraud, où une femme dirigeait des hommes.<sup>5</sup> Cent cinquante ans plus tard, Régine Pernoud (1909–1998) reprenait la thèse de Michelet dans sa célèbre étude de l'histoire des femmes au Moyen Âge, *La Femme au temps des cathédrales*.<sup>6</sup> Encore au début des années 1990, Howard Bloch suggérait que l'organisation interne unique de Fontevraud avait considérablement influencé l'émergence de l'amour courtois, un courant de la littérature médiévale où les femmes exerçaient une grande autorité sur les chevaliers qui s'étaient dévoués à elles.<sup>7</sup> Bruce L. Venarde analysait Fontevraud et son fondateur dans le contexte d'une vague de fondations de couvents durant les XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, une vague à laquelle Robert d'Arbrissel a incontestablement ouvert la voie.<sup>8</sup> Jacques Dalarun et Jean-Marc Bienvenu, chacun ayant largement travaillé sur différents aspects des débuts de l'histoire de Fontevraud, virent dans cette inhabituelle hiérarchie de genre une forme particulière d'ascétisme, où les hommes s'humiliaient volontairement en servant des femmes.<sup>9</sup>

**3** Vendôme, Bib. Mun., ms 193. L'histoire de cette lettre et sa tentative de destruction a été analysée en détail par Jacques Dalarun dans son ouvrage *L'Impossible Sainteté*, 98–104, ainsi que sur le site Internet du Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) et de l'Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (IRHT) consacrée à ce cas: <http://lettrevolee.irht.cnrs.fr/accueil.html>.

**4** Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France—Moyen Âge*, Oeuvres complètes de J. Michelet, 6 des 40 vols. (Paris: Flammarion, s. d.), 2:351. Accessible en ligne via le Projet Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38244/38244-h/38244-h.htm>.

**5** Michelet, *Histoire de France—Moyen Âge*, 2:349–51.

**6** Pernoud, *La Femme au temps des cathédrales*, 130–69.

**7** Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 181.

**8** Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society*, chapitre 3, et Dalarun, *Robert d'Arbrissel, Sex, Sin and Salvation*, xxv (introduction).

**9** Les principales études sur Robert d'Arbrissel et les débuts de Fontevraud sont: Bienvenu, "Aux origines d'un ordre religieux"; par le même auteur, "Les Premiers temps de Fontevraud"; Jacques Dalarun, *L'Impossible Sainteté*; et par le même auteur, *Robert d'Arbrissel, fondateur de Fontevraud*. Une liste complète des ouvrages et analyses sur Robert d'Arbrissel peuvent être trouvées dans l'introduction de Bruce L. Venarde à la traduction anglaise de l'ouvrage *Robert d'Arbrissel, Sex, Sin*

Ces conceptions sont cependant des idées fausses, aussi bien en ce qui concerne le fondateur de l'ordre que le fonctionnement de Fontevraud médiéval, créées délibérément durant un conflit long de deux décennies qui a opposé l'abbesse et ses moines.

Ce conflit, qui a secoué Fontevraud entre ca. 1627 et 1643 prend sa source dans une controverse autour de l'autorité restreinte ou non de l'abbesse. En moins de vingt ans, les deux partis opposés ont produit plus de deux milles pages de pamphlets, un *factum*,<sup>10</sup> et deux histoires monastiques dans lesquelles chacun cherchait à démontrer sa supériorité. Tandis que les moines luttèrent essentiellement par la voie légale, les intérêts de l'abbesse demandaient une manipulation intense du passé fontevriste, et donc, donna naissance à l'image philogyne de Fontevraud, qui persiste encore aujourd'hui.

Cet article a pour sujet le conflit du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle entre les moines fontevristes et leur abbesse, leurs arguments respectifs ainsi que l'image de Fontevraud médiéval que les parties ont créé à l'époque et qui persiste encore dans l'historiographie contemporaine. Comme peu d'autres exemples, les querelles fontevristes renvoient à la fois aux limites et à l'importance des bornes chronologiques: la compréhension du fond du conflit demande de considérer aussi bien le Fontevraud médiéval que le début de l'époque moderne. Car, comme nous allons démontrer, les manipulations du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle du mémoire fontevriste, surtout concernant les débats autour d'une autorité féminine sur des religieux masculins, ont clairement été le produit de leur temps.

### Les origines—la fondation de Fontevraud et la hiérarchie fontevriste

Début 1101, Robert d'Arbrissel installa la foule itinérante de ses fidèles dans les forêts éloignées d'Anjou, dans un lieu que les sources appellent *Fons Ebraldi*, ou Fontevraud. Cependant, cette installation était davantage imposée de l'extérieur que volontairement choisie. Robert, un des plus grands prédicateurs itinérants du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, avait parcouru l'ouest de la France pendant des années et avait publiquement fustigé les péchés du monde et de l'Église. Il avait attiré une congrégation de plus en plus importante des deux sexes, qui suivait Robert dans ces prédications itinérantes et vivaient avec lui dans le désert angevin. Par conséquent, aux yeux de nombreux de ses contemporains, la cohabitation du prêcheur avec des hommes et des femmes était scandaleuse et valut à Robert d'être convoqué devant le Concile de Poitiers en novembre 1100.<sup>11</sup> Pour éviter les accusations d'hérésie, Robert et ses fidèles acceptèrent de se fixer à un endroit et

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and *Salvation* de Dalarun, xxxi–xxix. Pour une analyse détaillée des raisons pour lesquelles Robert a fondé Fontevraud et sur les premiers temps de l'ordre, voir aussi Müller, "Women, Heresy and Aristocracy."

**10** Un *factum* est une publication écrite dans le cadre d'une action légale par l'une des deux parties impliquées, soit pour appuyer sa demande soit pour réfuter les demandes de la partie adverse. Il inclut souvent une déclaration de faits et cherche à influencer le public, le Parlement ou le Conseil (ou autre institutions impliquées) en leur faveur. Voir *Miscellanées Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)*, Guide de recherche en bibliothèque, <http://grebib.bnf.fr/html/factums.html>.

**11** La lettre de Marbod, évêque de Rennes, que Jeanne-Baptiste chercha plus tard à détruire, donne une idée des troubles causés par l'ascétisme de Robert même parmi les membres de l'Église partisans d'une réforme. Pour la meilleure édition commentée de cette lettre jusqu'à aujourd'hui,

de construire des espaces séparés pour les hommes et les femmes.<sup>12</sup> Même une fois la congrégation était définitivement installée, le prêcheur continua d'attirer des disciples. Les femmes en particulier le suivaient et les membres féminins de la congrégation dépassèrent rapidement les hommes.<sup>13</sup>

En un siècle, Fontevraud devint l'un des plus grands ordres monastiques de France, une sorte de Cluny féminin.<sup>14</sup> Les raisons en sont aussi diverses que l'étaient ses premiers membres. Les hommes de Fontevraud étaient surtout des membres du bas clergé sans paroisses, des paysans pauvres, et des artisans,<sup>15</sup> qui trouvèrent à la fois un foyer spirituel et matériel à Fontevraud. Contrairement aux origines sociales des hommes, qui semblent relativement homogènes, les membres féminins de la congrégation étaient d'origines plus diverses. On retrouve parmi les fidèles de Robert à la fois des prostituées et des princesses, désireuses de rejoindre la congrégation naissante. La diversité des origines sociales des femmes s'explique mieux par le manque général d'institutions pour accueillir des femmes qui existait alors. En 1100, il n'y avait qu'un seul couvent féminin dans tout l'Anjou qui n'accueillait que quelques femmes aisées.<sup>16</sup> Pour les femmes à l'autre bout du spectre social, il n'y avait rien. Il a fallu encore cent cinquante ans avant que les couvents des Filles-Dieu ne commencent à offrir aux prostituées repenties une alternative qui plaise à Dieu<sup>17</sup> à leur activité. En d'autres termes, la croissance rapide

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voir le premier volume, "Robert von Arbrissel," dans von Walter, *Die ersten Wanderprediger Frankreichs*, 1:181–89.

**12** Bienvenu, *L'Etonnant fondateur*, 71–73. Et *Vita B. Roberti de Arbrissello auctore Baldrico episcopo Dolensis* ou *Vita Prima* (§16) (VP), *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jean-Jacques Migne (Paris: Migne, 1854) 162 (PL), cols. 1045–78 à 1051 (§16).

**13** Quatre bâtiments différents ont été érigés à Fontevraud pour l'installation des femmes, alors qu'un seul était nécessaire pour héberger les hommes. Cf. VP 20, PL 162, cols. 1053–54.

**14** Il y avait au moins soixante dix-huit prieuré fontevristes disséminé en France; entre 1491 et 1643 cinq autres maisons furent intégrées de différents ordres ou récemment créées, formant un total de quatre-vingt quatre prieurés fontevristes, en plus des maisons mères de Fontevraud l'Abbaye et Saint-Jean-de-l'Habit, le couvent pour hommes situé près de l'abbaye. Ce total vient de l'inventaire des Archives départementales du Maine et Loire. L'ordre fontevriste était particulier sous deux aspects—d'un côté, c'était largement un ordre "national" (les quatre maisons fontevristes en Espagne et en Angleterre n'ont joué aucun rôle après le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle); de l'autre, il n'y avait aucun autre ordre monastique féminin de cette importance, et qui s'étende en Europe, comparable à Fontevraud.

**15** Werner, *Pauperes Christi*, 43–45; Bienvenu, *L'Etonnant fondateur*, 62–63, Tunc, *Les femmes aux pouvoirs*, 22–25. Même si aucun registre médiéval de Saint-Jean-de-l'Habit n'a été conservé, nous savons qu'encore au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les moines fontevristes avaient une position sociale inférieure à celle des nonnes. Registre des actes de prise d'habit, de professions des religieux de Saint-Jean-de-l'Habit, Archives Départementales du Maine et Loire (AdML) 101 H 23 <sup>23/24</sup>.

**16** Cet établissement était le couvent de Notre-Dame-du-Ronceray, localisé à Angers. Bienvenu, *L'Etonnant fondateur*, 56. Comme pour beaucoup de monastères féminins, peu de recherches ont été menées sur Ronceray. Une première introduction se trouve dans l'ouvrage d'Anne-Claire Merand, "L'abbaye de Ronceray." Cependant, des recherches plus approfondies manquent encore.

**17** Les couvents des Filles-Dieu furent fondées durant le règne de Louis IX (1224–1270) dans plusieurs villes françaises. A la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, les couvents parisiens des Filles-Dieu rejoignirent l'ordre de Fontevraud: cf. Antoinette Chauvet, "Institutions des Filles-Dieu,"

de Fontevraud suggère que, en plus de répondre à une demande religieuse largement étendue, le nouvel ordre répondait à un besoin social d'accueillir des femmes sans considération de leur rang ou de leurs origines.

En dépit de la diversité sociale initiale de Fontevraud, les femmes aristocrates prédominèrent rapidement. Pour la noblesse française, le jeune ordre permettait de caser leurs parentes, qu'elles soient non mariées ou veuves. Un lien étroit avec les familles puissantes se manifesta en effet dès le tout début: les premières prieure et abbesse de Fontevraud, Hersende et Pétronille, venaient de l'influente noblesse locale. Et la célèbre Aliénor d'Aquitaine était l'une des plus importantes premières bienfaitrices qui finit par se retirer au monastère, et la choisit comme lieu de sépulture.<sup>18</sup>

Au vu des étroites relations avec les plus puissantes familles de France, et de la supériorité numérique et sociale des femmes, le choix de Robert de désigner comme abbesse une femme noble était logique. Le Fontevraud du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle se comprend mieux en termes de hiérarchie sociale qu'en termes de hiérarchie de genre, et plutôt que d'institutionnaliser la soumission masculine à l'autorité féminine, il reflète simplement l'ordre du monde dans lequel il a été fondé.

Toutefois, placer une abbesse à la tête d'un ordre n'implique ni de museler les moines ni de leur faire jouer un rôle négligeable ou subalterne. Au contraire, les premières coutumes de Fontevraud suggèrent que les moines tenaient des positions importantes dans l'ordre. Seuls les *fratres* étaient responsables de la charge spirituelle—les statuts demandaient qu'ils célèbrent régulièrement la messe et interdisaient explicitement que cette tâche revienne à des prêtres extérieurs.<sup>19</sup> En tant que confesseurs, ils exerçaient aussi une influence directe sur les membres les plus puissants, et quatre prieurs fontevristes, qui formaient le conseil abbatial, avaient une influence directe sur toutes les décisions administratives.<sup>20</sup> En fin de compte, pour des changements concer-

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*Encyclopaedia Universalis* (2008), <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/institution-des-filles-dieu/>. Dalarun—s'appuyant sur un manuscrit du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle d'origine incertaine—relate un épisode où Robert d'Arbrissel est entré dans une maison de passe de Rouen pour se réchauffer les pieds et a engagé la conversation avec des prostituées du lieu qu'il a persuadées de renoncer à leur vie de péché et de le suivre vers Dieu. Cf. Dalarun, *Robert d'Arbrissel, fondateur de Fontevraud*, 102–3.

**18** Hersende et Pétronille (respectivement la première prieure et la première abbesse de Fontevraud) et Agnès, la sœur de Pétronille, prieure de Fontevraud sous Pétronille, et une autre Agnès, prieure d'Orsan et ancienne épouse d'un seigneur local, sont explicitement mentionnée dans les vitae de Robert d'Arbrissel. L'ensemble des chartes de donation conservées aux Archives Nationales de France donne une idée de l'importance des bénéfices apportés à Fontevraud par Aliénor d'Aquitaine (et d'autres), donnant à l'ordre une richesse considérable: Paris, Archives Nationales, LL 1599<sup>A</sup>.

**19** "1. Ut canonicum celebrent officium .... 26. Ut nullus sacerdos et parochianus praesumat celebrare officium si non fuerit prae inopia sacerdotis fratris": Dalarun, *Les Deux Vies*, 398 et 402.

**20** Les conseillers de l'abbesse de Fontevraud, ses conseillers-nés, étaient les prieurs de Saint-Jean-de-l'Habit, de Saint-Lazare (tous les deux situés dans l'abbaye de Fontevraud), de Saint-Michel (l'église abbatiale) et de Saint Laurent en Gascogne. Même si les conseillers-nés n'étaient mentionnés ni dans les statuts ni dans les vitae, des documents plus tardifs témoignent de l'importance de leur participation, qui a été de plus en plus réduite pendant l'abbatit de Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon: Honorat Nicquet, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* (1643), 360.

nant l'ordre dans son ensemble, l'abbesse était dans l'obligation de demander l'avis et l'accord des moines.<sup>21</sup>

Même si la nature des sources médiévales ne permet pas une description plus détaillée du rôle des moines, il est certain qu'ils occupaient une place importante au tout début de Fontevraud. Rien n'indique une soumission ascétique ou idéologique du masculin au féminin. La hiérarchie s'est plutôt alignée sur la répartition numérique et le rang social de ses membres sans pour autant explicitement priver qui que ce soit de son droit de participation. La "division des tâches" fontevriste allaient selon la ligne spirituelle: les femmes nobles non ordonnées priaient et administraient, tandis que les frères réalisaient les travaux manuels et les moines ordonnés remplissaient les tâches spirituelles—toutes tâches également importantes pour le fonctionnement religieux et administratifs de l'ordre.

Pendant, cinq siècles après la fondation de Fontevraud, la division initiale des tâches était de l'ordre du souvenir, comme le révèlent les échanges autour du conflit du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Des tensions entre la congrégation et les abbesses bourbonniennes de l'ordre, qui ont dirigé Fontevraud de 1491 à 1670, ont marqué la vie fontevriste pendant presque tout le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans le premier tiers du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, la situation s'est aggravée quand Louise de Bourbon (abbesse de 1611 à 1637) et sa successeure, Jeanne-Baptiste (abbesse de 1637 à 1670), commencèrent à établir des liens étroits avec l'ordre jésuite naissant.

### La Querelle des Frères—la montée de l'influence Jésuite à Fontevraud

Le conflit entre les moines de Fontevraud et leur abbesse devint public vers 1627, quand un groupe de *fratres* anonymes mit en circulation l'*Epistre Narrative*<sup>22</sup> de quarante-deux pages qui dénonçait l'excessive influence des Jésuites à Fontevraud. Les liens officiels entre Fontevraud et la Société de Jésus avaient été établis huit ans plus tôt, lorsque Louise de Bourbon avait acquis un bâtiment à La Flèche pour fonder un séminaire pour les novices masculins de Fontevraud en 1619.<sup>23</sup> Le choix de La Flèche était un choix délibéré. Depuis 1603, la ville accueillait le célèbre Collège Jésuite Henri-IV qui avait attiré de toute la France un millier d'étudiants la première année,<sup>24</sup> et, depuis 1619, on comptait parmi eux des novices de Fontevraud. Le nouveau séminaire n'était pas le seul signe de l'influence croissante de la Société sur Fontevraud: le nombre de confesseurs jésuites servant la communauté féminine augmentait constamment. Ce qui provoqua particulièrement les ressentiments parmi les propres moines de Fontevraud, dont la position était menacée par la position de plus en plus prééminente des Jésuites.<sup>25</sup>

21 *Vita altera*, 52.6, dans l'édition de Jacques Dalarun, dans son *Impossible Sainteté*, 290.

22 Le titre complet était *Epistre Narrative de l'Entreprise faite dans l'Ordre de Fontevraud, par un certain Religieux d'un aulture ordre, adressee par un Docteur celebre à un Evesque de France, & mise en lumiere par le commandement dudict Evesque*.

23 Angers, Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire, 144 H 2.

24 Rochemonteix, *Un Collège de Jésuites aux XVIIème et XVIIIème siècles*, 1:125–30.

25 Dès la première page de l'*Epistre Narrative* l'auteur fait référence à l'attachement particulier de

L'*Epistre Narrative* des moines se focalise sur un certain "Père N.," un Jésuite qui a gagné la confiance de la vieillissante Louise II et de sa co-adjutrice et successeuse, Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon. En peu de temps, "Père N." s'est élevé à une position influente dans l'abbaye, une position qu'il utilisa délibérément pour réduire l'influence des moines de Fontevraud et accroître la sienne propre.<sup>26</sup> Les auteurs de l'*Epistre* affirment que le "Père N." a persuadé l'abbesse de réunir un chapitre général pendant lequel le Jésuite a convaincu les prieures assemblées de leur droit à engager librement le confesseur de leur couvent respectif—que ce confesseur vienne de l'ordre fontevriste ou d'un autre.<sup>27</sup> Même s'il demeure des doutes sur le fait que le "Père N." de l'*Epistre Narrative* fut plus qu'un homme de paille utilisé pour personnifier la mauvaise influence des Jésuites à Fontevraud, les liens de plus en plus étroits entre la direction fontevriste et la Société de Jésus étaient réels. Comme la menace émanant des Jésuites pour les moines fontevristes comme seuls confesseurs de la communauté.

Le débat sur la désignation du confesseur de Fontevraud et des personnes autorisées à le faire, couvait depuis la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. En 1483, le pape Sixte IV avait autorisé l'abbesse Anne d'Orléans (de 1477 à 1491) à choisir librement son confesseur.<sup>28</sup> Interprétant cette bulle comme un privilège général, les abbesses ultérieures s'habituèrent à choisir leur propre confesseur, souvent à l'extérieur de l'ordre. Ce changement n'est pas demeuré incontesté. En 1543, la Sorbonne fut consultée sur la question, mais le privilège pontifical ne pouvait pas être ignoré facilement. Les éminents théologiens de l'université confirmèrent le droit de l'abbesse de nommer les confesseurs, mais la prévinrent des dangers d'agir ainsi et lui recommandèrent de s'appuyer sur les moines de l'ordre.<sup>29</sup>

Huit ans plus tard, "Père N." interprète le privilège accordé par Sixte IV comme pouvant s'étendre aux prieures: de compliquée, la situation des moines devient alors précaire. Selon l'*Epistre*, le Jésuite faisait l'éloge des avantages du choix libre des confesseurs comme un renforcement de la souveraineté de l'abbaye et du prieuré. Aux yeux des auteurs de l'*Epistre*, cependant, le raisonnement du "Père N." n'était qu'un moyen mal déguisé de cacher sa volonté de renforcer l'influence jésuite à Fontevraud.<sup>30</sup> Et effectivement, l'influence croissante des Jésuites était bel et bien au cœur du sujet: le tournant d'une encore plus grande ouverture de Fontevraud aux Jésuites, qui avait commencé avec la fondation du séminaire de La Flèche, et qui avait continué avec le recrutement de confesseurs jésuites, poussèrent les moines à chercher un public au-delà de la clôture de l'abbaye, un public qu'ils cherchèrent à atteindre en publiant l'*Epistre Narrative*. Dans ce document, les moines commencèrent à articuler une ligne argumentative légale, qu'ils

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l'abbesse fontevriste aux Jésuites. Il serait intéressant d'explorer l'étendue de l'influence jésuite sur le Fontevraud du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle plus en détail. Cependant, il y a peu de recherches universitaires sur l'histoire de Fontevraud après sa fondation: cette question parmi d'autres restent ouvertes.

**26** *Epistre Narrative*, 5.

**27** *Epistre Narrative*, 6 et 7.

**28** Jean Lardier, *La Sainte Famille de Font-Evraud* (1650), 571. Une copie de ce document se trouve dans: *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 88–95.

**29** Nicquet, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* (1642), 365.

**30** *Epistre Narrative*, 3 et 6.

affineraient constamment les années suivantes et formuleraient enfin dans le *Factum pour les Religieux*, publié en 1641.

## Défendre la cause des Frères

En 1627, le problème le plus urgent était, si ce n'est de réfuter, d'au moins tempérer la revendication des Jésuites sur le libre choix de confesseur des abbesses et prieures. Sur ce point, les moines de Fontevraud montrèrent autant d'esprit que de turbulence. Selon l'*Epistre Narrative*, ils convinquirent "Père N." de soumettre trois questions aux érudits jésuites de La Flèche, défiant ainsi l'intrus jésuite au sein de sa propre communauté. La première question concernait l'origine du pouvoir du confesseur de donner l'absolution et si cette autorité provenait de l'abbesse. La deuxième question renforçait la première: les abbesses et les prieures sont-elles autorisées à transférer le pouvoir de donner l'absolution aux autres sans le consentement des confesseurs de l'ordre ou du visiteur fontevriste?<sup>31</sup> En troisième lieu, il était demandé si le pouvoir du confesseur était une part de la charge (*rationes officii*) ou un privilège qui pouvait être conféré ou retiré.<sup>32</sup>

Même si les réponses de La Flèche semblaient soutenir les moines, elles échouèrent à résoudre le problème. À la première question, la réponse des jésuites était celle espérée: les confesseurs n'obtiennent pas leur pouvoir de l'abbesse qui, à cause de son sexe, "ne possède pas une telle juridiction [et donc] ne peut pas la conférer aux autres."<sup>33</sup> Concernant la deuxième question, ni l'abbesse ni les prieures ne peuvent transférer ladite autorité; cependant, à cause du privilège accordé par Sixte IV, l'abbesse avait le droit de désigner un confesseur externe, alors que les prieures n'en avaient pas le droit.<sup>34</sup> À la troisième et plus importante question, les Jésuites de La Flèche répondirent que le pouvoir des confesseurs était leur *rationes officii*, et trouvait son origine non avec l'abbesse mais avec le pape, à l'autorité duquel l'abbaye de Fontevraud était directement soumise.<sup>35</sup> En d'autres termes, le droit canon et la tradition de l'Église était du côté des moines, à l'exception du privilège accordé par Sixte IV en 1483, qui investissait l'abbesse d'une autorité qui se montrait de plus en plus menaçante pour la situation des moines à Fontevraud.

Comme contourner le privilège de Sixte s'était révélé impossible, les moines changèrent de stratégie et développèrent radicalement leur but dans les deux publications suivantes. Au lieu de s'interroger sur la légitimité des confesseurs externes, les *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636) et le *Factum* (1641) défiaient la validité d'une phase entière de l'histoire fontevriste, la réforme de l'ordre au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Cette dernière, avançaient-ils, avait apporté plusieurs changements à l'organisation de Fontevraud, y

<sup>31</sup> La charge de visiteur était la plus importante charge fontevriste confiée à un moine de l'ordre. Le père visiteur était désigné pour trois ans et inspectait les prieurés de l'ordre annuellement: *Regula Ordinis Fontis-Ebraldi* (1642), 236–37.

<sup>32</sup> *Epistre Narrative*, 12 et 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Epistre Narrative*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Epistre Narrative*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Epistre Narrative*, 16.



compris dans sa hiérarchie et sa règle. Il en résultait que le Fontevraud de l'après-réforme était en désaccord avec les décrets de l'Église qui interdisaient explicitement d'introduire un changement ou une réforme volontaire si ce n'est pour "retourner à la rigueur de la règle initiale si l'Ordre en avait relâché l'observation."<sup>36</sup> Dans un second temps, les moines demandèrent le rétablissement de l'état présumé d'avant la réforme, un processus dans lequel ils cherchaient à obtenir un rôle essentiel pour s'assurer une place de pivot dans le futur de Fontevraud. L'impopulaire privilège de Sixte IV, obtenu durant la réforme de l'Ordre, aurait dû disparaître avec la réforme contestée. C'était un plan complexe et ses chances de succès avaient dû paraître minces dès le début—mais les moines le tentèrent malgré tout.

En substance, la réforme de Fontevraud au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle consistait à implanter une nouvelle règle monastique détaillée en remplacement des statuts du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, établis par Robert d'Arbrissel. La règle révisée proposait deux altérations significatives des statuts d'origines. D'abord, les prieurs de Fontevraud furent désormais nommés "pères confesseurs." Ensuite, la nouvelle règle, une adaptation de la règle bénédictine, s'appliquait désormais aux hommes comme aux femmes fontevristes, causant un changement pour les hommes qui vivaient à l'origine selon la règle augustinienne. Passer de "prieurs" à "pères confesseurs" était un simple changement de nom, de même qu'échanger le *Praeceptum* pour la *Regula Benedicti* n'apporta que peu de changements concrets à la vie des frères.<sup>37</sup> Cependant, la moindre déviation par rapport à l'état originel de Fontevraud, son état, ou sa structure, même insignifiante, donnait aux moines un puissant argument contre la règle réformée, à savoir sa nouveauté. Si réformer signifiait retourner aux origines, la moindre modification de l'état originel introduite durant la réforme suffisait à invalider toute la réforme. Les moines construisirent leur argumentation sur ce raisonnement et réclamèrent violemment le retour à la règle augustinienne dans chacune de leurs deux publications.

Alors que les changements dans la règle et les noms étaient des faits, d'autres modifications prétendument introduites dans la réforme étaient des fabrications des moines. La réforme, clamaient-ils, avait apporté d'importants changements dans la structure interne de Fontevraud. Avant la réforme, et avant que les prieurs ne soient dégradés en "pères confesseurs," les moines étaient en charge des prieurés, tandis que l'autorité des prieures se limitait aux nonnes de leur couvent. Concernant l'abbesse, les prieurs avaient l'habitude de tenir un second rang après elle, d'autant mieux accepté qu'elle s'appuyait

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**36** Gilbert Huddleston, "Reform of a Religious Order," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York: Appleton, 1911), en ligne à <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12711a.htm>.

**37** Le terme de prieur, comme celui de prieure, suppose des tâches administratives et une autorité. Et en effet, à la fois dans les *Notes* et dans le *Factum*, on retrouve une demande de retour des prieurs et de leur attribution d'une autorité appropriée. La plus détaillée, dans les *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 36–41. Même s'il manque une preuve définitive, il semble probable que les prieurs médiévaux de Fontevraud étaient aussi impliqués dans la charge spirituelle, tandis que l'administration du prieuré, en même temps que l'administration de l'abbaye et de l'ordre entier, étaient à la charge de la prieure. Voir Müller, "From Charismatic Congregation to Institutional Monasticism."

sur les conseils et avis des moines pour administrer ce vaste ordre.<sup>38</sup> La réforme, affirmèrent les moines, avait altéré la hiérarchie d'origine, et ces transformations étaient à leur tour la cause des crises économiques et spirituelles qui entâchaient l'histoire de l'ordre au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.<sup>39</sup> Les moines étaient convaincus que, en tant qu'hommes, ils avaient plus de compétences pour les affaires ou les problèmes administratifs, ce qui se reflétait sur la meilleure condition générale de l'ordre fontevriste avant la réforme.<sup>40</sup> Les *Notes sur la Règle* s'achèvent avec la demande de replacer les prieurs dans leur position antérieure—comme seconds de l'abbesse et supérieurs des prieures.<sup>41</sup>

Quelques années après la publication des *Notes*, les moines firent appel au Parlement de Paris pour soumettre leur affaire à propos des confesseurs externes et des nouveautés de la réforme. Dans les années 1640, le plus haut tribunal de France avait déjà une bonne expérience des querelles fontevristes. Un siècle plus tôt, la première abbesse Bourbon, Renée, s'était querellée avec ses moines devant le Parlement une décennie entière, à tel point que l'affaire avait été transférée devant le Grand Conseil du roi, qui avait statué en faveur de l'abbesse en 1521. En 1640, les moines et leur abbesse Jeanne-Baptiste se rencontrèrent également au tribunal. Un an plus tard, les premiers publièrent le *Factum pour les Religieux*.<sup>42</sup> dans le but de gagner le soutien du public et du tribunal.

Le *Factum* est la présentation la plus remarquable de l'argumentation des moines. Même si aucun nouvel argument n'est introduit, ceux déjà connus depuis *l'Epistre Narrative* et les *Notes sur la Règle* étaient largement développés, parfois jusqu'au pédantisme législatif. Le cœur de ce document de deux cents pages repose sur la hiérarchie fontevriste et le gouvernement abbatial devenu "absolu".<sup>43</sup> En dépit de sa longueur, le contenu du *Factum* se résume rapidement: alors que les moines participaient à l'administration de l'ordre et votaient au chapitre général dans le Fontevraud d'avant la réforme, le chapitre général a perdu son influence après la réforme. En fait, clament-ils, le chapitre ressemble désormais à "un monstre avec une tête mais sans corps, ou seulement l'apparence d'un corps," où l'abbesse seule ordonne, absout, et juge.<sup>44</sup> "L'autorité absolue" de l'abbesse<sup>45</sup> se manifestait plus loin dans la suppression *de facto* du conseil abbatial et dans le fait qu'elle ne partage pas l'autorité dans l'ordre fontevriste.<sup>46</sup> En particulier, les moines voyaient dans le déni tacite des droits du chapitre général à la coges-

38 *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 37.

39 *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 33–35 et 40.

40 *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 37, 51, 56.

41 *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 81–82.

42 Le titre complet est le suivant: *Factum pour les Religieux de Fonte Vrault, touchant les differents dudit Ordre*. Pour une définition de la nature d'un factum, voir la note 11.

43 *Factum*, 33, 56.

44 "... Cette assemblée prétendue capitulaire ressembleroit à un monster, car il y auroit une teste qui n'auroit point de membres, sinon en apparence": *Factum*, 25.

45 *Factum*, 33, 56.

46 *Factum*, 33.

tion, une violation du droit canon. Pour le chapitre général, pour être en accord avec la loi de l'Église, chaque "prieur qui devait être rétabli" dans les couvents devait être rétabli en tant que seul représentant de leur couvent au chapitre général et s'investir dans chaque processus de prise de décision qui appartient à l'ordre dans son ensemble.<sup>47</sup>

Dans toute l'argumentation, les moines ne remettent jamais en cause la suprématie abbatiale. Cependant, ils demandent à être placés au deuxième rang dans l'ordre, une demande qu'ils renforcent avec trois arguments différents.

1. La tradition: le fondateur de Fontevraud, Robert d'Arbrissel, avait prévu que les moines assistant l'abbesse dans administration de l'ordre. En effet, affirment les moines, leurs prédécesseurs en avaient toujours fait ainsi jusqu'à ce que la réforme abolisse leurs droits traditionnels.<sup>48</sup>
2. La nécessité: les changements apportés par la réforme, notamment la prétendue primauté donnée aux prieures sur les moines et par la suite leur mise à l'écart de toute l'administration, a causé le déclin économique et spirituel de l'ordre. (Cette idée avait déjà été largement développée dans les Notes sur la Règle.)<sup>49</sup>
3. L'autorité spirituelle: l'insistance des moines sur le fait que les femmes doivent être exclues de l'autorité spirituelle est liée à la question originelle du conflit: qui peut désigner et qui peut être désigné confesseur des fontevristes. Pour les moines, la réponse restait sans ambiguïté après quatorze années de conflit: pour accorder l'autorité spirituelle nécessaire pour absoudre un pécheur, la personne qui l'accorde doit la posséder elle-même. Et puisque les femmes, qui ne pouvaient donc être ordonnées, étaient généralement exclues de toute autorité spirituelle, ni les abbesses ni les prieures ne pouvaient désigner des confesseurs extérieurs, c'est-à-dire transférer l'autorité spirituelle à des personnes extérieures à l'ordre.<sup>50</sup> (Cet argument demeure le plus complexe également dans le Factum.)<sup>51</sup>

En laissant de côté ces arguments qui servent essentiellement à démontrer la nouveauté de la règle et donc son invalidité, trois questions fondamentales peuvent être identi-

<sup>47</sup> *Factum*, 26. Le fait que seuls les moines et non les prieures peuvent représenter leur prieuré respectif au chapitre général se fonde sur la bulle *Periculoso* (1298), un décret pontifical qui rendait la clôture obligatoire pour les religieuses. Le Concile de Trente renforçait la bulle *Periculoso*. Voir session 25 du concile de Trent, chap. V "Concerning Regulars and Nuns," dans *Konzilien der Neuzeit: Konzil von Trient (1545–1563), Erstes Vatikanisches Konzil (1869/70), Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil (1962–1965)*, *Indices*, dir. par Josef Wohlmuth, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta* 3 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 177–78, <https://brill.com/view/title/47807>.

<sup>48</sup> *Factum*, 37, 46, 48–49, 65. En détail, 83–94.

<sup>49</sup> *Factum*, 39, 70, et *Notes sur la Règle de Marie de Bretagne* (1636), 33–35.

<sup>50</sup> *Factum*, 40–44 et 59–60, et *Factum* IIème partie, "Raisons," 1–8.

<sup>51</sup> Même si tout argument construit sur l'histoire de Fontevraud était forcément clairement circonscrite, la question d'une autorité spirituelle féminine était nécessairement plus complexe, dans la mesure où elle avait trait au droit canon avec ses innombrables réglementations souvent contradictoires, et où elles touchaient également la question des traditions monastiques, qui n'étaient pas moins complexes.

fiées: d'abord, la revendication de modifier la hiérarchie fontevriste pour que les moines viennent en second après l'abbesse. Ensuite, l'insistance sur la responsabilité abbatiale du chapitre général. Enfin, le droit du chapitre à la cogestion sur tous les plans.

Les deux derniers points en particulier montrent que les intérêts des moines sont allés au-delà d'un simple mécontentement face au recours à des confesseurs extérieurs. L'importance du chapitre général est une caractéristique du monachisme bénédictin, qui penche davantage pour une structure collégiale que pour une structure hiérarchique. Il semble donc juste de dire que dans le Fontevraud du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les moines s'opposent au monopole croissant de pouvoir de l'abbesse qui en est venue à oublier les institutions traditionnelles de Fontevraud et à donner préférence à des Jésuites comme guides spirituels et administratifs. Cette préférence n'était pas une coïncidence, comme nous le montrerons brièvement, et elle est profondément liée à l'implantation de l'absolutisme abbatial à Fontevraud.

### Défendre la cause de l'abbesse

Même si les documents abbatiaux sont plus divers que ceux des moines, tous défendent la souveraineté abbatiale. Au moment de la publication de *l'Epistre Narrative*, et probablement pour y répondre, l'entourage de l'abbesse commença à sélectionner les documents qui témoignaient de la longue et fructueuse histoire de Fontevraud, de la richesse de l'ordre, et de l'importance des abbesses fontevristes pour l'une et l'autre. Le premier ensemble de documents, rassemblés en cartulaires, couvre la période de 1100 à 1620 et va de donations à des privilèges en passant par des bulles pontificales et des courtes biographies des abbesses bourbonniennes.<sup>52</sup> Le second ensemble se caractérise par des publications de circonstances ou plutôt des réactions immédiates au *Factum* des moines.<sup>53</sup> Deux chroniques de Fontevraud forment le troisième et dernier ensemble de documents. Le plus important des deux histoires est *l'Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* de Honorat Nicquet, publiée à Paris en 1642. Le grand nombre de copies encore conservées montrent la large diffusion du livre à l'époque. En 1650, le confident de Jeanne-Baptiste, Jean Lardier, achève son ouvrage massif en trois volumes, *La Sainte Famille de Font-Evraud*, dont seulement le premier volume, un manuscrit de mille pages, a survécu à l'érosion du temps. Alors que les publications des moines avaient peu reçu l'attention des universitaires, les documents abbatiaux, facilement accessibles, ont souvent servi de base à des études sur Fontevraud et sa hiérarchie apparemment particulière.

Comme pour s'opposer à l'angle légal suivi par les moines, les publications abbatiales traitent de la question de la hiérarchie fontevristes dans une perspective historico-philosophique. Le jésuite Honorat Nicquet (1585-1667) en particulier décrit

**52** Paris, Archives Nationales LL 1599<sup>A</sup> et BnF, ms. lat. 5480 I et II.

**53** Ces documents incluent Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon, *Mémoires touchant l'Institut de l'ordre de Fontevraud présentés au roi par la dame abbesse dudit ordre*; Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon, *Lettre aux prieurés et couvents*; Nicolas Picard, *Remarques, en forme de réponse, sur un libelle diffamatoire de l'Ordre de Fontevraud, qui court par les provinces sous le titre Factum...*; Anonyme, *La Réponse d'un ecclésiastique à la lettre d'une religieuse de l'Ordre de Fontevraud sur un libelle imprimé sous ce titre Factum....*

Fontevraud comme une structure corporative avec à sa tête une abbesse toute puissante à laquelle tous les membres doivent une complète obéissance.<sup>54</sup> Une simple analogie sert de justification à une souveraineté abbatiale sans partage. Lorsque Robert d'Arbrissel a fondé Fontevraud, il a façonné l'identité et la structure de l'ordre d'après le moment de la crucifixion où Jésus confie son disciple préféré, Jean, au soin et à l'autorité de sa mère, Marie: *Ecce filius tuus, Ecce mater tua*.<sup>55</sup> A Fontevraud, l'abbesse incarne cette tradition mariale et donc devient la mère de tous les fontevristes, bénéficiant d'une autorité semblable à l'autorité parentale sur ses enfants. Les moines, qui suivaient les traces de saint Jean, étaient ses fils et lui devaient donc une obéissance inconditionnelle. En dépit de son apparente simplicité, l'analogie est en réalité plutôt sophistiquée, car elle combine une légitimité religieuse (la crucifixion) avec une légitimité construite sur la tradition monastique de Fontevraud (Robert d'Arbrissel).

Cependant, le raisonnement philosophique sous-jacent est caractéristique du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle plus que du Moyen Âge. En d'autres termes, l'idée d'une autorité parentale sans limite n'est pas un concept médiéval mais un concept du début de l'époque moderne, formulée par des défenseurs de l'autorité royale à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Jean Bodin, le plus célèbre défenseur d'une souveraineté pleine et entière, avait identifié l'autorité parentale comme la seule souveraineté incontestable et l'avait placée au centre de sa théorie du gouvernement.<sup>56</sup> Depuis le début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Jésuites contribuent à répandre l'idée de la souveraineté parentale dans le domaine ecclésiastique, y compris à Fontevraud. Avec leur conception du monde caractérisée par une idée de société corporative avec une tête toute-puissante, le principe d'une hiérarchie stricte et une insistance sur l'obéissance absolue, les Jésuites étaient la personification monastique de la pensée de Bodin.<sup>57</sup>

De toute évidence, les principes jésuites séduisaient davantage des abbesses bourbonniennes conscientes de leur autorité que la tradition collégiale de Fontevraud, et ces principes étaient la raison, à la fois du tournant jésuite de Fontevraud après 1619 et de la présentation par Honorat Nicquet de la structure de l'ordre dans les termes de Bodin, en remplaçant l'autorité paternelle évoquée par Bodin par l'autorité maternelle. En plaçant le conflit fontevriste dans le contexte plus large de la pensée politique de l'époque, la résistance des moines à l'influence jésuite à Fontevraud commence à apparaître non plus simplement comme une défense de leurs droits en tant que confesseurs, mais aussi comme une opposition à un absolutisme monastique naissant. D'autre part, plutôt que de défendre l'autorité traditionnelle de l'abbesse contre des moines usurpateurs, les écrits historiques émanant du camp abbatial servent de justification à une souveraineté abbatiale.

**54** L'abbesse elle-même utilise ce titre.

**55** L'analogie fait référence à l'Évangile selon Jean 19:26–27, et est fréquemment mentionné dans différents documents, dont la *Regula Ordinis Fontis-Ebraldi* (1642), 263.

**56** Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la République* (reimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1583; Aalen: Scientia, 1977), en particulier le Livre I, chapitres II–V.

**57** Höpfel, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 27–44, en particulier 5, 24, 27–30 et 34–44.

Pourtant, dans son désir de montrer la longue tradition de la souveraineté abbatiale, le camp de l'abbesse était confronté à un problème de taille: il n'y avait pas de documents historiques justifiant l'autorité abbatiale illimitée à Fontevraud—maternelle ou autre. La réponse abbatiale à ce défi était astucieuse et aussi complexe que la tentative des moines de l'emporter en contestant la validité de la réforme de Fontevraud. La voie vers la gloire abbatiale reposait sur la fabrication d'une tradition fontevriste d'une autorité maternelle et d'une obéissance filiale qui aurait remonté aux origines médiévales de l'ordre. Cette fin a été permise par deux moyens: la manipulation des documents fontevristes qui tendaient plus vers un ordre collégial que vers l'ordre hiérarchique désiré et la (ré-)écriture de l'histoire de Fontevraud.

Jeanne-Baptiste confia la tâche d'écrire une histoire convenable au jésuite Honorat Nicquet. Les 547 pages de l'*Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* qui en résultent sont divisées en quatre livres qui émanent des idéaux jésuites d'ordre et de hiérarchie. Les deux premiers livres donnent des informations au lecteur sur la fondation de Fontevraud et sur son fondateur, Robert d'Arbrissel. Le livre trois est dédié à la justification théorique et théologique de la hiérarchie de Fontevraud et à la soumission des moines à l'abbesse.<sup>58</sup> Enfin, le livre quatre est une collection de courtes biographies de toutes les abbesses. Même si les arguments légaux ne sont pas absents de l'*Histoire*, ils sont moins élaborés que dans les écrits des moines, et Nicquet cherche à justifier l'*auctoritas* principalement grâce à la tradition. Une grande partie de l'argumentation de Nicquet apparaît sous forme de réponses aux réclamations des moines et est renforcée par de nombreux exemples d'autorité féminine positive pris soit dans la Bible soit dans l'histoire séculière.<sup>59</sup> Dans le but de justifier les réclamations concrètes de la longue tradition de la souveraineté abbatiale, Nicquet se réfère à une vaste liste de confirmations pontificales, données aux abbesses précédentes, et de privilèges royaux, pour montrer la grande estime dans laquelle les pouvoirs temporel et ecclésiastiques ont tenu Fontevraud.<sup>60</sup>

La manipulation des sources, qui était le deuxième moyen pour construire une tradition d'absolutisme abbatial, prit d'abord la forme d'omissions. Comme mentionné précédemment, le Fontevraud du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle connut une ardente activité de compilation et de copie de documents destinées à être rassemblés en cartulaires. Ce faisant, les copistes omirent certaines parties—parfois de simples lignes, parfois des passages entiers—qui ne correspondaient pas à l'image voulue de la hiérarchie fontevriste. L'exemple le plus manifeste d'une telle manipulation est la *vita altera*.<sup>61</sup> de Robert d'Arbrissel. A l'origine écrite vers 1120, la *vita altera* mentionne le rôle des moines en tant

**58** Nicquet décrit la soumission des hommes aux femmes comme un exercice d'humilité qui plaît à Dieu, confirmé fréquemment par de nombreux papes: *Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* (1643), 217–27.

**59** Nicquet, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* (1643), 346–88.

**60** Nicquet, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* (1643), 253–81.

**61** Deux vies furent écrites peu après la mort de Robert d'Arbrissel: on les désigne le plus souvent comme *vita prima* et *vita altera*. Jusqu'à la réédition d'une partie des sources du Fontevraud initial par Jacques Dalarun, les deux vitae n'étaient accessibles que dans la *Patrologia Latina*, dont l'édition était fondée sur des copies défectueuses du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Voir PL 162, col. 1045–1078.

que conseillers abbatiaux, dont le consentement était nécessaire pour les décisions importantes et concernant tout l'ordre<sup>62</sup>. Cette partie, comme nombre d'autres, manque dans les copies du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle qui laissent de côté presque un tiers de la *vita* originale. Quand l'ensemble des copies furent achevées, Jeanne-Baptiste ordonna que l'ensemble des anciennes versions de la *vita altera* soit détruit.<sup>63</sup> Cependant, une des copies du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, que Jacques Dalarun a découverte au début des années 1980, met en lumière l'étendue de la manipulation des sources fontevristes orchestrée par l'abbesse.<sup>64</sup>

Au final, Jeanne-Baptiste réussit à lier la souveraineté abbatiale à l'identité fontevriste en fabriquant la longue tradition de son existence. Réunir les documents et les collationner en cartulaires facilement accessibles, la manipulation de documents essentiels pour omettre des détails défavorables, ainsi que la large diffusion de l'*Histoire de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud* soigneusement amendée par Nicquet, a aidé à créer l'image de Fontevraud comme un lieu où les femmes ont toujours dominé et les hommes ont toujours servi. Les moines, qui ne disposaient pas des moyens financiers de l'abbesse, ni de ses liens avec le roi de France et son Grand Conseil, n'avaient aucune chance d'arrêter les évolutions décrites, même s'ils ont certainement essayé.

## Conclusion

Les études existantes sur Fontevraud et de Robert d'Arbrissel ont fait ressortir l'aspect apparemment novateur d'une autorité féminine sur une communauté mixte comme seul contre-exemple de l'organisation patriarcale de la société médiévale. Les érudits du début de l'époque moderne, par ailleurs, ont peu prêté attention à Fontevraud. Ce qui est quelque peu surprenant si l'on considère l'influence politique et religieuse de l'ordre dans la France du début de l'époque moderne.<sup>65</sup> De plus, c'est précisément cette négligence qui a donné aux historiens des deux périodes une image distordue de Fontevraud, une incompréhension créée durant les querelles du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, décrites précédemment. L'anachronisme qui a consisté à plaquer des concepts d'autorité du début de l'époque moderne et des rôles de genre sur une institution médiévale—une institution

<sup>62</sup> *Vita altera*, 52.6; voir note 22.

<sup>63</sup> Dalarun, *L'Impossible Sainteté*, 98–116.

<sup>64</sup> Pour cette édition, voir Dalarun, *L'Impossible Sainteté*, 255–302, et plus récemment, *Les Deux Vies*, 191–299. La *Vita* amendée est de loin l'exemple le plus criant de ces manipulations; il existe d'autres exemples dont le compte-rendu de Marie d'Avoise sur la mise à l'écart des moines au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle face à des hommes armés appelés par la première abbesse bourbonnienne, Renée. Les deux copies, l'original à peine lisible, qui incluent la mention de violence, et la copie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui omet ce passage et d'autres événements, sont désormais conservées aux archives d'Angers, Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire 101 H 23<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Fontevraud prit en France le rôle de modèle de réforme pour tous les monastères féminins des XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles. Voir Jean-Marie Le Gall, *Les Moines au Temps des réformes, France 1480–1560* (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2001), 525. Pour l'augmentation du poids politique de Fontevraud au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle en France, voir: Müller, "Forming and Re-Forming Fontevraud." Pour une étude d'un des nombreux couvents placés sous l'influence fontevriste, voir Edwards, "My Sister for Abbess."

qui ignorait de tels concepts—est passée inaperçu aux yeux des historiens à cause de la tendance à établir une division stricte entre la période médiévale et le début de l'époque moderne, plutôt que de chercher des connections entre elles.

Absent du Fontevraud médiéval, le cas d'un pouvoir féminin et d'une servitude masculine trouve son origine au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, né d'un conflit interne entre la diminution des droits des moines à la cogestion, sous l'influence croissante des Jésuites, et les changements qui en ont résultés dans la hiérarchie de Fontevraud. La réinterprétation de la structure de Fontevraud comme une hiérarchie dans laquelle les moines sont les sujets d'une abbesse toute-puissante reflétait la pensée jésuite et fut certainement formulée par des conseillers jésuites, comme Honorat Nicquet en son temps.

L'absolutisme abbatial naissant divisa les membres de l'ordre en deux camps impossibles à réconcilier. Les moines, qui furent un temps soutenu par les prieures fontevristes<sup>66</sup> s'opposèrent à une autorité abbatiale sans limite et pensèrent que la meilleure façon de la contrer était de demander le deuxième rang dans la hiérarchie fontevriste, avec des pouvoirs de cogestion très étendus. Le camp abbatial, d'autre part, s'opposa violemment à toute—supposée ou réelle—restriction de la souveraineté abbatiale, et, dans le but d'introduire puis de consolider l'autorité voulue, commença à la justifier à l'aide de la souveraineté maternelle, un concept emprunté à la philosophie politique des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles.

Dans le processus d'introduction d'un pouvoir abbatial unique à Fontevraud, les proches de Jeanne-Baptiste ont réécrit l'histoire de l'ordre en l'adaptant à un idéal de souveraineté abbatiale. Ces manipulations de l'histoire fontevriste non seulement dépassent les bornes chronologiques entre les ères médiévales et modernes, mais connectent ces bornes à notre propre période, où nombre d'universitaires ont voulu voir dans Fontevraud un exemple exceptionnel de renversement de la hiérarchie médiévale entre homme et femmes, mais n'ont pas perçu que cette impression ne reflète que les manipulations du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle de la mémoire fontevriste.

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**66** Les prieures de Fontevraud s'opposèrent également à l'autorité abbatiale toujours croissante durant le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Plusieurs publications des prieures en témoignent, dont Paris, BnF 4-LD74-3 et Archives Nationales L 1019. Cependant les publications abbatiales ignorent largement les demandes des prieures, raison pour laquelle elles n'ont pas été prises en compte pour cet article.



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