FOUNDING AND INEFFABLE IDENTITIES:
PELAGIUS, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

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ABSTRACT

Raguel’s *Vita vel passio sancti Pelagii* (c. 967) and Hroswitha of Gandersheim’s poem (10th century) devoted to Pelagius are keywords for the creation of an European literary and symbolic space against Muslims. Both texts were born in a crossroad of religious, political and sexual passions. This article analyses their foundational status in order to understand Christian first *imaginaire* related to the construction of a virile “Reconquista”, which will underline, in literature and historiography, feminine and sodomitic features in many Jew and Muslim men (but also suspicious Christian) in Iberian Middle Ages.

KEYWORDS

*Vita vel passio sancti Pelagii*, Raguel, Hroswitha of Gandersheim, Pelagius, Medieval Homoeroticism.

CAPITALIA VERBA

*Vita vel passio sancti Pelagii*, Raguel, Hrotsvitha Gandeshemensis, Pelagius, Homoerotismus mediaevalis.
1.

The *Vita vel passio sancti Pelagii* —or *Pasión de San Pelagio*— is a hagiographic story composed, very probably before 967, by a Mozarab Jewish scribe known as Raguel, in very rhythmic Latin prose, which tells the story of the life, martyrdom and death of a Christian boy who died in the Cordoban court of the Emir Abd-ar-Rahman III at the age of thirteen and a half, around 925 —between the reigns of Ordoño II (914-924) and Alfonso IV of Leon (925-931)—, as a result of his refusal to recant and accept the sexual approaches of the future caliph. It is a brief piece that has enjoyed a modest but permanent diffusion, as confirmed by four sixth century manuscripts (including the *Pasionario II de Cardeña* and the *Pasionario de Silos*) and codices from the eighth century, as well as five prints dated before the twentieth century (from 1574, 1610, 1709, 1766 and 1893), and the most recent editions, notable among which are those prepared by Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz (1969), Juan Gil (1972) and, especially, the one by Celso Rodríguez Fernández (1991).  

The version that would seem to be truest to the lost original is not the oldest of those cited, but rather the factitious codex of large format from the first third of the thirteenth century, stored in the Archive of the Cathedral of Tuy —that occupies from the page 182r (col. b) to 184r (col. a)—. This circumstance and location were much more casual than usual, as generally acknowledged, bearing in mind that Ermogius, Pelagius’ uncle, was the bishop there and who, to recover the freedom he lost after the Battle of Valdejuntas (920), won by Abd-ar-Rahman III, left the boy as a hostage in the Cordoban prisons, where he remained for three and a half years. According to Celso Rodríguez,

1. I prefer “Pelagius” to “Pelayo” to distinguish our saint from other homonymous historical characters who are as well or better known (although, as is observed in the following note, the editors of the text we deal with opted, with good logic, by calling him “Pelayo”): King Pelayo, who is mentioned at the start of the “Reconquista” (eighth century), and Pelayo the bishop of Oviedo from 1101 to 1128, whose name derives from the extensive *Corpus Pelagianum*. I will deal with the king below; for the Asturian bishop, see: Bodelón, Serafín. *Literatura latina de la Edad Media en España*. Madrid: Akal, 1989: 113-17. On the other hand, the name “Pelagio” was not an unknown anthroponym in medieval Castilian, as shown by the spread of the worship of at least two other martyr saints: Pelagia of Antioch and Pelagia of Tarsus, as stated in the *Vida de Santa Pelagia*, edited by Ana Mª Rodado Ruiz and included in: Connolly, Jane E.; Deyermond, Alan; Dutton, Brian, eds. *Saints and their Authors: Studies in Medieval Hispanic Hagiography in Honor of John K. Walsh*. Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1990: 169-80.

2. Abd-ar-Rahman III ruled between 912 and 961, but adopted the title of “Caliph” from 929.

This foundation would be complemented with the writing of our *Passio*, which favoured a progressive consolidation of the worship of the martyrs in Galicia, Leon, Asturias and northern Portugal.

Both the monastic foundation and the textual foundation would be the first steps that served for his body, divided and buried in Cordoba (his head was buried in the cemetery of San Cipriano and his body in that of San Ginés), to be moved to Leon in 967, where King Sancho had ordered the building of a monastery dedicated to him. His remains were conserved in Oviedo from 995 in another Benedictine monastery, which would be called San Pelayo. As I see it, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the *Passio sancti Pelagii* was commissioned to ensure the remains of the saint were deposited in Tuy cathedral, through a timely indirect legitimation of its rights, something that was not achieved due to the warlike dynamic of that century, that meant that Asturias was a safer territory than the south of Galicia. Bear in mind that in the summer of 997, seventy years after the events narrated in the *Passio*, Almanzor’s army razed Santiago de Compostela. The spiritual fascination exerted by the bodies of saints on medieval Christian imaginary is well known, as is the material functionality that their relics played in favour of the faith and the coffers of its institutions. As Isabel Velázquez writes,

> _La llegada de reliquias de un santo —y en la Edad Media llegó a tener una importancia extraordinaria esta circulación de reliquias, multiplicándose y dando lugar a falsificaciones, proliferaciones de huesos, fragmentos de vestidos, etc.— traía aparejada la fabricación de relatos en torno a ellas, de milagros, así como una cierta reclamación o exigencia de noticias en torno al santo cuya reliquia se traía, sobre todo si éste —o sus reliquias— procedían de lugares lejanos. De esta forma, de una liturgia martirial, conmemorativa del santo en su_}

4. “Alveos, in the dioceses of Tuy, municipality of Creciente [Pontevedra], there is the conviction from time immemorial that Pelayo was born there to landowning parents and that, the death of the adolescent, one of the properties of their family was the site of a Benedictine monastery, founded by his uncle Ermogius, the bishop of Tuy, *in memoriam* his nephew, recently martyred”. Gil, Juan. _La pasión de S. Pelayo..._: 13, n. 4.

5. For an introduction to the figure and epoch of Almanzor, see the papers collected in De la Casa Martínez, Carlos; Martínez Hernando, Yolanda, eds. _Cuando las horas primeras... En el milenario de la Batalla de Calatañazor_. Soria: Universidad internacional Alfonso VIII. 2004.

6. Not exclusively medieval: “Sólo en 1925, año en que se celebró el milenio de su muerte, se extrajo de la urna de Oviedo una reliquia, un cúbito, con autorización del Papa Pío XI —después de la prohibición de Pío VII en 1804 de conceder a nadie más reliquias de Pelayo— para donarla a Tuy, que la guarda en su Catedral, en la Capilla de S. Telmo. Otras reliquias de S. Pelayo las tienen: Córdoba, desde 1758; las benedictinas de Santiago de Compostela; y, a título privado, desde 1942, P. Argimiro Hidalgo, residente en un piso de jesuitas jubilados de la plaza de S. Marcos de Oviedo (“Only in 1925, the millennium of his death was celebrated, a relic, a cubit, was removed from the urn in Oviedo with the authorisation of Pope Pius XI —after the prohibition by Pius VII in 1804 against conceding more relics of Pelayo to anyone—to give to Tuy, where it is kept in the Chapel of S. Telmo in the Cathedral. Other relics of Pelayo are in Cordoba, since 1758, the Benedictines of Santiago de Compostela and, privately, since 1942, by P. Argimiro Hidalgo, resident in a flat of retired Jesuits in the Plaza de S. Marcos in Oviedo”)”. Gil, Juan. _La pasión de S. Pelayo..._: 16, n. 12. For the popular worship of saints in the Middle Ages, consult: Brown, Peter. _The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity_. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
The martyrdom of Pelagius had an unprecedented echo in European lands, as shown by the poem dedicated to him by the Saxon Benedictine Hroswitha (c. 935-c. 999), canoness of the convent of Gandersheim—in fact, an autonomous principality with its own court and army, linked to the Germanic imperial family. However, this is not a narration in prose like the one by Raguel, but rather a more extensive composition of four-hundred and thirteen Latin hexameters, with higher doses of artifice, not only at the formal level. The poem by Hroswitha of Gandersheim is not based on the Mozarab text, but rather on an oral testimony (perhaps some of the members of one of the two missions that Abd-ar-Rahman III sent to the court of Otto the Great, or the one he sent to Cordoba, in the mid tenth century). As the author indicates in the text that links her corpus of legends (together with the one dedicated to Pelagius, it includes those of Mary, the Ascension, Gongolf, Theophilus, Basilius, Dionysius and Agnes) to her dramatic works, the events she narrates were presented by someone from Cordoba, who assured her he had seen Pelagius. Despite this, the critics consider Raguel’s Passio a more reliable account, as he claims to have listened to the testimonies of the martyr’s fellow prisoners—with which gives him greater proximity, even more so if we accept that he was himself from Cordoba.

7. “The arrival of the relics of a saint—and in the Middle Ages this circulation of relics grew to be of extraordinary importance, multiplying and giving rise to falsifications, proliferations of bones, fragments of clothing, etc.—brought with it the fabrication of tales about them, of miracles, as well as a certain reclamation or demand for news about the saint whose relic was brought, everything about if this—or his relics—came from distant places. This way, from a martyr liturgy, commemorating the saint in his tomb, it went to a cultural liturgy that penetrated into the reading in the churches (lectio sacra), together with the readings from the Holy Scriptures (lectio divina). This fact generated the need to group the passions into a book for liturgical purposes”. Velázquez, Isabel. Hagiografía y culto a los santos en la Hispania visigoda. Aproximación a sus manifestaciones literarias. Mérida: Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2002: 105. Despite the clear differences in this process with what our text suggests, obvious parallels can be established.

8. As will have been observed, in Galicia, Leon and Asturias as well as in Germanic lands, it was Benedictine convents that were linked to the worship of Pelagius.


10. We should keep in mind that the only explicit mention of Raguel appears in the Pasionario by Cardeña cited at the start: Se pronuncia en los siguientes términos: Raguel presbiter doctor fuit huius passionis cordobensis. Aunque este aserto no decide definitivamente la cuestión de la autoría, porque el gentilicio cordobensis puede concordar aquí no con presbiter o doctor sino con passionis lo que indicaría simplemente que la pasión y muerte de Pelayo se dio en Córdoba, sin embargo, mientras no haya ulteriores descubrimientos contrarios al informe del caradigense, es noble y justo que aceptemos como datos históricos genuinos el nombre de Raguel y su pertenencia al presbiterio de Córdoba (“It is pronounced in the following terms: Raguel presbiter doctor fuit huius passionis cordobensis. Although this assertion does not definitively decide the question of authorship, because the name cordobensis can tally here not with presbiter or doctor but rather passionis, which would simply indicate the passion and death of Pelayo happened in Cordoba, however, while there are no ulterior discoveries contrary to the report of the Cardeña text, it is noble and just that we accept the name of Raguel and his membership of the presbytery of Cordoba as genuine historical data”). Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 17-18.
However, it is interesting to note that Hroswitha grants greater prominence to Pelagius than Raguel does, as, in line with the Benedictine’s story, it would have been the martyr who offered himself as a hostage instead of his father. In other words, while the Mozarabic author subordinates him to his uncle, the bishop of Tuy, who left the niño in captivity, Hroswitha emphasises all the aspects that highlight his adult personality in the first part of her work and, throughout the second half, all those actions that not only affect his martyrdom but that also favour an image full of saintliness, even, as is logical, through miracles prior to his cruel death (absent in Raguel’s Passio). In this sense, Hroswitha’s poem would be closer to the sub-genre of the vidas than to the pasiones de santos, while Raguel would have known the typology and doctrinal contents of the latter perfectly, as martyrs do not need miracles to be sanctified.11

The same direct witness would have assured Hroswitha that Pelagius was el más bello de los hombres.12 It was very probably this immaculate and superlative beauty, combined with the emotive impact of the direct witness, which awoke our author’s interest and that encouraged her to add him to her collection, bearing in mind that all her legends featured men and women of extreme beauty, a common aspect of the pasiones and vidas de santos, but which it pleased her to recreate and extend in many ways. The same would serve to strengthen the ideal of virginity Pelagius embodied. It is worth noting that, in accordance with Peter Dronke:

\[\text{El intento del califa por seducir al chico cristiano (Pel. 227-270) aparece representado con perspicacia y atrevido realismo; sus palabras al reticente Pelagio —o lascive puer, iactas te posse licenter / spernere— están a la altura de la Antología griega.}^{13}\]

This attempt at seduction seems to be a calculated colonial look, avant la lettre, or, at least, a projection of the Benedictine’s aristocratic imagination, who in verses 219-223 has Abd-ar-Rahman III order the youth freed from his cruel chains, his body purified by washing with clean water and, after the bath, his limbs covered with a purple robe and his neck decorated with jewels and precious stones, so that

11. “In fact, the martyr accredits himself sufficiently as saved, as a saint, without miracles, as maiorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis (Ioh 10,13); [...] in the cases of martyrdom there are canonisations without a prior exam of the miracles”. Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo,...: 249.
12. “the most beautiful of men”. Dronke, Peter. Las escritoras de la Edad Media, Jordi Ainaud, trans. Barcelona: Crítica, 1995: 88. A good part of the criticism about the works of Hroswitha has concentrated on her dramatic work and less on her hagiographic legends, like the one dedicated to Pelagius. It is equally interesting to underline the recent studies that have analysed the classical sources the author used and the pieces featuring women, as stated in the otherwise indispensable monograph by Dronke (see the chapter he dedicates, Dronke, Peter. Las escritoras...: 86-123) or in the one by: Rivera Garretas, María-Milagros. Textos y espacios de mujeres. Europa, siglos IV-XV. Barcelona: Icaria, 1990: 81-104.
13. “The caliph’s attempt to seduce the Christian boy (Pel. 227-270) is depicted with perspicacity and daring realism; his words to the reticent Pelagius —o lascive puer, iactas te posse licenter / spernere— are at the level of the Greek Anthology”. Dronke, Peter. Las escritoras...: 94-95. With this “Oh, silly boy, you boast of being able to refuse me at your craving”, the British scholar refers thematically to some of the homoerotic poems in Book XII of the Antología palatina, compiled in the tenth century by Constantine Cephalas. See: Galán Vioque, Guillermo; Márquez Guerrero, Miguel Ángel, trans. Epigramas eróticos griegos. Antología palatina (Libros V y XII). Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001: 135-206.
he could be presented as a knight in the splendour of the palace. And then to try to steal an impossible passionate kiss from him, with which to procure a response that could not be more typical of a Christian martyr (conveniently filtered through the distinguished verses of Hroswitha):

No es digno de un hombre purificado con el bautismo de Cristo 
etregar su cuello inmaculado a un amor bárbaro, 
ni de un cristiano ungido con el santo óleo 
ser seducido por el beso inmundo asociado al demonio. 
Por eso, abraza lícitamente a los estúpidos, 
a los locos y a los ricos, que retozan contigo sobre el césped; 
permite a los esclavos que son tus ídolos que sean tus amigos.

2.

As with most of the pieces included in the hagiographic sub-genre of the passions of saints, the Passio sancti Pelagii by Raguel is a

relato muy estructurado y dirigido a múltiple fin: paidéutico, o de instrucción, sobre todo teológico-dogmática, parenético, o de exhortación moral, y homonoiético, o de consecución y mantenimiento de la unidad ideológico-religiosa.

The most extensive part would be the narratio (after the descriptive title and the proem, before the epilogue), which occupies over three quarters of the text in this case. Pelagius is presented as enlightened by God, happy with the fate his uncle procures for him by leaving him as a hostage in the Cordoban prison, where he dedicates himself to the purification of his sins —although, let it not be forgotten, he was only ten years old. The narrator describes his behaviour as castus, sobrius, quietus, cautus, orationibus uigil, lectioni assiduus, dominicorum preceptorum non inmemor;


15. “It is not meet that a man cleansed in the Baptism of Christ submit his chaste neck to a barbarous embrace; nor should a worshipper of Christ who has been anointed with sacred Chrism court the kiss of a lewd slave of the demon. Therefore do thou, with heart unrestrained, embrace these ignorant men who with thee/ attempt to appease stupid gods of clay; let those be/ thy companions, who are servants of an idol”. See the analysis of these verses by: Tolan, John V. Sarracenos. El Islam en la imaginación medieval europea. Valencia: Publicaciones de la Universitat de València, 2007: 140-43.

16. “very structured story and one aimed at various ends: paidéutico, or instruction, especially theological-dogmatic, parenético, or of moral exhortation, and homonoiético, or of achieving and maintaining the ideological and religious unity”. Rodríguez Fernández, Celso. “Tipología estructural y contaminación genérica en las ‘Pasiones’”, Actas del II Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval (Segovia, 1987), José Manuel Lucía Megías, Paloma Gracia Alonso, Carmen Martín Daza, eds. Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 1992: II: 723-44, the quote on 731.
bonis colloquiis ascitor, malorum expers, risui non facilis […] sollers erat in lectione ac facilis in doctrina.\textsuperscript{17}

This portrait highlights his profoundly humble nature through the inevitable amplificatio, but at the same time, does not impede him from disputing and settling the most heterodox spiritual discussions (that anticipate the contents of his dispute with the emir). This is the conduct that augurs his future martyrdom and which is reflected in the beauty typical of Heaven that adorns him,\textsuperscript{18} a body that he continually purifies with the aim of preparing his heavenly abode, which he should enjoy as a husband in his union with Christ, his preceptor.\textsuperscript{19}

It is worth highlighting that this description of external beauty, although typical of the hagiographic literature as an ideological projection of spiritual beauty, painted a portrait that would be fundamental in the following scenes, given that this fairness—accentuated by such a hostile setting as the prison thanks to the practice of all the virtues—reflects a purity that was explicitly sexual before his meeting with the emir, as a consequence of his association with the implicit poverty and “virginity” that anticipates his clash with the “riches” and the “vices” of enemies that were associated explicitly with the devil. The depiction of the Cordoban court as the epicentre of the material luxury is no stranger in Hispano-Latin hagiography. For example, almost a century before, Saint Eulogius of Cordoba dedicated the first chapter of the second book of his \textit{Memorial de los santos}, to the \textit{Presbítero y mártir cordobés Perfecto}, who he had described in an attack on the mistreatment inflicted on the Christians. In fact, around 850-856, Saint Eulogius sketched out the following about his home town during the rule of Abd-ar-Rahman II, who

\begin{quote}
la había encumbrado en lo más alto, enaltecido con honores, dilatado en gloria, colmado de riquezas y aumentado enormemente con abundancia de todas las exquisitencias del mundo, más allá de lo que se puede creer o decir, de suerte que excedió, superó y venció en cualquier fasto mundano a los anteriores reyes de su linaje, mientras que bajo su pesadísimo yugo la Iglesia católica gemía y era azotada hasta su destrucción.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Gil, Juan \textit{La pasión de S. Pelayo}…: 46-49, lines 37-41. Regarding Pelagius’ lack of proclivity for laughter, this was a very widespread virtue in the epoch: see, Alexander, Pedro M. “La prohibición de la risa en la ‘Regula Benedicti’. Intento de explicación e interpretación”. \textit{Regulae Benedicti Studia}, 5 (1976), 225-88 (cited in: Gil, Juan. \textit{La pasión de S. Pelayo}…).

\textsuperscript{18} Quis uero talem indolem plausibus non preferret quem species iam paradisigena prerogatiue decoratet. Gil, Juan. \textit{La pasión de S. Pelayo}…: 50-51, lines 46-47.

\textsuperscript{19} Purificans quoque uas suum, exercens habitaculum in quo post paululum ut sponsus letaretur. Gil, Juan. \textit{La pasión de S. Pelayo}…: 50-54, lines 49-50.

\textsuperscript{20} “had exalted it in the highest, exalted honours, dilated in glory, full of wealth and increased greatly in the abundance of all the delicacies in the world, beyond what one can believe or say, so that he exceeded, overcame and defeated the previous kings of his lineage in worldly pomp, while under his very heavy yoke, the Catholic Church moaned and was beaten to destruction”. San Eulogio de Córdoba, \textit{Obras completas}, trans. Pedro Herrera Roldán. Madrid, 2005: 101-02. About the political and religious meaning of the martyrdoms described in this \textit{Memorial}, see the introduction, especially San Eulogio de Córdoba, \textit{Obras completas}…: 30-33.
Thus, less than a century after the religious clashes that appear in the *Memorial de los santos*, Pelagius would face the heirs of those same Cordoban Muslims who Perfecto had faced up to while he accused their prophet of *protector de la inmundicia y esclavo de placeres voluptuosos (quien) os ha entregado a todos a las impurezas de una perenne lujuria.*\(^{21}\) Evidently, Pelagius was no priest, but his indoctrination was as deep as it was faultless through immaculate; nor was he an adult, but his youth was secondary to his moral stature. An identical maturity can traced to many previously compiled *pasiones* of child martyrs, like those that Saint Eulogius incorporated in his work, also later, like, to cite a single example, the life of Saint Aurea, willingly imprisoned and walled up, between the ages of 9 and 27 (when she died), refounded by Gonzalo de Berceo in the mid thirteenth century from a story in Latin composed by Munio, a monk in San Millán, in the eleventh century.\(^{22}\)

The child saints are presented in many texts from this epoch as the most powerful symbols of an impossible innocence, because it is the doctrine of their elders, and as paths to unwavering perfection that surpass the virtues of their adult relatives: Aurea surpassed her more than exemplary parents Amuña and Garcia and Pelagius surpassed his uncle Ermogius, the bishop who accompanied the royal host in the battle against the infidels.

However, in the case of Pelagius, Raguel introduces a timely *third age*, that of early adolescence, with the aim of transforming him into an object of desire for Abd-ar-Rahman III: his physical perfection, although a metaphor for his spirit, can only be reified (and never understood in this dual plane) by he who held the highest political and religious power among Muslims of al-Andalus and his palace court, some of whose members convey to him the extraordinary beauty of the captive, a fact that is already in itself a frontal attack, and as elemental as that derived from simple stupidity:

\[
\text{Atque sic stulti homines et veritatis nescii eius formam gurgitibus uitiorum putabant obruere,}
\]
\[
\text{quam idem Dominus noster inter sanctorum uirginum corus suis a dextris pollicebatur stare,}
\]
\[
\text{non utique intellegentes miseri Domino non posse contraire.}^{23}\]

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\(^{21}\) “Protector of the uncleanness and slave to the voluptuous pleasures (who) hath given all over to the impurities of perennial lust”. San Eulogio de Córdoba, *Obras completas...*: 103.

\(^{22}\) As Isabel Uría Maqua analyses: *La exaltación que hace el poeta de las mortificaciones, ayunos y vigilias de santa Oria (ver las coplas 16cd, 19-20, 24-26 y 115) sirve, en efecto, para justificar el alto galardón de las visiones, implicando con ello la doctrina del premio infalible, que Dios conde a los que le son fieles y se mortifican por Él* (“The poet’s exaltation of the Saint’s Oria mortifications, fasts and vigils (see coplas 16cd, 19-20, 24-26 and 115) serves, in effect, to justify the high award what visions are, thereby implying the doctrine about the infallible reward, which God grants to those who are faithful to Him and mortify by Him”). Uría Maqua, Isabel. *Mujeres visionarias de la Edad Media: Oria y Amuña en Berceo*. Salamanca: Seminario de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas, 2004: 11. By the same scholar, see her edition of the *Poema de Santa Oria* in Gonzalo de Berceo. *Gonzalo de Berceo*. Obrá completa, ed. Isabel Uría Maqua. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1992: 497-551.

\(^{23}\) Gil, Juan. *La pasión de S. Pelayo...*: 56-59, lines 65-68.
This was an unhealthy and malign ignorance, encouraged by the devil, who had also tempted the purified child, naturally with no chance of success: *ille anticus hostis suis cristatus nequitis cum inreitre nunc aperte, nunc tacite conabatur.*  

If we accept the compartmentalisation of the ages of his life proposed by Saint Isidore of Seville, our martyr would have spent almost the last three and a half years of his *pueritia* (between the ages of 7 and 14) in the Cordoban prison and would have been about to enter the *adulescentia* (from 14 to 21). The emir’s impure desires for Pelagius’ body are thus constructed as the antithesis of the sense that bodily purification acquires for the martyr himself. When the emir orders Pelagius brought before him at the start of the banquet, he is masterfully transformed into a luxury delicacy, beautiful despite his afflictions in prison, dressed regally, exposed to the gaze of all the courtesans and, especially, to that of Abd-ar-Rahman, who immediately quantifies his value and lays before him the best offer in exchange for the worst of resignations, a transcript of Jesus’ temptations in the desert:


Renouncing his Christian faith goes with freedom, individual and collective, and is equated with power and wealth, but that equally anticipates, through a certain ellipsis, what is expected from Pelagius in exchange: that he became one of the emir’s “young men” to serve him as he likes, according to his principles, as he, with the new rank he would be invested with, could be served. The chain of services is accepted in purely hierarchical logic, apparently secondary, but essential to satisfy the pleasure for which he is paid a salary: the price of the luxuries that are bought, displayed and consumed in the Cordoban court without further delay, as corresponds to his status: *Córdoba, “ornato del mundo” como la definiera la poetisa sajona Hroswitha, rivalizaba en cuanto prestigio with Kairuán y las metrópolis del Oriente musulmán por una parte, y Constantinopla por la otra.*  

This was an offer of assimilation that was not only religious, but also cultural, one that most Christian youths of the time would probably not have rejected if

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25. Le Goff, Jacques; Truong, Nicolas. *Una historia del cuerpo en la Edad Media*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2005: 80 (original French edition form 2003). Regarding Pelagius’ time in prison, we should not dismiss Celso Rodríguez’s suspicion according to which it would reflect “the symbolic number that the apocalyptic genre attributes to all persecutions: three years and six months; forty-two months; or once, twice and half a time (Dan 7,25; Lc 4,25; St 5,17; Ap 11,2; 12,6.14)”. Gil, Juan. *La pasión de S. Pelayo...*: 55, n. 60.


we accept the apocalyptic panorama described in the mid ninth century by Pablo Álvaro de Córdoba:

Los cristianos aman los poemas y romances de los árabes; estudian a los teólogos y filósofos árabes, no para refutarlos, sino para formarse en un árabe correcto y elegante. ¿Dónde se encuentra el laico que lee ahora los comentarios latinos sobre las sagradas Escrituras, o que estudie los Evangelios, los Profetas o los Hechos de los Apóstoles? ¡Ay! Todos los jóvenes talentos cristianos leen y estudian con entusiasmo los libros árabes; ellos tienen grandes bibliotecas muy costosas; ellos desprecian la literatura cristiana merecedora de poca atención. Han olvidado su propia lengua. Por uno que sabe escribir una carta en latín a un amigo, existen centenares que saben expresarse con elegancia en árabe y escriben poemas en esta lengua mejor que los propios árabes.28

However, for reasons of genre (hagiographic), Pelagius cannot be like the immense majority of boys and youths, but rather the exception that confirms the rules of child martyrs, as Raguel has suggested from the start of his story. Thus, the fulminant doctrinal lesson should come as no surprise to us:

Que uero sanctus Pelagius uniuersea despiciens ac ridenda esse intelligens, “hec”, ait, “que demonstras, o rex, nihil sunt, et Christum non negabo. Christianus sum, fui et ero. Nam hec omnia finem habent et cum suis spatiiis transeunt. Porro Christum quem ego colo, nescit habere finem quia nec initium ullum; ipse namque est qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto unus permanet Deus, qui nos ex nihilo fecit et uniuersea potestate continet.29

This seamless presentation is as clear as it is lacking in originality, as it offers a reasoning shared by many theological and hagiographic pieces. Its aim would be to reaffirm the martyr’s faith, and, in passing, that of those who read or listened to the *passio*, and his contempt for the worldly goods from the first person singular, as we had not heard the *voice* of Pelagius until this moment. Here shines a perfect educational exhibition, centred on the oneness and trinity of the divinity (father, son and holy ghost), in the divinity of Jesus Christ and the definition of God as creator and Lord.30

Raguel knew how to calculatedly intensify the dialogue and actions of this central episode and took advantage of the occasion so that, just at this moment, after the

28. “The Christians love the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them, but to train in a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries about the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, the Prophets or the Acts? ¡Ay! All the young Christian talents read and study the Arab books with enthusiasm; they have great, very costly libraries; they despise the Christian literature as worthy of little attention. They have forgotten their own language. For each one who knows how to write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are hundreds who know how to express themselves elegantly in Arabic and write poems in this language better than the Arabs themselves”. Tolan, John V. *Sarracenos...*: 117. About this episode, see also the approach by: Menocal, María Rosa. *La joya del mundo. Musulmanes, judíos y cristianos, y la cultura de la tolerancia*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2003: 78-82.
orthodox confirmation of the child’s faith, the emir started his physical approach, using the “touching”, which were heterodox as erotic. Like the Pelagius of Hroswitha of Gandersheim, the reaction of Raguel’s Pelagius would be defined through a trio of moral and sexual antitheses: luxuria carnis/castitas, superbia/humilitas and saevitas/temperantia, as Katharina M. Wilson set out with regard to the former. This tension is what justifies, for the first and only time in the work, Raguel to humanise his character through separate insults, an unexpected reaction that places the future martyr in the area of the superbia and the saevitas in defence of his castitas: Tolle, canis, inquid Sanctus Pelagius. Numquid me similem tuis effeminatum existimas?

According to Celso Rodríguez, “dog” and “effeminate”, as well as a “reaction discordant with his condition of quietus (line 37)”, would show an exaggeration with an “epic” flavour, like the “denigration of the vulgarity of the vices of the persecutor (lines 92-93)” a passage with “narrativising, or fictionalising” purposes.

So it seems, of course, but it is also worth noting that both insults concentrate the final thrust of the story and final sexual sense of the plot, because the unusual verbal offence is extended in a scene of great dramatic force where the exposure, visual and written, of Pelagius’ body dramatically enhances all its meanings through the reiteration of the doctrinal message:

Et ilico uestimenta ibi que indutus erat scidit et fortem in palestra se alletam constituit, eligens digne pro Christo mori quam turpiter cum diabolo uiuere et uitiis inquinari. Quem uero adhuc suaderi rex existimans, suis precepti tironibus ut eum suasoribus delinirent lenocinis, si forte apostatando tantis adquiescerit regalibus pompis. Sed ille, Deo adiuuante, fortis stetit et intrepidus permansit, Christum esse solummodo predicans eiusque per secuala preceptis obsecundare se dicens.

The tearing of the Muslim robes he had been forced to wear for his audience with Abd-ar-Rahman supposes, in the literal sense, rejection of the riches he had been offered. However, naturally, it metaphorises the impossibility of his religious dedication (apostasy) and sexual (the touchings): in this passage, Raguel managed to combine the renewed proclamation of the dogma of the faith by Pelagius with a view of his naked body, which is what continues to feed the emir’s lust and his order for his “young ones to seduce him with persuasive flatteries”. Despite his words, or precisely for this “firm” conjugation of gestures and words, Pelagius ended up

32. “Characterization, as well as thematic development, thrives on moral opposites. Pagans are characterized by sensuality (luxuria carnis), pride (superbia), and cruelty (saevitas); in contrast, Christians are marked by chasteness (castitas), humility (humilitas), and gentleness and self-control (temperantia). Very frequently, these character delineations occur along sexual lines: the villains are the male pagan persecutors, the heroines frail Christian virgins”. Wilson, Katharina M. “Hrotsvit of Gandersheim”, Medieval Women Writers, Katharina M. Wilson, ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984: 30-63, cited on 37.
33. Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 66-69, lines 92-93.
34. Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 22.
himselves as a body: his beautiful body, strong like that of an “athlete”, that materially expresses the tanned beauty in the spiritual “arena” of his faith in Christ, could not give in either to the “devil” or the “vices”. So he would end up being transformed into a martyrised body, torn like the robes that he himself had destroyed, through a parallelism neither innocent nor indecent, as Pelagius well knows and desires the fate that awaits him.

The last third of the Passio sancti Pelagii (lines 99-145) thus concentrates on the story of the martyrdom and death of the boy. Note that, in fact, the scenes with sexual content, while still of momentous importance, occupy a rather reduced space in the work as a whole (lines 61-101). This is because the narration of the tormenting of the martyr was so essential in the narratio of this hagiographic sub-genre as the prior presentation, in the majority of occasions limited to the presentation of the unshakable faith of each protagonist with some touches about their surroundings to individualise them.

In the case of Pelagius, the emir appears “pricked by rage” on being “rejected in his desires”: this reaction from the emir is especially interesting, as it seems to suggest that his ira stimulatus would derive less from its religious-political sense than the strictly sexual (in suis se desideriis spretum esse intelligens) and, by extension, from the content of his desire as well as the origin of the punishment imposed on Pelagius36. Abd-ar-Rahman orders him hung from some “iron sheaves” and when he sees that the terrible pain is not enough to make him renounce his faith, he orders him to be torn to pieces, a punishment that executioners betake “frenetically”, without knowing that they are really celebrating a religious “sacrifice”.37 The description of the slow execution deserves mention, as it reveals how Raguel again mixes the physical body and the spiritual body of the martyr, earthly miseries and eternal salvation, with identical doctrinal purposes:

Et quia iam electus manebat in celis, ad hoc duriter patiebatur in terris: nam alius brachium radicitus amputauit, alius tibias desecauit, alius etiam ceruicem ferire non destitit. Interea stabat martir intrepidus, ex quo gutatim sanguis distillabat pro sudore profluus, nullum utique preter Dominum Iesum Christum inuocans, pro quo pati non recusabat, dicens: ‘Domine, eripe me de manu inimicorum meorum’.

36. Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 70-71, lines 100-101. We have to accept the proposal by Celso Rodríguez, according to which “being Christian this was taken as a crime of lèse-divinity. But this was no all; its was also a crime of lèse-majesté, for contravening with the Christian faith and practice the will of the maximum authority: the then Abd-ar-Rhaman III, in the case of Pelagius”. Rodríguez Fernández, Celso. “Tipología estructural...”: 735).

37. Si la duración de la hora séptima hasta la décima —según se dirá más adelante— refleja la distribución temporal diurna romana, como es de suponer, el martirio de Pelayo comenzó entre las 12 y la 1,15 del día y terminó entre las 3,45 y las 5,02 de la tarde (“If the duration from the seventh hour to the tenth hour, according to what will be explained later, reflects the Roman daytime temporal distribution, as expected, the martyrdom of Pelayo began between the 12 and the 1.15 hours, and ended between 3.45 and 5.02 pm.”). Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 79, n. 77.
The list of the martyrised body parts (arm, legs, neck, hands) and the blood spilled, transcript of the body and blood of Christ, plagued with biblical references, runs parallel to the exaltation of his imperturbable conduct (intrepidus) and his celestial ascension. His body was rescued from the bottom of the Guadalquivir and solemnly buried. The differences between this martyrdom and the one recreated in Hroswitha’s poem are again notable, both in the characterisation of the martyr and in the development of the scene. In line with the summary by John V. Tolan,

Entonces, el rey advierte a Pelayo que está blasfemando contra “nuestros ídolos” y que la pena por semejante blasfemia es la decapitación. Presionando al joven para que se muestre respetuoso y coopere, se inclina otra vez para besar su cuello. Pelayo le da una bofetada en la cara; la sangre mancha la barba del rey. Enfurecido, el rey ordena a sus hombres que arrojen al joven a la ribera del río desde la muralla de la ciudad; milagrosamente, el joven cae con suavidad sin sufrir ningún daño. Los hombres del rey se dan cuenta inmediatamente de que no pueden herir con sus armas el cuerpo del joven. Finalmente, Jesucristo permite que sea decapitado, de manera que los ángeles pudieron llevar al nuevo mártir al cielo. Estos milagros forman parte del repertorio clásico de las pasiones, lo mismo que el milagro decisivo que se produjo inmediatamente después de que muriera el joven: el rey ordenó quemar su cuerpo, pero la cabeza seccionada proclama que Dios no consentiría que las llamas le causaran daño.\textsuperscript{39}

In contrast, Raguel then introduces a topical exhortation in honour of the martyr—who he again emphasises that he preferred sanctity to the earthly pleasures, threats and death “to the promises of some lost men”—\textsuperscript{40} and incorporates a final prayer as a kind of epilogue in order to benefit and look out for all his faithful.
3.

Both Raguel and Hroswitha of Gandersheim clearly tackled the type of desire Abd-ar-Rahman III felt for Pelagius. Although more elusive in the former case, both pieces show his sexual nature and diabolical inspiration, two aspects inextricably linked in tenth century Europe that combine with a third factor: the emir’s pagan faith (and immense power). These three ingredients are orientated in an obvious political-religious direction, related with the defence of Christianity during an epoch when its strength and extension had been weakened precisely by the ruling family in Muslim Cordoba to which the depraved co-protagonist emir belonged. However, the heinous character of this desire works as a decisive additional factor so that the story of the martyrdom takes on a much more dangerous shade, as well as forging its foundational statute.41

The narrations of the martyrdom of Pelagius are a frontal assault on the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula (and, by extension, Europe) through a profoundly negative depiction, also hyper-sexualised, of its leading representative; an “other”, religious and political, that is less original through its explicit association with lust than through the materialisation of a desire, heinous by definition, that is linked to its most quintessentially sinful expression, sodomy. This, in my view, would be the great originality of the texts by Raguel and Hroswitha of Gandersheim: the expression of undecidability as a mechanism of exalting a spiritual ideal, but also material, of opposing sexuality (virginity and chastity) that, at the same time, must be understood as a political and religious metaphor (death before physical penetration, corporal for territorial, consumed through the negation of the faith).

Regarding the notion of ‘sodomy’, as well as its values in the Christian religious context of the Middle Ages, its meanings in the medieval Muslim setting should be born in mind, as neither contemplated the concept of ‘homosexuality’, as is known.42 The difference between Christians and Muslim would thus lie not in the


42. Thus the following reflection by James T. Monroe is especially timely now: “we can state categorically that there were no homosexuals in pre-modern Arabic civilization and that as a consequence there were no heterosexuals or bisexuals in it either, simply because the concepts did not exist. [...] There does exist, however, a Classical Arabic term equivalent to the word sodomy, namely liwat”. Monroe, James T. “The Striptease That Was Blamed on Abu Bakr’s Naughty Son: Was Father Being Shamed, or Was the Poet Having Fun? Ibn Quzman’s Zajal No. 133”, Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature, Jerry W. Wright, Everett K. Rowson, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997: 94-139, quote on 116.
negative religious valuation of ‘sodomy’, quite similar in both cases, but rather in the
different moral and social acceptance of homoeroticism and homoerotic practices.43
Bear in mind that Raguel behaved very similarly to some Muslim religious men of
that time and place, as we can deduce from the following analysis by Rachel Arié of
Andalusian public morality:

Los censores más puritanos, frecuentes entre los fuqaha de las ciudades andaluzas,
estigmatizaron en todas las épocas la inmoralidad de muchos de sus compatriotas. Ya en el
siglo IX, la sociedad andaluza podía rivalizar con la bagdadí de su tiempo por lo disoluto de
sus costumbres.44

The symbolic difference between Raguel’s passio and Hroswitha’s poem could be
explained if we consider the geographic proximity of the enemy and their natural
recipients: Hroswitha could (re)create the martyrdom of Pelagius as a vita, a more
extensive, novelesque “poetic legend” with miracles, for her own benefit and that
of her privileged Benedictine community in the Germanic empire, so far from an al-
Andalus that radiated exotic luxury, while Raguel would have been (re)formulating
a briefer historicist passio, “chronicle in prose”, without miracles, for the benefit of
others, associated with the designs of the diocese of Tuy and the Kingdom of Galicia,
almost a frontier land where there were still frequent incursions or victorious battles
for the Muslims (like that of Valdejuntas, which meant the beginning of the end for
Pelagius).45

However, the ineffability of Raguel’s Passio sancti Pelagii interests me now because
I consider that it deals with the oldest transformation of one of the most unique
identities (the combination of homoerotic sexuality and Christian spirituality) which
can undoubtedly be valued as the great foundational myth of the Hispanic Middle
Ages: the Muslim invasion of 711, comparable, according to Alan Deyermond, to the
Greek legends about Troy or the chronicles that support the Arthurian material.46
I cannot dwell on the many discussions on this event, from the Middle Ages to
date, because, as is well known, it is one of the fiercest debates, precisely because
it is foundational, in the Hispanic historiography. I would just like to point out

43. “Moreover, since homoerotic attraction was viewed as perfectly natural by medieval Islamic society
(as adulterous attraction is viewed as natural by ours), the forms of repression, internalized guilt, and
bids for freedom that characterize homosexuality in modern European and American societies could not
and did not develop”. Monroe, James T. “The Striptease That Was Blamed...”: 118; compare this analysis
with the judgement of: Arjona Castro, Antonio. La sexualidad en la España musulmana. Cordoba: Servicio
de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba, 1990: 31-45.
44. “The most puritan censors, frequent among the fuqaha of the Andalusian cities, stigmatised in all
epochs the immorality of many of their compatriots. Already in the ninth century, Andalusian society
could rival with the Baghdad of its time for its dissolute customs”. Arié, Rachel. España musulmana...: 326.
45. I have been unable to consult the two texts of oral transmission that according to: Gil, Juan. La
pasión de S. Pelayo...: 19 spread the story of Pelagius: the drama El cautivo de Valdejunquera, manuscript in
the archive of the Benedictines in Oviedo, and the popular romance composed by the Jesuit Argimiro
Hidalgo Juárez, although I presume that they are not relevant for the purposes of this work.
that, as with other cultural and historical contexts, this is now a myth in which sexual transgression emerges in its most widespread nuclei: this is valid for the inaugural story featuring Rodrigo, Florinda “La Cava” and Count Don Julián, that culminates in the Battle of Guadalete (711), about which Germanic and oriental erotic affiliations have been proposed. José María Merino did the following recreation of this legendary episode:

Los narradores se contradicen al relatar los resultados de aquel encuentro. Hay quien asegura que el rey Rodrigo no pudo aplacar sus deseos y que en la primera entrevista violó a la hermosa doncella. Otros dicen que desde el primer momento surgió entre ambos una fortísima atracción amorosa y que Florencia se entregó con gusto a don Rodrigo. Fuese como fuese el inicio de sus relaciones, lo cierto es que don Rodrigo y Florinda tuvieron amores apasionados. Estos amores no se mantuvieron lo suficientemente secretos y al fin su noticia llegó al conde don Julián, que juzgó a su hija deshonrada por el rey y consideró a éste un infame seductor.

El furor del conde don Julián no se aplacó a su regreso a Ceuta, sino que la distancia de la corte le hizo ver aún más afrentosa su situación. Aquel furor fue el motivo de que el conde entrase en las intrigas políticas de ciertos descontentos, entre ellos el obispo don Oppas, y acabase facilitando la invasión de la península por los ejércitos árabes bajo las órdenes del general Tariq ben Ziyad y de su señor, Muza ben Nusayr.

Similarly, it might be recalled that the oldest explanation of the origins of the “Reconquest”, narrated at the end of the eleventh century in the so-called Crónica de Alfonso III (which found its way into Historia rebus Hispaniae, by Rodrigo Jiménez

47. Israel Burshatin summarises part of the discussion in Burshatin, Israel. “Narratives of Reconquest: Rodrigo, Pelayo, and the Saints”, Saints and their Authors: Studies in Medieval Hispanic Hagiology in Honor of John K. Walsh, Jane E. Connolly, Alan Deyermond, Brian Dutton, eds. Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1990: 13-26, where she explains how Alexander H. Krappe, in his monographic study (Krappe, Alexander H. The Legend of Roderick, Last of the Visigoth Kings. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1923) interprets the narrative of the sexual abuse of the daughter of Count Julián and his vengeance “across a wide cultural spectrum, including Byzantine chroniclers, the biblical story of Tamar and Amnon, Isidore of Seville, Fredegarius, and, especially, the Gothic Ermanarich cycle” (Krappe, Alexander H. The Legend of Roderick...: 14). About the legend of Rodrigo and the Toledan cave of Hercules, also associated with the foundational myth, see Delpech, François. “Talismanes en Toledo: la leyenda mágica de la ‘pérdida de España’”. La corónica, 36/1 (2007): 97-128.

48. “The narrators contradict each other when telling the results of that meeting. Some assure that King Rodrigo could not control his desires and in the first interview, he raped the beautiful maiden. Others claim that that right from the beginning, a powerful amorous attraction sprang up between them and that Florencia (Florinda) happily gave herself to Rodrigo. Whatever the truth of the start of these relations, the truth is that Rodrigo and Florinda were passionately in love. These loves were not kept secret enough and in the end, the news reached Count Julian, who judged his daughter to have been dishonoured by the king and considered the latter a vile seducer. Count Julian’s fury did not abate on his return to Ceuta, but the distance from the court made him see his situation even more shameful. That anger was the reason the Count found out about the political intrigues of certain disgruntled elements, among them Bishop Don Oppas, and ended up facilitating the invasion of the Peninsula by the Arab armies under the orders of general Tariq ben Ziyad and his lord, Muza ben Nusayr”. The sexual tales featuring Rodrigo and Pelayo were collected by Merino, José María. Leyendas españolas de todos los tiempos. Una memoria soñada. Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2002: 36-42 (“Don Rodrigo y la pérdida de España”, the fragment quoted is on 39) and 42-44 (“Mocedades de Don Pelayo”).
de Rada and, through this, to the *Primera Crónica General de España*, by Alfonso X) and featuring the future King Pelayo, offers a justification of sexual origin (his sister would have had a relation with the Muslim Muniza, then governor of Asturias) for the uprising that led to Pelayo’s victory in the mythical battle of Covadonga. The study of the various branches of chronicles enabled Manuel González Jiménez to summarise the historiographic tale as follows:

*tras la ocupación de Gijón por los muslimes, su gobernador envió a Pelayo a Córdoba y, aprovechando su ausencia, sororem Pelagii copulauit. A su regreso, Pelayo, que no consintió en esta unión, recuperó a su hermana e inició una sublevación. Huyó más allá del río Piloña, siendo elegido príncipe por cuantos estaban descontentos con la dominación árabe y comenzó a atacar a los invasores.*

49. “after the occupation of Gijón by the Muslims, the governor sent Pelayo to Cardoba and, taking advantage of his absence, sororem Pelagii copulauit. On his return, Pelayo, who did not consent to this marriage, recovered his sister and set off an uprising. He fled across the River Piloña, being elected prince by those who were unhappy about the Arab domination and began to attack the invaders”. González Jiménez, Manuel. “Sobre la ideología de la Reconquista: realidades y tópicos”, *Memoria, mito y realidad en la historia medieval. XIII Semana de Estudios Medievales (Nájera, 2002)*, José Ignacio de la Iglesia Duarte, José Luis Martín Rodríguez, coords. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2003: 151-170 (the quote on 157).

In other words, both the Muslim invasion of 711 and the Christian revolt of 717 had antecedents in erotic episodes with a triangular structure (in which the party aggrieved was always the Christian man: don Julián by his daughter, Pelayo by his sister —which, to a degree, evoke the triangle made up of Abd-ar-Rahman, Pelagius and Ermogius, who caused the imprisonment of his nephew). Nor should this omnipresence of sexuality surprise us if we think, for example, that one of the distinctive traits of the Castilian epic traditions, especially those related to the epic cycle of the counts of Castile, so closely linked to the Hispanic historiography, in Latin and vernacular, was precisely one of the factors that most distinguished them from the French *chansons de geste*— namely the notable position of women and their sexuality in the development of the plots.50

Thus, Raguel’s *Vita vel passio sancti Pelagii* should be re-evaluated as a key piece in this historical, literary and conceptual space, that arose from a crossing of religious, political and sexual passions. This would, therefore, be a foundational and identity

49. “after the occupation of Gijón by the Muslims, the governor sent Pelayo to Cordoba and, taking advantage of his absence, sororem Pelagii copulauit. On his return, Pelayo, who did not consent to this marriage, recovered his sister and set off an uprising. He fled across the River Piloña, being elected prince by those who were unhappy about the Arab domination and began to attack the invaders”. González Jiménez, Manuel. “Sobre la ideología de la Reconquista: realidades y tópicos”, *Memoria, mito y realidad en la historia medieval. XIII Semana de Estudios Medievales (Nájera, 2002)*, José Ignacio de la Iglesia Duarte, José Luis Martín Rodríguez, coords. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2003: 151-170 (the quote on 157).

50. *El primer poema épico español cuya existencia es demostrable, Los siete infantes de Lara, tiene como fulcro de la acción una escena de amor sexual entre Gonzalo Gústioz y la mora; las afrentas de la primera parte tienen acusados matices, subrayados por el simbolismo; y una mujer idea y domina la acción de cada parte. Una mujer desempeña un papel decisivo, o hasta llega a dominar la acción, en todos los otros poemas del ciclo de los condes […]. Lo más importante de lo expuesto es que el papel de las mujeres y de la sexualidad, lejos de ser síntoma de decadencia en la época tardía de España, es más acusado en el primer ciclo épico, el de los condes de Castilla (“The fulcrum of the action in the first Spanish epic poem whose existence is demonstrable, *Los siete infantes de Lara*, is a scene of sexual love between Gonzalo Gústioz and the Mooress; the reproaches of the first part have marked nuances, underlined by the symbolism; and a woman thinks up and dominates the action of each part. A woman plays a decisive role, or even comes to dominate the action, in all the other poems of the cycle of the counts […]. The most important of the above is that the role of women and sexuality, far from being a symptom of decadence in the late period in Spain, is more pronounced in the first epic cycle, the counts of Castile”). Deyermond, Alan. *El “Cantar de Mío Cid” y la épica medieval española*. Barcelona: Sirmio, 1987: 96-97.
piece whose echo and comparative analysis help us to understand the bases of the first Christian imagery on which the progressive virilisation of the “Reconquest” —and its heroes— rests, against the literary, metaphorical and symbolic feminisation and sodomisation of the Muslims (and more than a few suspect Christians under the official discourse) that were expressed in many other medieval Hispanic works, as shown by the various literary and historiographic genres, in Latin and in the Ibero-Romance languages, between the eleventh and late fifteenth centuries.51

4.

The worship of the young martyr spread especially in the eleventh century, as confirmed by the large number of Galician parishes that were —and still are— dedicated to him (at least forty, spread across the dioceses of Santiago, Lugo, Ourense, Mondoñedo-Ferrol and Tuy-Vigo), although they are apparently named in various ways: San Pelagio, San Paio, San Pelayo... However, it should be mentioned that, perhaps as a consequence of his remains being deposited in Tuy Cathedral, he was the only patron of Tuy until the thirteenth century, when the Dominican missionary Pedro González Telmo, better known as San Telmo, was buried there in 1251.52 Or perhaps not, and something prevented to link the relics of the martyr with a Mozarab and Leonese past, a legacy little defended by the order of Cluny from the end of the eleventh century, in benefit of Castile and a new cast of saints.53

Lastly, perhaps, as Mark D. Jordan who analysed the change undergone by the iconographic image and the worship of the saint during the later centuries suggested, it was precisely the ineffable nature of the sexual harassment he suffered


52. Gil, Juan. La pasión de S. Pelayo...: 16-17, n. 13.

and that favoured his martyrdom, that paradoxically propitiated his eclipse and transformation,

Pelagius has been transformed from a naked ephebe into a triumphant military saint. The transformation might be read as an accident of Iberian politics. Or it might seem to enact a dialectic by which the cause of a military struggle becomes its patron. Pelagius’s execution is a cause for which to fight: Pelagius is soon depicted as a leader in the fight, as a warrior himself. But the transformation from ephebe to glorious captain is also a curious sublimation of homoerotic desire. It would be too obvious for celibate men to revere Pelagius as a naked ‘athlete’ or spouse of Christ. It is much easier for them to revere Pelagius as a recognizable adult hero, a comrade in arms, a soldier. No hint of effeminacy remains—not of the attraction of youthful bodies. Pelagius is still to be desired, but now as a model of military power. His body has been changed from that of a defenseless boy to that of an armored man. Pelagius is no longer at risk of being raped.54

And the fact is the reading of his pasión would be especially unutterable during the liturgy —because of the nefarious passion that Abd-ar-Rahman III felt for him—, bearing in mind that the liturgical tradition required that the voices of the victim and the executioner be added (and the entity of his desire).55 The truth is that if nowadays we consult an iconographic dictionary of Christianity, we will see that very few traces of the true passion of our martyr remain:

Viste túnica corta propia de su edad y tiene como atributo las tenazas con que lo despedazaron, además de la palma, y en ocasiones, la azucena de la castidad. También se lo representa en la escena de su martirio: atado a una cruz en aspa, mientras los verdugos le arrancan trozos de carne con las tenazas.56

We can ask ourselves, “which pincers and which saltire cross?”. In the light of our route, the response apparently seems simple: those which the religious orthodoxies and historiography, bathed in tradition, end up imposing, more or less selfishly, preventing heinous questions and providing immaculate responses. Or simply, once again, sexual according to the chastity, like the text of the plaque placed on the

55. Bear in mind that “the dramatism of the Passio reached very high peaks. These combined with the great number of speeches in a prolonged and lively dialogue and all destined to the recitation, inflexis vocibus, and the song, in the Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours, within the temples, would probably give a sensation and impression similar to that of the tragedy read in the declamaciones and recitaciones”.
56. “He wears the short tunic of his age and has as an attribute the tenazas with which he was torn apart, as well as the palma, and on occasions, the azucena of chastity. He is also depicted in the scene of his martyrdom: tied to a cross in aspa, while the executioners strip pieces of flesh from him with the pincers.”
parish of San Juan de Alveos in 1925 stated during the commemorations of the millennium of his death:

\begin{quote}
Al Glorioso \\
San Pelayo \\
Hijo de esta Parroquia \\
de Alveos \\
Mártir de Jesucristo por la Fe y la Castidad \\
en Córdoba \\
el XXXVI de Junio del Año \\
CM-XXV. \\
S.M. el Rey D. Alfonso XII y el Pueblo que le Vio \\
Nacer \\
Consagra este Monumento en el Año Milenario \\
de su Tránsito al Cielo. \\
M-CM-XXV\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

\footnote{57. “To the Glorious / Saint Pelaius / Son of this Parish, / Alveos, / Martyr of Jesus Christ for the Faith and the Chastity / in Cordoba / the 26\textsuperscript{th} June / 925, / HM Alfonso XII and the village which saw /his birth /consecrate this Monument in the Millennial Year / of his Transit to Heaven. 1925”. Gil, Juan. \textit{La pasión de S. Pelayo}: 14, n. 4.}