

WOMEN, MEMORY AND BENEDICTINE REFORM: THE MONASTERIES OF SANTA MARÍA DE PIASCA AND SAN SALVADOR DE OÑA

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The monasteries of Santa María de Piasca and San Salvador de Oña, in the ancient kingdom of Castile and León, both originated as double houses closely linked to the interests of the noble families who founded them. Since their foundation in the tenth and eleventh centuries respectively, these monasteries, built as religious, patrimonial and memorial centers, were headed by powerful women acting as abbesses or governors. The situation at both institutions changed in the early twelfth century when Benedictine reform, encouraged by the monarchy, led not only to the loss of the direct control by the founding families but also their conversion into exclusively male centers. The memory of the foundation of the two monasteries, so closely linked to the work of those women, was suddenly interrupted by this new stage in their history. Shortly afterwards, in the second half of the twelfth century and first half of the thirteenth century, documentary initiatives were begun at both houses with the aim of recreating and increasing the importance of their origins. At Piasca, a new cartulary was created, while at Oña a concerted program of charter falsification was undertaken. The respective activities of the two houses demonstrate two ways that the new Benedictine male communities managed the memory of their beginnings as double houses under women's government. These examples in the

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north of the Iberian Peninsula are therefore exceptional case studies with which to calibrate how documentary memory was initially used, and for what purposes and how it was employed to negotiate gender issues in these religious centers.

WOMEN AND MEMORY IN SPANISH DOUBLE MONASTERIES

The study of memory in female religious centers enjoys a long tradition in medieval Europe, where the names of such abbesses as Hildegard of Bingen, Mathilde of Quedlinburg or Hathumoda and Geberga of Gandersheim are well-known in promoting or receiving hagiographic and historiographic texts.² In the Iberian Peninsula, the prolonged duration of double monasteries, which often favoured administration by women, has resulted in a long list of women who headed those mixed communities.³ They can be identified in monastic charters in the absence of more elaborate written texts. This has favoured an assessment of the political, familial and patrimonial implications of these women, with particular attention to their central role in maintaining dynastic memory.

Indeed, the late spread of Benedictine monasteries in Spain, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, allowed the continuation of double monasteries that enabled the entry of aristocratic women into new religious centers as part of the dynastic strategies of the families who founded them. The creation of exclusively female houses in the north of the Iberian Peninsula is unusual before 1100. In consequence, most religious women were in mixed monasteries, many of which were connected to the monarchy or were founded by powerful families, for various reasons, that were led by women of their lineage. Some of these early institutions had uncertain origins and unknown founders, but their work could be claimed, and read back into the past, by their later descendants, especially if the family had achieved a higher social standing. This is the case of Santa María de Piasca, whose documents date back to the mid-ninth century; it was not until 1030 that the first reference was made to its construction by the ancestors of Munio Alfonso. Other monasteries may owe their construction or foundation to the institution of the *infantado*: an inheritance linked to certain unmarried or widowed women of royal and aristocratic families.⁴ This is the case of

² Jirki Thibaut, 'Female Abbatial Leadership and the Shaping of Communal Identity in Ninth-Century Saxony: The Life of Hathumoda of Gandersheim', *The Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 7 (2018), 21–45.

³ Antonio Linage, 'La tardía supervivencia de los monasterios dobles en la Península Ibérica', *Studia monástica* 32, no. 2 (1990), 365–79.

⁴ Therese Martin, 'Fuentes de potestad para reinas e infantas: el Infantazgo en los siglos centrales de la Edad Media', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 46, no. 1 (2016), 97–136.

San Salvador de Oña, which was founded in 1011 due to the wish of Count Sancho García and his wife Urraca to provide a monastic home for their second daughter Tigridia.

Gender studies have interpreted female monasteries as a place where women were released from some of their sociocultural functions as wife and mother, enabling their empowerment through their ties to a sacred life. Indeed, some of the *dominae* who governed those religious institutions enjoyed considerable autonomy in a socially legitimized context, albeit always under a structure and ideological system dominated by men. These *deovotae*, consecrated to God, did not necessarily have to take vows as nuns, but could follow a type of monastic life that allowed them to govern and manage the institution in accordance with their abbatial control. Some of the roles assigned to those women guaranteed the interests of the founding family; they managed their patrimony, established privileged links with the religious sphere, and perpetuated dynastic memory. As Matthew Innes points out, the transmission of family memory, especially by women, allowed aristocratic families to use the past to legitimize the present.⁵ According to Carlos Laliena, 'women were a fundamental vector in the collective memory of the aristocratic families they belonged to and in the same way they played a decisive role in the formation of family identities'.⁶ The functions assigned to them included the commemoration of deceased relatives with liturgical formulae, especially annual memorial prayers, in a system that encouraged privileged burials. All of these activities, in the monastic context, were carried out within a female 'universe'.

Women's monasteries associated with royal dynasties and aristocratic families in general perfectly fulfilled this commemorative function. In this way, their presence as representatives of the founding families contributed to the identification of the monasteries as centers supporting the memory of the family. This was often vindicated by donations from different members of the lineage or through their choice as a place for prayer and burial.⁷ In consequence, the charters produced in that time demonstrate the deep-seated attachment of those women in the history of the monasteries.⁸

⁵ Matthew Innes, 'Keeping it in the family: women and aristocratic memory, 700–1200', in *Medieval Memories*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (London, 2001), 17–35.

⁶ Carlos Laliena, 'En el corazón del Estado Feudal: política dinástica y memoria femenina en el siglo XI', in *Mujeres de la Edad Media: actividades políticas, socioeconómicas y culturales*, ed. María del Carmen García Herrero (Zaragoza, 2018), 15.

⁷ Gregoria Caveró, 'Spanish Female monasticism: "Family" Monasteries and their transformation (eleventh to twelfth centuries)', in *Women in the Medieval Monastic World*, ed. Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (Turnhout, 2015), 15–52.

⁸ The small number of documents that have survived from Piasca and Oña for the period of their foundation, in addition to their preservation in the form of copies or forgeries, limits part of our analysis. However, it is necessary to point out, as

The eleventh-century transformations in Latin Christianity reached the kingdom of Castile and León at the end of the century. The reform particularly affected women's monastic life through the spread of the Benedictine rule and obligatory conversion of double houses into male monasteries, with very few exceptions: San Pelayo de León and San Pelayo in Oviedo or San Vicente in Segovia. In this context, the *dominae* lost their status and their capacity to govern as they were usually moved to women's priories under the control of an abbot.⁹ Yet that was not the only subordination these women would suffer. The passing of time allows us to see how the memory of the origins of the houses as double monasteries, inextricably linked to the presence and authority of women, were negotiated differently by new male communities. Thus, the production of a cartulary at Santa María de Piasca in about 1167 and the falsification of documents at San Salvador de Oña in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries reveal two ways to manage the memory of the founding women of those institutions in accordance with new gender priorities.¹⁰

THE FOUNDATION OF SANTA MARÍA DE PIASCA: THE FIRST ABBESSES AND URRACA ALFONSO

The foundation of a double monastery at Santa María de Piasca, in the valley of Liébana in the modern province of Cantabria, may date back to the second half of the ninth century.¹¹ However, the first written evidence

Letouzey-Réty does in this same volume, that the association of these women with the documentary culture is not limited to their mention in the documents, but that it is also necessary to re-establish the abbesses and nuns as the actors who commissioned and carefully preserved these documents. Otherwise, the example of Bouxieres, analyzed by Steven Vanderputten also in this volume, allows us to know how these nuns perceived the oldest contents of their archives and on what arguments they based their preservation. Catherine Letouzey-Réty, 'Memory and Documentary Culture at Holy Trinity Abbey, Caen in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', 254–70.

⁹ Francisco Javier Pérez Rodríguez, 'Las monjas de negra toga: monasterios femeninos benedictinos en los reinos occidentales hispanos en los siglos XI a XIII', in *Mujeres en silencio: el monacato femenino en la España Medieval* (Aguilar de Campoo, 2017), 111–46. For more about how the reform affected female monasticism, see Steven Vanderputten, *Dark Age Nunneries. The ambiguous Identity of Female Monasticism, 800–1050* (Ithaca, NY, 2018), 88–110; Vicenza Musardo, *Il monachesimo femminile. La vita delle donne religiose nell'Occidente medievale* (Milan, 2006), 196–215.

¹⁰ Although not related to the monastic sphere another interesting study on female memory is Ana Rodríguez, 'De olvido y memoria. Cómo recordar a las mujeres poderosas en Castilla y León en los siglos XII y XIII', *Arenal* 25, no. 2 (2018), 271–94.

¹¹ Concerning the first years of this monastery, see Julia Montenegro, *Santa María de Piasca. Estudio de un territorio a través de un centro monástico 857–1252* (Valladolid, 1993), 37–53.

for it is in a donation charter of 930.¹² In 941, a monastic pact between thirty-six nuns, under the rule of the Abbess Aylo, indicates the start of a demonstrable monastic observance in the institution, following the rule of St Fructuosus.¹³ Its status as a double house is confirmed by another charter in 945 that indicates the 'Lady Abbess Aylo with the whole consortium of sisters and monks' (*Apatissa Domna Aylo cum omni collegium sororum et monachorum*).¹⁴ From the tenth century to 1109, the administration of the monastery is predominantly run by women; twenty-three documents feature the names of abbesses who were beneficiaries of business transactions and another five who acted as grantors. They are each given the title of 'abbess'. After the 1040s, however, this title virtually disappears and is replaced by the formulae 'christi ancilla', 'mater' or 'domna'. This change coincides with the arrival of Urraca Alfonso as abbess of Piasca. It should be noted that from 1050, an abbot shared the government of the monastery which, like other double houses in Spain such as San Salvador de Oña, divided responsibilities over the female and male communities, respectively.¹⁵ It is quite likely that Urraca's activity outside the monastery, due to her multiple guardianships over the most important monasteries of the Alfonso lineage, required this abbot in a supporting role.¹⁶

The abbacy of Urraca Alfonso at Santa María de Piasca was no doubt the result of her family's connections to the monastery. One of her brothers, Count Munio Alfonso, appears as a benefactor from 1030 onwards, alluding to the construction of the monastery by his ancestors: 'ipsum

¹² Julia Montenegro, *Colección diplomática de Santa María de Piasca 857–1252* (Santander, 1991), no. 6 (Hereafter CDP).

¹³ CDP, no. 8. Some scholars consider that the list of men who subscribed this pact must have been on a fragment that is missing from the document, whereas others suggest that another separate pact must have existed. Fidel Fita, 'El monasterio dúplice de Piasca y la regla de San Fructuoso de Braga en el siglo X', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 34 (1899), 450–1; José Orlandis, 'Los monasterios dúplices españoles en la Alta Edad Media', *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 30 (1960), 192.

¹⁴ CDP, no. 10.

¹⁵ CDP, nos. 35 and 36.

¹⁶ Martínez Sopena points out that the guardianship of the family monasteries was concentrated in Urraca, at least from 1040 to 1080, who assumed a superior authority to that of the abbots of those monasteries, which the abbots themselves recognized, and reflected that of the family as a whole. Pascual Martínez Sopena, 'Parentesco y poder en León durante el siglo XI: La casata de los Alfonso', *Studia Historia* 5 (1987), 48. This dynamic of cooperation between genders as part of the same institution, even though they belonged to different monasteries, is analyzed by Constance Bouchard in this volume for the case of Cluny and Marcigny. Constance B. Bouchard, 'Women and Memory in Burgundian Charters', 235–53.

monasterii quos edificaverunt abios et parentes nostros', as noted above.¹⁷ The connection between the lineage of the Alfonsos and Piasca becomes especially clear between 1030 and 1075, when several members of the family made large donations to the monastery, which they considered part of their family heritage.¹⁸ It was not the only religious house that the family controlled in Liébana, as Urraca Alfonso was also the head of the monastery of San Martín de la Fuente. Her ability as an administrator is seen in many of the businesses recorded in the diplomatic collection of Piasca. In 1075, moreover, Urraca appears as the head of the family when the terms of the relationship between the lineage and those two monasteries was established.¹⁹ All the documents addressed to Piasca by the Alfonso family name her as its ruler, whereas other benefactors chose a male authority, providing evidence for her central role.

From 1080, encouraged by King Alfonso VI, the members of the Alfonso dynasty began the process of transferring Piasca from an autonomous community to dependency on the larger abbey at Sahagún in León.²⁰ Owing to the fragmentation of the ownership, the process was not completed until the early twelfth century. This led to the adoption of the Benedictine rule and the dissolution of the double community. A document dated in 1080 records the transference of a monastery dedicated to St Peter from King Alfonso VI to Doña Urraca with the condition of following the Marcigny rule.²¹ Scholars are not sure whether this concession referred to the female priory of San Pedro de las Dueñas, dependent on Sahagún, or

¹⁷ CDP, no. 27. In 997, the Abbess Doña Justa exchanged some lands of the monastery with Alfonso Díaz, who is designated as 'amantissimo domno', this being the first news that links the Piasca monastery with the Alfonso family (CDP, no. 25). On aristocratic control in these monasteries, see Mariel Pérez, 'El control de lo sagrado como instrumento de poder: los monasterios particulares de la aristocracia altomedieval leonesa', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42, no. 2 (2012), 799–822.

¹⁸ CDP, nos. 32, 39, 42, 47, 48. Luísa Tollendal Prudente, 'Mujeres y poder aristocrático entre los siglos XI–XII: las parentelas de Alfonso, Flaínes y Banu-Gómez', in *Pero Ansúrez: el conde, su época y su memoria*, ed. María Isabel del Val Valdivieso (Valladolid, 2019), 231–46.

¹⁹ Martínez Sopena, 'Parentesco y poder', 35. This document is kept in the archive of the cathedral of León.

²⁰ CDP, nos. 53, 55, 57, 58, 60, 65, 66. To learn more about this royal sponsorship of reform, see Georges Martin, 'Reforma litúrgica, infantazgo y protagonismo femenino bajo el reinado de Alfonso VI', in *Alfonso VI y su legado*, ed. Carlos Estepa (León, 2012), 115–19.

²¹ Marta Herrero, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún* (7 vols, León, 1988), ii, no. 777.

the monastery of San Pedro de Mazuecos in Valdeginete.²² A falsified text was written in the twelfth century, probably during the reign of Alfonso VII (1126–57), and supposedly dated in 1048. According to this document Count Gutier Alfonso and his wife Goto conceded to their sister Urraca Alfonso the monastery of San Pedro ‘quod a fundamine in uestro honore est constructum’, imitating the original diploma conceding the monastery of San Martín de la Fuente to that *dominae*. This forgery aimed to give greater prestige and antiquity to the foundation of the monastery of San Pedro, but the anachronisms committed by the author are quite evident. Thus, the forger mentioned a King Alfonso in León and Toledo, but c. 1048 this city was still under Muslim control and no Alfonso reigned. The document also features a sanction formula typical of the twelfth century.²³ Similarly, the text confused Urraca Alfonso, who probably died in 1080, with the abbess of San Pedro de las Dueñas, Doña Urraca Fernández, who also appears in some records of Piasca. In any case, this royal concession has been interpreted as the transfer of the nuns at Piasca to an exclusively female community, although this hypothesis is unconfirmed. Indeed, the definitive aggregation of Santa María de Piasca to Sahagún is attested in documents in 1122, after which time the exclusive presence of different priors is recorded. However, until this full aggregation took place, intermediate stages must have existed; an abbot together with Abbess Urraca and other nuns are recorded at Piasca.²⁴ It has been argued that documentation in the early twelfth century which names Urraca as abbess results from disturbances occurring after Alfonso VI’s death, which forced her to return to Piasca in search of quiet and safety. In any case, after 1122, the memory of the women’s community at Piasca disappears completely from the documents.

MANAGING THE MEMORY OF WOMEN: PIASCA

The transformation of the monastery of Santa María de Piasca into a priory dependant on Sahagún Abbey disrupted its two loci of identity: the high status of the female community and its links with the Alfonso family. This relationship of institutional dependency is also reflected in the charters and the archive from Piasca. This monastery was one of the few early medieval centers in the kingdom of Castile and León capable of accumulating a relatively large collection of charters. These records are currently held in the

²² Manuel Carriedo, ‘Los orígenes del monasterio de San Pedro de las Dueñas’, *Tierras de León* 105–6 (1998), 9–51. Cavero, ‘Spanish Female’, 27–39.

²³ Carriedo, ‘Los orígenes’, 17.

²⁴ CDP, no. 68. Miguel Ángel García de Guinea, ‘Monasterio e Iglesia de Santa María de Piasca’, in *Enciclopedia del románico en Cantabria* (3 vols, Aguilar de Campoo, 2007), ii, 562–3.

National Historical Archive within the folders belonging to Sahagún Abbey, so it is clear that they must have been transferred to the archive of the motherhouse at an unknown time. The written production at Piasca includes a cartulary whose original corpus has been dated about 1167. This codex is stored in Santander Municipal Library (Cantabria) and is untitled, though on its original front page the generic name of 'Bezerro', that is 'Cartulary', can be read.²⁵ The lack of a more descriptive name to distinguish it from other records, and its conservation in the same county, both suggest that it always remained in the monastery. Of the thirty-five folios in this cartulary, the original corpus numbers from fols. 6r–31r; the other folios were used by later copyists from the late twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. The degree of archival independence from the motherhouse represented by the production of the cartulary by the monks at Piasca must have been equivalent to the autonomy in economic, legal and territorial management that has been established by scholars.²⁶

The composition of this codex was an exercise in appreciation of the written memory of the monastic community, framed within a context of significant increase in patrimonial and legal problems. According to Julia Montenegro, the period 1163 to 1190 saw the greatest changes in the government of Liébana, leading to problems in territorial administration and disputes over positions of responsibility.²⁷ The resulting instability and fragmentation of the monastery's properties must have caused profound anxiety in the community. In this context, the production of a cartulary acquired significance as an instrument of property management and reaffirmation of institutional identity. Within this strategy in defence of patrimony and social cohesion, the period of female abbatial rule and female presence that characterized the first centuries of the monastery of Piasca had to be addressed.

The first section of the cartulary contains forty-six charters dated between 945 and 1165, of which thirty refer to the twelfth century. This suggests that the producers of the cartulary were mainly interested in

²⁵ Santander, Biblioteca Menéndez Pelayo, MS 1478. This generic name was given to cartularies because of the skin of the animal used to make them (*becerro* means 'calf').

²⁶ As Julia Montenegro deduced from the set of records preserved from the twelfth century, the Lebaniego priory enjoyed a certain autonomy since, in general, the grantors refer exclusively to Santa María de Piasca and its prior. The donation letters addressed to both monasteries are an exception. Montenegro, *Santa María de Piasca. Estudio de un territorio*, 211. Julia Montenegro, 'Organización territorial de Liébana durante la Edad Media: valles y alfores', in *El fuero de Santander y su época, Santander, Diputación regional de Cantabria* (Santander, 1989), 77–94.

²⁷ Montenegro, *Santa María de Piasca. Estudio de un territorio*, 226–7.

the more recent history of the monastery. This in turn indicates that the distant past of the institution was seen as less useful, apparently regardless of gender issues. Eighteen documents copied in this cartulary refer to the monastery's history before 1122, of which ten record the activity of abbesses as leaders of the monastery and the presence of nuns in the community.²⁸ The documents do not appear to follow any chronological order or arrangement in the codex itself. It seems they were included because of an interest in the properties that they involve. Nor is there any special attention to the memory of Urraca Alfonso in comparison to other abbesses. The modifications made by the copyists, in fact, do not display any systematic suppression of the women at Piasca or their role in the monastery. When women appear in the record, the copyists usually follow the common patterns for the abbreviation of the information.

Nevertheless, there is a donation from Count Muño Alfonso dated 1030 in the original of which Fronila is consigned as the regent of a double community:

To you, Abbess Fronildi, I grant the entire monastery, which our relatives, ancestors and protectors built, in the name of the abbot and the college of monks, or of all the servants and handmaids, who daily serve God in it or those who will serve him in the future.

uobis Fronilidi abbatissa qum greiem que tota ipsum monasterii quos edificaberunt abios et parentes nosotros adque patronos pro ad abbates et collegium fratrum uel omnium seruorum et ancillarum Christi qui quotidine die Deum militant et depregant uel aduenerint Deum depregare.²⁹

Here the scribe of the cartulary removes any trace of that addressee formula. It is very difficult to assess whether this deletion is due exclusively to reasons of saving space within the cartulary, for which some formulae that were considered irrelevant were deleted, or if it hides some intention to erase the female past of the house. In any case, it is thanks to the production of this cartulary that we possess three documents featuring women in Santa María de Piasca, the originals of which have been lost. This suggests that the recovery of institutional memory practised in this cartulary was determined mainly by criteria of its use in defence of its patrimony and not by gender issues. In this regard, the female contribution transmitted by the written memory of the monks at Piasca, half a century after they came to the monastery, was not subjected to any process of erasure, suppression or

²⁸ CDP, nos. 11, 25, 27, 29, 35, 36, 37, 42, 43, 45.

²⁹ CDP, no. 27, fol. 10r–v.

manipulation. It instead was assimilated and perpetuated to the extent that it helped to legitimize monastic claims over property.

THE FOUNDATION OF SAN SALVADOR DE OÑA: THE HEIRESS TIGRIDIA

According to its donation document, the monastery of San Salvador, in the current province of Burgos, was founded on 12 February 1011 by Count Sancho García and his wife Urraca. Their aim was to establish a funerary pantheon, securing prayers for the salvation of their souls, and to provide their second daughter Tegridia (or Tigridia) with a place of authority in monastic life. She was to govern the members of the community formed by 'Dei cultores' and 'Dei devotas'.³⁰ She was the only daughter of the count and countess to enter a religious house, as her three sisters, Muñadona, Sancha and Urraca, married into important local dynasties, following the strategic interests of the county. The count and countess's decision has been interpreted by Francisco Reyes not as a wish to create a true female community in the monastery, but as a place for one notable resident, Tigridia, and her ladies in waiting.³¹ It seems consequential that the monastery was originally personified in the figure of this aristocratic woman and the new monastic patrimony donated by the counts in the *infantado* tradition. In this way, the new foundation contributed towards the identification of this family with the territory of Burgos and supported the memory of the family. More than the large donation to their new monastery and even the choice of the abbey as the burial place of the counts, Tigridia herself and her leadership at the head of the new community made important claims for the dynasty's status. The regency of this important *dominae* at San Salvador must have ended in about 1030. Three years later the monastery was reformed by King Sancho the Great of Navarre, who brought this brief dynastic triumph to an abrupt end with the expulsion of the female community.

Despite the suppression of her community, Tigridia's reputation increased and she was eventually made a saint. After her death, Tigridia's body was moved to the chapel of St Inigo in the twelfth century; the location of her body inside the church itself, a privilege reserved 'to bishops

³⁰ For additional information about this diploma, see Manuel Zabalza, 'El documento fundacional del Monasterio de Oña (1011). Estudio y comentario', in *San Salvador. Mil años de Historia*, ed. Rafael Sánchez Domingo (Oña, 2011), 122–51.

³¹ Francisco Reyes Téllez, 'Los orígenes del monasterio de San Salvador de Oña: eremitismo y monasterio dúplice', in *Oña, un milenio*, ed. Rafael Sánchez Domingo (Oña, 2012), 45. Leticia Agúndez San Miguel, 'La memoria femenina en los diplomas falsificados de San Salvador de Oña: un monasterio dúplice frente a la reforma benedictina', *Edad Media, Revista de Historia* 22 (2021), 233–61.

and priests, or lay faithful who had managed to work miracles' was the only medieval support for this meritorious condition.³² In the sixteenth century, however, a new elevation of Tigridia was carried out when her remains were deposited in a polychrome wooden casket as a reliquary with an inscription in classical capital script 'Sanctae Tigridae virginis corpus'.³³ From the end of this century we have the first written records of her cult, although no miraculous performance is attributed to Tigridia. Her beatification was based solely on the virtues associated with her while alive. Thus, Tigridia's memory experienced its final triumph.³⁴

MANAGING THE MEMORY OF WOMEN: SAN SALVADOR DE OÑA

Seventeen charters are available in the monastery collection of San Salvador de Oña corresponding to the years of Tigridia's government; of these eleven are copies and six are only known through modern works. Ten of the charters provide information about her administration and the foundational document is evidently the most important. Six copies of this are known to be extant. The first three, written in Visigothic miniscule script, are copies imitating the foundational document, according to Manuel Zabalza.³⁵ The three later copies are in the National Historic Archive.³⁶ The first is an imitation copy dated in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, in the opinion of several authors.³⁷ The second is a copy authorised in 1279. The last one is a version on paper from the late fourteenth century that is too recent for our purposes. Therefore, five copies of the foundational diploma provide information about the memory of Tigridia and her designation at the head of a double monastery. However, the two later copies will be studied below in the context of their own production.

³² Gregorio Argaz, *La Soledad Laureada por San Benito* (6 vols, Madrid, 1675), vi, 441; Antonio Yepes, *Crónica general de la Orden de San Benito* (7 vols, Navarra, Matías Mares, 1609), ii, 358.

³³ María Pilar Alonso Abad, 'La Infanta y Abadesa Santa Tigridia: Patrimonio devocional en torno a la Santa del Monasterio de San Salvador de Oña', in *La infanta y la abadesa Santa Tigridia* (Burgos, 2019), 3–22.

³⁴ In the seventeenth century, the famous forger Juan Tamayo de Salazar invented a verse about the alleged miracles worked by this women. Argaz, *Soledad Laureada*, 441–2.

³⁵ Zabalza, 'Documento fundacional', 122–51.

³⁶ Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Oña, carp. 269, no. 9; carp. 293, no. 11; carp. 269, no. 12.

³⁷ Miguel Vivancos, 'Documentación en visigótica del monasterio de San Salvador de Oña: originales y copias', in *Oña un milenio*, ed. Rafael Sánchez Domingo (Oña, 2012), 54; Zabalza, 'Documento fundacional', 122.

According to the three oldest copies, Count Sancho and Countess Urraca founded a monastery in honour of San Salvador, Santa María and San Miguel in Oña and designated Tigridia, whose service they offered as governor in charge of all the 'Dei cultores' and 'Dei devotas' members who lived there:

I, in truth, Count Sancio and my wife, countess Urraca, when, with the spirit prepared for the Lord Iesus Christ creator of everything, we decided to offer our daughter called Tegridia and we chose her to preside and to govern the worshipers of God and to all the devotees of God, to the servants (men and women) of God who regularly served there, we solemnly granted legal residence in eternal possession.

Ego, quidem Sancius comes et uxor mea Vrraca cometissa cum cum (sic) prontis animis decreuimus, eciam Domino Ihesu Christo creatori omnium, offerre in munere filiam nostram nomine Tegridiam et elegimus eam ut preeset ad regendos Dei cultores et omnes Deo deuotas ... offerentes ad famulorum famularumque Dei seruientium, regulariter ibi degencium legali a stipulacione, in eternam possessionem donauimus ...³⁸

This reference, as well as another mention to the 'famuli' and 'famulae' who must live together in the monastery, has been interpreted by many scholars as the creation of a monastery with men and women.³⁹ According to Francisco Reyes 'in the masculine case, its consecrated character is evident. But not in the case of women, whose dedication cannot have involved any profession'.⁴⁰ The communal life of the two groups would have been governed by observance of a rule that is not specified but which most scholars have identified as the *Regula Communis* of St Fructuosus of Braga. In accordance with this version of the history, the designation of Tigridia as head of a double community was accepted, although insufficient data is provided about its organization and functioning, or about the position of Tigridia herself. Some authors give her the title of abbess whereas others question the appropriateness of this, based on the heterogeneous designations in the charters supposedly conserved during her time.

The first of the charters, transmitted in a copy from the late thirteenth century, records the donation in 1011 of the counts' properties in the town

³⁸ The passage can be found in all three manuscripts: Archivo Histórico Nacional, Oña, carp. 269, no. 9; carp. 293, no. 11; carp. 269, no. 12.

³⁹ The expression 'Dei cultores' conserves a neutral gender that may refer only to a group of women although historiography has accepted the conjunction of two genders in the monastery. Gonzalo Martínez Díez, 'Oña un monasterio milenario en sus orígenes', *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 244 (2012), 33.

⁴⁰ Reyes Téllez, 'Los orígenes', 45.

of Espinosa, which cites in a generic way 'sub dominio abbatissa'.⁴¹ After this diploma, another five charters about the count and countess's donation surprisingly make no mention of Tigridia. The next charter of interest to us is dated in 1014 but is preserved in a copy from the early twelfth century and another from the early thirteenth century, according to Miguel Vivancos.⁴² The text described the donation of the town of Nuez, and alluded to Tigridia without specifying her status: 'donamus adque concedimus tibi filia nostra dulcissima cognominata Tegridia et ad domnos qui seruiunt die noctuque'.⁴³ The next diploma contains the *traditio* of Elvira in 1016: 'Ego Gelvira trado ... ad atrium Sancti Saluatoris onnie et tibi domina Tigridia'.⁴⁴ Finally, a charter dated in 1017, although specialists date it between 1029 and 1033, is preserved in a copy from the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, and transmits the donation of the monastery of Las Muelas by Sancho III the Great. It states: 'Dono et concedo ad uos domna Tigridia abbatissa et a uestro monasterio'.⁴⁵ According to Santiago Olmedo, this concession can be understood as the wish of the king of Navarre to reconcile himself with the princess on the death of his brother and win the support of the monastic community.⁴⁶ In turn, Lorenzo Maté suggests that the donation was a way to dislodge the first occupants at San Salvador.⁴⁷

We know of another four charters that refer to Tigridia, according to information transmitted by Gregorio Argaiz, archivist at San Salvador de Oña in the mid-seventeenth century, none of which specify Tigridia's status.⁴⁸ The first, supposedly dated in 1020, contains an inheritance provision to Tigridia for Braulio and Matrona de Bentrete. The two following ones, dated in 1022, record two private sales. The last text, also supposedly dated in 1022, contains a punishment imposed by Tigridia for an act of adultery. Argaiz's evidence is extremely useful as he knew the documentation at Oña very well, but we should not ignore the fact that the diplomas he refers to were conserved as copies in different books and, as he himself stated, there are difficulties in dating them.

⁴¹ Juan del Álamo, *Colección diplomática de San Salvador de Oña 822-1284* (Madrid, 1950), no 35. Hereafter, CDO.

⁴² Miguel Vivancos, 'Documentación en visigótica', 56.

⁴³ CDO, no. 17.

⁴⁴ CDO, no. 18.

⁴⁵ CDO, no. 19.

⁴⁶ Santiago Olmedo Bernal, *Una abadía castellana en el siglo XI. San Salvador de Oña* (Madrid, 1987), 63.

⁴⁷ Lorenzo Maté Sadornil, 'El Monasterio de Oña en la órbita de Cluny', in *San Salvador de Oña: mil años de historia*, ed. Rafael Sánchez Domingo (Oña, 2011), 158.

⁴⁸ CDO, nos. 20, 21, 22, 23. According to Argaiz, the first document is in fol. 56 of the Book of Rules and the second in fol. 106 of the Old Book of Donations, both of which have been lost. Argaiz, *Soledad Laureada*, 441.

The more recent age of the other copies of the charters attributed to her administration raises doubts about their contents, and additionally they do not demonstrate a unanimous criterion about Tigridia's title, as they call her *abbatissa* and *domina* indiscriminately, although always after 1014. Among the charters from this foundational period, one dated in 1014 provides more information about the organization of the monastery. It records the *traditio* of Eldoara with the formula: 'Ego domna Eldoara sic me trado ad atrium Sancti Saluatoris et ad Abbas domino Ioanni'.⁴⁹ This suggests that an abbot was also at the head of the monastic community during the time of Tigridia, a comparable arrangement to that at Piasca. In sum, the infrequent mentions of Tigridia in the monastic documentation, especially bearing in mind that she was the founders' daughter, limits our understanding of her true role as head of San Salvador monastery. Some scholars have attempted to solve this ambiguity by alluding to the presence of another important woman, her Aunt Oñeca, abbess of San Juan de Cillaperlata, as tutor of the community, but no documents proving this have been discovered.⁵⁰

Three years after Tigridia's death, in 1030, the monastic reform encouraged by Sancho III took place, supposedly along Cluniac lines. This is attested by a diploma supposedly dated on 30 June 1023, although some specialists have put it back to 1033; others have convincingly argued that it is a forgery from the mid-twelfth century. The first argument against it is the use of careful elegant Latin, in a very different style from that used in the other diplomas of Sancho III. The second objection is the allusion to Sancho the Great freeing Spain from the Moors and the kingdom from heretics. The third argument lies in the problematic date of the diploma, which is inscribed under the authority of Pope Gregory who did not exist at the time. The fourth clue is in the constitutive provisions in the last part of the document, where it refers to the exemption from all secular power and describes ample abbatial prerogatives and liberties. Finally, the order of the signatories is highly suspicious; the king is in last place and the Navarrese bishops themselves are absent. Lorenzo Maté has noted that this document is remarkably similar to a pontifical diploma from 1061 granted to the monastery of San Juan de la Peña by Pope Alexander II.⁵¹

In this forgery, the justification for reform is framed within the common complaint of the decadence of women and their inability to keep proper monastic observance. Sancho the Great expresses his conviction that Spanish monasticism is lacking rigor in his time, acknowledges the excellence of Cluniac customs, and states that they should be applied in the

⁴⁹ CDO, no. 16.

⁵⁰ Argaiz, *Soledad Laureada*, 439.

⁵¹ Maté Sadornil, 'Monasterio Oña', 157–8.

monastery at Oña because of the laxity of the women there who refused to live under monastic rule. The interpretation of this message by some modern scholars is directly linked to the absence of Tigridia in the community and is an argument in favour of her holiness:

as in the absence of light there is no poisonous animal that does not dare to come out of its cave, the same occurred in the Monastery of San Salvador, when the Infanta (Tigridia) was not there, the nuns saw wrong in the wealth and there was so little courage in the one who succeeded her that it forced the prelates in Castile to ask King don Sancho the Great, who had inherited the crown, to remove them and leave the monks alone.⁵²

However, Santiago Olmedo argues that the reference in the charter to 'sine aliqua reverentia habitantibus' indicated, from a Benedictine point of view, that the simple traditional Spanish observance was regarded as a relaxation of monasticism.⁵³ According to this theory, King Sancho was simply acting within the general tendency to suppress the old model and gradually introduce Benedictine monasticism into the community, just as occurred at Piasca with King Alfonso VI. It will be argued below that the charter deliberately records only criticisms that affected the female community and that its aim was to legitimize the enforcement of Benedictine influence on the monastery even though it discredited the memory of the original community.

As stated above, this is not the only charter that shows evidence of manipulation at Oña and both may have the same intention. The fourth copy of the monastic foundation diploma also involves a falsification in the later twelfth or early thirteenth centuries. The most interesting point about this copy, as in the copy made in 1279, is that it alters the initial text to stress that Tigridia was at the head of only a group of women in the foundational stage of the community. Thus, the document says: 'et elegimus eam ad gubernandas Dei cultores', translated as 'to govern all the women consecrated to the worship of God and religious life'. However, if we compare the contents of the three oldest copies: 'et elegimus eam ut preeset ad regendos Dei cultores et omnes Deo votas', it is clear that 'ad regendos' has been deliberately changed to 'ad gubernandas'. As Zabalza remarks: 'in the original version, it is Tigridia who rules over two communities, defined perfectly grammatically, by the conjunction "et" whose role in the sentence is to connect two different realities'.⁵⁴

These examples of charter manipulation reveal the interests and intentions of the scriptorium at Oña between the mid-twelfth century and early

⁵² Argañiz, *Soledad Laureada*, 443.

⁵³ Olmedo Bernal, *Abadía castellana*, 73.

⁵⁴ Zabalza, 'Documento fundacional', 127.

thirteenth century as it addressed its past as a double monastery and the essential authority of Tigridia. The rewriting of these documents correspond to a legal conflict with the bishopric of Burgos over the payment of tithes at churches that were dependant on San Salvador de Oña. In 1094, the monastery of Oña accepted pontifical protection in an attempt to avoid paying tithes. This was rejected by the bishopric as shown by a diploma dated in 1144, in which Pope Lucius II ordered several abbots, including the abbot of Oña, to pay the canons of the bishop.⁵⁵ In this dispute, Oña claimed the monastic autonomy granted by King Sancho the Great to refute the bishopric's claims; the memory of the figure of Count Sancho validated the monastery's ownership of the properties and rights in question. In this context, Oña's past as a double monastery was not helpful for the Benedictine monks, as they were not the direct descendants of that original community nor of the benefits that the counts awarded them. The monks, in fact, were only established as the result of the king of Navarre's later reform. To counter this, the forged diploma of 1033 accuses the women of inappropriate behaviour and praises the new Benedictine community as the restorers of the perfection of monastic order. In addition, the most recent version of the foundational diploma removed male involvement in the origins of Oña and thus held them blameless for its spiritual decline.⁵⁶

This exercise of manipulating memory has been pointed to by some scholars as a possible reason for the infrequent mentions of Tigridia in the documentation at Oña. Patrick Henriët argued that because of the radical change involved in its transformation, the Benedictine copyists might have felt uncomfortable about the presence of an abbess and double monastery in the near past.⁵⁷ Similarly, Manuel Zabalza remarked, 'it is not strange that ... when this Copy "E" was made in the thirteenth century, the vocabulary alluding to the old monastic regime, which at that time was regarded as reprehensible and which should be hidden and forgotten, was altered

⁵⁵ José Manuel Garrido, *Documentación de la catedral de Burgos 804–1183* (Burgos, 1983), no. 129.

⁵⁶ As Robert Berkhofer points out in his excellent book, 'understanding forgery has important implications for monastic reform, documentary culture, and the relationship between collective memory and historical truth in the years 900 to 1150 ... The reformers had a new vision of what they wanted monastic life to be, which led them to reinterpret the past'. Robert Berkhofer, *Forgeries and Historical Writing in England, France and Flanders (900–1200)* (Woodbridge, 2022), 4. As the case of Oña shows, this reinterpretation could produce different, even contradictory, versions of the same period or event, in order to adapt to the contemporary needs that motivated the production of each forgery.

⁵⁷ Patrick Henriët, 'Deo Votas. L'infantado et la fonction des infantes dans la Castille et le León des Xe–XIIe siècles', in *Au cloître et dans le monde. Femmes, hommes et sociétés (IXe–Xe siècle)*, ed. Patrick Henriët and Anne Legras (Paris, 2000), 193.

and a solely female solution – “ad gobernandas” – was preferred for the first stage of the monastery.’⁵⁸ Both scholars, therefore, suggest that prestige was the reason for the manipulation of the memory of the foundational female stage of the monastery, even though rewriting of charters also meant that the past could not be used in the defence of the privileges being disputed with the Bishopric of Burgos.

CONCLUSION

The trajectories of the monasteries of Santa María de Piasca and San Salvador de Oña were quite similar. They were originally founded as double houses, linked to the interests of the powerful families who founded them and the defining influence of noblewomen as leaders of these communities and conservators of their documentary memory. The application of the Benedictine reform, by royal initiative at both monasteries, obtained the same result – the suppression of the female community – although it was carried out in different ways. Thus, Piasca possessed a long history of female government. Its connection with the Alfonso dynasty was perpetuated by several members of the lineage across several decades. With those antecedents, the subjection of the monastery to the great Sahagún Abbey and the masculinization of the community was a long complex process that no doubt was met with resistance. The presence of women at Piasca cannot have been easy to erase. In contrast, King Sancho III’s reform of San Salvador de Oña was carried out more quickly as it only interrupted two decades of monastic history connected with Tigridia. The transformation was accomplished despite Tigridia’s significant reputation for piety; as we have seen, she was later sanctified.

The new Benedictine communities at both monasteries subjected their institutional histories to a process of recovery and reinterpretation in the second half of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in contexts of legal disputes. However, the strategies seen in the cartulary at Piasca and the manipulated charters at Oña show two different ways of approaching their female history. The long duration of female authority, recorded and memorialized in the documentary tradition at Piasca, must have been so extensive

⁵⁸ Zabalza, ‘Documento fundacional’, 128. As Levi Roach states, ‘each falsified document is an attempt to rewrite the past or plug gaps in an existing narrative. Counterfeit charters therefore not only tell us about contemporary concerns, but also shed light on attitudes towards the past’. Levi Roach, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 2021), 15. The shift in Oña’s falsified documents, from degrading the institution by referring to its feminine past to completely rejecting or isolating it, exemplifies the changing attitude towards deceitful monasteries during the Middle Ages.

that it could not be denied, even in the attempt at legitimizing monastic power against the claims of its environment. In this case, the Benedictine monks made themselves into the continuation of a long prestigious history without referring to their gendered antecedents. By contrast, the drastic disruption caused by the suppression of the female past at San Salvador de Oña required a strategy of *damnatio memoriae* over their early years as a double monastery foundation. This was accomplished through the intense labour of textual manipulation. Oña resorted to criticizing its founding 'generatrices' as failures in monastic observance. It created a false narrative in which Oña was an exclusively female community in the first years of its existence to absolve themselves of responsibility for their false charges. The sleight of hand allowed the new community of monks to justify their presence as the proper custodians of the patrimony in litigation. In this way, the documentary manipulation helped to obscure its foundation as a double house and erase the women who established it. Therefore, the two examples demonstrate how, because of more immediate interests, forgetting and remembering became strategies in the production of documentary memory at Oña and Piasca which ultimately favoured the production of gender discourse.