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Sancha, Urraca and Elvira: the virtues and vices of Spanish royal women 'dedicated to God'

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Major changes occurred in Spain during the eleventh century on most fronts, and not least in the Church, where the liturgical change, from the Mozarabic to the Roman liturgy, was part of far-reaching structural and political upheaval. All the identified major players, who form the subject of studies of the period, were men: from Pope Gregory VII and King Alfonso VI of León and Castile, whose reign encompassed the most intense period of change, to the papal legates, the monks from Cluny, and the named illuminators and scribes. It is difficult to uncover any contributions to this process made by women. Some royal women are occasionally mentioned in charters and chronicles, but not usually in this context. Yet there is a reference in the *Historia Silense*, which does not fit this pattern. This chronicle, probably completed in the early twelfth century, speaks of Alfonso VI's father, King Fernando, giving the monasteries of his kingdom (that is broadly speaking León and Castile) on his death in 1065 to his daughters Urraca and Elvira. It says: 'He entrusted to his daughters all the monasteries of his whole kingdom in which they might live until the end of this life without being tied to a husband.'¹ It is important to use the *Historia Silense* critically, as parts of it may well have been commissioned by Fernando's daughter Urraca. She cannot have been responsible for the finished product as it includes events which happened after her death in 1101, but it incorporates substantial passages of identified earlier material, and the elements which deal with Fernando I, his Queen Sancha, and their children Urraca, Elvira, Alfonso VI and his brothers are all written with a bias which would accord well with Urraca having had considerable influence in the composition.²

Nevertheless it seems worthwhile exploring the *Historia Silense's* claim that Urraca and her sister, Elvira, were both in charge of all the monasteries of León and Castile during the period of the liturgical change. What does this mean? There is no mention of their involvement in the process in any manuscript or charter or in the works of modern historians. Was the claim inaccurate? Was this another case of the invisibility of women? Or was their position such that they were excluded from the processes of this major change?

In this paper I will explore the frameworks within which these royal women exercised any authority given to them, and any limitations imposed on it. Above all I will examine their possible role in liturgical reform.

Although there is very little or no attention paid to Urraca and Elvira's position in the works of mainstream historians of medieval Spain, there are some works which help us to fill in the background, notably a study of another Sancha, sister to Alfonso VII, by Luisa García Calles.³ García Calles's study identifies the institutions involved as the *infantados* and traces their history.

In the mid-tenth century Ramiro II, king of León built a monastery for his only daughter - also called Elvira. (Fig.1) It was part of, or attached to, the palatine complex in León and was called San Salvador de Palaz de Rey. The arrangement required Elvira to be '*deovota*', that is literally 'vowed to God'. This suggests initially that he made her a nun, but the contract was not quite so straightforward, and Elvira was able to act in many ways which do not fit with our usual conception of a nun. For example she was regent for her young nephew Ramiro III, signing many royal charters - as *regina*, *filia regis*, or as *ancilla christi*, and was involved in a battle where defeat spelt the end of her career. Her major lasting contribution to the religious life of the monastery was perhaps arranging for the translation of the body of St. Pelagius from Córdoba and for the housing of the relics in León, where he became the new titular saint of the palace monastery. The *infantado* based at León - more properly called the *infantado* of Torio - may have been the first *infantado*, but we do not have its foundation document, and we have to rely on documents from the Castilian *infantado*

León & Castile

Aragón

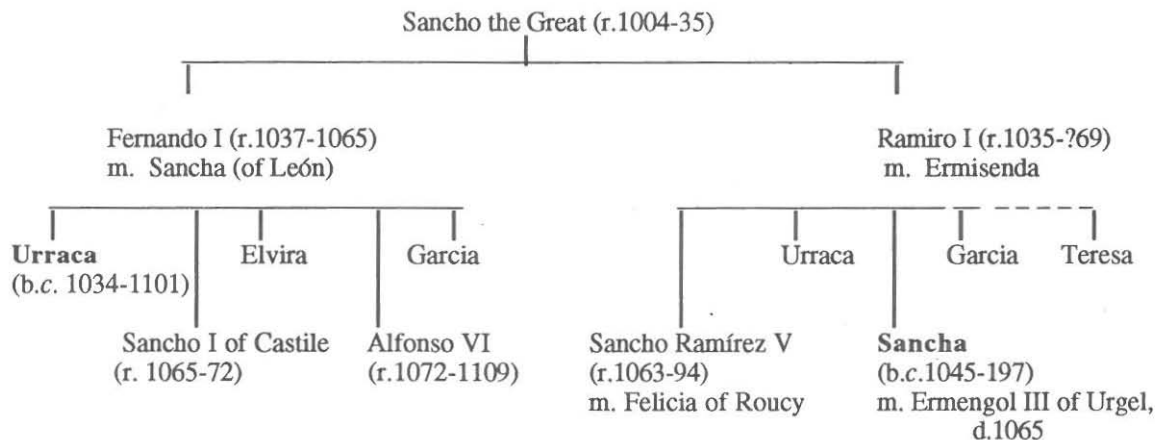


Figure 1.

of Covarrubias for more understanding of the contract involved. In the tenth century, precisely in 978, Count García Fernández of Castile and his wife gave a gift to the Lord Jesus Christ and his saints: their daughter Urraca.⁴ They gave her the monastery of SS. Cosmas and Damien at Covarrubias together with many estates and other monasteries 'to have, hold, protect and defend'.

From this and other sources we understand that an *infantado* could only be held by an unmarried woman, that it was usually given to her by her father, that it reverted to the male line after her marriage or death and that it gave her considerable wealth and power in that she controlled vast monastic estates and exercised judicial and economic authority in just the same way as the count or king himself would have done if he had not entrusted it to her. All the churchmen within the *infantado* are subject to her in all matters, including benefices, except the service at the altar.⁵ So this appears to explain why these very powerful women were not involved in the liturgical change. They had rights over everything else, but the liturgy. It is not clear, however, if this excluded all liturgical matters or only the mass where a priest would be required. Moreover the Count cannot have envisaged a situation in which the long-used Mozarabic liturgy would be abolished, and a new Roman liturgy introduced which brought in new texts for offices as well as masses. In any case we cannot assume that what applied in the tenth century in another location necessarily applied to León in the eleventh, and I believe that the religious aspects of the León *infantado* at that later date will bear further examination.

The *Historia Silense* tells us that '[Urraca, that is the daughter of Fernando I and sister of Alfonso VI] scorned carnal loves and the caresses of a decaying husband, living outwardly in the dress of the world, but inwardly united with Christ, her true husband under monastic obedience.'⁶ This quotation makes Urraca sound a very devout person, a nun in all but name: unmarried and celibate, under monastic obedience, and a bride of Christ. The only indication that she is not a nun is the frank admission that she did not dress as one. Her epitaph adds to this impression by stating that 'she loved St. Isidore above all, and subjugated herself to his service'.⁷ In this devotion to the titular saint of the monastery, Urraca follows in the footsteps of her ancestor, Elvira, and by the time of Sancha,

the sister of Alfonso VII, in the twelfth century the idea had grown so that St. Isidore was described as Sancha's bridegroom.

Urraca appears to have acted as the abbess of the palatine abbey, by her time a double monastery and re-dedicated to St. Isidore. Her mother, Sancha, had also held the infantado before her marriage to Fernando I and was titular abbess.⁸ Even after her marriage Sancha seems to have retained something of her position and, as the *Historia Silense* also tells us, it was Sancha who persuaded Fernando I to be buried at León and to build a new church for the purpose.⁹

We do not have a copy of the rule used at San Isidoro, and consequently we can envisage the requirements of Urraca's 'monastic obedience' in only the most general terms. Indeed we have very little information on any nun's rule in early medieval northern Spain. One survives from tenth-century Navarre and has been identified somewhat controversially by Bishko as the rule compiled by Abbot Salvus of the monastery at Albelda, which lay on the Riojan frontier with Castile.¹⁰ It is based on the Rule of St. Benedict with the gender changed where necessary, but the greatest part of it comes from Smaragdus's 'Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict', and there are also significant Mozarabic liturgical elements: an *ordo* for the reception of converts and a penitential. There is no reason to think that this rule or one close to it would have been used in León and Castile, but it is one possibility. Traditionally northern Spain had used ancient rules of Augustine, Jerome and Leander, and something more along these lines may have been used at León, as they were in Galicia to the west of León. I can confidently say that another text of Smaragdus, his homilies, was employed during the liturgical change and appeared in some of the transitional manuscripts,¹¹ and that the full text of Smaragdus's Commentary has been found in a tenth-century manuscript from the Castilian monastery of Silos.¹² This extends the geographic spread of Smaragdus text, although not as far as León. Bishko also draws attention to an eleventh-century manuscript, which is a collection of texts including the Rule of Leander, *de institutione virginum et contemptu mundi*; at the end of the manuscript there are excerpts from Smaragdus's Commentary, which shows that this text was still in use in a monastic context in that century.

Whatever rule was used at the palatine abbey, it is unlikely that Urraca took any vow of poverty. Within the infantado she had jurisdiction over a large amount of monastic property in the provinces of León, for by this time the infantados of León and Covarrubias had been joined.¹³ We can see this operating when for example the monks of San Pedro de Eslonza speak of Urraca as the '*domina et senior*' of their monastery - perhaps to be translated as; 'their most respected lord'.¹⁴ There are several charters showing this in action and Urraca was clearly a keen patron of this monastery. For example in 1099 she endowed it with sumptuous liturgical furniture and a collection of manuscripts including works popular in Leonese and Castilian monasteries, such as the *Moralia* of Job, the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory, works of St. Isidore and one liturgical manuscript, a collection of offices.¹⁵ This indicates that she was not totally unconcerned with liturgical matters, although it could still mean that she delegated the fulfilment of her interest to monks.

Apart from the monasteries and estates entrusted to her with the infantado, which might well be considered exempt from any vow of poverty as they were only in trust, she also retained property of her own. We can see this in a document of 1074 where Urraca and, her sister, Elvira gave land of their own, inherited from their father Fernando I, to the Bishop of Burgos.¹⁶ Urraca and Elvira also gave away a monastery belonging to the infantado (which was supposedly not allowed) and replaced it with Urraca's own villa of San Julian de los Oteros del Rey.¹⁷ However this on its own does not necessarily exclude Urraca from her claim to monastic obedience, since vows of poverty were often treated rather cavalierly, as Penelope Johnson has shown in her study of religious women in northern France.¹⁸

As to chastity, the *Historia Silense* certainly claims it for Urraca, although, as we shall see in due course, it may have done so more as a defence against accusations to the contrary.¹⁹ It is the third monastic vow, however, obedience, which may have presented Urraca with the greatest problem.

The modern view of Urraca, as it has passed into popular culture in the form of the film 'The Cid', comes from twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources. These were used by Menéndez Pidal, the great Castilian historian, in his book on the Cid, and when he advised on the film in Hollywood.²⁰

This view characterises Urraca as a scheming woman who dominated her younger brother Alfonso VI - certainly not as a quiet, unassuming, obedient all-but-nun.

At his death Fernando I had partitioned his empire between his three sons, the eldest Sancho was to have Castile; Alfonso, León; and the youngest García, Galicia. This arrangement did not last very long, and after the death of their mother in 1067 Sancho and Alfonso were soon fighting in earnest. After an indecisive battle in 1068, they both turned upon García and defeated him in 1071. By the following year they were back fighting each other, and Alfonso was defeated, imprisoned and exiled to Toledo. Later the same year fortunes were reversed, when Sancho was killed during the siege of Zamora. Castilian twelfth-century sources implicate Urraca in this conspiracy; for example Sancho's epitaph at the monastery of Oña claims that he was murdered 'by counsel of his sister'.²¹ Alfonso was her favourite,²² and she did hold lands near the city of Zamora where Sancho was killed, but the rest is speculation.

Although we cannot be sure of these accusations, they make us uneasy with the devout image of Urraca portrayed in the *Historia Silense*. I should now like to look at the works of art that she commissioned, and to consider what view of her they convey.

We have only one object which is securely tied to her and that is a liturgical work of art: a chalice presented to the church of San Isidoro at León. It carries the inscription IN NOMINE D[OMI]NI VRRACA FREDINA[N]DI that is: 'in the name of the Lord, Urraca [daughter of] Fernando'.²³ It is formed from a cup and a dish of sardonyx bound by gold mounts and straps. Several gems, as well as pearls and a crystal, are set into the goldwork together with a white paste-glass head in the manner of a classical cameo. It is undated, but experts broadly agree that it was probably produced towards the end of the eleventh century. It seems to have been intended for the church of St. Isidore from the beginning and to have stayed there until the present day. As a piece of liturgical furniture linked to San Isidoro, this chalice may be able to tell us something more about Urraca's role at the monastery.

All Urraca's recorded patronage took place within the framework of the *infantado*. In addition to the chalice, there is a description, from an eighteenth-century visitor to León, of a large crucifix which stood on the

altar of St. Isidore. It was destroyed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the wars of independence. The description says that it was encrusted with gold and precious stones - presumably using several of the techniques apparent in the chalice. It also had an inscription 'Mercy. Urraca daughter of King Fernando and Queen Sancha', and at the foot of the cross there was a figure of Urraca with her hands joined in prayer.²⁴ If this was recorded accurately, Urraca was assiduous in promoting her pious image and in displaying her patronage.

Her epitaph in the church of St. Isidore attributes more works to her, but unfortunately rather vaguely. It says 'she enlarged this church and enriched it with many gifts'.²⁵ These few words have led to many interpretations. Some scholars have maintained that she was responsible for part of the re-building of the main church including for example this south door. But they are not many, for few would date it before the first quarter of the eleventh century - therefore after her death in 1101. There is more support for the idea that she may have arranged for the building of the Panteón of the kings, the royal mausoleum of the kings of León. She has been thought responsible for all or part of its structure and for the paintings which cover its walls.²⁶

Although Urraca's patronage is closely tied to the infantado, benefiting mainly San Pedro de Eslonza outside San Isidoro itself, patronage does not seem to have been a traditional requirement of the position. Although previous holders may well have commissioned the occasional work of art, there is no evidence that any previous incumbent was a major patron. In the past the buildings, and possibly their contents, were apparently provided by the male members of the family. For example, we have no evidence of Urraca's mother, Sancha, acting as a patron during her occupancy, nor does the *Historia Silense* describe her as a patron of the church. We know that Sancha was involved in patronage during her marriage, most significantly on her own as the commissioner of a *Liber Diurnus* for herself and her husband. She is shown on the verso of folio 3 conducting the presentation of the book to Fernando.²⁷ Inside, however, it clearly says that the book is for King Fernando and Queen Sancha. There is a colophon giving the date and names of the scribes, but no other dedication, so I think that we can be fairly confident that this was a personal object not one presented to the church of the infantado. We have

no other evidence of Sancha acting as a patron on her own. A thirteenth-century chronicle, *Chronicon mundi*, by Lucas of Túy, which reports the gift of the infantados to Urraca and her sister on the condition that they remain unmarried, adds another condition: 'that they adorn the churches'.²⁸ In this chronicle Lucas of Túy also mentions the patronage of one of Urraca's successors, Sancha, the sister of Alfonso VII. By her time patronage appears to have become an integral part of ruling the infantado, but it may be anachronistic to ascribe it to Urraca. On the other hand, given Fernando's own avid patronage - there are records of him and his queen furnishing the church of San Isidoro with luxurious objects - and given his daughter Urraca's own donations, it does seem likely that this was the period when the infantado became a focus for patronage.²⁹

I have argued elsewhere that Urraca, probably with her father's initial encouragement, expanded the role of the infantado so that it came to concentrate on royal intercession and the enrichment of its church and mausoleum.³⁰ Although the monastery may have traditionally offered prayers for members of the royal family of León, I have also claimed that it was only under Urraca that it became responsible for the maintenance of a large scale programme of intercession which centred on her dead father, Fernando I.

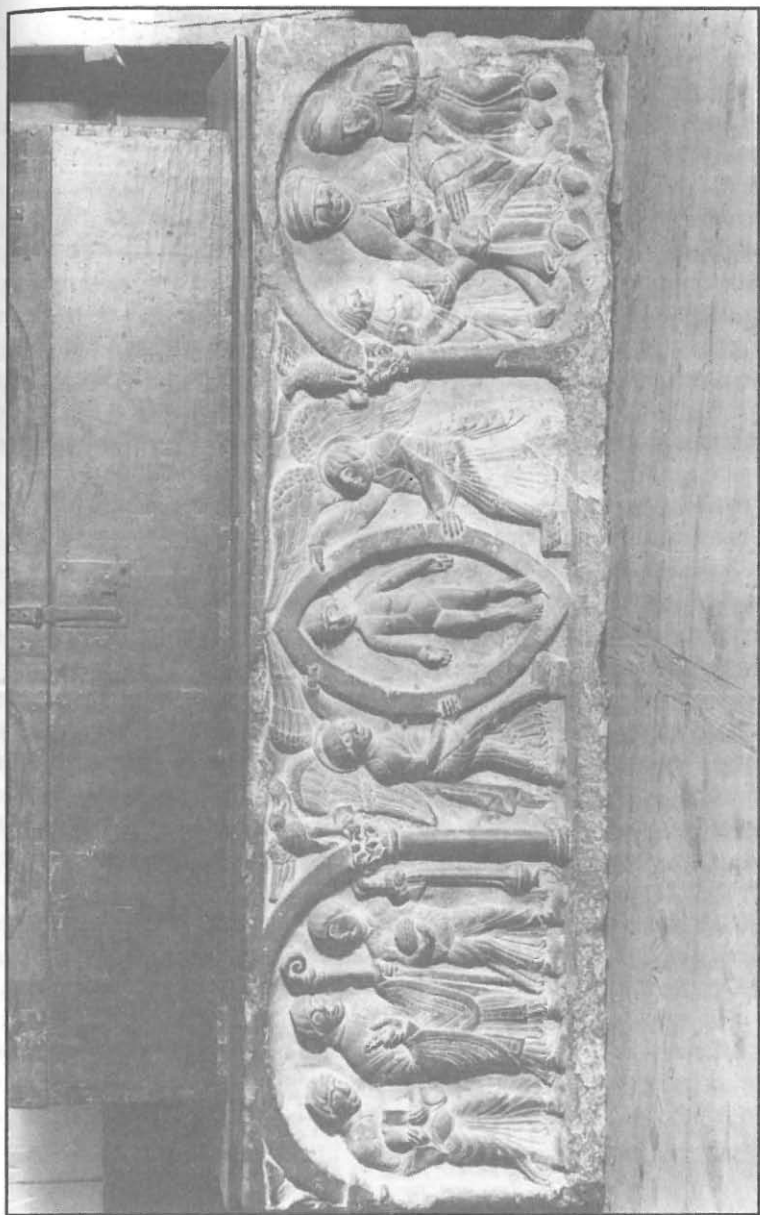
In both these characteristics, responsibility for patronage and intercession, I believe that Urraca was emulating the German queens and princesses who were responsible for the expiation of the sins and intercession for the soul of the dead king and his dynasty. The enrichment of a royal mausoleum was an important feature of this responsibility, and one highlighted by those who idealised the German royal women. The *Epitaphium*, written by abbot Odilo of Cluny in praise of the Empress Adelheid, cites virtues very similar to those claimed by Urraca.³¹ It describes how she enriched a monastery with buildings, gold and gems, precious vestments and other various furnishings. Although the *Historia Silense* does not use any of these exact phrases, similar vocabulary and ideals are present in its statement that '[Urraca] spent all the moments of her life in the realization of her most beloved task: adorning the sacred altars with gold and silver and precious stones and sacerdotal vestments'.³² Whether Urraca had access to this text through the Cluniac monks who came to implement the liturgical reform or only to its ideals, I believe that

the similarity suggests that she was influenced by the Cluniac philosophy. Adelheid was so highly regarded at Cluny, where she and the emperor for whose soul she interceded, were honoured *socii*, that in 1097 Pope Urban II canonised her. Fernando I, Urraca's father, was honoured by the abbey of Cluny on the very same level as the German imperial family, and Urraca may have aspired to Adelheid's status. This may also explain why she commissioned a chalice in a style which clearly belonged to a German imperial tradition.

If my arguments are correct, and Urraca took responsibility for intercession for her father's soul on the scale of that conducted by imperial queens, she had an important liturgical role. None of this, however, gives her a role in liturgical reform in León, and it is generally thought that women were not important players in this movement. Many of the monastic reformers were suspicious of women in the traditional sense as daughters of Eve who were a threat to their souls. Moreover the reform movement operated ultimately against women, as nuns suffered in status when the reforms were fully implemented in the twelfth century. Monastic patrons increasingly demanded masses for their souls rather than prayers of intercession, and nuns, who could not themselves be ordained, could supply these only by hiring a priest. This was, however, in the future, and these concerns would presumably not have troubled a double monastery like San Isidoro at León in Urraca's time.

I am now going to introduce some comparative material, which may throw light on the situation at León, but which also has intrinsic interest for our subject because it shows that it was not impossible for women in northern Spain at this time to have influence and possibly power over liturgical matters in general and reform in particular.

If we compare Urraca's position with that of a contemporary woman - indeed her relative - in another kingdom of northern Spain, Aragón, we will see what could be achieved. The king of Aragón, Sancho Ramírez V, had three sisters: also unhelpfully called Urraca, Sancha and Teresa. The sarcophagus of the second sister, Sancha, very probably depicts her, and it has been suggested that the figures flanking her are the other two sisters. (Plate 1, p.123)³³ They could just as well be sisters of the other sort, nuns of Santa Cruz, attending their senior member in death. It was not unusual for depictions of royal figures at this time to be accompanied by



armbearers or maids, for example in one of the wall paintings in the Panteón at León or in the manuscript illuminations of the *Liber Testamentorum* from Oviedo.

A doubtful charter records that the eldest sister, Urraca, was given by her father, Ramiro, in c.1060 to the convent of Santa Cruz de los Serós, which, it says, operated under the Rule of St. Benedict (the name, Santa Cruz de los Serós, is a corruption of Santa Cruz de los Sorores, St. Cross of the Sisters).³⁴ The convent lies near Jaca, just below the Pyrennees, and was a dependency of San Juan de la Peña, which was probably the first monastery in Aragón to adopt the Roman liturgy in 1071. We do not have any copies of the Rule used at Santa Cruz, and so we do not know if it used a straightforward adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict for nuns or a synthesised version like abbot Salvo's rule. Aragón is nearer to the kingdom of Navarre, and consequently Albelda, than the much more distant kingdom of León, but the evidence remains circumstantial. Whether the charter is correct or not, it is recorded that the Aragonese Urraca left her property to, and was buried at, Santa Cruz de los Serós, although her tomb has been destroyed.³⁵ In any case there appears to be nothing unusual about this possible arrangement and it need not detain us. The history of the third sister, Teresa, is even more uncertain, and we will not be considering her.

The second sister, Sancha, born around 1045, was given in marriage to Count Ermengol III of Urgel probably in 1062. She was his third, or maybe even his fourth wife, and they had no children. He died in battle in 1065, leaving Sancha a wealthy widow. Again not unusually, she went to live, at least part of the time, in a convent, in her case at Santa Cruz. It has been recognised that widows were often in an ambiguous position,³⁶ but Sancha's case is especially paradoxical.

In documents she generally used the title *comitissa* or *domina* or more formally *filia regis Ranimiri et Ermisende regine*, daughter of Ramiro and Ermisende, which more exactly defined her social status.³⁷ Her religious position was given only as 'handmaid of Mary, mother of God'.³⁸ She was not officially abbess of Santa Cruz - indeed a nun held this position, but it was her name which headed documents dealing with the purchase or sale of land or other property, and those which witnessed donations. Yet there also

appears to have been a degree of consultation as some charters say 'with the agreement of all the servants of God'.³⁹

Sancha does not seem to have been a nun strictly speaking any more than Urraca of León - perhaps even less. This depiction on her tomb, if that is what it is, is puzzling in that she appears to be dressed as a nun rather than as a royal woman. Unfortunately we do not know how Urraca was dressed in her image at the base of the crucifix in San Isidoro; we have only the *Historia Silense's* statement that she lived outwardly in the dress of the world.

Like Urraca, Sancha is unlikely to have taken a vow of poverty as she owned considerable property; she gave most of this to Santa Cruz, but she retained some which was to be handed over to the convent on her death.⁴⁰ She was an important figure at court and was a witness to several royal charters, especially for her nephew Pedro I.⁴¹ There is nothing so very unusual about her circumstances so far. They could be compared with the situation of many rich widows, who may have wished to avoid a second marriage or to live with family members already in a convent. There are, however, texts which imply her involvement in the process of liturgical change in Aragón. There seems to have been much less resistance to the change from the Mozarabic to the Roman liturgy in this kingdom, and it happened earlier, perhaps because there was a less powerful establishment with which to contend and a greater tradition of reform. Some historians believe that Sancha's grandfather - the one she shared with Urraca of León - introduced some reform, but the evidence is weak. Sancho Ramírez's father, Ramiro, was esteemed by the monks of Cluny and may have begun to introduce the Roman liturgy, but again there is no reliable evidence. It was Sancho Ramírez himself who, according to a letter from the Pope congratulating him, introduced the Roman liturgy into San Juan de la Peña, in 1071. Sancho Ramírez had also, early in his reign in 1068, visited Rome and submitted Aragón to papal protection declaring himself a *miles Sancti Petri*.⁴² That was under Pope Alexander II, and, twenty years later, Sancho converted that status into vassalage and paid an annual tribute to the Pope Urban II.⁴³

It is not surprising, therefore, that towards the end of his life in 1094, Sancho Ramírez was mentioned in a bull of Pope Urban II, which was addressed to the abbot of San Juan de la Peña. Urban calls him 'our very

dear friend, King Sancho' and asks the abbot to greet him on his behalf.⁴⁴ What is much more remarkable is that the Pope also sends his greetings to Sancho's sister, the Countess Sancha. This has been widely interpreted as indicating that Sancha was closely involved in the reform programme. Popes were not in the habit of sending their affectionate greetings to women, even royal ones, and it does seem reasonable to deduce that Sancha must have supported her brother in his reform of the church in some very significant way.

This impression is reinforced by two very unusual charters. One dates from 1082 in which the Augustinian Rule is introduced into San Pedro de Siresa, a venerable and learned monastery previously under the Benedictine order. The reform is clearly the initiative of Sancho Ramírez, and the charter states that Siresa will be a royal chapel and that the king will defend its interests against the bishop. Sancha is included in the list of signatories, ranked above the Counts of Barcelona and described as 'domna Sancia comitissa atque sorore regis presidente in Siresia'.⁴⁵ This is so extraordinary that one might be inclined to dismiss it as an error, but the designation is repeated in a document of 1093 in which Sancho Ramírez arbitrates between San Pedro de Siresa and the bishop of Jaca, where Sancha is again described as 'presidente in Siresia'.⁴⁶ Moreover this is not an isolated occurrence; there are four other recorded instances all involving women in Aragón in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries.⁴⁷ This presents us with a conundrum, as a woman in such a post, in charge of a male monastery, would offend against canon law. There is no explanation of Sancha's responsibilities or powers, and I have not so far found any evidence which might throw light on what the designation 'in presidente' meant. The word has three meanings one literally 'to sit in front of' which might suggest that she presided over meetings, and seems unlikely. Another would imply managing the monastery, but the documents show that Siresa had a prior to run it on a day to day basis. The third suggests guarding the monastery, watching over it, and defending it. This seems the most likely sense: that Sancha stood in for her brother the King in his role as defender of the rights of the monastery should they be challenged by the bishop.

In another charter of 1082, Sancha is described even more improbably as 'in sede episcopali Iruniensis in comendatio' that is having in trust the see

of the bishopric of Pamplona.⁴⁸ Another document even says that she governed the bishopric. This situation is explained in part by a conflict between Sancho Ramírez and his younger brother García, bishop of Jaca and Pamplona. Sancha was closely involved in this dispute, supporting one brother against the other - just as Urraca of León had, although not with such fatal consequences. With Sancha's complicity, García was accused of treason against Sancho Ramírez, on the grounds that he had conspired with Alfonso VI of León and Castile to attack a castle in Aragón. García was excommunicated for 'conspiring to destroy the church', and stripped of his control of Pamplona; the Countess Sancha was put in his place.⁴⁹ This situation was not allowed to continue, unlike the presidency of Siresa, and by 1084 Frotardo, the papal legate, had arranged for a new bishop of Pamplona, this time a French monk. Nevertheless Sancha does not seem to have been damaged in any way by her intervention in political and church affairs.

One of the reasons for Sancha's apparent inviolability may have been that she was seen to take the vow of obedience seriously, and to maintain the virtue of humility even while she held positions of considerable power. Sancha appears to have deferred to her brother in all matters quite willingly and spoke of him with great affection as more a father than a brother.⁵⁰ All her positions were given to her by her brother, and we have no evidence of any disagreement between them. Her reputation could not be more different from that of Urraca of León.

Unlike Urraca, Sancha does not seem to have carried any major responsibility for intercession for her parents' souls or for other members of the family, and her chosen residence, Santa Cruz, was not a royal mausoleum. She did ask the nuns to offer prayers, but this was the extent of her involvement. When she gave property to Santa Cruz de los Serós it was with the formula 'for the salvation and redemption of my soul and those of my father and mother and all my relations and for the remission of their sins and those of my lord king Sancho'.⁵¹ But this is no more than an accepted formula and does not imply anything beyond the expectation of the nuns' prayers on behalf of those mentioned - a normal requirement to accompany a gift.

Sancha also differs from Urraca in that she has left us no imposing works of art exclusively linked with her. She made two recorded donations

to the fabric of buildings. One, to the cathedral at Jaca in an undated document, was not for any specific purpose but rather for the work in general.⁵² The cathedral at Jaca had been consecrated in 1063,⁵³ but it is currently believed that most of the extant work dates from the twelfth century, so we cannot point to any work and say that it was probably paid for by Sancha. The second donation, to be given after her death, was for the fabric of the church at Santa Cruz de los Serós, and again most of the building has been dated to the twelfth century.⁵⁴ There is no mention of Sancha commissioning manuscripts or liturgical furniture. It was not that rich works were not produced for women in Aragón; there is, for example, a bookcover commissioned by Sancho Ramírez's wife, Felicia of Roucy. This sophisticated work displays consummate skill in ivory carving and metalwork, as well as incorporating a Byzantine ivory. It is clearly tied to Felicia by the inscription on the Romanesque ivory.⁵⁵

Sancha's only monument is, therefore, her sarcophagus. This is now also thought, on stylistic grounds, to have been carved several years after her death.⁵⁶ If that is correct, it suggests that Sancha and her sisters remained very important to Santa Cruz long after their deaths, and that the sarcophagus may, therefore, still tell us something of how Sancha was regarded. The iconography of the three women is unusual, and there seems little doubt that it is intended to represent Sancha; that the attendant figures are her sisters is less sure, especially as they had separate tombs (incidentally the sarcophagus now contains three sets of bones after the destruction of the other sarcophagi). (Plate 1) The other images on this side of the sarcophagus, which is divided into three sections, are concerned with the process of death: clergy presumably conducting the office of the dead, and Sancha's soul, portrayed as a small naked figure in a mandorla, being received into heaven by two angels. One end of the sarcophagus displays two griffins, and the other a *crismon* which was the royal *signum* of Aragón, and is also found above the west door at Jaca Cathedral and in a cruder form at the church of Santa Cruz.

The carvings on the other side of the sarcophagus are the most difficult to understand: the structure is again tripartite, and under two of the arches two knights on horses ride towards each other with spears; under the third arch a man battles to control a lion. (Plate 2, p.129)⁵⁷ One interpretation which has been offered for this would fit our knowledge of Sancha rather



well. Maldonado has seen in the chivalric battle an opposition between the vice *superbia* and the virtue *humilitas*. The horsemen had previously been viewed as just a scene from contemporary life, or as Christian fighting muslim - although there is little to differentiate the riders - or even as two saints, Mercury of Cappadocia and Julian the Apostate. Maldonado proposed instead that this is a *psychomachia* - a battle between a virtue and a vice, which is a much more convincing interpretation in a funerary context. She based her explanation on the identification of one horseman as David, personifying humility, and the other as Goliath, personifying pride and the devil, but I do not think that the biblical identifications are necessary to justify the *superbia-humilitas* opposition.⁵⁸ If we return for a moment to the Nuns' Rule of Abbot Salvo, we will find that it includes a large portion of Smaragdus' Commentary dealing with a twelve-rung ladder of humility. Smaragdus explicitly states that pride leads to hell, and humility to heaven, promising that 'he who lives in pride will after death descend humiliated into hell' while 'the glory of the kingdom of heaven will take up all those who live with a humble spirit'.⁵⁹ Smaragdus also uses a military metaphor: 'not only soldiers are called to the greatest war, but also others' - surely appropriate for a woman's sarcophagus - and, 'armed with the twelve steps of humility we should rise and go to war with the devil', and 'rejoicing and triumphant we will ascend by the twelve steps of humility to the kingdom of heaven'. It is possible to see both metaphors on Sancha's sarcophagus, the spiritual battle and then the happy soul reaching heaven.⁶⁰ If this interpretation is correct, Sancha's monument spoke eloquently of her monastic virtues.

It is clear from our examination of Sancha's life that Sancho Ramírez placed absolute trust in his sister - and probably not a great deal in any one else. Sancha did not hold an official position in the family, and no institution similar to the *infantado* seems to have existed in Aragón. Indeed as a widow Sancha could not have filled a position which required virginity. One possible explanation for this close brother/sister relationship could be sought in their ancestry. For Sancho and Sancha, as grandchildren of Sancho the Great, had Basque blood. It is much disputed and difficult to prove, but the Basques are thought to have operated a matrilineal system of inheritance in which the sister's property passed to her brother's children not to her own.⁶¹ Such a background might also

have made Fernando I, who had the same roots, sympathetic to the infantado in León. In any case in Aragón we have found a woman deeply involved in church reform. Moreover she achieved this without incurring any disapproval - indeed she received the highest papal approbation for it. Modern historians continue to speak well of Sancha, and in Aragón she is celebrated almost as a *hausheiliger*.

In view of the scope given to Sancha in Aragón, it seems improbable that Urraca in León could have been excluded totally from the processes of liturgical change, especially when we consider that she already held official responsibility for the monasteries of the kingdom through a more established and powerful position than any held by Sancha. If she had access to the wealth and connections required to commission major works of art, and chose to have herself conspicuously portrayed in one of them, it seems unlikely that she would have easily accepted any change with which she did not agree. If we take all this into account, I think it can help us to identify Urraca's hand in the reform process in León.

In 1080 Pope Gregory VII wrote a letter of complaint to Alfonso VI expressed in very strong terms and sent via Abbot Hugh of Cluny. It was occasioned by a major reversal in the introduction of the Roman liturgy into León and Castile. The abbey of Sahagún, which was to have been the flagship of the reform, had rebelled and the programme seemed to be on the point of collapse. Gregory blamed this on a monk from Cluny, Robert, who was acting as advisor to Alfonso VI and who had been installed as abbot of Sahagún. He also accused an unnamed 'perfidious woman' (*perditam feminam*), Robert's helper.⁶² Gregory asked the King to give up the incestuous love of a woman, and, in a separate sentence, to repudiate the illicit marriage into which he had entered with his wife's relative.

It is now widely accepted that the Pope was referring to Alfonso's second wife, Constance of Burgundy, who was related to his first wife Agnes of Aquitaine in the fourth degree.⁶³ Although this interpretation is initially convincing, the arguments against it are many: first that the marriage was not annulled, and that Alfonso remained married to Constance until her death.⁶⁴ After the reform was accomplished, the question of Alfonso's marriage was left with the papal legate and never mentioned again. A second stronger argument is that Constance chose to be buried at Sahagún, where she had built a palace, bath and church, after

the monastery had been most successfully reformed.⁶⁵ An unusual choice of site, if that place had almost destroyed her reputation and her marriage. Moreover Constance's known activities in the reform movement are all on the side of the Roman liturgy - even excessively so. It was she who was supposed to have worked with Archbishop Bernard in Toledo to seize the previous mosque for Christian worship, and much earlier, before the crisis of 1080, she wrote to a French monk Adelelm of Chaise-Dieu asking him 'to bring about tranquillity'.⁶⁶ As the niece of Abbot Hugh of Cluny we would expect no less of her.

It is possible that Pope Gregory may either have been confused by his informants, or he may have been linking two issues together. When he spoke of incest, Gregory used a quotation from the Bible concerning King Solomon: 'women make wise men apostates' (Sirach 19.2). He may have chosen it just because of the apt reference to apostates, but he could also have selected it because Solomon had too many wives. As the book of Kings says (IKings 11.3) 'he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.' A muslim source accuses Urraca of having an incestuous relationship with her brother, King Alfonso VI.⁶⁷ Whether this was true, or whether she merely dominated him and his decisions to the extent that everyone thought that they had a sexual relationship, is not crucial to us. Such a rumour might have been sufficient to evoke Gregory's rebuke. Certainly Urraca seems a much more plausible candidate for the 'perfidious woman' than Abbot Hugh's niece. She had an important position within the status quo, and, therefore, might have well tried to dissuade Alfonso from abolishing the Mozarabic liturgy. She would also have had the power-base from which to conduct such a campaign and a legitimate interest in the monasteries under her control. She may have thought that it posed a threat to her position, indeed in that Alfonso decided to be buried at Sahagún, and not with his father at León, the liturgical change may have destroyed the central importance of San Isidoro to the ruling family. This explanation provides not only another reason for the abuse which was later heaped on Urraca, but also - given that Urraca and the palatine church would have been forced to conform with the rest of Alfonso's kingdom, when the Roman liturgy was imposed - a rationale for her eagerness to have herself portrayed as chaste and obedient.

We have now looked quite extensively at the spheres in which these Spanish royal women operated. They had a great deal in common in that they were both sisters of the most important Spanish monarchs of their time, brothers who changed the shape of northern Spain, introduced reform, and promoted the pilgrimage and other links with France and Italy across the Pyrenees. Both women lived within a monastic framework, and both reached far beyond it. Each owned considerable property, and became involved politically in opposing another brother. It appears relatively unimportant that only one of them married.

Yet there are differences. Sancha apparently convinced contemporaries and later historians that she was a virtuous sister, and her only monument attests to this. Urraca, on the other hand, expended considerable wealth and effort in presenting herself as an ideal royal sister, but succeeded only in being demonised. This may have been a fair judgement, but it could equally be a case of women being viewed as good or bad depending on the degree to which they accepted their subordinate position in society.⁶⁸

NOTES

¹ J. Pérez de Urbel and A.G. Ruiz-Zorrilla, eds., *Historia Silense*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Escuela de Estudios Medievales, 1959, p.205. 'Tradidit etiam filiabus suis omnia totius regni sui monasteria, in quibus usque ad exitium huius vite absque mariti copula viverent.' The *Historia Compostellana* has an alternative form of words: 'omnia vero totius regni monasteria suis duabus filiabus possidenda concessit'; see H. Flórez, *España Sagrada*, vol. XXII, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 1749-1879, p.326.

² See C.J. Bishko, 'The Liturgical Context of Fernando I's last days' in *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History 600-1300*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1984 VII p.48. Bishko believes the *Historia Silense* to have been written during the reign of Alfonso VII 1126-1157 at León, and probably at San Isidoro. For details of the arguments see C. Sanchez Albornoz, 'Sobre el autor de la llamada *Historia Silense*', *Cuadernos de Historia de España* 23-24 (1955) 307-316, and 37-38 (1963) 292-317, esp.313-314.

Pérez de Urbel, p.79, claimed that Urraca was a likely commissioner of the work, and that its author was perhaps her secretary and aide in the administration of the infantado.

³ M.L. García Calles, *Doña Sancha, Hermana del Emperador*, León, Centro de Estudios 'San Isidoro', León-Barcelona, 1972.

⁴ J.M. Garrido Garrido, *Documentacion de la Catedral de Burgos (804-1183)*, Burgos, Garrido, 1983, pp.22-23: 'Decrebimus munus offerre Domino Ihesu Christo et Sanctis eius, id est, prolem filiamque nostram Urraca ut habeas, teneas, vindices atque defendas iure perhenni'.

⁵ L. García Calles, p.112: 'demptis dumtaxat necessariis clericorum'.

⁶ Pérez de Urbel, pp.122-123: 'spretis carnalibus copulis periturisque mariti indumentis, de foris sub laycaly habitu, sed intrinsecus sub monachali observatione, Christo vero sponso inhesit, ac omni vite sue tempore in ornandis auro argentove pretiosisque gemmis sacris altaribus sacerdotalibusque vestimentis desideratum exercitium peregit'. The translation is from S. Havens Caldwell, 'Urraca of Zamora and San Isidoro in León: Fulfillment of a Legacy', *Woman's Art Journal* 7, 1 (Spring/Summer 1986), p.24.

⁷ W. M. Whitehill, *Spanish Romanesque Architecture*, Oxford, OUP, 1941, p.151: 'multis muneribus ditavit, et quia beatum Isidorum super omnia diligebat, ejus servitio se subjugavit'.

⁸ J. Pérez Llamazares, *Historia de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León*, León, Centro de Investigacion 'San Isidoro', 1927, p.34.

⁹ P. Blanco Lozano, *Colección diplomática de Fernando I (1037-1065)*, Archivos Leoneses, no.40, León, Centro de Investigacion 'San Isidoro', Archivo historico diocesano, 1987, p171, and Pérez de Urbel, p.197.

¹⁰ C.J. Bishko, 'Salvus of Albelda and Frontier Monasticism in Tenth-century Navarre' in *Speculum* XXIII, 4 (1948) 559-590.

¹¹ See R. Walker, *Views of Transition: Liturgy and Illumination in Medieval Spain*, London and Toronto, British Library, 1998.

¹² *In Regulam S. Benedicti* in Silos MS 1, mid-C10; see A. Boylan, Manuscript Illumination at Santo Domingo de Silos (Xth to XII centuries), unpublished PhD thesis, Pittsburgh, 1990, p.220.

¹³ García Calles, p.106.

¹⁴ A. Calvo, *San Pedro de Eslonza*, Madrid, C.S,I.C. Instituto 'Enrique Flórez', Diputación Provincial de León, 1957, p.75.

- ¹⁵ Calvo, p.271.
- ¹⁶ Garrido Garrido, pp.58-60.
- ¹⁷ Pérez Llamazares, p.42.
- ¹⁸ P. D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- ¹⁹ Pérez de Urbel, pp.122-123.
- ²⁰ R. Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid*, London, Hutchinson, 1989, pp.4-5.
- ²¹ R. Menéndez Pidal, *La España del Cid*, Madrid, Espase-Calpe, 1969, pp.186-87.
- ²² Pérez de Urbel, pp.122.
- ²³ For illustrations of the chalice, see, for example, *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D.500-1200*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993, cat. no.118, p.254, or A. Viñayo González, *L'ancien royaume de León Roman*, La-Pierre-qui-Vire, Zodiaque, 1972, P. 133 (colour plate).
- ²⁴ M. Risco, *Iglesia de León y monasterios antiguos y modernos de la misma ciudad*, II, Madrid, 1792 [facsimile, León, 1978] pp.146-47.
- ²⁵ J. Williams, 'San Isidoro in León: Evidence for a New History' *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973), p.179: 'Domna Urraca regina de Zamora filia regis magni Fernandi. Haec ampliavit ecclesiam istam et multis muneribus ditavit'.
- ²⁶ Williams, p.179, and J. Wettstein, *La Fresque Romane, La Route de saint-Jacques, de Tours a Leon, Etudes comparatives II*, Geneve, Droz, 1978, p.124.
- ²⁷ *The Art of Medieval Spain*, cat. no.144, p.290.
- ²⁸ J. Puyol, *Crónica de España por Lucas, obispo de Túy*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 1926, p.358.
- ²⁹ Flórez, vol.IX, pp.370-75.
- ³⁰ A paper given at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1996, 'Women and Patronage in Eleventh-century Spain', as yet unpublished.
- ³¹ H. Paulhart, 'Die Lebensbeschreibung der Kaiserin Adelheid von abt Odilo von Cluny (Odilionis Cluniacensis abbatis Epitaphium domine Adelheide auguste)' in *Mitteleilungen des instituts für öster-reichische geschichts-*

forschung, *Festschrift zue Jahrtausendfeier der Kaiserkrönung Ottos des Grossen*, vol.2, Graz-Köln, 1962.

³² Pérez de Urbel, p.123.

³³ Photo courtesy of the Instituto Amatller de Arte Hispánico, Barcelona.

³⁴ Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de Santa Cruz de los Serós*, Textos medievales 19, Valencia, Editorial Anubar, 1966.

³⁵ Ubieto Arteta, pp.

³⁶ J. Carpenter and S-B. MacLean, eds., *Power of the Weak*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1995, p.xvi.

³⁷ M. González Miranda, 'La condesa Doña Sancha y el monasterio de Santa Cruz de los Serós', in *Estudios de edad media de la corona de Aragón*, vol.VI, Zaragoza, Escuela de Estudios Medievales, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Sección de Zaragoza, 1956, pp.192.

³⁸ Ubieto Arteta, p.26: 'Dei genitricis Mariae ancilla'.

³⁹ González Miranda, p.192.

⁴⁰ González Miranda pp.189-194, especially pp.190-191, and pp.195-199. See also Ubieto Arteta, pp.18-22 and 33-35.

⁴¹ González Miranda, p.193.

⁴² P. Kehr, 'Cómo y cuándo se hizo Aragón feudatorio de la Santa Sede', in *Estudios de edad media de la corona de Aragón* (op. cit. note 36), pp.203 and 304.

⁴³ Kehr, *Cómo y cuándo*, pp.285-326, and J.F. O'Callaghan, 'The Integration of Christian Spain into Europe: The Role of Alfonso VI of León-Castile' in B.F. Reilly, *Santiago, Saint-Denis, and Saint Peter, The Reception of the Roman Liturgy in León-Castile in 1080*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1985, p.103. See also T.N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragón*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1986, p.13.

⁴⁴ P. Kehr, *Papsturkunden in Spanien Vorarbeiten zur Hispania pontifica*, II, Navarra und Aragon, Berlin, Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, 1928, p.98: 'regem sanctium karissimum amicum nostrum ex nostra parte saluta et comitissam sororem eius'.

- ⁴⁵ A. Durán Gudiol, *Colección diplomática de la Catedral de Huesca*, 1, Zaragoza, Escuela de Estudios Medievales, Instituto de Estudios Pirenaicos, 1965, docs. 45 and 56, and A. Durán Gudiol, *El Monasterio de San Pedro de Siresa*, Zaragoza, Diputación General de Aragón, 1989, p.15.
- ⁴⁶ A. Durán Gudiol, *La Iglesia de Aragón durante los reinados de Sancho Ramírez y Pedro I (1062?-1104)*, Roma, Instituto Español de Eclesiásticos en Roma, 1962, p.60.
- ⁴⁷ González Miranda, p.192-93: doña Lopa, the widow of Fortunio Sanz de Lasavasa, in Albero de Iuso from December 1097 to May 1103; doña Talera, viscountess of Bearne, in Zaragoza and Uncastillo 1134-35; doña Teresa, the daughter of Count Rodrigo, in Ricla in 1144; and Bez, Countess, in Atavés c.1144.
- ⁴⁸ González Miranda, p.193. See also A.I. Lapeña Paúl, 'Iglesia y monacato en el reinado de Sancho Ramírez', in *Sancho Ramírez, rey de Aragón, y su tiempo 1064-1094*, Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, Diputación de Huesca, 1994, p.141; and J. Goñi Gartambide, *Historia de los obispos de Pamplona, SIV-XIII*, Pamplona, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, Institución Príncipe de Viana, 1979, pp.225-6.
- ⁴⁹ Kehr, 'Cómo y cuándo', p.265-6.
- ⁵⁰ Ubieto Arteta, p.35, 'Sancio rege qui non tantum fuit mihi frater set per omnia pater'.
- ⁵¹ Ubieto Arteta, p.21.
- ⁵² Whitehill, p.236-8: 'ad laborem de sancti petri de iacha'.
- ⁵³ Whitehill, p.236-8: by the Bishops of Auch, Urgell, Bigorre, Oloron, Calahorra, Leire, Jaca and Zaragoza, and Roda, who were attending a Church Council at Jaca.
- ⁵⁴ Whitehill, p.256: a document of 1095, 'percipio ego Sancia de omnibus rebus sive substanciis meis quaque inventa fuerint post meum discessum sit in fabrica ecclesiae sanctae Mariae ob redemptione peccatorum meorum'.
- ⁵⁵ For illustrations see *The Art of Medieval Spain*, pp.268-69, cat. no.128.
- ⁵⁶ D. Simon, 'Le sarcophage de Doña Sancha à Jaca', *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa*, 10 (1979) 112-23. The sarcophagus probably dates from the second decade of the twelfth century.

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- ⁵⁷ Photo courtesy of Instituto Amatller d'Arte Hispánico, Barcelona.
- ⁵⁸ M.R. Maldonado, 'La contraposición "superbia-humilitas" El sepulcro de Dona Sancha y otras obras', *Goya* 146 (1978) 75-81.
- ⁵⁹ Smaragdus, in J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, Brepols, 1844-64, vol. 102, col.805, chapter VI: 'de humilitate et multiplici eius commendatione duodecim gradibus distincta', and 'quia qui in praesenti superbus perservans vivit post mortem humilitatus in infernum descendit gloria regni coelorum suscipiet omnes qui humiliatio vivunt spiritu'.
- ⁶⁰ Smaragdus, col.808: 'evocatio dicitur, quando ad summum bellum, non solum milites, sed etiam ceteri vocantur quia ut ad bellandum contra diabolum duodecim gradibus humilitatis armati fortiter consurgamus, quotidie a Domino evocamur, educimur ac provocamur; ut illo duce de victoria triumphantes ad coelorum regna per duodecim humilitatis gradus ascendentes perveniamus gaudentes'.
- ⁶¹ R. Collins, *The Basques*, Cambridge Mass. and Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, pp.100, 160, and 194.
- ⁶² E. Caspar, *Das Register Gregors VII*, vol. II, (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae selectae), Berlin, Weidmann, 1920-23, pp.520-521.
- ⁶³ J.F. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, Ithaca and London, 1975, pp.109-112.
- ⁶⁴ Caspar, vol. II, pp.569-72, and O'Callaghan, p.112.
- ⁶⁵ S. Moralejo, 'The Tomb of Alfonso Ansúrez (+ 1093): Its Place and the Role of Sahagún in the Beginnings of Spanish Romanesque Sculpture', in B.F. Reilly, ed., *Santiago, Saint-Denis, and Saint Peter, The Reception of the Roman Liturgy in León-Castile in 1080*, New York, 1985, p.64, and p.97 n.97. See also R. Escalona, *Historia del Real Monasterio de Sahagún*, 1782, Reprint León, Ediciones Leonesas, 1982, p.493, charter cxxvii.
- ⁶⁶ B.F. Reilly, 'The Chancery of Alfonso VI of León-Castile (1065-1109)', in B.F. Reilly, ed., *Santiago, Saint-Denis, and Saint Peter, The Reception of the Roman Liturgy in León-Castile in 1080*, New York, 1985, p.20.
- ⁶⁷ S.G. Armistead, '"The Enamoured Doña Urraca" in Chronicles and Balladry' in *Romance Philology*, XI (1957-58), pp.26-29.
- ⁶⁸ J. Murray, 'Thinking about Gender', in Carpenter, p.2.