

# Proprietary Churches, Episcopal Authority and Social Relationships in the Diocese of León (11th-12th centuries)

**Mariel Pérez**

*Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET, Argentina)*

*Instituto de Historia Antigua y Medieval, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires*

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the subordination of proprietary churches to the bishopric of León in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries from a social perspective that considers the consolidation of episcopal authority in relation to the social dynamics operating at the local level. The transfer of proprietary churches to ecclesiastical authority was usually accomplished through donations that were part of a wider process of gift-giving and social bonding that in turn allowed the proprietors to obtain certain concessions. However, since the mid-eleventh century the emergence of a newly defined episcopal authority in the context of the Gregorian Reform gave new meaning to these practices and gave way to more coercive modalities of episcopal imposition over proprietary churches.

**Keywords:** Proprietary Churches; Episcopal Authority; Social Relationships; Gregorian Reform; Kingdom of León; Diocese of León.

## 1. Introduction

One of the main aspects in the process of ecclesiastical reorganization initiated in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – which was part of a constellation of new representations and practices regarding the Church – was the suppression of lay influence over ecclesiastical matters<sup>1</sup>. This challenged the control exercised by laymen over the so-called “proprietary churches”, religious institutions built on private lands and controlled by their proprietors<sup>2</sup>. This was a common practice in the Kingdom of León, which charters reveal the existence of a multiplicity of churches and monasteries owned by monarchs, noblemen, members of the clergy, wealthy peasant families or entire peasant

---

Abbreviations: León III = Ruiz Asencio, *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León*, III; León IV = Ruiz Asencio, *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León*, IV; León V = Fernández Catón, *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León*, V; León VI = Fernández Catón, *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León*, VI; Sahagún II = Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún*, II.

<sup>1</sup> Although these changes are commonly associated with the notion of Gregorian Reform, they were part of a wider and already ongoing reforming trend during the Papacy of Gregory VII and which transcended the Gregorian program itself.

<sup>2</sup> Tellenbach, *Church*, 286-93; Wood, *Proprietary Church*, 851-82. The concept of *proprietary churches* (originally, *Eigenkirchen*) has been coined by Stutz, *Geschichte*, who stressed the ownership of the land in which the church was built. However, as pointed out by Carine Van Rhijn and Steffen Patzold, the concept of *Eigenkirche* supposes a modern model of ownership and assumes the idea that the proprietor enjoyed full secular and ecclesiastical rights over their church, Patzold and Van Rhijn, *Men in the Middle*, 3-5. Considering the difficulties of this concept, in this paper I will use the notion of proprietary churches in its broader sense: to refer to various churches and monasteries treated as property and that were not integrated into monastic networks or diocesan structures.

communities<sup>3</sup>. From the very moment they appeared on the records, many of these churches were already passing from lay into ecclesiastical hands. However, since the mid-eleventh century this process acquired new features, promoted by a more vigorous and systematic initiative on the part of ecclesiastical authorities and the kings of León-Castile<sup>4</sup>.

For the Kingdom of León, the subordination of local churches to ecclesiastical jurisdiction has been considered from different perspectives. Studies focusing on Church structures have emphasized the introduction of the Gregorian ecclesiastical order into the Spanish churches and have evaluated how successful bishops were when implementing the reformist program within their dioceses. The transfer of proprietary churches to ecclesiastical authority is here understood in terms of an imposition of Romano-Gallic practices and ideas – to a large extent due to the action of Cluniac clergy – upon deep-rooted local customs, which entailed a slow and rather difficult process<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a number of local churches remained lay property<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, it is worth noticing that, in a strict sense, the Gregorian attack in the Kingdom of León was not focused on Church organization or lay influence, but rather on the substitution of the Hispanic liturgy for the Roman rite<sup>7</sup>. The problem of episcopal jurisdiction over proprietary churches was more deeply considered in studies regarding churches and monasteries owned by aristocratic families. These works unveiled the modalities and chronological frameworks of the transfer of aristocratic churches to ecclesiastical authority: in the mid-eleventh century proprietary churches started being surrendered to independent monasteries and episcopal sees and by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century – after a long process that involved some episodes of aristocratic resistance to the reforming offensive –, the new model of lay patronage imposed by the Church was mostly accepted among aristocratic families<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, peasant communities seemed to have put up a more determined and longer resistance to the ecclesiastical offensive with regard to local churches, parochial rights and tithe collection<sup>9</sup>. Finally, the articulation of local churches within the emerging parochial framework was also examined from a territorial perspective focusing on the

---

<sup>3</sup> For the Iberian territories, proprietary churches have been the object of extensive study. See Torres López, “Iglesias propias”; Bidagor, *Iglesia propia en España*; Orlandis, “El concilio de Coyanza”; Faci Lacasta, “Estructuras sociales”, 136-9; Loring García, “Nobleza e iglesias propias”; Martínez Sopena, “Monasterios particulares”; García García, “Aristocracia laica”; Fernández Conde, *Religiosidad medieval, Alta Edad Media*, 293-357; Pérez, “El control de lo sagrado”, among others.

<sup>4</sup> The main lines of this process are drafted by Martínez Sopena, “Aristocracia, monacato y reformas”.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher, *Episcopate*, 162-73; Faci Lacasta, “La reforma gregoriana”; Reglero de la Fuente, “Los obispos y sus sedes”; Calvo Gómez, “Rasgos de la reforma del clero”.

<sup>6</sup> Fletcher, *Episcopate*, 158-179. Moreover, the so-called “Becerro de las Presentaciones” shows that in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century an important number of churches and monasteries were still property of laymen, who enjoyed the right to present the priests and to get part of the tithes collected. Fernández Flórez, “Becerro de Presentaciones”. To this regard, see also Martínez Sopena, *Tierra de Campos*, 273-288.

<sup>7</sup> Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII*, p. 468-80; Ayala Martínez, *Sacerdocio y reino*, p. 306-20; Deswarte, *Une Chrétienté romaine*, p. 368-83.

<sup>8</sup> Barton, *The aristocracy*, 185-220; Martínez Sopena, “Monasterios particulares”; “Fundaciones monásticas”; “Aristocracia, monacato y reformas”; Calleja Puerta, *El conde Suero Vermúdez*, 419-513.

<sup>9</sup> Alfonso Antón, “Iglesias rurales”.

social organization of space. In this sense, a series of studies have outlined the changes in the ecclesiastical organization of northern Iberia from the disarticulation of the diocesan pattern from Late Antiquity to the configuration of a hierarchical and territorially defined structure, based on the local parish, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>10</sup>.

All these studies have largely contributed to our knowledge of the changes undergone by local churches in the context of the transformations carried out in the ecclesiastical frameworks of medieval Iberia from Visigothic times to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, some aspects of this process are still to be explored, especially regarding the social dynamics by means of which these changes took place. To this aim, this work will consider the subjection of proprietary churches to the bishopric of León in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries from a social approach willing to understand the consolidation of episcopal authority in relation to the social dynamics operating at the local level. For that purpose, I will analyze two different but yet indissoluble aspects of this process. First, I will examine the transfer of proprietary churches to the see of León and show how these transfers were integrated into a more complex logic of gift-giving and social bonding. Second, I will consider the role played by the consecration of churches in the imposition of episcopal jurisdiction over proprietary churches within the context of an ecclesiastical reform. But before, it is necessary to briefly examine the reality of proprietary churches in the Kingdom of León and the major features of the process through which these institutions were transferred to ecclesiastical authority.

## 2. Proprietary churches and the ecclesiastical reform in the Kingdom of León

The private foundation of churches was already a reality in northern Iberia in the early medieval centuries<sup>11</sup>. However, it has been suggested that, in the Visigothic period, these churches were subjected to episcopal jurisdiction: the *Colección Canónica Hispana* indicated that bishops would ordain the priests, exert visitation rights and perceive a third part of the income of these churches<sup>12</sup>. In any case, the social and political changes resulting from the fall of the Visigothic Kingdom deeply affected the ecclesiastical organization of the Iberian Peninsula and established new conditions for the development of these churches. Particularly, the region of the Duero valley would remain at the margins of central political power until the “repopulation” movement initiated in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the integration of the area into the political structures of the kingdom of Asturias<sup>13</sup>. In this context, the diocesan geography of this region would

---

<sup>10</sup> López Alsina, “Parroquias y diócesis”; “El encuadramiento eclesiástico”; “La reforma eclesiástica”; Calleja Puerta, *La formación de la red parroquial*. For the urban territory, Calleja Puerta, “Eclesiología episcopal”. This approach is based on the studies on social organization of space developed by J. A. García de Cortázar. See García de Cortázar, “Del Cantábrico al Duero”; “Organización social del espacio”.

<sup>11</sup> Torres López, “Iglesias propias”; Bidagor, *Iglesia propia en España*; Martínez Díez, *Patrimonio eclesiástico*.

<sup>12</sup> Martínez Díez, *Patrimonio eclesiástico*, 73-9.

<sup>13</sup> See Reglero, “Ocupación de la cuenca del Duero”.

be disrupted by the action of the Asturian kings, who suppressed old diocesan sees, such as Braga and Palencia and created new ones, such as Oviedo and León, in line with the new political project. These changes undermined the basis of the traditional diocesan pattern, since the distribution of the rural churches between the remaining bishoprics broke the territorial continuity of the dioceses<sup>14</sup>. This scenario favored the spread of proprietary churches throughout the area. Leonese charters show, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century well into the 11<sup>th</sup>, the multiplication of monasteries and churches owned by monarchs, noblemen, members of the clergy acting on personal basis, wealthy peasant families or even entire village communities. These institutions, along with their lands, were integrated into the personal property of their owners, who were usually in position of appointing the clergymen and keeping ecclesiastical income to themselves<sup>15</sup>.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the terminology in use to refer to these institutions was diverse and seemingly interchangeable: *ecclesia*, *monasterium*, *basilica* or even *cemeteryum*. There are examples of institutions referred to both as *monasterium* and *ecclesia*, even throughout a single charter. The extent to which these terms might have referred to different types of religious institutions is uncertain. It has been asserted that what charters called churches or monasteries were actually the same reality: churches served by small monastic communities, which exerted parochial functions within the local society<sup>16</sup>.

Terminological problems must not conceal, though, the fact that the notion of proprietary church encompasses a diversity of concrete realities. As pointed out by Pascual Martínez Sopena, it is necessary to make a distinction between monasteries founded by the aristocracy and churches born within village communities<sup>17</sup>. Families from the aristocracy usually founded and endowed religious institutions served by monastic communities. These monasteries were places of prayer, burial of the family and care for the widows and the elderly. But at the same time, in a pre-parochial context, they probably served as churches and provided some level of pastoral care for the family and the local populations<sup>18</sup>. Within peasant societies, the reality beyond proprietary churches seems to be more nebulous. As described below, the charters show a varied range of situations, from churches and monasteries owned by local elites and served by an abbot or presbyter acting by himself or accompanied by his family or by a small religious community; to churches owned collectively by entire village communities and served by a priest providing some sort of pastoral care for the local

---

<sup>14</sup> López Alsina, “La reforma eclesiástica”, 425-34. On the evolution of the ecclesiastical geography of the Spanish territories, see Mansilla Reoyo, *Geografía eclesiástica*.

<sup>15</sup> Some scholars argue that there is no evidence of institutionalized tithe collection until the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. See Martínez Sopena, *Tierra de Campos*, 296; Davies, “Local priests”, 134-5. Cf. López Alsina, “El encuadramiento eclesiástico”, 454.

<sup>16</sup> Loring García, “Nobleza e iglesias propias”, 90-93. Similar remarks on Peña Bocos, *La atribución social*, 105.

<sup>17</sup> Martínez Sopena, “Fundaciones monásticas”, 44.

<sup>18</sup> On aristocratic monasteries, see Loring García, “Nobleza e iglesias propias”; Martínez Sopena, “Parentesco y poder”, 46-50; “Monasterios particulares”; García García, “Aristocracia laica”; Martín Viso, “Monasterios y poder aristocrático”; García de Cortázar, “Monasterios hispanos”; Pérez, “El control de lo sagrado”.

population<sup>19</sup>. Wendy Davies suggested that – based on the references to the books included in the endowments of local churches – many local priests would have been in a position to provide basic rites, prayers and biblical readings for their local communities<sup>20</sup>. These priests had a prominent role in the community: they usually were important land proprietors at the local level, enjoyed a distinguished status within the community, acted as scribes recording the transactions of the villagers or even writing the charters of their lords, and performed as social mediators between the community and the secular and ecclesiastical authorities. In fact, local churches played themselves an important part in the social articulation of the community, as they were a place where the villagers got together to deliberate and to make decisions concerning community interests and where the juridical acts of the villagers were recorded and endorsed<sup>21</sup>.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish Church, strongly endorsed by the monarchy, started to show some concern regarding the control of clergymen and ecclesiastical possessions. The Leonese Laws of 1017 established the bishop's jurisdiction over their *abbates* and *monacos*, what has been interpreted – despite the use of a monastic terminology – as an affirmation of the general jurisdiction of bishops over the secular and regular clergy<sup>22</sup>. But the first clear and systematic step towards a global reorganization of the Leonese Church was the decrees issued at the Council of Coyanza (c. 1055). This council, promoted by King Fernando I, was a part of a program that combined ecclesiastical reform and consolidation of royal power: the king endorsed the strengthening of the Hispanic Church and, in turn, bishops – some of them appointed by the king himself – became a major pillar in the legitimation of the monarchy<sup>23</sup>. The council addressed diverse aspects of the celebration of the Christian rites, the administration of sacraments, the ecclesiastical discipline and Christian life<sup>24</sup>. But we can also acknowledge in Coyanza the germinal elements of a new conception of ecclesiastical organization, expressed in the will to strengthen the bishops' authority over churches<sup>25</sup>. The third canon prescribed that all the churches belonging to a diocese

---

<sup>19</sup> On this variety of situations, see also Davies, *Acts of Giving*, 46-48. Some authors formulated an evolutionary model according to which many local churches were originally owned by the entire community but later fell into the hands of some of their notable members, who were able to take over property rights in the church; see Álvarez Borge, *Poder y relaciones sociales*, 55-56.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, "Local priests", 139-42. For a general view on the practice of pastoral care in medieval Spain see, Soto Rábanos, "La práctica de la pastoral".

<sup>21</sup> Davies, "Local priests", 137-9, 142-3; Ruiz de la Peña, "Parroquias"; Calleja Puerta, *La formación de la red parroquial*, 100-1. The social role of presbyters in rural communities has been emphasized for other areas, as well. See Davies, *Small Worlds*, 99-102; Wickham, *The Mountains*, 44-5.

<sup>22</sup> López Alsina, "La reforma eclesiástica", 435-6. Leonese Laws (Braga version), in Martínez Díez, *Legislación conciliar*, 71.

<sup>23</sup> On Fernando's policy regarding the Church, see Ayala Martínez, *Sacerdocio y reino*, 269-93.

<sup>24</sup> On the Council of Coyanza, see García Gallo, "El Concilio de Coyanza".

<sup>25</sup> The aim and the relation of the Council of Coyanza with romano-gallican reforming trends has been the object of different interpretations. For Alfonso García Gallo, the council aimed to restore the ecclesiastical discipline following the Visigothic tradition, dismissing any influence either Roman or Cluniac, García Gallo, "El Concilio de Coyanza", 366-70, 630-1; also Grassotti, "La Iglesia y el Estado"; García y García, "Legislación"; Martínez Díez, "La Iglesia de las normas", 84-87. On the other hand, Charles Bishko placed Coyanza within a period of Franco-Catalan religious influence in León between the years 1020-1050, which paved the way to a future Cluny alliance initiated by Fernando I, Bishko, "Fernando I" (*cf.* Pick, "Rethinking Cluny"). In recent years, authors have conceived the decrees of

should remain under episcopal jurisdiction and forbade clergymen to serve any laymen unless they did it voluntarily or following the bishop's orders. It also established that churches should remain undivided and not be shared among presbyters<sup>26</sup>. In turn, further councils held in León (1114), Burgos (1117) and Palencia (1129) aimed against the rights of the lay founders in churches and ecclesiastical incomes and prohibited the clergy to receive churches from laymen<sup>27</sup>.

While canonical legislation reveals the will of the Leonese Church to impose episcopal authority over local churches, the charters allow an approach to the methods by means of which this process took place. In practice, the transfer of proprietary churches to ecclesiastical hands was usually carried out through donations for the salvation of the soul. Church donations first benefited larger monasteries. Wendy Davies has pointed out that this movement started in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, well before the influence of the ecclesiastical reform, and allowed the constitution of ecclesiastical networks around larger religious institutions<sup>28</sup>. In León, the first noteworthy beneficiary of this process was the monastery of Sahagún, which in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century became a major religious center and attracted an important amount of donations of lands and churches<sup>29</sup>. Eventually, the accumulation of churches in the hands of Sahagún – which in 1083 received a papal exemption from episcopal authority and was put under the direct authority of the Holy See<sup>30</sup> – would present a challenge for the bishops of León, who since the late-eleventh century started claiming episcopal rights in these churches<sup>31</sup>.

It was since the last decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century that the bishopric of León acquired a more important role in the absorption of proprietary churches by drawing donations from aristocratic families, local elites and village communities (Table 1)<sup>32</sup>. This process

---

Coyanza as a part of a wider reformist movement, the product of both internal and external incentives. See Fernández Conde, *La religiosidad, Plena Edad Media*, 138; Isla Frez, *Realezas hispánicas*, 158-69; López Alsina, “La reforma eclesiástica”, 439; Ayala Martínez, *Sacerdocio y reino*, 290.

<sup>26</sup> “statuimus ut omnes ecclesie que in unaquaque parrochia habentur in suorum episcoporum iure permaneant et clerici nullum inde seruicium laicis faciant nisi sua uoluntate et suorum episcoporum iussione. Et ipse ecclesie sint integre et non diuise inter presbiteros”, Council of Coyanza, in Martínez Díez, *Legislación conciliar*, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Council of León (1114), III, VII; Council of Burgos (1117), XI; Council of Palencia (1129), 10, 17, in Martínez Díez, *Legislación conciliar*, 196-7, 220-1, 275, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Davies, *Acts of Giving*, 62-64. For France, the role of the large Benedictine monasteries in the absorption of proprietary churches was pointed out by Aubrun, *La paroisse*, 78-85.

<sup>29</sup> Martínez Sopena, *Tierra de Campos*, 423-36; on the role of Sahagún in the absorption of proprietary churches, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Sahagún III, doc. 809, 1083.

<sup>31</sup> In 1091, the bishop of León and the abbot of Sahagún agreed that the monastery should be allowed to keep the tithes of the churches that were already under the monastery's control. León IV, doc. 1260, 1091. The series of disputes between the see and the monastery for the control of local churches would even involve the Holy See. León V, doc. 1606, 1177; doc. 1648, [1184]; León V, doc. 1663, [1186-1187].

<sup>32</sup> León III, doc. 629, 1002; doc. 770, 1020; León IV, doc. 952, 1037; doc. 992, 1040; doc. 1002, 1042; doc. 1009, 1043; doc. 1047, 1047; doc. 1083, 1052; doc. 1115, 1059?; doc. 1119, 1060; doc. 1134, 1065; doc. 1143, 1066; doc. 1163, 1069; doc. 1191, 1073; doc. 1197, 1076; doc. 1207, 1077; doc. 1209, 1078; doc. 1216, 1080; doc. 1217, 1080; doc. 1248, 1090; doc. 1266, 1092; doc. 1267, 1092; doc. 1271, 1092; doc. 1281, 1094; doc. 1284, 1095; doc. 1293, 1097; doc. 1299, 1099; doc. 1298, [1093-1098]; doc. 1301, 1099; doc. 1316, 1104; doc. 1319, 1105; León V, doc. 1335, 1111; doc. 1344, 1113; doc. 1366, 1120; doc. 1380, 1124?; doc. 1437, 1142; doc. 1441, 1143; doc. 1500, 1157; doc. 1518, 1162; doc. 1550, 1164;

took place in a context of progressive definition of episcopal attributions<sup>33</sup>. The charters from this period hint at the idea that churches and clergymen should be subordinated to episcopal jurisdiction. They also refer to episcopal rights in the tithes and in other ecclesiastical incomes collected within the diocesan territory. In the decades of 1060 and 1070, some aristocratic families put their churches under episcopal jurisdiction and granted the see of León a third of certain ecclesiastical incomes collected in their villages. In 1065, Toda and their sons Fernando and Martín Flaínez gave to bishop Pelayo the “*usura*” from all their villages and churches, as well as a third of the alms collected by their monasteries; they also prescribed that the clergymen from their churches were subordinated to the bishop’s jurisdiction<sup>34</sup>. Similar concessions were made in 1066 by Diego Pétriz and María Froilaz<sup>35</sup> and in 1071 by countesses Justa and Mumadonna, who referred explicitly to tithes<sup>36</sup>. As shown by these examples, the subordination of churches to ecclesiastical authority did not always go together with the transfer of property rights. In these cases, lay proprietors allowed the imposition of episcopal jurisdiction over their churches, but kept property rights to themselves and their descendants. Moreover, it is worth noticing that response of aristocratic families towards the Church was not passive at all, instead it must be understood as a part of a political game, as a social strategy to redefine their position within a new political framework characterized by a strong bond between the monarchy and the Church<sup>37</sup>. The case of Toda and their sons is an example of this. As the wife of Flaín Fernández, a powerful count who had revolted against Fernando I and suffered the confiscation of his lands, the subordination of her churches to episcopal jurisdiction – at the very beginning of Alfonso VI’s reign – can be seen as an attempt to regain the support of the monarchy.

---

doc. 1535, 1165; doc. 1551, 1169; doc. 1593, 1176; doc. 1594, 1176; doc. 1602, 1177; doc. 1603, 1177; doc. 1619, 1181; León VI, doc. 1770, 1202; doc. 1772, 1203; doc. 1774, 1203; doc. 1803, 1208.

<sup>33</sup> On the development of episcopal power in northern Spain in the context of the Gregorian Reform, see Reglero, “Los obispos”, 242-59.

<sup>34</sup> “concedimus uobis patri nostro Pelagius episcopus per hunc seriem testamenti de omnes nostras uillas uestra usuram que debemus reddere ad sedem episcopalem, siue et de monasterios tertias uotos uel omnia uestra usura tam uobis quam qui post uos ordinem episcopalem tenuerit in casa Sancte Marie Legionis, et non tollamus monacos de nostras ecclesias de uestro iudicio, set stent pro uestra parte et post partem uestri successores omnibus diebus”, León IV, doc. 1136, 1065.

<sup>35</sup> “concederemus de omnes nostras uillas et de nostras ecclesias uel monasterios a[d sedis] Sancte [Marie Legi]onensis uel patri nostro Pelagio episcopo omnem usuram que debet deseruire ad episcopatum suas tertias et suas usuras de anno in anno, et stent illas ecclesias uel monasteri[os] uel monacos qui ibidem fuerint concurrentes et deseruientes ad sedis Legionense et non proclament se nisi ad suo episcopo et reddant suas tertias uel usuras tam in nostra uita quam in omni tempore”, León IV, doc. 1142, 1066.

<sup>36</sup> “de omnibus uillis meis que sunt in diocesi Sancte Marie iam dicte sedis Legionensis omnis decimationis tertia portio panis ac uini ad eandem sedem pertineat siue reddatur, sicut lege et auctoritate canonum censetur”, León IV, doc. 1175, 1071; “disposuerat ipse comite uotum in corde suo ut de omnibus uillis suis, tam ille quam etiam et frater suis Guterre Adefonso, et fecerunt testamentum ut darent de omnis decimationis panis ac uini tertia portio ad eandem sedem. Quod et ego sic confirmare uolo et permanere concedo ut in quacunque loco ipsas uillas fuerint testatas uel concessas, nullus sit ausus ipso foro ad ipsa sede contendere que iam ibidem prius uolumus conferre”, León IV, doc. 1176, 1071.

<sup>37</sup> The aristocratic groups showed a diversity of social strategies regarding ecclesiastical institutions within the context of Church reform, from the subordination of their churches to episcopal or monastic jurisdiction – which implied a political alignment with the monarchy – to episodes of resistance expressed in conflicts over land property. See Martínez Sopena, “Aristocracia, monacato y reformas”; Pérez, “Aristocracia, monasterios y conflictos por la tierra”.

In fact, her son Fernando Flaínez would soon appear in the records as the king's standard-bearer, and Martín Flaínez would become count and one of the most important figures in Alfonso's court<sup>38</sup>.

The way in which proprietary churches started falling under ecclesiastical authority was then diverse. However, there seems to be one invariable feature in this process: the individualized nature of the action exerted by ecclesiastical authorities over local monasteries and churches. This is an expression of the very nature of episcopal authority, which was not yet exerted over a continuous diocesan territory, but rather over individual dependencies<sup>39</sup>. Bishops and abbots had to deal individually with the owners of churches, aristocratic families, wealthy peasants, local presbyters or village communities. Therefore, the actions of bishops had necessarily to be adjusted – at least to a certain extent – to the constellation of practices, interests and relationships of the local societies. On the other hand, the development, since the last decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, of a new conception of ecclesiastical organization and the progressive definition of a series of episcopal prerogatives gave church donations a whole new meaning.

### 3. Church donations, social relationships and patronage

The charters show that the transfer of proprietary churches to the diocese of León was to a large extent accomplished through donations. These donations allowed the transfer of the property rights in these churches and their lands to the bishopric, which entailed their subordination to diocesan jurisdiction and the imposition of episcopal rights in tithes and other incomes. This should not suggest, however, a top-down process in which laymen simply accepted to waive their rights in the churches in favor of the bishopric. The charters suggest that church proprietors had the chance to negotiate with bishops the terms under which donations took place. In some cases, donors could maintain certain rights for life in the properties and incomes related to the church (for instance, donations *post obitum* or donations *reservato usufructu*)<sup>40</sup>. These methods enabled the donors to give the church to the bishopric without impoverishing either themselves or their descendants. Donors could also receive land concessions from the see in exchange for their shares in the family churches<sup>41</sup>.

As a form of gift-giving, church donations often implied building up patron-client relationships between the donor and the ecclesiastical recipient, which placed the donors under the patronage of the bishopric and allowed them to hold their churches or to benefit from other kind of concessions<sup>42</sup>. In 1078, Pedro Muñiz and his wife donated

---

<sup>38</sup> For the political trajectory of this family, see Martínez Sopena, "El conde Rodrigo de León", p. 59-66.

<sup>39</sup> See Lauwers and Ripart, "Représentation de l'espace". For the Spanish dioceses, Calleja Puerta, "Eclesiología episcopal": 444.

<sup>40</sup> León IV, doc. 1163, 1069; doc. 1319, 1105; doc. 1380, 1124?; doc. 1500, 1157.

<sup>41</sup> León IV, doc. 1209, 1078; doc. 1316, 1104; doc. 1319, 1105; doc. 1380, 1124?, doc. 1500, 1157; León V, doc. 1628, [1181-1191].

<sup>42</sup> For gift-giving and clientship in Early Medieval Iberia, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, 160-3.



the see of León and bishop Pelayo a monastery devoted to San Pedro and San Pablo that the Muñiz had built in Alcuetas, along with its properties and some other lands in Quintanilla and Ribella. The couple also gave one of their children to the see<sup>43</sup>. But this donation also implied a personal engagement between the donors and the bishop. The donors kissed the hands of the bishop, to whom they referred as “*patrono nostro*”; in turn, the couple was entitled to hold the monastery and after their death, their children – on condition that they served the see of León and that the bishop appointed the abbot<sup>44</sup>. The charters show other examples of this kind of practices that combine the donation of a church with the (explicit or implicit) establishment of patronage relationships. In 1104, Xabe Vélaz, his wife and his children gave the see of León a monastery they had built by the river Sequillo in Villabaruz. The donors prescribed that no family member would have hereditary rights in the monastery. However, they established that the monastery would be held for life by their son Juan; in addition, if after his death, any member of the family became a clergyman, he would be allowed to settle down in the monastery on condition he owed obedience and fealty to the bishop<sup>45</sup>.

This kind of bonds sometimes comes to light in a series of different transactions over time. The case of Vermudo López illustrates this situation. A charter from 1090 shows this person giving the monastery of San Nicolás in Cabrerros del Río – on the occasion of its consecration by the bishop – to the monastery of San Juan of Valdemora, subordinated to the see of León. He prescribed that the monastery and all the other properties given in donation would serve the see of León and stay under its authority, and donated a lot of lands, cattle and diverse belongings, as well as a third of the incomes he acquired for life<sup>46</sup>. One year later, Vermudo made a donation to the see León; on this occasion, some lands in Cabrerros del Río, Quintanilla de los Oteros y Santibáñez<sup>47</sup>. These two charters seem to reflect a one-way transfer of properties from the laity to the bishopric. However, if we look closer into the records, we find that Vermudo’s alleged generosity was compensated with a concession from the see. Sometime between 1090 and 1091, Bishop Pedro addressed Vermudo López as “*noster familiaris*” and referred to the good services and fealty Vermudo had always owed to the Leonese see<sup>48</sup>. As a reward for his services and in acknowledgement of his

<sup>43</sup> On the formulas implying transfer of a person to an ecclesiastical institution in Early Medieval Iberia, see Davies, *Acts of Giving*, 52-61.

<sup>44</sup> “*Modo pater nostro Pelagio episcopo dicimus uobis et osculamur uestras manus ut teneamus ipsum monasterium in uestra uita et seruiamus cum illo ad sedem Sancte Marie uel episcopus qui ibi fuerit, sicut seruiunt alii monasterii, et post obitum nostrum, si fuerint unos de nostros filios bonos et humiles et fecerint sicuti et nos fecerimus, ut teneant ipsum monasterium, et semper seruiant cum illo ad ipsa sede que de sursum resonat; et si non seruiert ad ipsum monasterium uel monacos que ibi steterint male fecerint, extranent se de ipso monasterio et de suas diuisas que de sursum resonat et ipso monasterio sedeat pro ad partem sedis Sancte Marie. Et adhuc dicimus monaco que ibi fuerit in nostra uita sedeat positum per manum pontifice ipsius sedis*”, León IV, doc. 1209, 1078.

<sup>45</sup> León IV, doc. 1316, 1104.

<sup>46</sup> León IV, doc. 1248, 1090.

<sup>47</sup> León IV, doc. 1258, 1091.

<sup>48</sup> For José Orlandis, the notion of *familiaritas* designated the bond between religious institutions and laymen who offered themselves and their possessions to the former; see Orlandis, “*Traditio corporis*”. But, as pointed out by Maria Filomena Coehlo, this bond had different implications according to the social status of the donors. For the humble, the church offered prayers but also economic protection and

friendship (*amicicium*), the bishop gave him the monastery of San Juan in Santibáñez de Saperos, by the river running to Valdemora. Due to the location and dedication of this monastery, it might be inferred that this is the same monastery to which Vermudo had given the monastery of San Nicolás in the first place. He was then receiving back the monastery he had first donated. In exchange for this concession, Vermudo would immediately build a new construction for the monastery under certain terms. The monastery would be held for life by Vermudo, and after his death, it would be held by his wife Teresa as long as she did not remarry. Vermudo and his wife committed themselves to always serve the see of León and to receive and honor the bishop any time he should visit. When both of them died, the monastery and its possessions would go back to the bishopric<sup>49</sup>.

This series of charters sheds light on the social dynamics that individual transactions keep in the shadows. Vermudo López, who was undoubtedly a prominent member of the local society, with sufficient means to build a monastery and many landed properties in different locations, had given a monastery of his own to the monastery of San Juan de Saperos (subjected to the see of León) and had put it under episcopal jurisdiction. But this practice, which at first sight appears as a simple donation, was part of a more complex dynamic of social bonding and exchange. Through this donation, Vermudo López established a special bond with the see of León and his service and fealty were highly rewarded with the concession of the monastery.

When property rights in churches were shared (or claimed to be shared) among a group of heirs, the transfer to ecclesiastical authority led to more complex and sometimes conflictive situations. After a donation, a member of the family could claim hereditary rights in the church and try to get some kind of compensation in exchange for waiving his rights. The conflict around the monastery of San Adrián de León illustrates this situation. By 1059, Presbyter Fernando, along with his *consanguineis* Sancho Cítiz, his children and the children of Cidi Cítiz, donated the monastery of San Adrián, located in the city of León, as well as other properties, to bishop Alvito and the see of León<sup>50</sup>. But in 1081, Bishop Pelayo accused Fernando (who was now abbot) of not having served the monastery properly and entrusting it to his relatives, who took over

---

appropriate care in case of illness. For the aristocracy and the local elites, *familiaritas* ensured burial rights within the institution and the possibility of taking the holy orders, Coelho, “Comunidades monásticas”, 291-7.

<sup>49</sup> “Notum sit cunctis qui hec audituri sunt quia quidam noster familiaris, nomine Ueremudo Lupiz, nobis semper bene seruiuit et utiliter de sua nobis substantia ministravit, et semper fidelis fuit loco sancto Sancte Marie sedis Legionensis et omnibus ibi Deo seruientibus. Propterea placuit inprimis mihi Pelagio, episcopo ipsius sedis Sancte Marie sedis, et omni congregationi nostre ut, secundum seruitium quod nobis exhibebat et secundum seruitium quod nobis [sic] amicicium quam in illo cognoscebamus, acciperet a nobis aliquod benefitium et placitam remunerationem. Est igitur quoddam monasterium quod dicitur Sancti Iohannis de Ualle de Saperos, quod est situm super riuulum quod discurrit ad Uallem de Mora; hoc concessimus illo in beneficio et remuneratione, sub tali conuentione: ut teneat in uita sua et edificet sicut oportet monasterium, edificare absque ulla retardatione. Et iterum dicimus ut ita curam abeat ipsius monasterium edificare sicut pater debet curam abere domus sue. Et postquam migrauerit Uermudo Lupiz, similiter uolumus ut habeat concessum uxor sua, si superuixerit, illud monasterium. Si absque secundo uiro manere uoluerit et similiter sicut maritus suus edificare uoluerit, si ita uxor eius Tarasia facere uoluerit, monasterium possidere poterit.”, León IV, doc. 1263, [1090-1091].

<sup>50</sup> León IV, doc. 1115, 1059?.

the monastery and divided its possessions among themselves<sup>51</sup>. Faced with the claim of the bishop, Fernando reached an agreement with his relatives. They would waive their rights in the monastery and acknowledge the abbot – whose appointment should be approved by the bishop of León – as the only proprietor. In exchange, they would be granted the usufruct of certain lands; they were also promised that the monastery would not be given *in prestamo* to anyone and that any member of the family who took the holy orders would be preferred to rule the monastery over other people<sup>52</sup>. This conflict shows the diversity of interests regarding the monastery. Family members were interested in the property, which they ultimately gave up in exchange for the concession of other lands. But they also had expectations regarding their bonds with the monastery, as expressed in the bishop’s promise not to grant it to other people and to favor the family members over others as candidates for the abbacy. The monastery was finally transferred to the see of León, but at the cost of making certain concessions to the former heirs and assuring them some rights in the monastery.

Keeping privileged bonds with churches was a recurrent leitmotiv in the negotiations between the proprietors and the see. The charters show that donors tried to ensure their future admission (and their descendants’) as clergymen in their churches. In 1104, Xabe Vélaz, his wife and his children gave their monastery to the Leonese see on condition that the monastery remained in their son’s Juan hands and that any of their descendants were allowed to settle there if they became clergymen<sup>53</sup>. Also, in 1095 the families of Rodrigo Yáñez, Ansur Yáñez, Pelayo Yáñez, Anaya Rodríguez y Pelayo Ovéquiz, along with all the inhabitants of Vane Munius, gave the monastery of San Juan to the see of León and agreed that, if any of them were willing to enter the clergy, they would be ordained by the bishop and would settle down in the monastery<sup>54</sup>. The donors could also bargain with the bishops the right to rule these monasteries as abbots. In 1092, Sol y Orobellido Peláez, along with presbyter Félix, gave the see of León the church of San Pelayo of Pozuelo on condition that, after their death, any member of the family willing to enter the clergy would be appointed abbot in the monastery with the approval of the bishop<sup>55</sup>. The same condition was also agreed upon for Abbot Fernando’s relatives with regard to the monastery of San Adrián de León, as seen above<sup>56</sup>. In this way, the proprietors were still able to ensure for themselves and their

---

<sup>51</sup> “cum essem multis curis occupatus et non possem providere causam monasterii, sicut oportebat, dedi uel potius comendavi illud ad possidendum et gubernandam quibusdam meis propinquis causa dilectionis. Quamobrem inuaserunt clastrum monasterii, alii ad manendum, alii ad pausandum, et possessiones eius que foris erant inter se diuiserunt et tenuerunt multis diebus”, León IV, doc. 1220, 1081.

<sup>52</sup> León IV, doc. 1220, 1081.

<sup>53</sup> “Post mortem uero filii nostri, si aliquis propinquis noster clericus extiterit et in eodem monasterio stare quesierit, licentiam morandi ibi habeat, tamen fidelis et in omnibus obediens episcopo Sancte Maria existat”, León IV, doc. 1316, 1104.

<sup>54</sup> “Quod si aliquis homo ex nobis uitam sanctam uoluerit in hoc loco facere, faciat tamen cum ordinatione et uoluntate episcopi sui”, León IV, doc. 1284, 1095.

<sup>55</sup> “ut si post obitum nostrum aliquis de gens nostra in seruitio Dei persistere uoluerit, uestro consilio annuente illo episcopo et nostro adiutorio, erigatur ille abbas in ipso monasterio”, León IV, doc. 1271, 1092.

<sup>56</sup> “Placuit etiam nobis rogare et testificari domnum Pelagium presentem episcopum et alios domnos qui futuri sunt ut non detur iste locus alicui in prestamo, set quamdiu potuerit aliquis inueniri Deum timens in

descendants the possibility of being accepted as clergymen in their former churches, which would allow the family to perpetuate their control over these institutions. However, this could not be taken for granted, since now the bishop's prerogatives conditioned more clergy ordination and appointment<sup>57</sup>.

#### 4. Consecration of churches and episcopal authority

As seen above, the transfer of proprietary churches to ecclesiastical hands was part of a wider movement of gift-giving and social bonding in which donations played a major role. However, since the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of a series of prerogatives associated to the episcopal dignity and the development of a new conception of ecclesiastical order not only gave a new meaning to church donations, but also allowed the development of a more coactive intervention of ecclesiastical authorities in the society. In this regard, the consecration of churches became an important element in the construction of episcopal authority<sup>58</sup>.

In medieval Christianity, the notion of sacred was the result of an act of consecration performed by the clergy and which conferred sacredness to people, places and objects<sup>59</sup>. Since the Early Middle Ages, the Church outlined an increasingly elaborated ritual of consecration destined to transform the religious centers into sacred places. Bishops stood out as leading actors in this process. Laymen were able to build and found churches and monasteries, but only the bishop was in position to acknowledge the foundation and consecrate the church<sup>60</sup>. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in line with the development of new reforming trends, the consecration of churches acquired new features. In a moment in which lay appropriation of *res ecclesia* was being questioned and churches, cemeteries and tithes started being "recovered" from lay hands, consecration transformed the churches and their possessions into sacred elements that, as property of God, could only be controlled by the clergy, the representatives of God on Earth. Therefore, in the reformist context of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, consecration became a means to impose ecclesiastical authority and reformulate the social organization<sup>61</sup>.

---

habitu monastico de nostra propinquitate ibidem preponatur. Si autem de nostris defuerit, tunc episcopus inquirat aliquem seruorum Dei aptum pro regimine monasterii cui hoc iniungat.", León IV, doc. 1220, 1081.

<sup>57</sup> The Council of Compostela prescribes that priests and abbots must be ordained by bishops and establishes basic knowledge requirements for aspirants. Council of Compostela (1056), II: 1-2, in Martínez Díez, *Legislación conciliar*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> The Council of Coyanza included the consecration of the altar among the bishop's prerogatives. Council of Coyanza, 2, in Martínez Díez, *Legislación conciliar*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Schmitt, "La notion de sacré".

<sup>60</sup> See Lauwers, *Naissance du cimetière*, 55-88; "Des lieux sacrés". From an ecclesiological perspective, Iogna-Prat, *La Maison Dieu*, 45-7, 260-84, 333-51.

<sup>61</sup> On the role of church consecration in the transformations of episcopal authority, see Lauwers, *Naissance du cimetière*, 237-238; "Consecration d'Eglises", 95; "Le château". For Miguel Calleja, the ecclesiastical monopoly over what was considered sacred and the capacity of excommunication were the

Leonese charters show that, since the last decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, consecration was deeply involved in the transfer of proprietary churches and tithes to episcopal hands. Different episodes reveal how the imposition of episcopal jurisdiction over these churches was a direct consequence of the act of consecration. In 1070, Gonzalo, acting on behalf of bishop Pelayo of León, consecrated a church in Valdoncina. On the occasion of the consecration, the villagers put the church under the authority of the see of León, to which the church would give the same payments as other “*ecclesias dioeciales*”. Moreover, the villagers gave the see various lands “*ad illa sacrationem in dextros ecclesie*”, which shows that not only the church itself but also its surrounding lands were being transformed into sacred places<sup>62</sup>. Also, in 1076 the villagers of Villa Roales granted bishop Pelayo the church of Santa María – which they inherited from their ancestors – so that it were consecrated: “*pro que non erat dedicata et fuimus a uobis que dedicassetis ea sicut et uenistis dedicare*”. The villagers prescribed that the church would serve the bishop and the see of León and had no other lord but the bishopric<sup>63</sup>. Similarly, on the occasion of the consecration of the church of San Miguel, the villagers of Villa Foracasas endowed the church with lands and vineyards of their own and put them under the authority of the bishop, as inferred from the charter<sup>64</sup>. All these cases refer to churches owned by entire village communities. However, churches and monasteries owned individually by the aristocracy and the local elites were part of the same process. This is the case of the aforementioned Vermudo López, who in 1090 donated the monastery of San Nicolás to the monastery of San Juan of Valdemora (under the jurisdiction of the see of León) on the occasion of its consecration by bishop Pedro<sup>65</sup>.

Consecration not only led to the subordination of monasteries and churches to ecclesiastical authority; it was also a means to compel the lay proprietors to render a third of the tithes (the so-called “episcopal third”) to the bishop. In 1077, the people of Villa Vega, on the occasion of the consecration of the local church, promised to give annually a third of the tithes of bread and wine to the see of León, as well as a jug of wine to the clergyman<sup>66</sup>. Similarly, in 1071 Countess Mumadonna – fulfilling the wishes of her departed husband, Count Munio Alfonso, and his brother, Count Gutier Alfonso – granted the see a third of the tithes of bread and wine collected within their

---

most important means to impose the parochial system in northern Iberia, Calleja Puerta, “Eclesiología episcopal”, 452.

<sup>62</sup> “nos iam dictis concedimus ad ipsum locum iam dictum, ego Abduz presbiter V<sup>a</sup> de mea hereditate, et Dominico presbiter, V<sup>a</sup> de mea hereditate, et item Dominico presbiter V<sup>a</sup> de mea hereditate, et ego Uita Siloniz una terra, et Micael Ferriz I uinea, et Arias una uinea et una terra, Martino Aluariz una terra, Uellití una terra, et nos Maria et Auria una terra ad illa sacrationem in dextros ecclesie quando eam sacrauit ille episcopo domno Gunsaluo per iussionem Pelagii, Legionensis episcopus, cuius illa ecclesia debet esse et cui census debes reddere III sicut alias ecclesias dioeciales, et tenet ea domno Gunsaluo per manum pontificis Sancte Marie dum illi placuerit. Damus et concedimus has terras et uineas, et mercis copiosa accipere ualeamus ante Deum et omnia quod offerimus perpetualiter deseruiat ad ipsum locum”, León IV, doc. 1172, 1070. On the sacralization of temples and their surrounding areas in northern Spain, see Calleja Puerta, “Eclesiología episcopal”, 452-62.

<sup>63</sup> León IV, doc. 1197, 1076.

<sup>64</sup> León IV, doc. 1216, 1080.

<sup>65</sup> León IV, doc. 1248, 1090.

<sup>66</sup> León IV, doc. 1206, 1077.

lands. The charter was recorded on the day of the consecration of San Juan, in San Román de la Cuba, which suggests a bond between the consecration of this church (most probably owned by the Alfonsos) and the concession of the tithes to the see<sup>67</sup>.

A charter from 1071 illustrates the role of consecration in the imposition of ecclesiastical authority over proprietary churches. A priest called Fernando, along with the inhabitants of Namo, erected a church devoted to San Román in Vegamián, by the river Porma. When the church was finished, the villagers invited bishop Pelayo in order to consecrate the church. But when the bishop arrived in the village, he realized that the villagers expected to turn the church into their own hereditary property (*toth hereditarii super eam fueritis*). Thus, the bishop refused to consecrate it and threatened the villagers with excommunication if they persisted with those intentions. When faced with the bishop's threat, the villagers promised that neither they nor their descendants would claim hereditary rights in the church and they gave it to Presbyter Fernando. On these conditions, the bishop finally agreed to consecrate the church<sup>68</sup>. This episode shows two interesting aspects. First, the clear incompatibility between the sacredness of the church – the direct consequence of the episcopal consecration – and the exercise of lay hereditary rights over it. By rendering the church sacred, consecration was removing it from all personal property. Therefore, the bishop refused to consecrate the church unless their founders renounced all appropriation ambitions. Second, the lay appropriation of the Church's possessions is conceived as a sin and punished with excommunication, which was used as a threat to compel the community to waive all hereditary rights they could have in the church.

Although the consecration of religious places played a key role in the imposition of ecclesiastical authority over proprietary churches, bishops still had to face episodes of resistance from aristocracy, local elites and *concejos*. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century several churches and monasteries were still held as property<sup>69</sup>. The Leonese charters also show conflictive situations between laymen and ecclesiastical institutions over the control of local churches, the appointment of the clergymen and the distribution of the tithes

---

<sup>67</sup> León IV, doc. 1176, 1071. According to the “Becerro de Presentaciones”, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century there were two churches in San Román de la Cuba: San Román, belonging to the monastery of Sahagún, and San Juan, belonging to the monastery of San Pedro de Dueñas, Fernández Flórez, “Becerro de Presentaciones”, 446. Both were probably associated with the Alfonsos before being transferred to these monasteries. In 1042, Munio Alfonso gave his share of the village of San Román de la Cuba to his wife Mumadonna and prescribed that, after her death, the village were transferred to the monastery of Sahagún (Sahagún II, doc. 467, 1042). Moreover, during these years the abbess of San Pedro de Dueñas was Urraca Alfonso, sister of Munio and Gutier (Dominguez Sánchez, *Colección documental*, San Pedro de Dueñas, doc. 1, 1048?).

<sup>68</sup> “Ipsa uero ecclesia iam perfecta, uocauerunt episcopum domnum Pelagium Legionensem, in cuius diocesi est ipsa ecclesia, ut dedicaret eam; quo ueniente, ut res perfecte cognouit, quia multi eam fabricauerunt et pro hereditate uolebant, noluit eam consecrare sed ait ad omne concilium: «Ista ecclesia nullomodo eam consecrabo sed magis excommunicabo si toth hereditarii super eam fueritis». At illi omnes consilium inierunt ut eam offerrent Domino et illi clerico Fredinando presbitero; et ipse clericus faceret de ea quod sua esset uoluntas, siue testandi eam, siue habendi uel quod ei bonum uideretur. Quo audito, episcopus et omnes in manu ipsius placitum roborantes quod eam amplius pro hereditate non requirerent, consecrauit eam”, Sahagún II, doc. 708, 1071.

<sup>69</sup> Barton, *The aristocracy*, 185-220; Martínez Sopena, “Aristocracia, monacato y reformas”.

collected<sup>70</sup>. Laymen also attacked sacred places and possessions as an expression of their resistance to ecclesiastical authority, as was the case in Valdecastro. A charter from 1115 narrates a conflict between the bishop of León and the *infanzones* of Valdecastro over the monastery of San Tirso. A man called Miguel Rodríguez claimed that the monastery “*deberet esse suam hereditatem*”, whereas bishop Diego asserted it was property of the see<sup>71</sup>. Then, the knights, “*malitia et zelo diaboli*”, took over the monastery and its properties and destroyed the church and altars. In consequence, the bishop threatened the knights with anathema. Regretful for their acts, the knights asked for mercy; the bishop, in view of the humility they had shown, forgave the knights on condition that they renounced to claim any rights in the monastery or its properties<sup>72</sup>. Nevertheless, the conflict was not over yet. Two years after this episode, the bishop and the knights of San Tirso reached a new agreement and, on this occasion, the knights were granted certain rights with regard to the monastery, such as their participation in the election of the abbot<sup>73</sup>. The bishop had to compromise, after all.

This episode shows the difficulties that the ecclesiastical hierarchy had to deal with in order to eradicate the influence of local elites over religious institutions, difficulties that in this case involved violent resistance. It is interesting to note that the knights not only took the monastery and its properties, but also destroyed the church and the altars, that is to say they rebelled against ecclesiastical authority by destroying sacred items. This suggests that, whereas the act of consecration enabled the imposition of the ecclesiastical authority over the churches and their possessions, these places (now consecrated) became the pole in which conflicts between laymen and clergy were objectified. Thus, the destruction of a church appears as manifestation of the lay resistance to the authority of the Church. In this regard, the response of the bishop is of the same nature, since he threatens the knights with excommunication, which forced them to give up their claims over the church.

## 5. Conclusions

The subordination of proprietary churches to episcopal authority was accomplished through a complex game made up by the attempt on the part of ecclesiastical authorities to impose control over local churches and the social dynamics operating at the local level. The actions of bishops were not isolated from the society in which they operated.

---

<sup>70</sup> León V, doc. 1623, 1181; doc. 1638, 1182; León VI, doc. 1717, 1195.

<sup>71</sup> The charters reveal that San Tirso was founded at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Cid Fortes; in 1060, his heirs donated it to the see of León. León IV, doc. 967, 1038; doc. 1119, 1060 (and 1067).

<sup>72</sup> “Tunc ipsi milites malitia et zelo diaboli accensi, ceperunt illud monasterium cum uillulis suis, et diripuerunt illud et destruxerunt altaria, simul et ecclesiam cum omnibus suis edificiis et perfiis monasterii. Dominus episcopus quando uidit quod essent inbuti ad perpetrandum tantum scelus, misit eos sub gladio anathematis. Ipsi uero quos superius nominauimus quando uiderunt se stricti et recto iudicio conuicti, per uerissima testamenta etiam subiacti, pecierunt misericordiam pontifici, ut sibi indulgeret, timendo diem mortis et iram Dei omnipotentis. Episcopus uero quando uidit humilitatem illorum, indulsit eis, tali scilicet conuentione, ut numquam requisissent partem in illum monasterium, nec in omnibus uillulis monasterii.”, León V, doc. 1350, 1115.

<sup>73</sup> León V, doc. 1358, 1117.

In this sense, the transfer of proprietary churches to ecclesiastical jurisdiction was usually carried out through donations that were part of a wider process of gift-giving and social bonding and often implied the creation of patron-client relationships between the donors and the bishopric. Bishops engaged in a transactional game that involved concessions, agreements, clientelism, but also conflict and resistance. In this process, proprietors were able to preserve certain rights in their churches, mostly with regard to their lands and incomes, but also to their admission as clergymen. Yet this should not be interpreted as a failed attempt towards ecclesiastical control. On the contrary, it was in fact the very process through which it was actually achieved. However, the development of a new conception of ecclesiastical order and the definition of the role of bishops in a context of Church reform would reframe these practices and give them a whole new meaning, since they became part of a global process of ecclesiastical and social transformation. The episcopal claims for jurisdiction over churches and clergymen, rights over tithes, ordination of the priests and church consecration were an expression of these changes. But, at the same time, they played an active part in the development of a more coercive ecclesiastical intervention in the society, as shown by the role of church consecration in the imposition of episcopal authority over churches and tithes. Still, the development of ecclesiastical authority, founded on the control of what was sacred, led in some cases to conflicts with laymen over the property of local churches, the appointment of the clergymen and the distribution of the tithes. Finally, it must be pointed out that the compromises attained in the game between ecclesiastical authorities and laymen allow us to question the traditionally assumed sharp dichotomy between the reality of proprietary churches and a post-Gregorian scenario in which lay influence on ecclesiastical matters was finally rooted out. Rather, the evidence suggests the development of different formulas of ecclesiastical control over churches that allowed some space for lay intervention.

## **Bibliography**

- Alfonso Antón, Isabel. "Iglesias rurales en el norte de Castilla: una dimensión religiosa de las luchas campesinas en la Edad Media." In *Sombras del Progreso. Las huellas de la historia agraria*, edited by R. Robledo, 27-65. Barcelona: Crítica, 2010.
- Álvarez Borge, Ignacio. *Poder y relaciones sociales en Castilla en la Edad Media. Los territorios entre el Arlanzón y el Duero en los siglos X al XIV*. Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 1996.
- Aubrun, Michel. *La paroisse en France des origines au XVe siècle*. Paris: Editions Picard, 1986.
- Ayala Martínez, Carlos de. *Sacerdocio y reino en la España Altomedieval. Iglesia y poder político en el Occidente peninsular, siglos VII-XII*. Madrid: Silex Ediciones, 2008.
- Barton, Simon. *The aristocracy in twelfth-century León and Castile*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Bidagor, Ramón. *La Iglesia propia en España. Estudio histórico-canónico*. Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1933.



- Bishko, Charles J. "Fernando I y los orígenes de la alianza castellano-leonesa con Cluny." *Cuadernos de Historia de España* XLVII-XLVIII (1968): 31-135, XLIX-L (1969): 50-116.
- Calleja Puerta, Miguel. "Eclesiología episcopal y organización del espacio en las ciudades y villas del noroeste peninsular (1100-1250)." In *Monasterios, espacio y poder en la España cristiana medieval. XX Semana de Estudios Medievales, Nájera, 2009*, edited by J. I. De la Iglesia Duarte, 429-90. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2010.
- Calleja Puerta, Miguel. *El conde Suero Vermúdez, su parentela y su entorno social. La aristocracia leonesa en los siglos XI y XII*. Oviedo: KRK Ediciones, 2001.
- Calleja Puerta, Miguel. *La formación de la red parroquial de la diócesis de Oviedo en la Edad Media*. Oviedo: Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, 2000.
- Calvo Gómez, José Antonio. "Rasgos de la reforma del clero en la Península Ibérica durante el siglo XI." *Studia historica. Historia medieval* 33 (2015): 201-32.
- Coelho, Maria Filomena. "Comunidades monásticas: relaciones de parentesco espiritual y feudalismo monástico (León, siglos XII y XIII)." In *El lugar del campesino: en torno a la obra de Reyna Pastor*, edited by A. Rodríguez, 289-308. Valencia: PUV, 2007.
- Cowdrey, Herbert Edward John. *Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Davies, Wendy. "Local priests in northern Iberia." In *Men in the Middle. Local Priests in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by S. Patzold and C. Van Rhijn, 125-44. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.
- Davies, Wendy. *Acts of Giving: Individual, Community and Church in Tenth-Century Christian Spain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Davies, Wendy. *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Deswarte, Thomas. *Une Chrétienté romaine sans pape: l'Espagne et Rome (586-1085)*. Paris: Garnier, 2010.
- Domínguez Sánchez, Santiago. *Colección documental medieval de los monasterios de San Claudio de León, Monasterio de Vega y San Pedro de las Dueñas*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 2001.
- Faci Lacasta, Francisco Javier. "Estructuras sociales de los reinos cristianos (s. VIII-XI). La iglesia propia en España." In *Historia de la Iglesia en España. II-1. La Iglesia en la España de los siglos VIII-XIV*, edited by R. García Villoslada, 118-39. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982.
- Faci Lacasta, Francisco Javier. "La reforma gregoriana en Castilla y León." In *Historia de la Iglesia en España. II-1. La Iglesia en la España de los siglos VIII-XIV*, edited by R. García Villoslada, 262-75. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982.
- Fernández Catón, José María. *Colección documental del archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230), Tomo V (1109-1187)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 1990.
- Fernández Catón, José María. *Colección documental del archivo de la Catedral de León (775-1230), Tomo VI (1188-1230)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 1991.
- Fernández Conde, Francisco Javier. *La religiosidad medieval en España. Plena Edad Media (siglos XI-XIII)*. Gijón: Trea, 2005.
- Fernández Conde, Francisco Javier. *La religiosidad medieval en España. Alta Edad Media (siglos VII-X)*. Oviedo: Trea, 2008.

- Fernández Flórez, José Antonio. "El Becerro de Presentaciones, código 13 del Archivo de la Catedral de León. Un parroquial leonés de los siglos XIII-XV." In *León y su historia. Miscelánea histórica V*, 263-565. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 1984.
- Fletcher, Richard A. *The Episcopate in the Kingdom of León in the Twelfth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- García de Cortázar, José Ángel. "Del Cantábrico al Duero." In *Organización social del espacio en la España medieval. La Corona de Castilla en los siglos VIII a XV*, edited by J. A. García de Cortázar, 43-83. Barcelona: Ariel, 1985.
- García de Cortázar, José Ángel. "Monasterios hispanos en torno al año mil: función social y observancia regular". In *Ante el milenario del reinado de Sancho el Mayor: un rey navarro para España y Europa, XXX Semana de Estudios Medievales, Estella, 14 a 18 de julio de 2003*, 213-70. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2004.
- García de Cortázar, José Ángel. "Organización social del espacio: propuestas de reflexión y análisis histórico de sus unidades en la España medieval." *Studia Historica. Historia medieval VI* (1988): 195-236.
- García Gallo, Alfonso. "El Concilio de Coyanza. Contribución al estudio del Derecho canónico español en la Alta Edad Media." *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español XIX-XX* (1951): 275-633.
- García García, Elida. "Aristocracia laica y monasterios familiares en Asturias (ss. X y XI)." In *Homenaje a Juan Uría Ríu*, 253-74. Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1997.
- García y García, Antonio. "Legislación de los concilios y sínodos del reino leonés." In *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media, vol. II, Ordenamiento jurídico del reino*, edited by J. M. Fernández Catón (ed.), 9-113. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 1992.
- Grassotti, Hilda. "La Iglesia y el Estado en León y Castilla de Tamarón a Zamora (1037-1072)." *Cuadernos de Historia de España LXI-LXII* (1977): 96-144.
- Herrero de la Fuente, Marta. *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Sahagún (857-1230), II (1000-1073)*. León, Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 1988.
- Iogna-Prat, Dominique. *La Maison Dieu. Une histoire monumentale de l'Église au Moyen Age (v. 800-v. 1200)*. Paris: Seuil, 2006.
- Isla Frez, Amancio. *Realezas hispánicas del año mil*. Santiago de Compostela: Ediciones do Castro, 1999.
- Lauwers, Michel, and Laurent Ripart. "Représentation et gestion de l'espace dans l'Occident médiéval, V-XIIIe siècle." In *Rome et l'État moderne européen*, edited by J.-Ph. Genêt, 115-171. Rome: École Française de Rome, 2007.
- Lauwers, Michel. "Consecration d'Eglises, réforme et ecclesiologie monastique. Recherches sur les chartes de consecration provençales du XIe siècle." In *Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration de l'église dans l'Occident medieval*, edited by D. Méhu, 93-142. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008.
- Lauwers, Michel. "Des lieux sacrés aux territoires ecclésiiaux dans la France du Midi: quelques remarques préliminaires sur une dynamique sociale." *Lieux sacrés et espace ecclésial, IXe-XVe siècle, Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 46 (2011): 13-34.
- Lauwers, Michel. "Le château, le cimetière et l'île. Les consécrationes de l'évêque Jean de Thérouanne, ou les transformations du dominium ecclésial entre le IXe et le XIIe siècle." In *Faire lien: aristocratie, réseaux et échanges compétitifs: mélanges en l'honneur de Régine Le Jan*, edited by L. Jégou, S. Joye, Th. Lienhard and J. Schneider (eds.), 429-42. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015.

- Lauwers, Michel. *Naissance du cimetière: lieux sacrés et terre des morts dans l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Aubier, 2005.
- López Alsina, Fernando. "El encuadramiento eclesiástico como espacio de poder: de la parroquia al obispado." In *Los espacios de poder en la España medieval: XII Semana de Estudios Medievales, Nájera, 30 de julio al 3 de agosto de 2001*, edited by J. I. de la Iglesia Duarte and J. L. Martín Rodríguez, 425-57. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2002.
- López Alsina, Fernando. "La reforma eclesiástica: la generalización de un modelo parroquial renovado." In *La reforma gregoriana y su proyección en la cristiandad occidental: siglos XI-XII. XXXII Semana de Estudios Medievales Estella, 18 a 22 de julio de 2005*, 421-50. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra-Institución Príncipe de Viana, 2006.
- López Alsina, Fernando. "Parroquias y diócesis: el obispado de Santiago de Compostela." In *Del Cantábrico al Duero. Trece estudios sobre organización social del espacio en los siglos VIII a XIII*, edited by J. A. García de Cortázar, 263-312. Santander: Universidad de Cantabria-Parlamento de Cantabria, 1999.
- Loring García, Ma. Isabel. "Nobleza e iglesias propias en la Cantabria altomedieval." *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval V* (1987): 89-120.
- Mansilla Reoyo, Demetrio. *Geografía eclesiástica de España: estudio histórico-geográfico de las diócesis*. Roma : Iglesia Nacional Española, 1994, 2 vol.
- Martín Viso, Iñaki. "Monasterios y poder aristocrático en Castilla en el siglo XI." *Brocar* 20 (1996): 91-133.
- Martínez Díez, Gonzalo. "La Iglesia de las normas: el derecho canónico." In *La reforma gregoriana y su proyección en la cristiandad occidental: siglos XI-XII. XXXII Semana de Estudios Medievales Estella, 18 a 22 de julio de 2005*, 53-98. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra-Institución Príncipe de Viana, 2006.
- Martínez Díez, Gonzalo. *El Patrimonio eclesiástico en la España Visigoda: estudio histórico-jurídico*. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 1959.
- Martínez Díez, Gonzalo. *Legislación conciliar del Reino Astur (718-910) y del Reino de León (910-1230)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", 2009.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. "Aristocracia, monacato y reformas en los siglos XI y XII." In *El monacato en los reinos de León y Castilla (siglos VII-XIII), X Congreso de Estudios Medievales 2005*, 67-100. Ávila: Fundación Sánchez Albornoz, 2007.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. "El conde Rodrigo de León y los suyos. Herencia y expectativa de poder entre los siglos X y XII." In *Relaciones de poder, de producción y parentesco en la Edad Media y Moderna*, edited by R. Pastor, 51-84. Madrid: CSIC, 1990.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. "Fundaciones monásticas y nobleza en los reinos de Castilla y León en la época románica." In *Monasterios románicos y producción artística*, edited by J. A. García de Cortázar, 35-62. Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación de Santa María la Real, 2003.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. "Monasterios particulares, nobleza y reforma eclesiástica en León entre los siglos XI y XII." In *Estudios de historia medieval. Homenaje a Luis Suárez Fernández*, 323-331. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1991.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. "Parentesco y poder en León durante el siglo XI. La 'casata' de Alfonso Díaz." *Studia Historica. Historia medieval V* (1987): 33-88.
- Martínez Sopena, Pascual. *La Tierra de Campos occidental. Poblamiento, poder y comunidad del siglo X al XIII*. Valladolid: Institución Cultural Simancas, 1985.

- Orlandis, José. “*Traditio corporis et animae (la familiaritas en las Iglesias y Monasterios españoles en la alta Edad Media).*” *Anuario de historia del derecho español* 24 (1954): 95-280.
- Patzold, Steffen, and Carine Van Rhijn, ed. *Men in the Middle. Local Priests in Early Medieval Europe*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.
- Peña Bocos, Esther. *La atribución social del espacio en la Castilla altomedieval. Una nueva aproximación al feudalismo peninsular*. Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 1995.
- Pérez, Mariel. “Aristocracia, monasterios y conflictos por la tierra. Reforma eclesiástica y relaciones sociales en León (siglos XI-XII).” *Bulletin du Centre d’Études Médiévales d’Auxerre* 19/1 (2015). Accessed July 6, 2015, doi: 10.4000/cem.13899.
- Pérez, Mariel. “El control de lo sagrado como instrumento de poder: los monasterios particulares de la aristocracia altomedieval leonesa.” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42/2 (2012): 799-822.
- Pick, Lucy K. “Rethinking Cluny in Spain.” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 5/1 (2013): 1-17.
- Reglero de la Fuente, Carlos. “La ocupación de la cuenca del Duero leonesa por el Reino Astur.” En *La época de Alfonso III y San Salvador de Valdediós, Congreso de Historia Medieval, Oviedo (27 setiembre - 2 octubre) 1993*, edited by F. J. Fernández Conde, 127-150. Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1994.
- Reglero de la Fuente, Carlos. “Los obispos y sus sedes en los reinos hispánicos occidentales.” In *La reforma gregoriana y su proyección en la cristiandad occidental: siglos XI-XII. XXXII Semana de Estudios Medievales Estella, 18 a 22 de julio de 2005*, 195-288. Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra-Institución Príncipe de Viana, 2006.
- Ruiz Asencio, José Manuel. *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775- 1230). III (986-1031)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación “San Isidoro”, 1990.
- Ruiz Asencio, José Manuel. *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775- 1230). IV (1032-1109)*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación “San Isidoro”, 1990.
- Ruiz de la Peña, José Ignacio. “Parroquias, concejos parroquiales y solidaridades vecinales en la Asturias medieval.” *Asturiensia medievalia* 7 (1993-1994): 105-22.
- Schmitt, Jean-Claude. “La notion de sacré et son application a l’histoire du christianisme medieval.” *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques [En ligne]* 9 (1992). Accessed April 26, 2016, doi: 10.4000/ccrh.2798.
- Soto Rábanos, José María. “La práctica de la pastoral en la Península Ibérica (siglos XI-XII).” In *La pastorale della Chiesa in Occidente dall’età ottoniana al Concilio lateranense IV: atti della quindicesima Settimana internazionale di studio, Mendola, 27-31 agosto 2001*, 251-297. Milano: Vita e Pensiero Università, 2004.
- Stutz, Ulrich. *Geschichte des kirchlichen Benefizialwesens, I, Die Eigenkirche*. Berlin: 1895.
- Tellenbach, Gerd. *The church in western Europe from the tenth to the early twelfth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Torres López, Manuel. “El origen del sistema de “iglesias propias.” *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 5 (1928): 307-475.
- Wickham, Chris. *The Mountains and the City: The Tuscan Appennines in the Early Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Wood, Susan. *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.