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In the Name of the Queen: Female patron portraits and inscriptions in 11th Century Navarre

“Si non possit homo sine phantasmate intelligere,
cum phantasma sit similitudo rei corporalis,

intelligere autem sit universalium, quae a particularibus abstrahuntur”

Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros De sensu et sensato, De memoria et reminiscencia commentarium*, Corpus Thomisticum, Sentencia libri De sensu et sensato, Tractatus II, Lectio 2, n. 2.1

In his commentary on Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia*, Thomas Aquinas synthesized his fundamental position on “artificial memory” and, following Cicero’s recommendation (*Ad Herennium*, III),² established the need to connect intelligible notions with images (*phantasms*). As such, he picked up certain generalities from Albertus’ *ars reminiscendi*, where Aristotelian reminiscence or spiritual and intellectual apprehension, that is artificial memory that belongs to the rational part of the soul, requires several preordained sensible images (*sensibilia*)³ that are previously to be imagined through multiple similitudes and then to be unified in single images or figures.⁴ With all due anachronistic caution, a certain parallelism may have existed between this theorization on the patterns that should lead the cognitive processes associated with the activation and training of memory, and the conception of certain medieval donor and patron images.

Although it is generally accepted that behind donor and patron representational modes between the 11th and 12th centuries there is some intention to emphasize their self-awareness and to involve the viewers in a self-reflection game,⁵ these images’ capacity to act as persuasive and informative tools for a civil or religious purpose is

1 “Man cannot understand without images (*phantasmata*), the image is a similitude of a corporeal thing, but understanding is of universals which are to be abstracted from particular”, Spiazzi 1949, 91.

2 Núñez 1997, 199–208.

3 That is to say images capable of being apprehended by the senses.

4 Borgnet 1890, IX, 97f. On the notion of the art of memory: Yates 1966, III, 68–71.

5 Sand 2014, 84.

This paper is the result of much more extensive research for my Ph.D. Thesis entitled “Ego regina: Female artistic patronage in Aragon, Navarre and Catalonia (1000-1200)”, which I am carrying out under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Manuel Castiñeiras, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, in connection with the research projects: [MICINN HAR2011-23015] *Artists, Patrons and Audiences. Catalonia and the Mediterranean (11th–15th Centuries)*-*Magistri Cataloniae*, and [MICINN HAR2015-63883-P] *Mobility and Artistic Transfer in Medieval Mediterranean (1187–1388): artists, objects and models*-*Magistri Mediterranei*.

rarely examined, especially when consisting of the representation of a female patron or donor. However, it may be considered that sometimes these images are conceived from a combination of several elements, such as captions and portraits, which create sensible images or *sensibilia* that allow to retain and reminisce certain concepts associated with authorship, consequently turning into actual mnemonic resources, even more so if it is accepted that these intelligible images from memory could comprise in themselves the patron's intention.

In this regard, the works of art and architecture commissioned by queen consort of Navarre Estefanía de Foix could perhaps shed some light on this. This queen is better known for the presence of her portrait in Nájera's foundational diploma.⁶ Its content included both the foundation and the endowment of Santa María la Real de Nájera by the king of Pamplona García Sánchez III (k. 1035–1054) "*communi consilio dilecte coniugis Sthepanie*",⁷ that is to say "in agreement with my dear wife Estefanía" on 12th December 1052 (fig. 1). In fact, this portrait is not contained in the original diploma of 1052, but in a copy, which was made and confirmed by queen Estefanía on 5th September 1054.⁸ Folio's decoration has been argued to be crucial in iconographic terms, especially due to the representation of the first donors' portrait in the Iberian Peninsula.⁹ This portrait runs across the bottom margin with the royal couple of García and Estefanía placed in the left and right corners, while a miniature model of the church of Santa María de Nájera was depicted between them (fig. 2-4).¹⁰ In the upper margin, the scene of the Annunciation, with the Virgin on the left and Angel Gabriel on the right, is visually mapped (fig. 5-6).

⁶ Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Carmen Manso, Director of the Departamento de Cartografía y Artes Gráficas from the Real Academia de la Historia, for allowing and aiding me to study the folio.

⁷ For the content of the foundational diploma see: Fita 1895; Cantera 1991.

⁸ This folio belonged to Pablo Bosch's collection: Fita 1895, 155; Giménez/Ortiz de Urbina/Lavín/Espinosa 1999, 255, and was donated by him to the Real Academia de la Historia in 1915: Gómez Moreno 1934, 17. In spite of the fact that text interpolations and repainting of the illuminated frames in 1587 have led some specialists to question the illumination of the folio's miniatures in the 11th century, as well as to question the correspondence between the content and the original text, on considering it a later copy, perhaps from the 12th century as suggested by M. A. Ladero (Ladero 2001, 324), the miniatures' artistic filiation leaves not the least margin of error about their execution at the early date of manufacture of the document.

⁹ Gómez Moreno 1934, 18; Sicart 1981, 34; Moralejo 1995, 56–63; Silva 1980, 260–261; Silva 1988, 445–448; Silva 2005, 363–365.

¹⁰ As argued by S. Silva, the portrait, in its essential conception as a representation of donors with the model of the church commissioned by them, does not differ at all from the most common and longstanding typological scheme adopted in Western and Byzantine traditions: Silva 2005, 364 Cf. Lipsmeyer 1981.



Fig. 1: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. © Real Academia de la Historia.



Fig 2: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. Portrait of queen Estefanía de Foix © Real Academia de la Historia.



Fig 3: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. Portrait of king García Sánchez III © Real Academia de la Historia.



Fig 4: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. Model of the church of Santa María de Nájera © Real Academia de la Historia.



Fig 5: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. Annunciation. Virgin Mary © Real Academia de la Historia.



Fig. 6: Foundational folio of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, BA-005-001. Annunciation. Angel Gabriel © Real Academia de la Historia.

The presence of the Annunciation has generally been connected to the legendary account that, according to modern historiography,¹¹ motivated the foundation of the church.¹² As reflected by J. De Moret, while king García was enjoying a hunting journey, he found a cave located in the area, where the church of Santa María would be built, and discovered inside it a lost sculpted Virgin.¹³ Nonetheless, this legend

¹¹ Yepes 1960, III, CXXV, 80–90; Amiax 1608, 39; Garibay y Zamalloa 1628, B. XXII, Ch. 27, 78–79; Salazar 1987, 65–66; Anguiano 1985, 570–573; Fuente 1879, II, 60; Anguiano 1884, 67–72, 156; Moret 2009; Garrán 1892, 7–8, 71–72; Pérez de Urbel, w.d., 239.

¹² Silva 2005, 363.

¹³ Moret 2009, XIII, Ch. II, 3–6. For a survey on the variants of the foundational legend see: Sáenz 2005, 412–414. By extension, this interpretation may be enriched with the fantastic references given in the account *Crónica Najerense* to the oratory of Santa María located inside the cave that is part of

barely justifies the representation of such an episode, while at the same time some other type of Virgin imagery would have been more suitable. In fact, such an interpretation, which is mostly grounded on tradition, obviates the actual circumstances that led to the foundation of the church. The reasons behind the foundation and substantial endowment of Santa María de Nájera (fig. 7),¹⁴ far from legendary, are grounded on heterogenic political and religious intricacies.¹⁵ First and foremost king García's intention should be taken into consideration to reinforce his father king of Pamplona Sancho III's (k. 1004–1035) initiative to turn Nájera into one of the Navarrese monarchy's central political axes by undertaking a series of political strategies in terms of financial and patrimonial consolidation, territorial expansion and ecclesiastic restructuring, in which Estefanía was directly or indirectly involved.¹⁶

Among the actions that implied monetary gain for García and the Kingdom of Pamplona, his marriage to Estefanía, daughter of count of Foix and Carcassonne Bernardo Roger,¹⁷ should be considered, as it allowed the creation of new family ties between the king and the House of Barcelona,¹⁸ with little subsequent resistance to García's mediation in the conflicts between the Taifas of Zaragoza and Toledo that assured him regular receipt of tributes (*parias*), which in return reverted to Santa María de Nájera.¹⁹ By doing so, García emulated the course of action taken by his brother Ramiro I, king of Aragón (k. 1035–1063), who in 1036 married Gisberga-Ermesenda de Foix, another daughter of count Bernardo Roger. Even so, it was the conquest of the city of Calahorra in 1045, which was in Muslim hands, which provided the most immediate financial profit.²⁰

the monastery, where king García conceived the idea of building a new church dedicated to the Virgin after God's harbinger of his defeat of the Muslims. For a critical study of the *Crónica Najerense* and an examination of this episode in the context of anti-Navarrese propaganda after 1076: Pérez Rodríguez, 1993, 199–211, sp. 211.

14 For an extended inventory of property including 33 monasteries, churches, hermitages, 9 villages, one tenth of tributes (*parias*) obtained by García and his successors from Muslims, and other properties: Cantera 2005, 49.

15 Cantera 1982, I, 253–273.

16 This matter has been extensively studied, especially regarding territorial and patrimonial issues between king Sancho III's sons—García, Ramiro and Fernando—by A. Martín Duque, F. Miranda García and E. Ramírez Vaquero, whose studies form the basis of this reflexion: Martín Duque 2005, 17–37; Ramírez Vaquero 2005, 119–149; Miranda 2004, 43–70; Miranda 2006, 132–133, with extensive bibliography.

17 *Arras* marital pre-contract whereby both spouses mutually endowed, dated 25 May 1040: Rodríguez De Lama 1992, II, doc. 3.

18 Martín Duque 2005, 30; Ramírez Vaquero 2005, 139, 144.

19 Lacarra 1962–1963; Cantera 1991, doc. 10; Martín Duque 1998, 257.

20 Laliena 1996, 61.



Fig. 7: Church of Santa María la Real de Nájera. Nájera, La Rioja (Spain). Photo: Verónica Abenza.

Further to the consolidation and expansion of territorial control, Sancho III's death in 1035 resulted in the cession of the Kingdom of Pamplona to the heir, García,²¹ while at the same time he received ownership rights over the Castilian villages of Oca and Álava, whereas the remaining lands of the County of Castile were inherited by his brother Fernando (k. 1037–1065). Further assistance provided by García to Fernando in his confrontation with his brother-in-law, king of León Bermudo III (k. 1028–1037), during the Battle of Tamarón (1037), brought about Bermudo's death, Fernando's proclamation as king of León and the transferral of the lands that were part of the so-called "Castilla Vieja" to García.²² As a result, García extended his jurisdiction over a large part of the County of Castile, while at the same time in the rest of Castile under León's sovereignty García became a vassal of his brother. In order to overcome this jurisdictional constraint, García endowed Estefanía by virtue of their marital arrangement with the villages of Colindres, Soba, Mena, Castrobarto, Tedeja, Briviesca, Monasterio, Oca and Alba, which were located within the Castilian County and more pre-

²¹ For a definition in territorial terms of the Kingdom of Pamplona as inherited by king García: Ramírez Vaquero 2005, 129.

²² Miranda 2004, 43–70; Martín Duque 2005, 31–32; Carrasco 2005, 111–112.

cisely on the Western borders of García's domains,²³ and entrusted their guardianship to several noblemen of Pamplonese lineage, who remained faithful to the king.²⁴

Ultimately, regarding religious matters that also affected border issues, García proceeded to increase the properties of the monastery of San Millán de La Cogolla, and with an ecclesiastic reorganization, integrating the dioceses of Valpuesta and partially that of Oca, which were part of "Castilla Vieja", within the Episcopal see of Nájera-Calahorra.²⁵ In this regard, it is worth recalling how, since 1045, the bishop of Nájera was the titular bishop of both sees, whereas a certain preference for Nájera was already established. In fact, Santa María's foundation became crucial within this process of ecclesiastic restructuring, since not only the construction of a new church was foreseen, which should accommodate the royal pantheon, but also instead of establishing a monastery a canonical chapter was constituted, whose members were to explicitly assist the bishop in ruling the diocese of Nájera-Calahorra, where he established his permanent residence.²⁶ As argued by M. Cantera, the generous endowment of monasteries, churches and hermitages by king García was the result of his aspiration to place under the sole control of Santa María a series of religious establishments closely linked to the power of the founders and their relatives.²⁷ It should also be noted how Santa María contributed to the consolidation of the city of Nájera as a staging point on the pilgrimage Way of St. James,²⁸ especially after García and Estefanía's endowment of Santa María's charity hospital for pilgrims on 18th April 1052.²⁹

In the light of the foregoing, García's ambitions to extend his sovereignty far from the jurisdictional borders of his Kingdom interfered with his brothers Fernando and Ramiro's own political strategies, which resulted in the conflict of Atapuerca, where García died on 1st September 1054.³⁰ However, at the same time, and in view of the above, it seems that García also decided to articulate the governance of his Kingdom by deliberately taking advantage of the alliances made by virtue of his marriage with Estefanía.³¹ As a result, the foundation of Santa María, crucial to the instrumentalization of his territorial, patrimonial and religious manoeuvring, turned into a collabora-

²³ Rodríguez De Lama 1992, II, doc. 3. Á. Martín Duque has stressed the actual importance of these villages as they were more than half of the villages with which García endowed Estefanía, with the presence among them of only two villages located in Aragón and only three in La Rioja: Martín Duque 2005, 33.

²⁴ Martín Duque 2005, 33.

²⁵ García De Cortázar 1969, 156.

²⁶ Fortún Pérez 2005, 232.

²⁷ Cantera 2005, 50.

²⁸ Cantera 1983, 367–371; Cantera 1984, I, 175–182.

²⁹ Cantera 1991, doc. 9.

³⁰ Lacarra 1972, I, 248–254. In this regard, the role played by the Castilian noblemen in this confrontation has been revisited: Martín Duque 2005, 34.

³¹ Active involvement of queens consort in exercising the *potestas*, as argued by M. Aurell for the examples of Cataluña and Aragón, is not unique to Estefanía: Aurell 1998. Additionally, the importance

tive undertaking, with the participation of his wife as stated by the abovementioned provision: “*communi consilio dilecte coniugis Sthepanie*”.³² In fact, the content of the diploma insists not only on presenting the queen as the main *instigante* (instigator) of the building project, but also on stating her concern about finishing the project:

Igitur cum huius rei voluntate [ta]m in hedificande ecclesie constructione quam in dotis astipulari donatione maxime *meę uxoris salutaris consilii suggestione incepissem Deo, eademque instigante*, quomodo nondum peracta peragerentur subiecte deliberationis ordine non neglexi instituire. Sciens amaram mortem nulli etati parcere, sed omnia in commune natur[a] cogente edaci morsu decerpere huiusce conditionis stabile testamentum putabam utiliter depromere, quod me redderet securum sua perfectione. *Si forte uxor mea, que me fideli admonitu semper Deo servire instigavit*, priusquam ego a seculo migraverit, et me, ut sepe fit, mundane vel delitie vel turbationes ab incepto tardaverint, ex omnibus que ipsa moriens dereliquerit, sicut idem meo consensu destinavit et his omnibus que ego Sancte Marie tradidi mea dicione absolutis scilicet tam de suis quam de meis opus inceptum consummetur et pro eius anima Dei servitium frequentetur. [...].³³

However, it is in Estefanía’s willingness to adhere to her husband’s ruling strategies, as well as to actively promote and protect them, especially after García’s death, that the clues for the decorative programme of the foundational folio are to be found. The textual content of the foundation was directly transposed into imagery, since miniatures include the donors’ portrait. Consequently, images contribute to their virtual presence even in the event of the actual absence over time. However, miniatures also frame the textual content, while at the same time there is some ulterior visual relationship between images and text, which was conceived to address text remarks to the receivers. The arrangement of the miniatures was conceived as a specular composition that leads to an immediate visual association between García and the Angel Gabriel and between Estefanía and the Virgin. In the first case, this correspondence is emphasized in terms of gestures by García, who points directly to the angel (fig. 2,6), whereas the relationship between Mary and Estefanía is even more complex—perhaps established in terms of visual “identity” —and highlighted by the use of the same colours for their vestments, that is scarlet for the mantle and blue for the tunic. This

of such marital provisions in the case of queen consort of Aragón Felicia de Roucy (?–a. 1000) has recently been assessed: Abenza 2015, 88–97.

32 Cantera 1991, doc. 10.

33 “Being, then, willing to do all this, for the construction of the church that has to be built and its endowment with legit donation, to which my wife begged and advised, by her and God’s instigation I have also wisely arranged its continuation and completion. And knowing that the bitter death does not forgive anyone, but it cuts and gnaws with ravenous bite instead, I conceived a will as a firm arrangement for the completion of this work. It has been always the queen, my wife, the one who has instigated me to serve God and here it is our mutual arrangement”: Cantera 1991, doc. 10. While it should be considered that the text could have been partially remade, especially as regards the prologue, which has been argued to have been interpolated or to be a later addition from the 12th century, there is no reason to question the truthfulness of the background within these lines: Cantera 1991, 17.

sort of duplication was a visual resource often used in pictorial narrative in medieval illumination.³⁴ (fig. 3,5)

On the other hand, even if it seems almost imperceptible at first sight, the scene of the Annunciation might be added to the elements that strictly speaking have traditionally been considered as part of the portrait of the donors, that is García, Estefanía and the small model of the church of Santa María. This is due to a particular conception and use of images to evoke devotional mimesis and, more specifically, some sort of *imitatio Mariae* or Virgo-mimesis. Such creation of devotional *topoi*, which in turn serve as *exempla*, has its genesis in St. Augustine's teachings on the *forma intelligendi* or authorized interpretation of one's identity, of what one is only capable of through the assimilation of "laudable prototypes"³⁵ in the way in which "[...] one portion of the earthly city became an image of the heavenly city, not having a significance of its own, but signifying another city and therefore serving, [...], for it was founded not for its own sake, but to prefigure another city", and finding ourselves in the earthly city with "two things: its own obvious presence, and its symbolic presentation of the heavenly city".³⁶

Accordingly, in view of the aforementioned visual relationship, the Virgin and Angel Gabriel act as sacred prototypes, sanctioning García and Estefanía's authority as well as legitimizing and "sanctifying" their own undertaking. However, portraits and epigraphs seem to be conceived at the same time in order to create a broad dialogue between patrons and potential audiences. Captions and figures became a sort of *sensibilia*, which were accurately composed in order to spark their viewers' memory and convey specific notions of authorship and self-designation as if the individuals were acknowledging their own involvement in the creative process and voicing these concepts themselves. Consequently, their authority and piety were to be remembered by viewers over time whenever the folio was on display.

One ought not to forget that queen Estefanía commissioned this folio for its confirmation in 1054.³⁷ Therefore, the queen herself is the sole person responsible for broadly spreading, through the diploma, her and her husband's political and dynastic concerns. As such, the collective nature of the project is stressed by the fact that both spouses are holding a copy of the foundational scroll in their hands. However, García's hand is pointing directly to the text where the amount of the endowment is

³⁴ Weitzmann 1947; Pächt 1962.

³⁵ Sand 2014, 120.

³⁶ Marina 2007, Book XV, Ch. II. To learn more about the influence of St. Augustine's ideas in the creation of devotional *topoi*: Hugues 2000; Sand 2014.

³⁷ In this regard, Father Sandoval's description of Estefanía's portrait should be noted. He stresses how she wore the garments of her widowhood: Sandoval 1614, folios 50v–51v. The loss of the original folio poses the question as to what extent the confirmation copy may reproduce the original decoration, even if it is uncertain whether this primary document was ever decorated. However, the textual emphasis on the queen as the main instigator of the foundational project makes it possible to consider Estefanía as the commissioner of the first folio.

specified, and by extension towards the angel, which defines him as the initiator and main financial donor. Conversely, Estefanía is facing and pointing towards the model of the church (fig. 4), and by doing so she is highlighting the visibility of the temple of Santa María even if the diploma was not necessarily to be kept within that same sacred space. At the same time this device allowed viewers to be aware of her contribution as responsible for the supervision of the building works. Although it has been traditionally accepted that the building campaign began in 1052, it appears unlikely that the works were finished by the time of García's death in 1054. In fact, as suggested by Estefanía's donation of the monastery of Santa Coloma de Nájera with its villages and tributes for the benefit of the chapter of Santa María, which was recorded in the folio, it is more likely that the works were extended,³⁸ at least until after the consecration of the church in 1056, when one may assume that the east end had already been built. Further to completion of the works, Estefanía's will recorded the sale of several silver vessels in order to donate the amount "*in opera de Sancta Maria*".³⁹

However, the specular composition of lower captions HAEC SUNT GARSIAE VERBIS FORMATA MARIAE || NITITUR HAEC PROPIA FIERI CONIUX STEPHANIA⁴⁰ and their arrangement starting at the foot of the sovereigns and finishing at the model of the church seems to transliterate the symbolic message conveyed by the images, that is Estefanía's active involvement in supervising the building and decorative processes, whose main financial donor was García and to render the text clearer to the audience. The wording of the upper epigraphs SUM DOMINI FAMULA, FIANT MIHI NUNC, TUA DICTA || AVE SPONSA DEI, REPLET TE GRATIA TUI FILII⁴¹ in reverse reinforces the Virgo-mimetic conception of captions and images and the Virgin becomes a laudable model for Estefanía's initiatives as a fulfilment of her husband's desires in the same way that Mary is willing to please God by freely accepting God's gift.

The recourse to the Virgin as a prototype also provides *exemplum* of moral and familiar model behaviour for female sovereigns, especially as mothers in substantiating their own lineage.⁴² In this regard, it may be recalled how, after García's death, the early years of his heir Sancho Garcés IV's (k. 1054–1076) government were determined by increased dependence on local nobility and his progressive transferral of territorial and financial prerogatives to his uncles Fernando and Ramiro, and by the

³⁸ Despite the fact that this monastery had already been donated to the charity hospital for pilgrims of Nájera by García and Estefanía back in 1052, the donation was not confirmed until 1054, whereas the queen retained the prerogative to keep it while she lived and the donation was completed in 1066 after the execution of the queen's will: Cantera 1991, doc. 9 and 18; Cantera 2013, 72.

³⁹ The concept "*in opera*" may refer either to the management or to the building works of the church: Cantera 1991, doc. 18.

⁴⁰ This was signed to Mary in words of García || This is accomplished by Estefanía, García's wife.

⁴¹ I am the Lord's servant, May your word to me be fulfilled || Greetings Lord's wife, the Lord is with you.

⁴² As argued by P. Corbet, Carolingian and Ottonian empresses used similar sorts of symbolic appropriation: Corbet 1996, 109–131.

returning of Estefanía's Castilian villages to their former owner.⁴³ During her widowhood, Estefanía's initiatives to reinforce her son's weak authority were confined to the building and decorative project of Santa María de Nájera. As such, her commission and quick confirmation of the foundational diploma on 5th September 1054, only four days after García's death and Sancho's proclamation as king of Pamplona, may be framed within that context. In fact, maternal connotations associated with the Annunciation may have been deliberately integrated within the symbolic content of the iconographic programme of the folio and conceived to illustrate Estefanía's desire to protect and preserve Sancho's sovereignty over the Kingdom of Pamplona (fig. 8).⁴⁴

This also applies to the endowment of liturgical furnishings for the new church and, particularly, to the lost altar frontal described by A. Yepes and P. De Sandoval as an altar frontal decorated with golden repoussé imagery, pearls, enamels and precious stones, with a framing caption:

[...] *un frontal gran del altar de nuestra Señora, quaxado de planchas de oro de martillo, y en el mucha imagineria de bultos de oro, que estava guarnecido con catorze piedras preciosas, veynte y quatro granos muy grandes de aljófar, y veynte y tres esmaltes grandes [...]. Tenia un letrado relevado de oro por toda la orla que dezia estas palabras: BEATA MARIAE QUAM SINE SCIRET, NEQUIS DUBITARET CERTISSIME SCIAT, HOC REX PISSIMUS FECIT GARSEA BENIGNUS, ET ME STEPHANIE FACTUM SUB HONORE MARIE SCILICET ALMANII DECUS ARTIFICIS VENERANDI (sic).*⁴⁵

Once again, this caption identifies García as the main financial donor and initiator, whereas with the clause "ET ME STEPHANIE FACTUM" Estefanía reveals some intention of self-designation by the queen as 'author' within the creative process, that is as the agent responsible for supervising the execution of the frontal commissioned to the goldsmith "Almanio". In fact, it is highly likely that both the confirmation folio and the altar frontal were intentionally made between 1054 and 1056 in order to be shown over the course of representative critical situations such as ownership disputes, and especially in view of the consecration ceremony held on 29th June 1056 by Archbishop of Narbonne Guillermo Guifredo, at which kings Fernando and Ramiro were pres-

⁴³ Carrasco, 2005, p. 103.

⁴⁴ There is certain parallelism between this interpretation and F. Prado's recent interpretation of the folio 3v from the so-called *Diurnal* de Fernando I y Sancha I (Santiago de Compostela, Biblioteca Universitaria, Rs. 1), where the presence of the Leonese royal couple accompanied by the scribe Pedro (Moralejo 1995; Castiñeiras 2001; Castiñeiras 2013, 1148), the painter Fructuoso (Williams 2011, 415), or their son Alfonso VI (Prado-Vilar 2009), has traditionally been accepted, as it may have been conceived as a visual statement with maternal connotations: Prado-Vilar 2009, 205–206.

⁴⁵ "[...] An altar frontal of Our Lady, with gold plates, bulk gold sculpture, decorated with fourteen gems, twenty-four pearls, and twenty-three big enamels [...]. It was framed by a gold inscription that said: Holy Mary, who without knowing and doubting has all certainty, pious and kind king García did all of this, and I was made by queen Estefanía in honour of the Virgin by Almanius, who is praised by artists": Yepes 1617, VI, folio 125; Sandoval 1614.

ent.⁴⁶ Whereas the frontal was to be perpetually visible within the sacred space of the altar, the confirmation folio with its pictorial devices was to leave a deep impression on the minds of the viewers that were summoned on the occasion of the consecration, as to become a perpetual reminder of García and Estefanía's authority. As such, both the sumptuousness in terms of materials and decoration, and imagery were carefully conceived to turn into mnemonic *sensibilia*.

As I have argued elsewhere, the closest precedent for Nájera's altar frontal can be found in the golden altar frontal from the Cathedral of Girona (fig. 9).⁴⁷ In this regard, one ought not to forget documentary evidence about García's journey in 1038 to find his future wife in Barcelona.⁴⁸ It has been traditionally accepted that Estefanía's sojourn within the Court of Barcelona was associated with her blood relationship with countess Ermessenda de Carcassonne.⁴⁹ Whereas Girona's altar frontal was probably still being made in 1038, the consecration deed of the cathedral from the same year recorded the donation by Ermessenda of *trescentas auri contulit uncias ad auream construendam tabulam*.⁵⁰ Indeed, there is every reason to believe that the countess was responsible for supervising the execution of the frontal as well as the subsequent additions of precious stones and enamels, such as the enamel depicting a female figure surrounded by the caption GISLA COMITISSA ME FIERI IUSSIT,⁵¹ which identifies the involvement of her daughter-in-law countess Guisla de Lluçà in the execution of the frontal.⁵²

J. Duran-Porta has recently stressed the exceptional presence in Girona's frontal of large *cloisonné* enamels, whose closest precedents are to be found in the Ottonian period, as in the case of the so-called First Cross of Mathilda of Essen.⁵³ In fact, the presence of such enamels in Nájera's frontal could be reasonably explained by Almanio's participation. As I have argued elsewhere, Almanio could have known this type of precedents as well as certain features associated with the works from Arch-

⁴⁶ F. Fita stressed how the annotations made on the reverse of the folio were illustrative of its frequent use in view of the disputes that took place in 1534, 1551 and 1557: Fita, 1895, 156–157, 172, which motivated the making of several modern copies: Cantera 1991, 17–22; Rodríguez De Lama 1992, 43–48; Galván 2006, 287–290. On the forgery of several original documents from Nájera: Cantera 2013, 59–76.

⁴⁷ The association between both frontals was suggested by F. Fita and recently reassessed by me: Abenza 2017, 279–297.

⁴⁸ Moret 2009, I, 641–642; Devic/Vaissete 1875, 117; Ubieto 1963, II, doc. 72; Lacarra 1972, I, 246; Salazar Acha 1994, 154–155.

⁴⁹ J. Salazar has suggested an alternative proposal that poses no question about the contacts between Estefanía and Ermessenda: Salazar Acha 1994, 154.

⁵⁰ “Three hundred gold *uncias* for a golden altar frontal”. Girona, Arxiu Capitular, Llibre Verd, folios 106r–107r, ex A.

⁵¹ Countess Gisla made me.

⁵² For Girona's altar frontal: Marqués 1959; Comas 1960; Español 2005; Molina 2005, Castiñeiras, 2008.

⁵³ Duran-Porta 2015, 283.

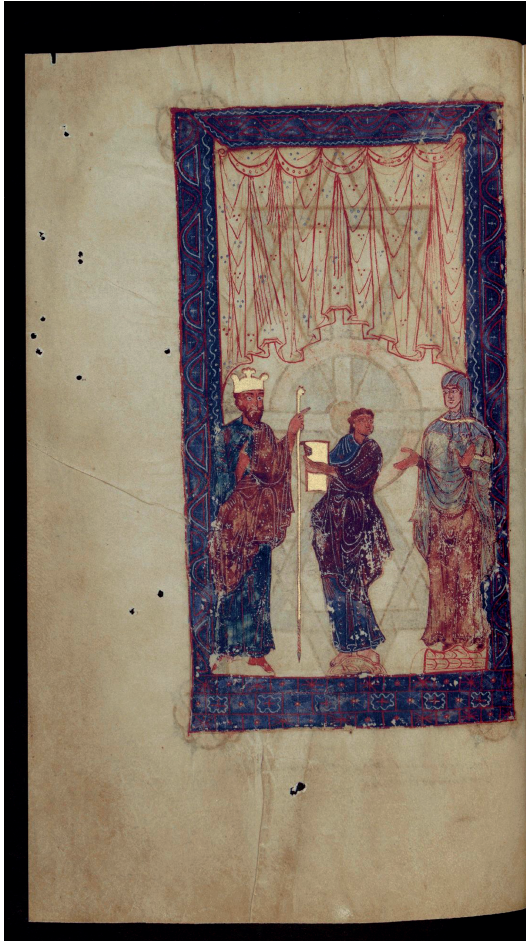


Fig. 8: *Libro de Horas de Fernando I y Sancha*, Biblioteca Xeral da Universidade de Santiago, Ms. Res. 1, f. 6v (now f. 3v). © Biblioteca Xeral da Universidade de Santiago.

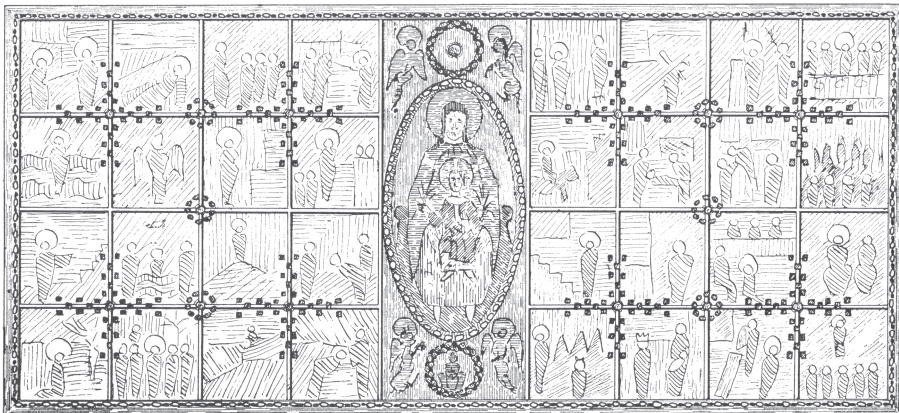


Fig. 9: Hypothetical reconstruction of Giorna's altar frontal. Drawing: Ginés Baltrons.

bishop Egbert of Trier's workshops and other works from the abbey of Essen, where several enamelled plaques with donor portraits are to be found.⁵⁴ An image of this kind, either adapted to the portrait of the queen or some other sort of adaptation from Virgin imagery, such as the abbess-donor figure placed at the foot of the Virgin as *Sedes Sapientiae* in the Second Cross of Mathilda of Essen, may fit in well with the figurative repertoire in Nájera, which would consequently emulate Girona's. In this regard, Nájera's subsidiary lost altar frontal ought to be recalled, commissioned by king Sancho Garcés IV and his wife Blanca with Mariological imagery depicting the Annunciation and the Visitation.

After García's death and Sancho's proclamation as king, Estefanía lost at least at a legal level any source of socially recognized power and, through the decoration of the works she commissioned, publicly presented herself as morally capable of making judgements about matters that were to be ruled by Sancho, whose minority required some sort of ulterior *auctoritas* that had to be exercised by his mother. As such, Estefanía presented herself to a broad audience as a prestigious patron, and her memory seems to be perpetuated through the centuries, as attested by evidence located in the church of San Esteban of Sos del Rey Católico (Zaragoza, former Kingdom of Pamplona) (fig. 10). Evidence of Estefanía's involvement in the foundation of this church is confined both to the presence of the caption STEFANIA in the walls of the gallery that links the Low Church, which was built in around 1107–1122, with the Upper Church of San Esteban, which was built up to the beginning of the 13th century, and to the presence in the Romanesque portal of the Upper Church of a statue-column depicting a queen with a crown, where the caption dona e(stefania) is still visible.⁵⁵ However, the presence of these visual elements, in addition to ulterior evidence such as the epigraph era mxciij (1093) (year 1055⁵⁶) inscribed on the door lintel and placed next to the queen statue-column, which was recorded by Abbad Ríos, seems to be proof of their use by a community of canons in providing the foundational legend of the monastery, as well as associating the building project of the church with a celebrated patron (fig. 11-12).

Such recourse to what has been defined as "fake patronage" served the canons to attract new potential donors both at the time of the foundation at around the beginning of the 12th century, when Estefanía had already been dead for decades, and a century later when the community faced the need to build and decorate a new church. This retrospective representation of the patron is in contrast with the means by which the patronage is manifested in employing both visibility placing the statue at the front door of the church and durability with the *titulus* inscribed in stone for public view and so essentially different from the written captions. However, despite

⁵⁴ Garrison 2012.

⁵⁵ Martínez Álava 2010, 593–623.

⁵⁶ Due to the dating system of the Spanish Era.

the fact that there is no documentary record of Estefanía's involvement in the foundational process other than the name given to the church, and given the fact that the cartulary of San Esteban, which constitutes the only account of the foundation, gives no mention of the queen, the possibility that her participation may have been attested by other means cannot be excluded.⁵⁷ Indeed, the placement of the inscription bearing her name beside a series of carved reliefs depicting votive crosses that served a funerary purpose, as well as in proximity of the tombstone bearing the name of abbot Garsia, could associate such elements with the canons' intention to commemorate the memory of their founders by remembering their pious actions within the celebration of consecration ceremonies and the recitation of the Office of the Dead. One ought not to forget that this abbot Garsia could have been either Garsia Garsés, whose main involvement in the foundation and building of the Lower Church is recorded in the cartulary, or Garsia Fortuniones, who was the abbot responsible for attracting most donations for the construction of the Upper Church. Indeed, perpetuation of the memory of such prestigious patrons through tradition is in line with other legendary accounts concerning medieval buildings of crucial infrastructure on the pilgrimage Way of St. James, such as the Romanesque bridge of Puente la Reina (Navarre) or the Romanesque church of Santa María de Eunate (Navarre), whose construction is traditionally attributed to anonymous queens⁵⁸ (fig. 13-14).

Be that as it may, the typological conception of captions and portraits in the works commissioned by queen Estefanía as some sort of *imitation Mariae* contributed to presenting the queen, like her counterparts Ermessenda and Guisla, as the ideal observant of the duties expected from the perfect Christian female sovereign, which tradition equated with the Virgin Mary's behaviour, and in so doing their initiatives were legitimated even when they constituted an attempt to exercise their authority beyond the limitations of their social and marital status. In the case of some of these sign-bearing artefacts such as the confirmation folio, the restricted visibility of their textual and figurative mnemonic devices turn them into an outline of ideological basis to raise arguments against political claims. Yet, those conceived for public display such as the altar frontal were instrumental in portrayed them as prestigious patrons, whose memory was worth perpetuating in the ages to come.

⁵⁷ Galindo Romeo 1924, 81–114; Piedrafita 1994/1995, 50–74.

⁵⁸ Aceledgui 2007, 1167–1171; Martínez Álava 2007, 860–882.



Fig. 10: Church of San Esteban. Sos del Rey Católico, Zaragoza, Aragón (Spain). Photo: Verónica Abenza.



Fig. 11: Church of San Esteban. Sos del Rey Católico, Zaragoza, Aragón (Spain). Lower Church. Gallery. Photo: Verónica Abenza.



Fig. 12: Church of San Esteban. Sos del Rey Católico, Zaragoza, Aragón (Spain). Upper Church. Portal. Photo: Verónica Abenza.



Fig. 13: Romanesque bridge. Puente la Reina, Navarra (Spain). Photo: Verónica Abenza.



Fig. 14: Church of Santa María de Eunate. Muruzábal, Navarra (Spain). Photo: Verónica Abenza.

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