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Monasteries in a peripheral area: seventh-century Gallaecia

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This chapter discusses the pivotal role of a special kind of monastic organisation in a peripheral area (*Gallaecia*) during a period in which this region was affected by change. As I shall argue, the monasteries depicted in the seventh-century *Regula communis* functioned as 'places of power', in that they enabled the inhabitants of Galicia to resist these changes and preserve older patterns of community life within the monastic confines. These monasteries were able to withstand the might of bishops and local aristocratic landowners, well into the era of the so-called Reconquest. But first we should answer an essential question: what is a peripheral area? Or, more specifically, why do we characterize late ancient and early medieval *Gallaecia* as a peripheral area?

Gallaecia and its isolation

The first and commonsensical meaning of periphery is that of an area closest to the outer of a given space perceived as 'the centre': an external boundary or region. In this physical sense, *Gallaecia*, turned into a province by Diocletian's reform, was situated on the furthest borders of the Roman world. *Gallaecia* was a *finis terrae* in the west of the Empire, the most remote province of Hispania, which itself was seen by imperial authors as an outermost boundary.¹ However, this concept of remoteness and distance, of eccentricity, was not only perceived by those writing in the centre of power, be it in Rome or in the East. *Gallaecia*'s inhabitants also felt that they were part of a distant world. After the middle of the fifth century, Hydatius began his Chronicle by saying that he was writing from 'the end of the earth' (*extremus plage*), in the context of relating some events that occurred 'within *Gallaecia*, at the edge of the entire world' (*intra extremam uniuersi orbis Galleciam*).² This same sense of remoteness was expressed by Pope Vigilius, who in 538 replied to a series of letters sent from Bracara by Bishop Profuturus. From the perspective of Rome, the Profuturus had the care of Christ's flock in the 'outer parts of the world' (*extremis mundi partibus*).³ This perhaps stands to reason, but a few years later, in 561, Lucrecius of Braga, in the opening speech of a council held in this metropolitan see, referred to *Gallaecia* as *in ipsa extremitati mundi*.⁴ Already in the seventh century, and in the monastic context upon which this article centres, Valerius of Bierzo confirmed that feeling of geographical isolation: ... *in ista ultimae extremitatis occiduae partis confinia*.⁵ This is also an acknowledgement of a cultural and political remoteness, not only with respect to an Empire long forgotten, or to an apostolic see that by the seventh century had practically lost all contact with Hispania, but even with regard to the centre of Visigothic political power then located in Toledo.⁶

Gallaecia was therefore situated within the geographical limits of the known world, but its

¹ J. Arce, "Orbis Romanus y Finis Terrae", *Los finisterre atlánticos en la Antigüedad. Época prerromana y romana*, ed. C. Fernández Ochoa (Madrid, 1996), p. 73, with references to Silius Italicus, *Punica* 17.637 (*terrarum fines Gades*); Plinius maior, *Naturalis historia* 5, 76 (*Gadibus extra orbem conditis*); *Expositio totius mundi* 59 (*est ibi finis mundi*); M. Barahona Simoes, "Finis Terrae: the land where the Atlantic Ocean begins", *History of the European Ideas* 15, 4-6 (London, 1992), pp. 853-8. Of a general nature, C. Nicolet, *L'inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'empire romain* (Paris, 1988).

² Hydatius, *Chronica*, *Intr.* 1 and 6. The references are from the edition by R.W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana. Two contemporary accounts of the final years of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1993).

³ Vigilius Papa, *Epistula ad Profuturum*, *Intr.*, Migne PL 84, col. 829-32.

⁴ Ed. J. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos* (Barcelona-Madrid, 1963), p. 66.

⁵ Valerius abbas Bergidensis, *De genere monachorum* 1, 9-10; also in *Epistola de beatissimae Aetheriae* 1, 11-13: ... *huius occiduae plagae sera processione tandem refulsisset extremitas...*, and 4, 8-9: ... *extremo occidui maris Oceani litore exorta...*

⁶ J. Mattoso, "Les Wisigoths dans le Portugal Medieval: état actuel de la question", *L'Europe Héritière de l'Espagne Wisigothique*, eds. J. Fontaine and Ch. Pellistrandi (Madrid, 1992), p. 325; cf. J. Leyser, "Concepts of Europe in the early and high Middle Ages", *Past and Present* 137 (1992), pp. 28-31.

isolation was not merely a geographical matter. In fact, the *Gallaecia* depicted by seventh-century sources was a Visigothic province largely unaffected by the developments in the rest of the kingdom. Isolated politically during the period of Sueve control, its integration within the structures of the Visigothic kingdom was slow and probably never complete. Its administrative structure was not adapted until the middle of the seventh century, in the period following 652, when Recesvinth carried out a general administrative reorganization.⁷ At time many mints of that territory were apparently closed, with only three left to function, while the original provincial borders were redrawn. All this become clear from the acts of the Council of Mérida in 666.⁸ It is hard to say whether *Gallaecia* was thought of as similar to the rest of the territory once subject to Sueve rule. Visigothic sources seem to attribute to *Gallaecia* a different status and its own idiosyncrasies, as is shown by literary texts⁹ as well as by ecclesiastical¹⁰ and legislative documents.¹¹ Whether or not these references imply anything more than a stock phrase for defining this part of the kingdom we do not know; if so, this would mean that the once the Sueve kingdom was subdued, there was a tacit agreement that a distinct Sueve-Galician aristocracy still existed. This could explain why Gregory the Great referred to Reccared as 'king of the Goths and the Sueves' (*rex Gothorum atque Sueuorum*).¹²

Most likely this special political status of the former Sueve kingdom was the result of a *de facto* situation, not of any formal or legal recognition. The story of the conquest of *Gallaecia* by Leovigild leaves no doubt as to the method used: 'King Leovigild laid waste to *Gallaecia*, took the kingdom from King Audeca, who was taken prisoner and subjected the people, the treasure and the fatherland of the Sueves to his power, making it a province of the Goths'.¹³ The Sueve kingdom consisted of its treasure, an inalienable property associated with the monarchy; of the patria, the territory over which the monarchy reigned, and which is specified as *Gallaecia*; and of its people, probably not only Sueves, but all the subjects of the kingdom. All this was subjected by right of conquest. However, in the same year a certain Malaricus, probably a Sueve aristocrat, assumed tyrannical power and almost managed to reign.¹⁴ It is very likely that such situation instability characterized the entire Visigothic period in these northwestern border areas of the realm.

An isolated reference from the Asturian period tells us that, while his father was alive, Wittiza lived in Tude, present-day Tuy.¹⁵ The chronicle of Alfonso III implies that this happened on the instructions of his father: 'Wittiza, with whom the king while alive shared the realm, and ordered to live in the city of Tude, so that the father had the kingdom of the Goths, and the son, that of the Sueves'.¹⁶ We do not know whether this decision was motivated by some political conflict and the weakness of the kingdom in its final years, when centrifugal forces threatened to disintegrate the realm. This disintegration is often ascribed to conflicts between monarchs and nobles,¹⁷ but we

⁷ Cf. E.A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 211-7.

⁸ *Concilium Emeritensis*, a. 666, c. 8: '... suggerente sanctae memoriae sanctissimo viro Orontio episcopo, animus eius (Recesvintus) ad pietatem moverit, ut terminos huius provinciae Lusitaniae... sedem reduceret et restauraret. (...) hoc etiam adiciens ut de [eo] id unde ad Galliciae metropolim diocesis sui fuerat possessum ille reciperet, quamvis longa post tempora, quae parochiae // suae fuerant debita.'

⁹ Ioannes [abbas] Biclarenensis, *Chronica*, a. 590, 1: *Sancta Synodus episcoporum totius Hispaniae Galliae, et Galleciae in urbe toletana...*

¹⁰ *Concilium III Toletanum*, a. 589, c. 2: '...omnes ecclesias Spaniae, Galliae vel Gallaeciae Concilium XIII Toletanum, a. 683, Tomus: ... in provincia, Galliae vel Galliciae atque in omnes provincias Hispaniae.'

¹¹ *Leges Visigothorum IX*, 2, 8: '... quilibet infra fines Spanie, Gallie, Gallecie vel in cunctis provinciis...

¹² *Epistula IX*, 229.

¹³ Ioannes [abbas] Biclarenensis, *Chronica*, a. 585, 2: 'Leovegildus rex Gallaecias vastat, Audecanem regem comprehensum regno privat, Suevorum gentem Thesaurum et patriam in suam redigit potestatem et Gothorum provinciam facit.'

¹⁴ Ioannes [abbas] Biclarenensis, *Chronica*, a. 585, 6: 'Malaricus in Gallaecia tyrannidem assumens quasi regnare vult.'

¹⁵ *Chronica Albendensis XIV*, 33: *Uittizza rg. An. X. Iste in uita patris in Tudense Hurbe Gallicie resedit.* See J. Gil, J. L. Moralejo, J. I. Ruiz de la Peña, *Crónicas asturianas* (Oviedo, 1985), pp. 151-88.

¹⁶ *Adefonsi Tertii Chronica 4 (Rotensis)*: '(Wittiza) quem rex in uita sua in regno participem fecit et eum in Tudensem ciuitatem auitare precepit, ut pater teneret regnum Gotorum et filius Sueuorum', *Crónicas asturianas*, pp. 113-49.

¹⁷ L.A. García Moreno, *El fin de reino visigodo de Toledo. Decadencia y catástrofe. Una contribución a su crítica* (Madrid, 1975), pp. 140-212.

should not rule out separatist tendencies in *Gallaecia*,¹⁸ still identified by this text as ‘the kingdom of the sueves’. Its distinct status apparently continued to be recognized. The choice of Tude as Wittiza’s seat of power is equally peculiar. Probably the city had gained a certain prominence within *Gallaecia*, for after Chindaswinth’s reign, only Bracara, Lucus and Tude continued to be mints. The city may have been chosen and promoted by the Visigothic authorities as an alternative to Braga, which was the centre of the old Sueve aristocracy and therefore a possible stronghold of resistance. These references are brief, but no briefer than those concerning the rest of the peninsula. Except for this intriguing passage about Wittiza and Tude, we have no information about later Sueve attempts to regain independence, or about the need for a military occupation. Suffice it to say that in the seventh century the region was undeniable in the political periphery.

Christianisation

Its geographical location and political isolation are two aspects of the peripheral status of *Gallaecia*. Of greater interest to us is the region’s closely related social and cultural separateness. Its analysis takes us directly to the role played by the monasteries in this region in the seventh century. On the one hand, this was a result of the peculiar way in which Christianity came to be implanted in the Hispanic North-West, and on the other, of the impact Christianity appears to have had on the social structures in a region where primitive economic relations and group associations still predominated.

The introduction of Christianity in *Gallaecia* was a relatively late and difficult process. It is almost unanimously accepted that the North and North-West of Hispania were pockets of paganism until practically the end of the Visigothic period; already in 561 Lucrecius of Braga observed that the most isolated regions of *Gallaecia* still had not embraced the true faith.¹⁹ Whether this was a matter of the survival of specific beliefs, or, more accurately in my view, a continuity of ancestral ways of life deeply rooted in rural society, is a matter for discussion. The way in which historians sometimes jump from so-called ‘superstition’ to well-defined forms of paganism is not sustained by the sources.²⁰ The texts simply yield insufficient information to warrant such conclusions. We are dealing with a province of the Empire with relatively low levels of urbanization, despite the survival of pre-Roman housing structures. Hence the ecclesiastic organization of the countryside occurred very late. Until the end of the sixth century, no episcopal and hierarchical structures were established. Instead, the bishops had to fight against great landowners who built churches on their estates. Around this time the *Parrochiale Suevum* describes a system of churches depending on a group of episcopal sees which were being formed simultaneously, thanks to the conciliar action initiated by Martin of Braga, the missionary responsible for the conversion of the Sueves; he seems to have been behind the councils held in this city in the years 561 and 572.²¹

For the rest, the first diffusion of Christianity in important areas of *Gallaecia* at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth was the work of Priscillianism.²² The success of the followers of Priscillian among the Galician population was largely due to their acquiescence with regard to indigenous practices of magic and prophesying. This is revealed by the acts of the Council

¹⁸ E. Ewig, “Residence et capitale pendant le haut Moyen Age”, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien* Beihefte der *Francia* 3 (Sigmaringen, 1976), p. 369, considers that there was a lively autonomism of the Sueve kingdom, fueled by the tradition of the old *sedes regia*.

¹⁹ *Concilium I Bracarense*, a. 561, ‘Incipit: ... in ultimis huius provinciae [regionibus] constituti aut exiguum aut pene nullam rectae eruditionis notitiam contingerunt.’

²⁰ Cf. J. N. Hillgarth, “Popular religion in Visigothic Spain”, *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, ed. E. James (Oxford, 1980), pp. 3–60; M. Sotomayor, “Penetración de la Iglesia en los medios rurales de la España tardorromana y visigoda”, *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell’Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1982), pp. 17–53.

²¹ P. David, “L’organisation ecclésiastique du royaume suève au temps de Saint Martin de Bracara”, *Etudes historiques sur la Galice et le Portugal du VIe au XIIe siècle* (Lisboa-Paris, 1947), pp. 1–82; P.C. Díaz, “El *Parrochiale Suevum*: organización eclesiástica, poder político y poblamiento en la *Gallaecia* tardo-antigua”, *Homenaje a José M^a. Blázquez*, VI, ed. J. Alvar (Madrid, 1998), pp. 35–47.

²² Cf. M.V. Escribano, “Igrexa e Herexia en Gallaecia: O Priscilianismo”, *Galicie fai dous mil anos. O feito diferencial galego I. Historia 1*, ed. G. Pereira-Menaut (Santiago de Compostela, 1997), pp. 278–321.

of Braga in 561, and by the testimony of the accusers of Priscillian's adherents,²³ even to the extent that the persistence of such practices and the success of Priscillianism have been seen as two facets of the same reality: the survival of indigenous culture.²⁴ The Priscillianist ideas were theologically poor, but not necessarily heretical;²⁵ all the same, the practices Priscillian's followers expressed a radical and challenging rejection of all worldliness. Their taste for isolated religious services of men and women in small convents, where consecrated wine and bread was kept to be used during Mass, and some other customs such as going barefoot, which gave rise to the suspicion of superstition and magical arts (*superstitio extitabilis, arcanis ocula secretis*²⁶ or *magicarum artium profana secreta*²⁷), together with their anti-hierarchical conception of the episcopal office, would soon lead to their relentless persecution on the part of the bishops.²⁸

The success of Priscillianism in the Hispanic North-West has been explained by its sympathetic attitude to indigenous religious practices. Whatever the case, its loss of influence from the middle of the sixth century did not necessarily the eradication of the older beliefs with which Priscillianism had been identified. When, in the mid-seventh century, Braulius of Zaragoza warned Fructuosus of Braga to beware of the corrupt doctrine of Priscillian,²⁹ he may have been more worried by its reputed condoning of traditional practice than by any well-defined dogma. The writings of Martin of Braga, especially his treaty *De correctione rusticorum*, the acts of the Second Council of Braga of 572 and, even at the end of the seventh century, the writings of Valerius of Bierzo, reveal the resilience of such traditional religious practices.³⁰

Martin of Braga, a Pannonian monk who came to *Gallaecia* from the East, is remembered for his missionary work and his fight against paganism.³¹ However, his many activities also included the founding of monasteries, especially the abbey-bishopric of Dumio, on the outskirts of Braga, which was to become an important centre of monastic culture in the next century. From its foundation onwards, the monastery at Dumio was closely connected with the Sueve monarchy. Probably Martin earned his episcopal office as a reward from the Sueve church for his success in converting the king, and, finally, the Sueve people. There was no vacant see, and a location as close as possible to Braga and the Sueve monarch was considered appropriate for the man who had converted the royal family.³² Hence, the monastery at Dumio became an episcopal see, but without any churches or territory over which to exercise its jurisdiction. The sphere of influence of the bishop of Dumio was defined by the monastic family,³³ which ultimately gained a tremendous authority. Dumio possessed an undeniable moral authority resulting from Martin's prestige. Doubtless the see's legal status was exceptional,³⁴ and its position with respect to the bishop of Braga, in whose diocese

²³ J. Cabrera, *Estudios sobre el priscilianismo en la Galicia antigua* (Granada, 1983), pp. 221-3. L. Cracco Ruggini, "El éxito de los Priscilianistas: a propósito de cultura y fe en el siglo IV d.C.", *Congreso Internacional la Hispania de Teodosio, v. 1*, eds. R. Teja and C. Pérez (Valladolid-Segovia, 1997), p. 41.

²⁴ Cf. C. Mole, *Uno storico del V secolo. Il vescovo Idazio* (Catania, 1978), p. 124.

²⁵ A.B.J.M. Goosen, "Algunas observaciones sobre la neumatología de Priscilianus", *Primera reunión gallega de estudios clásicos* (Santiago de Compostela, 1981), pp. 237-42; more extensively, see idem, *Achtegronden van Priscillianus' christelijke ascese* (Nijmegen, 1976), 2. Vols.

²⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicorum II*, CSEL 1, p. 46, 1.

²⁷ Leo I Papa, *Epistula 15, 16, 1.4*. See B. Vollman, *Studien zum Priscillianismus. Die Forschung, die Quellen, der fünfzehnte Brief Papst Leos des Grossen* (St. Ottilien, 1965), pp. 122-38.

²⁸ M.V. Escribano, *Iglesia y Estado en el certamen priscilianista. Causa ecclesiae e iudicium publicum* (Zaragoza, 1988), pp. 246-59.

²⁹ *Epistula 44, 75*. Cf. L. Riesco Terrero, *Epistolario de San Braulius* (Sevilla, 1975), p. 171.

³⁰ S. McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (Washington, 1938); M. Meslin, "Persistances païennes en Galice, vers la fin du Vie siècle", *Hommages à Marcel Renard 2* (Bruxelles, 1969), pp. 512-24.

³¹ A. Ferreiro, "The missionary labors of St. Martin of Bracara in 6th century Galicia", *Studia Monastica* 23 (1981), pp. 11-26.

³² Cf. P.C. Díaz, "El reino suevo de Hispania y su sede en Bracara", *Sedes regiae (ann. 400-800)*, eds. G. Ripoll and J. M. Gurt (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 404-23.

³³ *Parrochiale Sueuum 6: Ad Dumio familia servorum*, CCSL 175, pp. 411-20.

³⁴ P.R. Oligier, *Les Evêques Réguliers* (Paris-Louvain, 1958), p. 20, attributes an Irish origin to this type of bishopric, considering that they were not known on the continent except in the north of Armorica.

Dumio had been installed, was equally unusual.³⁵ On the death of the metropolitan bishop Lucrecius of Braga, Martin came to occupy the latter's see without abandoning his 'bishopric' Dumio. Initially this did not create a precedent, for it was only shortly before 656 that Fructuosus once more exercised episcopal authority over both Dumio and Braga.

Monastic foundations

Dumio's monastic influence was to be far-reaching. Whether bishops managed to conquer rural areas is a matter of debate, but the monasteries' authority and success in this respect is indisputable. Whereas the representatives of the diocesan clergy could only resort to the preaching of the gospel, hoping that their churches would become centres of faith and religious practice, the introduction of the monasteries offered a model of organization which, as we shall see, enabled the integration of traditional ways of life into new systems of values. The priests, with their scant theological training, as the councils repeatedly pointed out,³⁶ easily adapted to local syncretistic traditions,³⁷ but the monasteries were capable of imposing more or less uniform standards of behaviour, supported by rigid penitential systems. In many places remote from the episcopal centre, the maintenance of the churches had become a problem, to the extent that buildings fell into ruin and the daily liturgy was no longer carried out, as King Egica stated in the *Tomus* presented before the sixteenth Council of Toledo in 693.³⁸ The monasteries, however, fulfilled a role they also assumed elsewhere in Europe. These were self-sufficient units in a rural landscape, capable of attending to their own spiritual needs and those of their surroundings; these centres of religious power were therefore well placed for spreading the gospel to the remotest corners of rural areas.³⁹ As we shall see, this effectiveness was ensured by respect for a monastic rule and a ready submission to the bishop who endorsed it.

The extraordinary proliferation of monasteries in seventh-century *Gallaecia* is usually explained by the missionary zeal of the two 'founding fathers', Martin and Fructuosus of Braga. However, practical considerations will have mattered as well. Large rural monasteries were more capable of meeting the demands of peasant communities than urban bishops. But the latter reasserted themselves in due course. As a result, the documents of the second half of the seventh century testify to concerted attempts to reinstate some kind of canonical order in monasteries accused of 'laxity'.

It is not the object of this paper to study all the monastic manifestations of the Hispanic North-West, and neither shall we deal here with those communities which, with greater or lesser flexibility, adapted to the canonical and monastic systems which had proliferated north of the Alps, in response to Eastern models. For example, in *Gallaecia* Bishop-Abbot Fructuosus (d. c. 665) founded a number of monastic communities known from the *Vita Fructuosi*.⁴⁰ He also established a monastic rule perfectly suited into these traditions, a formula which probably lasted throughout the century. The foundation of the monastery of Samos shortly after 650, on the initiative of Ermefredus of Lucus, probably followed a similar pattern.⁴¹ But here we are interested in another

³⁵ An interesting comparison can be made with the seventh-century Meuse valley, where aristocratic monastic foundations, often with their own 'Klosterbischof', helped to contain episcopal power. See A. Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VIIe-Xie siècles): Contribution à l'histoire religieuse des campagnes du haut moyen âge*. Biheften der Francia 14 (Sigmaringen, 1985); M. de Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism: the power of prayer', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History II, c. 700-c.900* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 625-8.

³⁶ J. Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda* (Rome, 1955), pp. 69-118.

³⁷ Cf. H. Kuhn, "Das Fortleben des germanisches Heidentums nach der Christianisierung", *La conversione al cristianesimo nell'Europa dell'Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1967), pp. 743-57; R. Künzel, "Paganisme, syncretisme et culture religieuse populaire au haut Moyen Age. Réflexions de méthode", *Annales ESC* 47 (1992), pp. 1055-69.

³⁸ Cf. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, pp. 484-5

³⁹ Cf. G. González Echegaray, "El monacato en la España nórdica en su confrontación con el paganismo (ss. VI-VII)", *Semana de Historia del monacato cántabro-astur-leonés* (Oviedo, 1982), pp. 35-56; Hillgarth, "Popular religion in Visigothic Spain", p. 38, A. Barbero and M. Vigil, "La organización social de los cántabros y sus transformaciones en relación con los orígenes de la Reconquista", *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la Reconquista* (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 188-92.

⁴⁰ M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Vita Sancti Fructuosi* (Bracara, 1974).

⁴¹ A. Mundó, "La inscripción visigoda del monasterio de Samos", *Studia Monastica* 3 (1961), pp. 157-64, although he

category of texts. These reveal not only the variety of responses to monastic initiatives in *Gallaecia*, but also ways in which the monasteries served as a focus of regional traditions, harnessing and adapting them to new beliefs. Religious and social conflict was important during this period, and should be taken into account.

The first document which merits our attention is the famous *Regula communis*, or Rule of the Abbots. Of uncertain authorship, although attributed by some scholars to Fructuosus, the *Regula communis* was probably a document arising from specific circumstances. It was a series of instructions issued by an assembly of abbots who attempted to ‘canonize’ the many spontaneous monastic initiatives just mentioned. The *Regula communis* is generally thought to have been written around 660⁴². Apparently it should offer an alternative for the rigid monastic system outlined by Fructuosus in his earlier monastic rule (c. 645), which had been put into practice in Fructuosus’ own foundations. The inflexibility of this system was unacceptable to the monasteries organized outside the monastic traditions represented by Fructuosus. We get to know more about such ‘unruly’ monasteries from the two first chapters of the *Regula communis*; the first chapter is of particular interest in this respect:

Indeed, some have the custom of organizing monasteries in their own homes, through fear of hell, and of joining together in a community with their wives, children, serfs and neighbours under the steadfastness of an oath, and of consecrating churches in their own homes with the names of martyrs, and of calling them monasteries. But we do not call those dwellings monasteries, but rather the ruin of souls and the perversion of the Church. Hence the origin of heresy and the schism and great controversy over the monasteries.⁴³

Ch.J. Bishko⁴⁴ believes that these monasteries, like the presbyterial ones cited in the second chapter of the *Regula communis*, were fostered by a segment of the secular clergy strongly opposed to the Bishop-Abbot of Dumio. Bishko’s argument rests on the reference to ‘heresy and schism’ in the first chapter, as well as on chapter 20 which speaks of *nostra ecclesia*.⁴⁵ He assumes that the Bishop-Abbot of Dumio was the *episcopus sub regula* mentioned in the *Regula communis*, and that the monasteries and monks under his rule lived in constant struggle against other communities supported by another part of the clerical hierarchy mentioned in Rule’s second chapter:

Some presbyters[priests] have the custom of feigning holiness, and they do so, not precisely for the sake of eternal life, but rather serve the Church as paid workers, and with the pretext of holiness seek the emoluments of wealth (...). They did not live an industrious life in the monastery (...), they preach what they do not observe and follow the common way of secular bishops, of worldly princes or of the people. (...). These, just as they rejoice in their advantages, congratulate themselves on our misfortunes, and plot with full intention so as to divulge falsely what they have not heard against us and spread and maintain publicly in the squares what we have not committed, as if we had been caught in misdeed. Furthermore, those who leave the monastery because of their own vices are received with applause,

believes that the disciplinary reference would refer to the *Regula communis*.

⁴² J. Campos and I. Roca, *Santos Padres españoles II* (Madrid, 1971), p. 166.

⁴³ *Regula communis* 1: ‘*Solent enim nonnulli ob metum gehennae in suis sibi domibus monasteria componere et cum uxoribus filiis et seruis atque uicinis cum sacramenti conditione in unum se copulare et in suis sibi ut diximus uillis et nomine martyrum ecclesias consecrare et eas tale nomine monasteria nuncupare. Nos tamen haec non dicimus monasteria sed animarum perditionem et ecclesiae subuersionem. Inde surrexit haeresis et schisma et grandis per monasteria controuersia.*’ See *Santos Padres Españoles II*, eds. J. Campos and I. Roca (Madrid, 1971), pp. 172-208.

⁴⁴ Ch.J. Bishko, “The factual tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History* (London, 1984), p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Regula communis* 20 [De fugitiuis]: ‘*Quod si et ipsi laici suo eum recipierint consortio et pariter cum eo contra monasterium exarserint in contumeliam, cuncti a nostra ecclesia expellantur et nullo nobiscum karitatis foedere copulentur, quousque ueritatem cognoscant, et nobiscum stantes iniurias ecclesiae uindicantes pari deuotione consurgant.*’

protected and defended by them.⁴⁶

With regard to the control of monastic life, these texts supposedly reflect the confrontation of two divergent ethical conceptions, cherished by opposing factions in the Galician bishopric: an ascetic movement pitted against a more worldly group, which was denounced by the Third Council of Braga held in 675. There a whole series of disciplinary errors were noted: acceptance of anticanonical liturgical practices, worldliness, abuse of episcopal power, simony, etc.⁴⁷ But the first chapters of the *Regula communis* may also reflect a conflict of jurisdiction between a monastic congregation sponsored from Dumio, with substantial influence in other dioceses, and the claims of bishops who felt their rights were infringed upon. The latter must have considered Dumio's pre-eminence as a flagrant violation of their episcopal prerogative. Furthermore, as is revealed in the second chapter, conflict also raged over the control of donations and the management of charities. If we think of the *Regula communis* as an initiative of Fructuosus, and of a monastic congregation backed by Dumio, we must keep in mind that shortly before 656 Fructuosus once more joined the see of Dumio to that of Braga, as Martin had done a century before. The Tenth Council of Toledo (656) was attended by Fructuosus in his capacity as the metropolitan of *Gallaecia*. It issued a decree deposing Potamio, the bishop of Braga, who had confessed to fornication, and declared:

This is what the council decreed concerning Bishop Potamio: with the full agreement of all of ours we have decided that the venerable Fructuosus, bishop of the church of Dumio, should be in charge of the church of Braga, so that by assuming leadership of the church of Braga he will thus hold together and preserve the entire metropolitan province of Gallaecia and all its bishops and peoples, as well its pastoral care and the administration of ecclesiastical property.⁴⁸

Fructuosus was probably chosen for this exalted role by virtue of his prestige, which had given Dumio renewed influence. When Fructuosus gained the metropolitan see and thus became the head of the Galician Church, this created a favourable climate for the proliferation of monasteries following the *Regula communis*. However, we do not know when Fructuosus died; this must have happened before 675, when Leudigisus was the metropolitan bishop presiding over the Third Council of Braga. From then on, the subscriptions to ecclesiastical councils seem to indicate a conflict, possibly over efforts on the part of Braga to absorb Dumio. After all, Fructuosus position as a bishop in two sees depended on his personal prestige. The continuation of this situation must have been subject to the approval of the monks of Dumio, who would not renounce their episcopal rights unless they had a good relationship with their metropolitan bishop. This may not always have been the case. In 683 Liuva subscribed the acts of the Thirteenth Council of Toledo as bishop of Braga and Dumio, whereas two years earlier he had done so exclusively for Braga. In 684 another council was held in Toledo and the see was represented by an abbot, but in 688, when the Fifteenth Council of Toledo gathered, Dumio was represented by Vincentius and Braga by Faustinus. After thirty years of unification, a bishop of Dumio appeared on the scene once more. This marked a climax in the ongoing tension between episcopal jurisdiction on the one hand, and the monastic confederation led by Dumio on the other; the conflict, once Liuva had died, may well have induced the monks to demand, once more, a bishop of their own.

Subsequently, Faustinus was transferred to Hispalis (Seville), in the wake of the removal of Sisibert of Toledo, and the bishop of Porto, Felix, was appointed as metropolitan of Braga.⁴⁹ We do

⁴⁶ *Regula communis* 2.

⁴⁷ See, specially, *Incipit* and cc. 1, 2, 4, 7 and 8. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, pp. 371-78.

⁴⁸ *Concilium X Toletanum*, a. 656, 'Item Decretum pro Potamio episcopo in eodem concilio: venerabilem Fructuosum ecclesiae Dumiensis episcopum communi omnium nostrorum electione constituimus ecclesiae Bracaraensis gubernacula continere, ita ut omnem metropolim provinciae Gallaeciae cunctosque episcopos populosque conventus ipsius omnemque curam animarum et rerum Bracaraensis ecclesiae gubernanda suscipiens ita componat atque conservet...'; Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 321.

⁴⁹ *Concilium XVI Toletanum*, a. 693, *Decretum iudicii ab universis editum*, Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, pp. 513-5.

not know whether these moves were used to resolve the conflict mentioned above; when the Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693) confirmed these new appointments, Felix signed as bishop of Braga, making it clear that he was also bishop of Dumio. The solution of the problem cannot have benefited Dumio, for we know that the bishops of this general council took a dim view of a monastery that was also an episcopal see.⁵⁰ However, it is also clear that at this stage the monastic congregation at Dumio was an extremely powerful organization; for the see of Braga, losing control of it meant relinquishing authority in a substantial part of the Galician Church.

'Neighbourhood monasteries'

We have paid some attention to these debates, for they loom large in present-day ecclesiastical history, but they are in fact only of secondary importance. In our view, the tension between different types of monasteries, and above all the appearance of those monasteries created by an accumulation of families and neighbours, can be explained differently. In its first two chapters the *Regula communis* describes two kinds of 'reprehensible' monasteries: those built in the cities by priests with a view to profit, and others that apparently emerged spontaneously. The latter, it was said, diverged from the essential principles of Christian charity; they had no stable leadership, sought worldly profit, and its members were solely concerned with maintaining a wife and children. Everyone should stay away from these communities, and neither should they be imitated. To end this situation an attempt was made to subject the 'spontaneous' monasteries to a discipline, putting them under the guidance of a bishop who 'lived by the Rule' (*per Regulam uiuit or who sub Regula uiuit* - probably the bishop of Dumio, as we have said⁵¹), or perhaps under the supervision of more than one bishop.⁵² This discipline was to be guaranteed by monthly synods of abbots, where the abbots gathering in different regions.⁵³

The Rule criticized two kinds of monasteries, yet when we unravel the disciplinary content of its subsequent chapters we find that its most important target consisted of the apparently very threatening monastic associations of families, neighbours and their servants. To counter these, a rigid abbatial authority was put into place. To oppose those who, living as they pleased, did not want to be subjected to any superior, and elected as abbot someone who would allow them their whims,⁵⁴ the authority of a superior with due qualifications was to be established. (cc. 3, 5, 10 and 14). In order to prevent indiscriminate access to monastic life, it was decided that only free men or ex-serfs with a charter of liberty could enter the monastery, who, moreover, would submit themselves obediently to the discipline of the abbot (cc. 4 and 5). But it soon became clear that the Rule imposed a discipline that was at loggerheads with more traditional models of monastic life, something which, as we have pointed out, also held true of the *Regula Fructuosi* that was so severe with 'anti-canonical' practices.⁵⁵

The sixth chapter of the *Regula communis* foresaw the possibility of men entering the monastery with their wives and children: 'How men should live without danger with their wives and children in the monastery' (*Qualiter debeant uiri cum uxoribus ac filiis absque periculo uiuere in*

⁵⁰ *Concilium XII Toletanum*, a. 681, c.4, revoked a decision from the times of Wamba, taken on the initiative of the King, by which the Monastery of Aquis had become an episcopal see. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 392.

⁵¹ Cf. J. Orlandis, "El movimiento ascético de San Fructuoso y la congregación monástica dumienne", *Estudios sobre las organizaciones monásticas medievales* (Pamplona, 1971), p. 77; idem., "Las congregaciones monásticas en la tradición suevo-gótica", *Estudios sobre las organizaciones monásticas medievales*, p. 102, who follows I. Herwegen, *Das Pactum des Hl. Fructuosi von Bracara* (Stuttgart, 1907), pp. 55-60.

⁵² Cf. Ch.J. Bishko, "Episcopus sub regula or episcopi sub regula? St. Fructuosus and the monasticized episcopate in the peninsular west", *Bracara Augusta* 21 (1967), pp. 63-4; idem., "The Pactual tradition in Hispanic Monasticism", pp. 19-20.

⁵³ *Regula communis* 10: 'Secundo ut per capita mensium abbates de uno confinio uno se copilentur loco, et mensuales laetantias strenue celebrent...' These assemblies of abbots were not a novelty but acquired genuine significance here, cf. A. Mundó, "Les anciens synodes abbatiaux et les *Regulae SS. Patrum*", *Studia Anselmiana* 44 (1959), pp. 107-25.

⁵⁴ *Regula communis* 1: '...quia suo arbitrio uiuunt nulli senioreum uolunt esse subiecti (...) talem praeesse sibi abbatem desiderant ut ubi se uoluerint conuertere quasi cum benedictione suas uoluntates faciant'.

⁵⁵ A. Linage Conde, "En torno a la *Regula Monachorum* y su relación con otras reglas monásticas", *Bracara Augusta* 21 (1967), pp. 123-63.

monasterio). Throughout this long and detailed chapter, the separation of sexes is regulated as well as the relationship between parents and children under seven years old. The latter were expected to be instructed in the Rule ‘so they may be prepared, whether they are boys or girls, for the monastery where they will live in the future’ (*ut siue sint pueri siue puellae monasterio prouocentur, ubi habitare futuri erunt*). Clearly boys and girls will live in the same monastery. In later chapters (cc. 15, 16 and 17) some practical arrangements for the separation of the sexes are worked out: the conditions under which men and women can see each other, their placing and conduct when meeting at a religious service, and so on. It is evident that these regulations were meant for an environment that accepted the monastic profession of entire families; the continuation of family ties within the religious community was taken into account, albeit within severe limits. Ultimately, this system would produce so-called double monasteries.⁵⁶ Moreover, not only families in the sense of parents and small children entered these monasteries, but also larger groups of relations and dependents, including serfs. According to the Rule, the regular meetings should first strive to correct ‘the many men’ who showed concern for their wives and children and even for other relations.⁵⁷ In a context where the illness of a monk was foreseen it was established:

We order that all sick monks should lie in male monasteries and we order that neither mother, nor sister, nor wife, nor daughter, nor relation, nor a female stranger or a female slave nor any other kind of woman should care for the men during their illness. If one of the aforementioned women should happen to be sent with the abbess with some medicine, she shall not be able to visit him without a male nurse, nor remain next to him. We order the same regarding the men.⁵⁸

The first chapter of the Rule criticized the often less than voluntary monastic professions made by serfs, a theme also taken up by Valerius of Bierzo (d. c. 695).⁵⁹ Yet as far as we can see, the *Regula communis* by no means tried to eradicate these collective professions. Instead, the text sought to ‘canonize’ them. But who were the men and women who made these collective professions? Once more, we turn to the Rule and related documents.

Novices and peasants

When the first chapter of the *Regula communis* condemns local monasteries set up without control, it emphasizes a particular and peculiar aspect of those making their profession:

Estranged from the very neighbours to whom they had bound themselves by oath, they separate with intense quarrels and disagreements. And not simply, but with insults, they carry off each others’ goods that, carried away by an illusory idea of charity, had previously put together to use in common. But if one of them should suffer weakness, they resort to the relations that they left in the outside world for them to help them with weapons, sticks and threats.⁶⁰

This situation, presented as characteristic of these arbitrarily established monasteries, also occurred among those reorganized by the Rule, and furthermore, it did so in a way very similar to the one just observed:

⁵⁶ J. Orlandis, “Los orígenes del monaquismo dúplice en España”, *Estudios sobre las organizaciones monásticas medievales*, p. 34. Cf. Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*, p. 492, who understands that the *Regula communis* was already in its origins, destined to these double monasteries.

⁵⁷ *Regula communis* 13: ‘Solent nonnulli prosuis uxoribus atque filiis aut etiam quibusque propinquis curam habere more pietatis plerique uero qui non sunt in talibus implicati pro alimento sunt solliciti.’

⁵⁸ *Regula communis* 17.

⁵⁹ *De genere monachorum* 1: ‘... tolluntur ex familiis sibi pertinentibus subulci, de diversisque gregibus dorseni, atque de possessionibus parvuli, qui pro officio supplendo inviti tondentur et nutriuntur per monasteria, atque falso nomine monachi nuncupantur.’

⁶⁰ *Regula communis* 1.

We have found that in not very cautious monasteries those who entered with their goods, having later lost their fervour, seek with great infamy the world they left and return to it like dogs to vomit, and try, together with their relations, to snatch back what they had taken to the monastery, calling upon secular judges and devastating the monasteries with men of arms.⁶¹

This situation is described again with regards to fugitive monks (c. 20), who, probably with the intention of re-appropriating what they had contributed, relied on the support of their relations to recover it. Despite the brevity of these references, it seems clear that those making their profession in this type of monastery were not really aware from the start that a monastic profession implied a renunciation of worldly property. Although the Rule points out (c. 18) that those who wish to enter the monastery must first distribute all their riches among the poor, this does not seem to have been common practice. It is very likely that the contribution of each of the members who entered the community was essential for its maintenance; these were not large foundations with an abundant original patrimony based on a large estate. Rather these were communities situated in marginal areas, ‘in rough and steep mountains and inaccessible valleys’ (*fragosa et abrupta montium et inaccessibilia uallium*), as we read in the text. Here agriculture yielded only a meagre livelihood, sufficient for scarcely three months, the Rule says, so it should be supplemented with livestock.⁶²

Furthermore, these newly professed monks who renounced their vows seem to have harboured notions of ownership that were very different from those we know from late Roman law or the *Leges Visigothorum*, by which most ecclesiastical institutions and more ‘central’ monasteries lived. The *Regula communis* evokes conceptions of property involving extensive communal rights. These may have been connected with the agricultural or grazing practices of local communities, or by the collective use of undivided public areas. Later tradition in Galicia considered the family house as something sacred, a part of a patrimony handed over through the generations; its maintenance was more important than the private interest of the family member who benefited from it by association.⁶³ Something similar may have pertained in an earlier age.

As P.D. King maintained, in the Iberian peninsula of the seventh century the individual could no longer count on an effective network of kinship.⁶⁴ This observation is correct if we analyse the contents of the great majority of Visigothic sources, especially the legislative ones. In the *Regula communis* we find several references to this subject, embedded in more general statements about the patrimonial interests of the monastery, monastic discipline and the effective exercise of abbatial authority. We have already seen some examples of this, such as a concern that those who wish to enter the monastery should leave their goods to the poor and not to any relative. Apart from being more virtuous, a donation to the poor would be a more effective way to renounce one’s property than handing it over to a family member. (c. 4). Likewise there is mention of the elderly who retire to the monastery, so as to avoid affection for one’s relatives (*propinquitatis affectum*, c. 8); or, in a more general way, when the sins and wickedness of monks is discussed, it is said that ‘many are in the habit of caring for their wives, children and other relatives, according to customary affection’ (*solent nonnulli pro suis uxoribus atque filiis aut etiam quibusque propinquis curam habere more pietatis*).⁶⁵ These attachments are very human, and induced compassion, nostalgia, or a desire to see their relations once more in those who had converted to monastic life. Yet in the world we encounter in the *Regula communis*, with its irregular ‘neighbourhood’ monasteries, King’s observation about increasing individualism does not seem to hold true. Here, ties and loyalties of kinship still generated lasting solidarity, and most likely

⁶¹ *Regula communis* 18.

⁶² *Regula communis* 9: ‘... et insuper uix tribus mensibus per pleraque monasteria abundarentur, si sola cotidiana fuissent paxamacia in hac prouincia plus omnibus terris laboriosa.’

⁶³ J. García Fernández, “Sobre los orígenes del paisaje agrario gallego”, *Estudios geográficos* 129 (1972), pp. 753-63. Of a more general nature A. Gurevic, “Représentations et attitudes à l’égard de la propriété pendant le haut moyen âge”, *Annales ESC* 27 (1972), pp. 523-47.

⁶⁴ P.D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 222.

⁶⁵ *Regula communis* 13.

communities of patrimonial interests tended to extend beyond the restricted family circle, and beyond affective emotions.

On at least three occasions the Rule describes what these ties of kinship were like. A first reference lists those to whom a professing monk must not leave his goods: 'He should not give it to his father, nor mother, nor brother, nor relative, nor blood relation, nor adoptive son, nor wife, nor children' (*non dedit patri, non matri, non fratri, non propinquo, non consanguineo, non filio adoptiuo, non uxori, non liberis...*) (c. 4). Elsewhere (c. 13) the Rule discusses the monks' vanity about their family connections: 'one boasts about the nobility of his genealogy and lineage, and others make similar claims for their parents, their cousins, their relatives, their brothers and blood relations and the like' (*alius de genealogia et de sua gente fatetur esse princeps, alius de parentibus, alius de germanis, alius de cognatis, alius de fratribus et consanguineis et idoneis*). When making it clear that a sick monk should not be attended by any woman when he becomes, the Rule sums up the possible relationships that might be involved: 'mother, full sister, wife, daughter, relative, stranger, slave' (*mater, germana, uxor, filia, propinqua, extranea, ancilla*) (c.18). Likewise, the *Pactum*, a document transmitted together with the *Regula communis* with which we will deal below, a more general list of forbidden connections is mentioned: *cum parentibus, germanis, filiis, cognatis uel propinquis...*, which covers all possibilities.

The terminological problems are evident. These terms can have had a special meaning in local tradition which now eludes us, but clearly that the concept of the late Roman family is not very useful in the Galician context. Part of the terminology conforms to that of that found in the *Leges Visigothorum*; at times, however, the meaning of terms denoting 'family' seems to have a broader scope. A case in point is *propinquus*, especially if it is used in opposition to *extraneum*.⁶⁶ This broad spectre is best expressed in the already mentioned reference to someone taking pride in his 'genealogy and people', a phrase which perhaps indicates the more encompassing solidarity leading to a predominance of collective interests. It should also be noted that the *Regula communis* has a more elaborate terminology for degrees of kinship than any other Western monastic rule; whereas the *consanguinei* can still be found occasionally, and the expression *propinquus* is used once by Isidore of Seville and by Aurelian and Caesareus of Arles (as opposed to eight times in the *Regula communis* and another mention in the *Pactum*), *genealogia* does not appear in any other Rule.⁶⁷ This is probably because the underlying social reality the *Regula communis* reflects diverged from the more general pattern in the Iberian peninsula.⁶⁸

One might wonder whether these relationships were a matter of communities defined by kinship, or of villages with strong 'neighbourly' interests. The existence of such villages is confirmed in the Hispanic north in the early Middle Ages.⁶⁹ Relatives and *uicini* joined together to form part of the monasteries denounced in the first chapter of the Rule. In this respect, one should realize that for a long time in rural areas 'relations' and 'friends' tended to be confused. Members of a village community considered themselves related to each other, which, given the level of endogamy, was often true.⁷⁰ To sum up, 'in a traditional society the only true friends a man can have are those linked to him by ties of blood'.⁷¹

Social change and monastic adaptation

This seems to have been the situation that the *Regula communis* bears testimony to, and it

⁶⁶ This opposition is likewise found in *Regula Isidori*, whose context, that of the south of Hispania, is totally different: ... *parentibus uel extraneis...* (c. 19); ... *propinquum uel extraneum...* (c. 24).

⁶⁷ Cf. J. M. Clement, *Léxique des aniciennes règles monastiques occidentales*, 2. Vols. (Steenbrugis, 1978).

⁶⁸ Cf. D.A. Bullough, "Early medieval social groupings: The terminology of kinship", *Past and Present* 45 (1969), pp. 11-2, who shows how *cognatio*, *genealogia* and *consanguinitas* are terms used in the sense of kin-group, or kindred, while the persons who collectively form the group are known as *propinqui* or *parentes*. On the terminology of kinship, within the context of Gaul, see R. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le Monde Franc (VIIe-Xe siècle). Essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris, 1995), pp. 159-78.

⁶⁹ J.A. García de Cortazar, "Les communautés villageoises du Nord de la Péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Age", *Flaran* 4 (1982), pp. 55-77.

⁷⁰ J.L. Flandrin, *Orígenes de la familia moderna* (Barcelona, 1979), pp. 48-50;

⁷¹ Bullough, "Early medieval social groupings: The terminology of kinship", p. 12.

probably corresponded to a specific level of social development. When in the fifth century Hydatius wrote his chronicle, there were indigenous groups in *Gallaecia*, the Auregenses⁷² and Aunonenses,⁷³ which were strong enough, according to the chronicler, to maintain a prolonged and even successful armed conflict with the Sueve kings, as was the case of the Aunonenses with whom the Sueve kingdom was forced to sign a peace treaty. They also had the ability to get into contact with the Visigoth king in Gaul. These peoples are not mentioned again, but in the following century the Sueves still faced the Runcons.⁷⁴ Martin of Braga observed how deeply rooted traditional beliefs were, and there existed a very powerful indigenous substratum, as revealed in the already mentioned *Parroquiale suevum*.⁷⁵ This text gives a total of 132 place names, 13 episcopal sees and 119 churches; from the analysis of 89 of these, Piel deduced that 11 were personal names, 27 Roman-Latin generic names and 51 pre-Roman names without etymology.⁷⁶ The first impression is that the rural area and its social reality to which the text refers had a mainly non-Romanized substrate, and furthermore that at least 19 of these names, together with 11 mediaeval interpolations, have ethnic origins. In these regions, if a new church had to be named, the name of a people (or of the segment of a people) was preferred over a place name.

The family and social relationships mentioned in the *Regula communis* confirm these observations. The members of the monastic communities the Rule attempted to regulate, and at least 'the neighbourhood monastery' denounced in the first chapter, seem to have been part of a rural population inhabiting marginal areas, where relatively primitive social relations still predominated.⁷⁷ These were communities in which social, economic and family life had never adapted to Roman influence. This of course does not only hold true for *Gallaecia* alone, but for any extensive and largely inaccessible mountain area relying on hunting and livestock for its sustenance.⁷⁸ In Galicia, however, this situation prevailed, to continue throughout the post-Roman centuries.⁷⁹

Galician monasteries as places of power

We have tried to sketch a context for the people who organized themselves in the communities regulated by the *Regula communis*. But why did these monasteries play such a prominent role? Only by addressing this question we can understand the place of these powerful communities in the world of late antique and early medieval *Gallaecia* and their significance as 'places of power'. We began our argument by pointing out the marginal or peripheral nature of *Gallaecia*. This marginality did not, however, imply stagnation; it did not mean that there was no familiarity with classical forms of social and spatial organization, or involvement in long-distance trade and cultural contacts, or that there was no similarity to processes of development known in the rest of the Iberian peninsula, and the West in general. In fact, our brief survey of indigenous Galician culture from the fifth to the seventh centuries reveals qualitative and quantitative changes. Hyadatus' Aunonenses can probably be identified with the church of Aunone, mentioned in the

⁷² Hydatius, *Chronica* 197.

⁷³ Hydatius, *Chronica* 229, 235 and 243.

⁷⁴ Ioannes [abbas] Biclarensis, *Chronica*, a. 572, 3; Isidore of Seville, *Historia gothorum, vandalorum et suevorum* 91.

⁷⁵ CCSL 175, ed. P. David, 411.20.

⁷⁶ J.M. Piel, "Über die Namen der sog. Divisio Theodemiri", *Romanische Forschungen* 71 (1959), pp. 160-7.

⁷⁷ This strength of the elements that we have called primitive is not unanimously accepted. Cf. G. Pereira-Menaut, "Cambios estructurales versus romanización convencional. La transformación del paisaje político en el Norte de Hispania", *Estudios sobre la Tabula Siarensis*, eds. J. González and J. Arce (Madrid, 1988), pp. 245-59; idem., "Callaecia", *Conquista romana y modos de intervención en la organización urbana y territorial. Dialoghi di Archeologia 1-2*, eds. F. Coarelli, M. Torelli and J. Uroz Sáez (Roma, 1992), pp. 319-25.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. Goody, *The development of Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 15-6.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. Gaudemet, *Les communautés familiales* (Paris 1963), pp. 85-100; E. Hinojosa y Naveros, "La comunidad doméstica en España durante la Edad Media", *Obras. II* (Madrid, 1955), pp. 331-45; J. Martínez Gijón, "La comunidad hereditaria y la partición de la herencia en el derecho medieval español", *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 27 (1957), pp. 221-302; L. García de Valdeavellano, "La comunidad patrimonial de la familia en el derecho español medieval", *Estudios medievales de Derecho Privado* (Sevilla, 1977), pp. 295-321; T.F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages: Comparative perspectives on social and cultural formation* (Princeton, 1979), p. 137; E. Montanos Ferrín, *La familia en la alta edad media española* (Pamplona, 1980), pp. 161-328.

Parrochiale among the churches of the diocese of Tude. This may indicate a process of territorialization. By the beginning of the seventh century such ethnic groups seem to have disappeared. Valerius, who gave by far the best description the rural environment of *Gallaecia*, no longer mentions them. Whereas in the fifth century such ‘peoples’ still represented military force and autonomous political capacity, their names had turned into a mere identifying labels by the sixth century. By the time Valerius wrote, a brief description of ancestral and ‘popular’ practices sufficed. Most likely, the traditional society was breaking down, and the *Regula communis*, as well as the organization of family and neighbourhood communities in monastic style, was a sign of this transition. These monasteries provided new forms of social solidarity in a rapidly changing world. On the other extreme of the social spectrum, among the large land-owning aristocracy, the development that took place from the fifth to the seventh century seems to have followed generally known patterns. The invasions of the fifth century probably threw the Galician aristocracy into a temporary state of confusion, but apparently the ensuing conflict of loyalties did not affect the aristocracy’s power and status. Although some events might lead us to think the Sueves attacked or killed the representatives of this social group,⁸⁰ other events make it clear that some Galician aristocrats were willing to cooperate with the Sueves.⁸¹ In the following centuries the large landowners occupied an essential position in the social network of the kingdom. Their unquestionable economic autonomy was accompanied by an undeniably important role in religious affairs; they built churches on their lands and had so much power that they came into conflict with the bishops, since they administrated these churches and managed them, ignoring diocesan discipline.⁸² They probably also had a large measure of autonomy in the fiscal and political domain. When Leovigild was carrying out his campaigns against the frontier of the Sueve kingdom, he came up against a certain Aspidius, whom he captured with his wife and children; the chronicler defined him as ‘the lord of the place’ (... *loci seniore...*).⁸³ Whether the man in question was a large Galician-Roman landowner or an indigenous aristocrat, his power must have been based on this wealth and the accumulation of landed property. The church itself controlled large areas of land; its wealth included large monasteries, among which Dumio was particularly conspicuous. Its huge fortune and the size of its properties can be deduced from the will of Abbot Ricimiro, revoked by the Tenth Council of Toledo held in 656.⁸⁴

Evidently in this period the accumulation of land on the part of the local aristocracies and the church was accomplished at the expense of the small landowners and the peasant communities. This process, which is evident from the writings of Valerius of Bierzo,⁸⁵ hit a hard blow at traditional arrangements of property. Most likely it meant the appropriation of common pastures, and ultimately the absorption of entire peasant communities into the landowner’s patronage, as well as the breaking up of the undivided patrimonies which were essential for maintaining the peasant community and the solidarity of the kin-group.

These conflicts are implicit in the text of the *Regula communis*. Disturbances were caused by relatives who came to recover property contributed by the newly professed, and the first chapter of the Rule reveals the instability of these pseudo-monasteries where, upon leaving, the run-away monks fought over patrimonies they had donated to the monastery. The sudden and violent attacks suffered by the communities under the *Regula consensoria monachorum*⁸⁶ were all signs

⁸⁰ Hydatius, *Chronica* 191, 194 and 225.

⁸¹ Hydatius, *Chronica* 240.

⁸² *Concilium II Bracarense*, cc. 5 and 6. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 83.

⁸³ Ioannes [abbas] Biclarense, *Chronica*, a. 575, 3: ‘Leovegildus rex Aregenses montes ingreditur, Aspidium loci seniore cum uxore et filiis captivos ducit opesque eius et loca in suam redigit potestatem.’

⁸⁴ Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, pp. 322-4.

⁸⁵ R. Frighetto, *Panorama económico-social del NO. de la Península Ibérica en época visigoda. La obra de Valerio del Bierzo* (Tesis Doctoral. Salamanca, 1996), forthcoming.

⁸⁶ *Regula consensoria monachorum* 7: ‘... *incursio repentina aut hostilitas...*’, Migne PL 66, cols. 993-6. Ch.J. Bishko, “The date and nature of the Spanish Consensoria Monachorum”, *American Journal of Philology* 69 (1948), pp. 382-3, felt that this attack would respond to the same cause reflected in chapter 18 of the *Regula communis*, where the relatives of a monk tried to recover by force what he had brought to the monastery; or even more clearly in the reference in chapter 3 where the possibility is posed that “an enemy of the monastery should appear and try to take something and carry it away by violence...” (*Si certe aliquis insequitor monasterii accesserit et aliquid auferre*

that previous patterns of property ownership were breaking down, a process to which the monastic organisation contributed as well. After all, the very notion of irrevocable donations to a monastic community by an individual was directly opposed to the concept of undivided peasant patrimonies.

The peasant communities organized themselves as monasteries in an attempt to preserve their integrity. This 'a priori' needs to be demonstrated. A close reading of the *Regula communis* and the criticism it met, as well as of the *De Genere monachorum* by Valerius and the *Consensoria*, reveals that the motive to found these monasteries was not primarily a religious one, at least not 'religious' in the way a monastic profession required. The first criticism of the authors of *Regula communis* was that some had joined forces for fear of hell, and thus sought to gain more than was possible in the world outside; their behaviour was comparable to that of lay people and worldly princes (c.1). Of those who professed to the Rule, it was observed that many did not come to the monasteries through love of Christ, but were driven by weakness, rather than by religious considerations (c. 9). Allegedly, they were scared of impending death and anguished by illness, acting not from love of Heaven but out of fear of the punishments awaiting them in Hell (c. 18). From the more general chapters of the Rule it becomes clear that economic order was both of major importance and discipline difficult to impose. It was necessary to accommodate elements that did not fit monastic tradition: cohabitation of the sexes, family life, and the care of the helpless elderly of the community. It also transpires that the monastic space envisaged was not a unity, but a dispersed group of buildings - probably a village converted into a monastery.⁸⁷

What possible advantages could this have? In principle the arbitrarily formed monasteries are presented as a failure. However, the procedure seems to have become acceptable once some order was imposed. The formation of a monastic congregation fulfils this requirement in several ways. On the one hand, the acceptance of a discipline set by a bishop afforded legitimacy; this, and the Rule sustaining it, had the support of the clerical hierarchy. Given the fact that the diocesan bishop was also the bishop of Dumio, it was a system both favoured by tradition and by an ecclesiastical structure with tremendous economic power. To the church of Dumio, this was a convenient base for spreading the faith; submission to the Rule and a regular supervision of activities and discipline to some extent safeguarded unity of purpose and orthodoxy. To those who were part of these monasteries, organization meant stability. The support of Dumio was a guarantee against attempts at annexation on the part of the diocesan church and laymen alike (c. 3). Meanwhile, the old structure of kinship and even of neighbourhood could be maintained. Furthermore, and this was essential, these communities operated on a contractual basis. They were not governed by an externally imposed discipline, but by a discipline sustained by mutual agreement, which included the possibility of expulsion.

To all this we must add a phenomenon that may have been essential for the continuity of the community and the preservation of traditional concepts of property: the Christianisation of rural areas had a direct influence on customs relating to wills. The request that faithful Christians should yield a part of their inheritance to the Church - 'Christ's share' as St. Augustine called it -⁸⁸ or that the son who was a priest or monk should not be forgotten in the will, are to be found everywhere in late ancient Christian literature. We should also remember that a voluntary donation, seeking divine favour, would soon become a universal custom, which in turn was to become one of the main mechanisms for accumulating property on the part of churches and monasteries.⁸⁹ This undoubtedly altered strategies of inheritance; the church demanded documents proving rights of property, at times infringing upon local customs. By encouraging these kind of donations the church stemmed the flow of such legacies to the family. In practice, it broke up family property structures with a broad collective base. The foundation of monasteries

conauerit...).

⁸⁷ P.C. Díaz, *Formas económicas y sociales en el monacato visigodo* (Salamanca, 1987), pp. 90-4.

⁸⁸ Augustinus, *Sermo* 355, 4: 'Sed plane, si faciat quod saepe hortatus sum: unum filium habet, pentet Christum alterum; duos filios habet, putet Christum tertium; decem habet, Christum undecimum faciat, et suscipio.' Cf. J.Gaudemet, *L'Eglise dans l'Empire Romain (IV-V siècles)* (Paris, 1958) pp. 295-8, with reference also to Salvien of Marseilles (*Timothee ad ecclesiam Libri IV*).

⁸⁹ Díaz, *Formas económicas y sociales en el monacato visigodo*, pp. 45-7, where the case of Hispania is analyzed.

based on family or neighbourhood groups halted this process. It created a closed circuit of transfer of property and inheritance, thus impeding the disintegration of traditional structures and safeguarding the integrity of patrimonial property. This is why abandoning the monastery became an act especially condemned by the *Regula communis* as well as the *Pactum* and the *Consensoria*. The monastery became a defensive structure of the peasant community against innovations dictated by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The *Pactum* is crucial to this argument. This was a contractual document given to those who professed to monastic life, freely committed themselves on entering the monastery, which limited the authority of the community's superior, and therefore also that of the group of supervising abbots. The *Pactum* became a substitute for the customary law that governed the peasant community and gave it cohesion. In the model of such a *pactum* transmitted together with the *Regula communis* we find some examples of the original community rule inspiring these contracts. For example, after affirming that they would humbly accept their abbot's discipline in accordance with the Rule, and promising that they would follow his teaching, the text states that if 'someone grumbling against the Rule and your authority should be stubborn, disobedient or perverting the law, then we shall all have the power to meet in an assembly, and, after having read the Rule in the presence of everyone, to prove his guilt in public'.⁹⁰ To call upon a meeting of the entire community, on the initiative of the rank and file of the monks and in cases when the authority of the abbot was called into question, was not common in monastic rules, which usually upheld the principle of obedience and the disciplinary superiority of the abbot or his representatives. However, the *Pactum* did authorize the superior to act against any of the members of the community who, with the aid of a relative or another monk, had plotted secretly *contra regulam*; he could impose a solitary confinement of six months, with the monk being shorn and clad in penitential garb.⁹¹ If the culprit did not accept this, he was to be stripped, receiving 72 lashes, and, 'after having taken off his monastic habit, so he is undressed from [the clothes] he was dressed in upon his entry, he should be cut off from and expelled from the community with public shame' (*deposita ueste monasterii, indutus quod in introitu exutus est scissum notabili cum confusione a coenobio expellatur*).⁹² Expulsion was also prescribed by the *Regula communis* for the excommunicated who continuously persisted in their errors. This was expressed in similar terms: 'Taken into the meeting he should be divested of his monastic habit and clothed in the dress he once brought when he came from the world; had he should be expelled from the monastery with shameful notoriety' (*in conlatione deductus exuatur monasterii uestibus et induatur quibus olim adduxerat saecularibus; et eum confusionis nota a monasterio expellatur...*)⁹³. Given that a monastic profession was meant to be irrevocable, an expulsion was a drastic punishment in monastic tradition. It is contemplated, for example, two times in the *Regula Benedicti* (cc. 28 and 71), but it is unknown in Hispania out of the North-West pactual context.⁹⁴ Here, expulsion was a matter of the community protecting itself against errant members, according to the rules which had governed their peasant communities. Expulsion from the monastery resembled the exclusion from the neighbourhood group, or from the kin-group within which the individual received protection.

The opposite case, that of a monk who decides to leave the community because of some vice, is dealt with in a similar way. Once apprehended by the civil authorities he must immediately be subjected to the discipline of the Rule by his superior; if he seeks refuge elsewhere, he will be

⁹⁰ *Pactum*, ll. 683-5: '*aliquis ex nobis contra regulam et tuum praeceptum murmurans, contumax, inoboediens, uel calumniator, existeret tunc habeamus potestatem omnes in unum congregare, et lecta coram omnibus regula culpam publice probare.*'

⁹¹ *Pactum*, ll. 690-2: '*... per sex menses indutus tegmine raso aut cilicio, discinctus et discalceatus in solo pane et aqua in cella obscura exerceat quodlibet opus excommunicatis.*'

⁹² *Pactum*, ll. 694-6.

⁹³ *Regula communis* 14. The text foresees that the guilty party may try to defend himself with the aid of his relatives (*et cum propinquis se uindicare maluerit*), which agrees with the idea that expulsion is a punishment, separation from the community and its protection.

⁹⁴ The *Consensoria* also stated that monks could be expelled for compelling reasons. *Regula consensoria monachorum* 4: '*Sed si contingerit ut aliquis ex qualibet causa necessitatis a monasterio fuerit abstractus...*'

excommunicated without ever being reconciled, not even on his deathbed.⁹⁵ Significantly, those supposedly could give protection to the runaway monk were the ‘bishop, or someone under his authority, or a layman’ (*episcopus uel eius qui sequitur ordo, aut laicus*), which once more indicates a tension between a monastic congregation depending on a bishop-abbot, presumably the one of Dumio, on the one hand, and the rest of the bishops or at least some of them on the other. The contractual nature of the power structure within the community is also revealed at the end of the *Pactum*. If the abbot treats any of the monks unjustly, with pride or anger, or if he is guilty of favouritism, the monks have a right to be heard, and the superior must bow to the Rule (*in communi regula ceruicem humiliare et corripere et emendare*), and if he has no intention of mending his ways,

we shall also have the power to bring in the other monasteries, or at least to call to our meeting to our congress the bishop who lives according to the rule, or the count who is a catholic defender of the church, so that you shall mend your ways in their presence.⁹⁶

The fact that this *Pactum* has been transmitted together with the *Regula communis* has been taken as proof that this was the very *pactum* referred to in chapters 8 and 18 of the Rule. Whether the system of signing the contractual agreement of stability was already in existence when the Rule was drawn up, or whether it arose from some immediate need, or under pressure from rival forms of monasticism, is a matter for debate.⁹⁷ There is also doubt as to whether the text known as *Regula consensoria monachorum* is another model of pactual contract, and if so, which monasteries it applied to. For a while this text was considered a rule of Priscillianist monks. However, its structure, its references to the agreements entered into for the sake of stability and for the preservation of the order in the case of external attack, as well as the explicit reference that the text makes to itself as a *pactum*,⁹⁸ have lead scholars to think this was another contractual model that was not necessarily associated with the Dumian community. Bishko considered this text to be connected with a specific type of consensorial monastery,⁹⁹ which was perhaps on good terms with those represented by the *Regula communis*. After all, the latter was not condemned in the *Regula consensoria*, and the two texts have been transmitted in the same collections of monastic rules.¹⁰⁰ According to Bishko, the ‘consensorial’ monasteries represented an independent phenomenon, unrelated to the presbyterial or neighbourhood monasteries criticized in the *Regula communis*.¹⁰¹ These communities probably also had some pact; as such, Bishko identified the *iuramentum* or *sacramenti conditio* mentioned in the first chapter of the *Regula communis*.¹⁰² In Bishko’s view these monastic pacts were yet another example of the various ways in which monastic orthodoxy adapted to indigenous custom and vice versa,¹⁰³ but in no case should such oaths be treated as an example of ‘Germanism’ coming from Sueve or Visigothic influences, as many scholars are inclined to, taking Herwegen’s lead.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ *Pactum*, ll. 696-705.

⁹⁶ *Pactum*, ll. 705-717: ‘*tunc habeamus et nos potestatem cetera monasteria commouere aut certe episcopum qui sub regula uiuit uel catholicum ecclesiae defensorem comitem et aduocare ad nostram conlationem ut coram ipsis te corripias.*’

⁹⁷ A. Linage Conde, “La autoridad en el monacato visigodo”, *Ligarzas* 7 (1975), pp. 22-4; Bishko, “The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, pp. 20-3.

⁹⁸ *Regula consensoria monachorum* 6: ‘*quia non poterit proprie retinere quod per pactum ad omnes pertinere.*’

⁹⁹ Bishko, “The date and nature of the Spanish Consensoria Monachorum”, pp. 377-95.

¹⁰⁰ R. Arbesmann and W. Humfner, *Iordanis de Saxonia Liber Vitas Fratrum* (New York, 1943), pp. lxxvi-lxxvii, attribute the *Consensoria* to Fructuosus of Braga. However, G. Turbessi, *Regole monastiche antiche* (Roma, 1974), pp. 295-7, includes it in the monastic legislation of St. Augustine.

¹⁰¹ Herwegen, *Das Pactum des Hl Fructuosus von Bracara*, pp. 76-8, identified it as the pact of the monasteries condemned in chapter 1 of the *Regula communis*.

¹⁰² Bishko, “The date and nature of the Spanish *Consensoria Monachorum*”, p. 392; idem, “The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, p. 21.

¹⁰³ Bishko, “The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, pp. 23-4, although he considers that the nature of this indigenous substratum has not yet been determined.

¹⁰⁴ Herwegen, *Das Pactum des Hl Fructuosus von Bracara*, p. 26, nn. 1 and 2.

The *Regula communis* and the *Pactum* both clarify the nature of the relationship between monastic communities ‘proper’, and those supervised by the bishop-abbot and the congress of abbots. The latter represented an agreement between powers and a mutual acceptance of discipline and doctrine, in exchange for the maintenance, in as far as possible, of older conceptions of power, based on the structures of kinship and the social environment from which such communities arose. This type of monastic association would enable local communities to preserve some of their former group cohesion, with the support of the ecclesiastical authorities of Dumio or of Dumio/Braga and the lay powers in the region.

The chapters of the Rule reveal how collective tasks, previously taken care of by the rural community, were now undertaken by the monastery. The Rule foresees, as an important task, the reception and care of the elderly and sick, the care of children, and furthermore unusual tasks such as the redemption of captives, which should probably be seen in the light of the climate of violence that the Rule itself reflect, and especially the *Consensoria*.¹⁰⁵

Seen from this perspective, the monasteries of the *Regula communis* incorporated earlier structures of peasant power, which were then associated in a monastic confederation and sponsored by the abbey/bishopric of Dumio in what the Rule calls *nostra ecclesia* (c. 20), a device which, despite certain restrictions, allowed these communities to keep their own identity, turning them into a powerful network within *Gallaecia* in the second half of the seventh century. This confederate and ‘pactual’ structure enabled these members of these monastic communities and the members of former peasant communities to withstand the might of the large landowners and the diocesan church, which, by contrast, founded the presbyterial monasteries denounced in the Rule’s second chapter. According to this text, the presbyterial monasteries encouraged defections and would receive and protect those who had abandoned the monastic communities subject to the discipline of the *Sancta communis regula*. This conflict probably reflects the crisis and social polarisation of Visigothic society during those final years of the monarchy.¹⁰⁶

It is rather difficult to determine the success of the monasteries following the *Regula communis*. Towards the end of the seventh century, Valerius at great length condemned monastic communities consisting of families and their serfs. Most likely he not only had the monasteries criticized by the *Regula communis* in mind, but also those sponsored by this very Rule. Despite occasional disagreement, the strategy of turning local communities into monasteries seems to have been sufficiently effective to withstand ecclesiastical resistance and local aristocracies. In the whole of northern Hispania, ‘neighbourhood’ and family monasteries organized in this way proliferated during the Reconquest, which probably slowed down the introduction of a manorial system.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ P.C. Díaz, “Redimuntur captiui. A propósito de Regula Communis IX”, *Gerion* 10 (1992), pp. 287-93. About the liberation of captives as a constant theme in Merovingian and early Carolingian hagiography, see F. Graus, “Die Gewalt bei den Anfängen des Feudalismus und die “Gefangenenbefreiung” der merowingischen Hagiographie”, *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1 (1961), pp. 61-156. About children and their care in Western monasteries, see Mayke de Jong, In Samuel’s Image. Child oblation in the Early Medieval West (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1996), pp. .

¹⁰⁶ Bishko, “The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, p. 22, who also believes that the neighbourhood monasteries were encouraged by the diocesan clergy at odds with Dumio, which is more difficult to sustain.

¹⁰⁷ Ch.J. Bishko, “Gallegan Pactual Monasticism in the Repopulation of Castille”, *Estudios dedicados a Menéndez Pidal, vol. II* (Madrid, 1951), pp. 513-31; published with an “Additional Note” in *Spanish and Portuguese monastic history, 600-1300* (London, 1984), pp. 513-31 and 532A-36A; idem, “The Pactual Tradition in Hispanic Monasticism”, pp. 25-43; J. Orlandis, “Los monasterios familiares en Hispania durante la Alta Edad Media”, *Estudios sobre instituciones monásticas medievales*, pp. 125-64. More recently J.M. Mínguez, “Ruptura social e implantación del feudalismo en el Noroeste peninsular (Siglos VIII-X)”, *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval* 3 (1985), pp. 7-32.