

# *BEATAS, BEATERIOS AND CONVENTS: THE ORIGIN OF THE BASQUE FEMALE CONVENTUAL LIFE*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes the beaterios as expressions of feminine religiosity during the Middle Ages preceding the regular convents founded during the Modern Age. This is confirmed through both the role of the beaterios leading the birth of conventual female Basque life and its features within the contemporary Basque society.

## **KEYWORDS**

Lay sisters, Convents, Religious, Basque Country, Beguinage.

## **CAPITALIA VERBA**

Sorores laicae, Coenobia, Religiosi, Vasconia, Beguinagium.

## 1. Introduction

One of the most significant social phenomena of Early Modern Spain was the spread of regular clergy which in turn led to a proliferation of convents, with an increase in foundations which intensified during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> This vigorous expansion of conventual foundations was undoubtedly a post-tridentine phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The Basque Country experienced a similar movement reflected in the intense establishment of female convents although with some nuances when compared with the Spanish phenomenon. This difference in the intensity of conventual foundations has its origin in the Medieval Ages.<sup>3</sup>

The increased number of foundations in the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>4</sup> has its origins throughout the Middle Ages. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, female monastic life was already shaped as an urban phenomenon<sup>5</sup> and it was seen as parallel to the masculine monastic life, which, essentially, was an antisocial escape to the desert.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Caesarius of Arles wrote *Regula sanctorum virginum*, the first western rule written exclusively for women<sup>7</sup>. During Early and High Middle Ages more religious Orders entered in the Iberian Peninsula, such as the Benedictines or the Cistercians. Besides, from the 13<sup>th</sup> century on, it is possible to speak about female urban conventualism.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in Navarre, we can underline: the Benedictines of Estella which were founded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century; the Cistercians nuns of Tudela, created in 1157; the Poor Clares of Santa Engracia, a convent in Pamplona from the year 1228; the Benedictines of Estella which were founded in 1232; the Augustines of San Miguel in Barañain, created in 1244; the Cistercians of Santa María de Salas in Estella from the year 1260; the Poor Clares

1. Atienza, Ángela. "Nobleza, poder señorial y conventos en la España moderna. La dimensión política de las fundaciones nobiliarias", *Estudios sobre señorío y feudalismo: homenaje a Julio Valdeón*, Esteban Sarasa, Eliseo Serrano, eds. Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2010: 235.

2. Atienza, Ángela. "La expansión del clero regular en Aragón durante la Edad Moderna. El proceso fundacional". *Revista de historia moderna: Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 21 (2003): 18.

3. This article focuses on the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country located in Northern Spain, that is, the provinces of Biscay, Guipuzcoa and Alava. Navarre and the Basque territories located in Southern France are not taken into account.

4. Catalán, Elena. "El clero ante la crisis del siglo XVII. Conflictos y estrategias". *Tiempos modernos: Revista Electrónica de Historia Moderna*, 20 (2010): 20.

5. Reder, Marion. "Las voces silenciosas de los claustros de la clausura". *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 25 (2000): 282.

6. Linage, Antonio. "La mujer y el monacato", *I Congreso Internacional del Monacato femenino en España, Portugal y América (1492-1992)*, María Isabel Viforcós, Jesús Paniagua, eds. Leon: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1993: 16.

7. Vogüé, Adalbert de. "Cesareo de Arlés y los orígenes de la clausura de monjas", *XX Semana de estudios Monásticos: 'Mujeres del absoluto. El monacato femenino. Historia, instituciones, actualidad'* (Abadía de Silos), Clemente de la Serna, ed. Burgos: Abadía de Silos, 1986: 183.

8. Rucquoi, Adeline. "Los franciscanos en el Reino de Castilla", *VI Semana de Estudios Medievales de Nájera (31 de julio al 4 de agosto de 1995)*, José Ignacio de la Iglesia, Javier García Turza, José Angel García de Cortázar, coords. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 1996: 66.



of Tudela, founded in 1261 and the convent of Poor Clares in Estella which dates back to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For its part, in Galicia we can stress: the Benedictines in San Breixo de Donas from the 9<sup>th</sup> century; the nuns of San Benito de San Xoán in Cova, founded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century; the Benedictines of San Salvador in Sobrado which date back to 1287; the Poor Clares of the convent of Santa Clara in Allariz since 1289 and the convents of Poor Clares in Santiago de Compostela and Pontevedra rose during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. More examples of Medieval foundations can be found in Saragossa where in 1234 the convent of Santa Catalina was founded, so the monastery of the Resurrection in 1276. It is a generalized line throughout the Late Middle Ages: the Iberian Peninsula witnessed a very important dynamic of female conventual foundations.

## 2. Situation and evolution in the Basque Country

Regarding the Basque female conventual foundations, there was a different rhythm which lets appreciate the differences not only among the three Basque provinces but also between them and the rest of the Christian Iberian Peninsula. Thus, it was in the province of Alava where the first foundations took place; besides, this province promoted the largest number of Basque female convents during the Middle Ages. In the first place, in Vitoria it was founded a Poor Clares convent whose foundation date remains unknown but, thanks to some documents, it is possible to know that by 1247 it already existed.<sup>9</sup> By this time, it was also founded the Cistercian convent of Santa María in the village of Barria, although its foundation date is unknown, it is dated during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

Salinas de Añana held a convent related to the female branch of the Knights Hospitaller. Once again, the foundation date is unknown, but given that its first written mention is dated from 1302, its foundation could be placed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in 1378 the Dominican convent of San Juan Bautista was founded in the village of Quejana. This convent was closely linked to the Ayala lineage,<sup>12</sup> because the marriage formed by Fernán Pérez de Ayala and Elvira de Zeballos wanted to found a convent. In this way, next to their palace, a church and a convent were built.

9. Prada, María Fernanda. *Ocho siglos de Historia de las clarisas en España*. Murcia: Publicaciones Instituto Teológico de Murcia, 2013: 30.

10. Arana, María José. "La mujer vasca en la vida religiosa de Euskal Herria", *Historia de los Religiosos en el País Vasco y Navarra*, Joseba Intxausti, ed. Oñate: Editorial franciscana Arantzazu, 2002: 843.

11. Jimeno, Roldán. "Clero secular y regular en la Historia de Vasconia". *Iura Vasconiae: revista de derecho histórico y autonómico de Vasconia*, 3 (2006): 133.

12. García Fernández, Ernesto. "Dominicos y Franciscanos en el País Vasco (siglos XIII-XV)", *VI Semana de Estudios Medievales de Nájera (31 de julio al 4 de agosto de 1995)*, José Ignacio de la Iglesia, Javier García Turza, José Angel García de Cortázar, coords. Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 1996: 218.



On the other hand, in the other two Basque provinces there were only two more female convents: in San Sebastian there was the Augustinian convent of San Bartolomé since 1250,<sup>13</sup> while in Lequeitio, a town located in Biscay, a Dominican convent was founded in 1368. This convent had, precisely, its origin in a *beaterio*.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that we are in front of a devastating framework: in total, there were only six female convents which had been founded since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and four of them were situated in the same province. This was the religious reality until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when gradually more female convents were founded, a process that finalized in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Clearly, it can be noticed that these foundations, with the exception of the province of Alava, took place with some delay in relation to the European and Castilian foundations.<sup>15</sup> There is not a unique answer to explain the causes of the situation, though the existence of other type of female religious, such as the *beatas* or *seroras* helps to clarify the issue.

The *seroras*, also known as *freilas*, were a religious institution which, thanks to the approval of the bishops, took care of some local churches, chapels and objects of cult.<sup>16</sup> In other words, women acting as *seroras* were an extension of the 'ladies of the house' because they acted as a minister of the religious domestic cult.<sup>17</sup> In that period, the churches and the chapels were crowded,<sup>18</sup> a fact that explains the great extension of the *seroras*, a female religious phenomenon that was especially important in the province of Guipuzcoa. Therefore, when a woman felt religious concern, she could embrace the *seroras*. In spite of all this, there was not a direct link between the *seroras* or its houses (*seroratos*) and the nuns and their convents, because the former preceded but they were not the origin of the convent's religious life.

The *beaterio* has to be seen as a Medieval female community of semi-religious women who lived spiritually under an exemplary behavior, apart from a convent.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, *beatas* were lay women who may be linked to Catholic Orders and congregations, but who had not taken any kind of vows. It is necessary to state that not all *beaterios* were consecrated to the contemplative life, because some of them were focused on helping the ill and taking care of children's religious education, as well as being a refuge for dowryless young women.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of their orientation,

13. Murugarren, Luis. "Presencia religiosa-agustiniana en Guipúzcoa". *Revista agustiniana*, 35/196 (1994): 77.

14. Arana, María José. "La mujer vasca en la vida religiosa...": 843.

15. Arizaga, Beatriz; Martínez Martínez, Sergio. *Atlas de las villas medievales de Vasconia*. Bilbao: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2006: 96.

16. Azpiazu, José Antonio. "Las seroras en Gipuzkoa (1550-1630)". *Cuadernos de Sección, Antropología-Etnografía*, 13 (1995): 45.

17. Frank, Rosilyn M. "En torno al papel de la serora en Euskal Herria: documentos y archivos". *Academia*. 12 October 2015 <[http://www.academia.edu/3664984/La\\_serora\\_vasca\\_documentos\\_y\\_archivos](http://www.academia.edu/3664984/La_serora_vasca_documentos_y_archivos)>.

18. Arriet, Arantxa. *Las seroras en Euskal Herria*. San Sebastian: Instituto Superior Ciencias Religiosas Pio XII, 2011: 49.

19. Beldad, Juliana. *Monjas y Conventos en Castilla La Nueva: un modelo de vida religiosa rural en los siglos XV-XVII*. Ciudad Real: Almod, Ediciones de Castilla la Mancha, 2010: 24.

20. Atienza, Ángela. "De beaterios a conventos: nuevas perspectivas sobre el mundo de las beatas en la España moderna". *Historia social*, 57 (2007): 168.



living without any kind of enclosure was a characteristic shared by the whole *beaterios*.

It has already been pointed out that by the 4<sup>th</sup> century female religiosity was still shaped and that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Saint Caesarius of Arles wrote the first western rule for women. Besides, it is known that in the Cistercian Order religious women existed from the very first moment of its religious path,<sup>21</sup> situation shared by other religious Orders, such as the Premonstratensians or the Augustinians.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Poor Clares started their course, leading to the birth of more female communities. That means that an answer to female religiosity already existed. So, why did arise a new type of female religiosity in the mid of the Medieval Ages?

At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there was an imbalance in the European population due to different reasons. In the first place, the birth rate was very high and the families could not afford to pay the dowries of all women. For that reason, *beaterios* were seen as a suitable place for women.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, it has to be taken into account that the female life expectancy has always been higher.<sup>24</sup> Besides, there were more biological aspects which involved a marked distinction between both genders. For example, in that period there was a religious fervour which made some men embrace monastic life, and at the same time continuous wars caused different damages over male gender.

As a direct consequence of these circumstances, there was a percentage of single women.<sup>25</sup> Excluding recent decades, throughout History female spinsterhood has not been considered correct,<sup>26</sup> that is, the society did not accept that women could remain single since the mentality of that period forced to have women in the marital institution. Finally, although it is true that women had a place in the religious Orders, as a result of the importance given to the convents, the figure of the nun was reserved to a small select group of the most influential families,<sup>27</sup> which prevented the rest of women to be ordained. Besides, when a woman joined a convent it was compulsory that she brought a dowry. The dowry required in the marriages was much higher than the one demanded in the convents; in this way, noble families sent their female members to the convents because these religious places were

21. Berman, Constance H. "Were there Twelfth-Century Cistercian Nuns?". *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 68/4 (1999): 825.

22. Simons, Walter. *Cities of Ladies. Beguine communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002: 109.

23. Engen, John van. *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life. The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008: 133.

24. Leonard, Amy. *Nails in the wall. Catholic nuns in Reformation Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 15.

25. Lewis, Gertrud Jaron. *By women, for women, about women*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1996: 3.

26. Poutrin, Isabelle. "Les religieuses espagnoles au siècle d'or. Entre dépendance sociale et autonomie spirituelle". *Cahiers du Centre de recherches historiques*, 40 (2007): 4.

27. Makowski, Elizabeth. *Canon Law and Cloistered women. Periculoso and its Commentators. 1298-1545*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997: 11.



seen as a way to maintain their wealth.<sup>28</sup> However, the religious dowry was still an expenditure that not all the families could afford it.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, this economic factor together with the social negative attitude towards the female spinsterhood and the incapacity shown by the existing convents to accept more candidates, contributed to the birth and spreading of the *beatas*.<sup>30</sup> This phenomenon of the *beatas* spread out all over Western Europe. These semi-religious women were known with different names, such as *pinzochere* in Italy or *beguines* in the Netherlands and in France.<sup>31</sup>

Thanks to the surviving documents, it can be stated that there were not any important Basque towns without *beaterios*.<sup>32</sup> In most of the cases, the foundation date remains unknown, being the Dominican *beaterio* of Bilbao one exception since it is known that it was founded in 1499.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as the origin of the most of the female convents was a pre-existing *beaterio*, the difficulties for knowing the foundation dates concerns both the *beaterios* and the convents.<sup>34</sup> Usually, *beaterios* were born as a natural process, without any specific foundation date. The most of the female convents founded in the Early Modern Ages had its roots in the Medieval times, a time of *beaterios* in the Basque provinces. Some of them reached the papal favour: in 1296 Pope Boniface VIII gave a papal bull to the *beatas* of Orduña, in Biscay.<sup>35</sup>

Although the scarcity of document is the main problem, when it comes to enumerate the *beaterios* before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its number was high. María José Arana, an expert in this topic, states that there could be around eighty *beaterios*.<sup>36</sup>

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28. Evangelisti, Silvia. *Nuns. A history of convent life, 1450-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008: 5.

29. Rapley, Elizabeth. *A social history of the Cloister. Daily life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime*. Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2009: 35.

30. Lewis, Gertrud Jaron. *By women...: 3*.

31. Green, Dennis H. *Women readers in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge (UK): University of Cambridge, 2010: 156.

32. Lizarralde, José Adriano de. “Orígenes de la vida claustral en el País Vasco”, *I Congreso de Eusko Ikaskuntza*. Oñate: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1918: 592.

33. Rodríguez Condado, Eugenio. *Monasterio de la Encarnación y el convento de Santo Domingo de la villa de Bilbao*. Bilbao: Gráficas Alustiza, 2000: 15.

34. Atienza, Ángela. *Tiempo de conventos: una historia social de las fundaciones en la España moderna*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2008: 39.

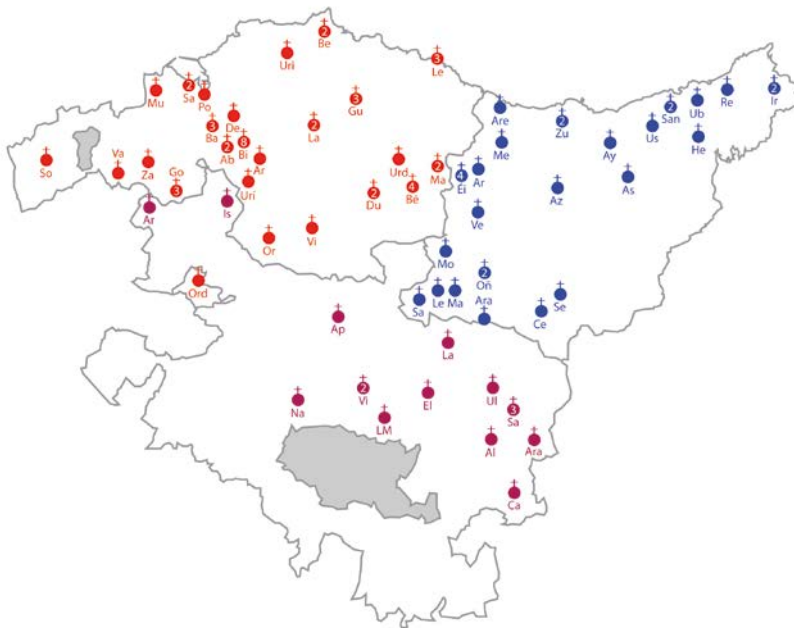
35. Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental, 619/24.

36. Some original documents mix up the terms *beaterios* and *seroratos*, the place where the *seroras* lived.



**Table 1. *Beaterios* in the Basque Country before the 16<sup>th</sup> century**

Province	<i>Beaterios</i>
Alava	Isasti, Arceniega, Nanclares de Oca, Apodaca, Elburgo, Larrea, Agurain-Salvatierra (3), Santa Cruz de Campezo, Vitoria (2), La Magdalena, Ula and Arana
Guipuzcoa	San Sebastian (2), Irun (2), Renteria, Uba, Hernani, Mendaro, Aya, Usurbil, Eibar (4), Oñate (2), Aranzazu, Cegama, Bergara, Salinas de Leniz, Lete, Segura, Mondragon (2), Azpeitia, and Zumaia (2)
Biscay	Santurce (2), Portugalete, Muskiz, Balmaseda, Soscaños, Zalla, Gordejuela, Barakaldo (3), Bilbao (8), Deusto (1), Uribe, Bermeo (2), Guernica (3), Uribarri, Marquina (2), Lequeitio (3), Berriz (4), Urdayaga, Durango (2), Villaro, Orozco, Arrigorriaga, and Orduña



MAP 1. BEATERIOS IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY BEFORE THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. MAP MADE BY AITOR CASTAÑEDA ZUMETA.



As it can be seen, both in the table (table 1) and in the map (map 1), *beaterios* had an essential presence in the Basque Country, especially in the coastal provinces. Nevertheless, not all the *beaterios* have survived and the most of them ended in becoming convents.<sup>37</sup> In this way, although in the Middle Ages *beaterios* were distinguished by not having any link to a religious Order, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century this tendency changed: the *beaterios* disappeared or embraced a religious Order, specially the Franciscans.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century more *beaterios* were founded.

The majority of the *beaterios* adopted the Order of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, an early member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, canonized and declared the patron saint of this Third Order of Saint Francis. For this reason, the *beatas* who embraced this Order were known as *isabelinas* or tertiaries. The high number of Franciscan tertiaries explains why the Poor Clares convents were the preferent destiny of the *beatas*. On the other hand, there were also Augustinian, Mercedarian and Dominican *beaterios*.



MAP 2. TERTIARIES *BEATERIOS* IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY DURING THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. MAP MADE BY AITOR CASTEÑADA ZUMETA.

37. Atienza, Ángela. “De beaterios a conventos...”: 148.

38. Ozaeta, Emiliano. “Las órdenes Monasteriales y mendicantes en el País Vasco entre 1491 y 1521”, *El Pueblo Vasco en el Renacimiento (1491-1521), Actas del Simposio celebrado en la Universidad de Deusto (San Sebastián) con motivo del V Centenario del Nacimiento de Ignacio de Loyola (1-5 Octubre de 1990)*. Bilbao: Mensajero, 1994: 526.



It has to be pointed out that in Biscay there was a high percentage of *beaterios*. Moreover, from all the convents that existed in Biscay during the Early Modern Age, only two of them did not have their origin in a *beaterio*. In particular, the Dominican convent of Santa Margarita in Ermua<sup>39</sup> that was founded by Mariana Ruiz de Lobiano in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the convent of Poor Clares in Balmaseda which was founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Juan de la Piedra Verástegui. The rest of the nineteen convents<sup>40</sup> had their origin in a *beaterio*. In total, during the Early Modern Ages, there were twenty two female convents in Biscay, a fact that reflects that the *beaterios* faded out. In the Franciscan family we can mention the convents of Santa Clara in Abando,<sup>41</sup> the Conception in Abando, Santa Cruz in Bilbao, San Antonio in Durango, Santa Isabel in Gordejuela, Santa Clara in Guernica, Santa Clara in Orduña, Santa Clara in Portugalete and Santa Isabel in Villaro. The *beaterios* of Santa Isabel in Bilbao and the ones located in Larrabezua, Muskiz, Urdagaiga-Berriz and Zalla disappeared when the *beatas* moved out to other *beaterios*. Some Mercedarian *beaterios*, such as the ones situated in Arrancudiaga, Deusto, Larrabezua and Muguica, also dissolved when the *beatas* moved out to other *beaterios*. However, the Augustian and Dominican *beaterios* did not disappear.

Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century some *beaterios* started to embrace religious enclosure, but the process stretched on until 1741, when the Mercedarians of Berriz were the last *beatas* to take enclosure. Besides, two noteworthy cases must be mentioned, the Augustians *beatas* of Marquina and the Mercedarians of Santurce due to both communities reached the 19<sup>th</sup> century without having embraced religious enclosure.<sup>42</sup>

It has been said that during the Medieval Ages the province of Guipuzcoa only had a convent, but in the Early Modern Ages this province witnessed a conventual foundation boom. A high number of local lineages that had a position at the Court, like Juan López de Lazárraga, Alonso de Idiáquez, Miguel Antonio de Oquendo or Martín López de Isasi, founded convents in Oñate, San Sebastian, Lasarte and Eibar.<sup>43</sup> Regarding the *beaterios* of this province, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century they also approached to a religious Order, which facilitates to know with precision their existence. Thus, in the Franciscan family, the *beaterio* Purísima Concepción in Azpeitia was held on in 1497, the *beatas* of Santa Ana in Oñate in 1503, the *beatas* of Purísima Concepción in Mondragon after 1509, the *beaterio* Santa Trinidad in Bergara in 1513, and in

39. In 1700, this community moved out to Elorrio, where they still exist. The community is known as the Convent of Santa Ana.

40. The Poor Clares in Abando, Bilbao, Durango, Guernica, Orduña, Portugalete; the Isabelines in Gordejuela and Villaro; the Concepcionists of Abando; the Augustines of Durango and two convents in Bilbao; the Dominicans in Bilbao and Lequeitio; and the Mercedarians of Berriz, Bilbao, Guernica, Marquina and Orozco.

41. The *elizate* of Abando, Begoña and Deusto were annexed to the city of Bilbao in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

42. Intxaustegi, Nere Jone. "Beatas y beaterios vizcaínos: desde el nacimiento medieval hasta la extinción en el siglo XIX", *Actas de la XIV Reunión de la Fundación Española de Historia Moderna (Zaragoza, 1 a 3 de junio de 2016)*, forthcoming.

43. Intxaustegi, Nere Jone. "Convents: the image of the Basque patronage network power", *Monastic Europe: Landscape & Settlement Conference, Ennis, 2015*, forthcoming.



Segura the *beaterio* Purísima Concepción in 1513. The Augustians were represented by the *beatas* of Mondragon since 1511, there were *beatas* in Rentería since 1543, in 1561 the *beaterio* of Mendaro appeared, and in 1570 the *beaterio* of Santa Catalina in Motrico. In Hernani there was a *beaterio* that in 1541 embraced the enclosure.<sup>44</sup> In Lete-Escoriaza the *beatas* of Santa Ana approached to the Mercedarians, while the *beaterio* of Azcoitia was transformed into a convent of the Brigittine Order.<sup>45</sup> Besides, there are evidences that some *beaterios* just disappeared, such as the one located in Cegama.<sup>46</sup>

In Alava, the majority of the *beaterios* embraced the Franciscan family. In this way, the *beatas* of Salvatierra did it in 1552 and the ones living in Alegria in 1581. It is known that the *beaterios* of Nanclares de Oca and Santa Cruz de Campero also approached to the Franciscans, but the exact date remains unknown. On the opposite site, the *beatas* of Vitoria embraced the Dominican family in 1510 and the community became a convent in 1530.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, it is also known that some *beaterios*, like the one in Apodaca, just disappeared.<sup>48</sup> During the Early Modern Age, this province witnessed the foundation of different convents, such as the Augustinian convent of Arceniega in 1606 and the Bridgettines of Vitoria.

Although we do not know why before the 16<sup>th</sup> century some *beaterios* disappeared, the ones that did it in that century were influenced by the Papal Church. Like the papal bull *Periculoso* of Pope Boniface VIII, issued in 1298, shows, since the Middle Ages the Church had insisted on the female religious enclosure. In the Council of Trent, this policy continued, although in both cases the Church legislation only affected nuns, not *beatas*.<sup>49</sup> Nuns support their rejection on two bases: the enclosure was a danger for their lifestyle and the enclosure implied stricter conditions.<sup>50</sup> Thus, a high number of nuns stood against Tridentine legislation and, for example, the defiance of some convents of Zamora extended until the 30s of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the resistance of the tertiaries of Biscay lasted 47 years. There were also more examples of affronts and opposition in convents located in Salamanca, Caceres, Coria, Trujillo, Cazalla de la Sierra, Astorga, Plasencia, Valladolid, Barcelona, or Galicia.<sup>51</sup>

Pope Pius V answered all the controversy in 1566 through his bull *Circa Pastoralis*. This document established a compulsory enclosure for all the female religious, both

44. Arocena, Fausto. "Notas para un historial del Monasterio de San Agustín de Hernani". *Boletín de Estudios Históricos sobre San Sebastián*, 19 (1985): 11.

45. *Breve noticia de la Religión de Santa Brígida y de este convento de Santa Cruz. Recopilada por una religiosa del mismo convento*. Bilbao: without Publisher, 1891: 45.

46. Arana, María José. "La mujer vasca en la vida religiosa...": 852.

47. Tabor, Fernando. *Convento de Santa Cruz de Vitoria-Gasteiz. Su patrimonio artístico-mueble (catálogo de la exposición)*. Leioa: Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2007: 9.

48. Arana, María José. "La mujer vasca en la vida religiosa...": 852-853.

49. Arana, María José. "La mujer vasca en la vida religiosa...": 854.

50. Evangelisti, Silvia. *Nuns. A history of convent life...*: 6.

51. Atienza, Ángela. "Las grietas de la clausura tridentina. Polémicas y limitaciones de las políticas de encerramiento de las monjas... Todavía con Felipe IV". *Hispania*, 74/248 (2014): 813.



nuns and *beatas*. Besides, if a convent did not embrace the enclosure, the community would be forbidden to receive novices, that is, it was destined to extinguish.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the male hierarchy of the Church had the duty to watch and implement the observance of this Papal decision.

On the other hand, in January 1570 the papal bull *Decori et honestati* was issued listing the reasons why nuns could abandon both temporally and permanently the religious community. Pope Gregory XIII, who was also influenced by Charles Borromeo, continued with Pius V's policies. Given that the economic reasons motivated the most of the nuns' opposition, the papal bull *Deo sacris virginibus* issued in 1572 had the objective of answering to that objection. This document promoted different measures to solve the economic difficulties, such as the generosity and help of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the monastic Orders, the public institutions, or the family and friends.

As a consequence of the legislation and a draconian chase, the Basque *beaterios* gradually embraced religious enclosure. Although it is not known if the *beaterios* from Alava and Guipuzcoa asked for any kind of help to the public institutions,<sup>53</sup> the *beaterios* from Biscay were supported by the institutions of the province when they refused to embrace religious enclosure. The Franciscan *beaterios* of Bilbao stood out in their fight both resorting to the Real Council of Castile and pleading in the court of the Nuncio in Spain. Thanks to this, in 8<sup>th</sup> August 1584 the Metropolitan Bishop of Burgos, Cristobal de Vela, in behalf of the Nuncio sentenced in favour of the *beatas*.<sup>54</sup>

The *Juntas Generales* of Biscay<sup>55</sup> wrote a document denouncing the disadvantages of the enclosure because the *beatas* were poor and were in charge of teaching young people. This report's main ideas were the following: a) ancestral existence of the *beaterios* in Biscay without the enclosure; b) *beatas* had an inspiring life in which they follow religious practices; c) *beatas* helped not only in the religious education of children and young people but also in teaching households; d) the difficulty to replace them in those tasks; e) the importance of handmade work for the sustenance of the *beatas*; f) finally, the *beatas* were the best opportunity to join religion without the austerity of the enclosure lifestyle.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, *beatas* ended up giving in and embracing religious enclosure. This process started in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and finalized in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Given that the economic links between *beaterios* and their neighbouring region were essential for their survival, the confinement broke the economic viability of the communities, which did not arouse any change in the Papal policy.

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52. Intxaustegi, Nere Jone. "La rebelión de las clarisas vizcaínas frente al Concilio de Trento", *Líneas recientes de investigación en Historia Moderna*, Félix Labrador, ed. Madrid: Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, 2015: 96.

53. Archivo del Convento de Santa Clara de Portugalete, manuscript *Historia del Convento de Santa Clara de Portugalete*.

54. Rodríguez Condado, Eugenio. *El monasterio de la Santa Cruz. Bilbao-Begoña-Lujua. Historia*. Bilbao: without Publisher, 1994: 16.

55. It was the legislative, executive and judicial organ of Biscay. Nowadays it still exists, though with slightly different liabilities.

56. Uribe, Ángel. *La Provincia franciscana de Cantabria*. Oñati: Editorial Franciscana Aránzazu, 1996: II, 351.



### 3. Epilogue

The existence of *beaterios* in the Basque Country is undeniable from the Middle Ages in the three provinces. Besides, it is clear that there was a close link between *beaterios* and convents, relating a high number of the former and a lower presence of the latter. In this way, in Alava there were convents and *beaterios*, while in Guipuzcoa and Biscay the amount of *beaterios* was greater and there were only two convents in total.

Diverse reasons can explain the differences among the provinces. First, the physical features of the territory: the coastal provinces of Biscay and Guipuzcoa were an isolated, mountainous and wooded region, in front of Alava that was a flat region, which included both a different weather and an easy contact with the neighbour kingdoms. This environment could have influenced on the reception of religious ideas with more or less intensity, which conditioned the building of the convents. Thus, the convents in the coastal provinces were located in San Sebastian and in Lequio, towns strongly linked abroad through commerce.

Secondly, the particular traits of Basque people's religiosity. A topical expression stated that Basque people were very religious, but the historical confrontation does not validate it;<sup>57</sup> therefore, the delay in the conventual implantation could be linked to the few weight of Christianity among Basques. It is true that the Basque Episcopal structure was definitely established along the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>58</sup> but that does not mean that Christianity had penetrated deeply into Basque population. The witchcraft processes in 16<sup>th</sup> century in Biscay and Guipuzcoa as well in Navarre and the French Basque Labourd, at least shows the distrust of the Church regarding the popular religion in these regions.<sup>59</sup> Besides, the bilingualism of the territory can not be forgotten: Biscay and Guipuzcoa were Basque monolingual territories while in Alava Castilian had a bigger presence. This situation could have influenced the late reception of Christian faith, as well as female monastic Orders.

On the other hand, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Bishop of Calahorra, to whom Biscay depended on, could not enter into the province due to a prohibition dated from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup> Besides, the lineages so-called *Parientes Mayores*, (The Elders)<sup>61</sup> had some rights over the parishes, as the collection of tithes, and did not accept the

57. Bilbao, Luis Mari. "El clero y el régimen patronal de las Iglesias del País Vasco en 1616 ante el juicio de su Obispo. Glosa de un documento inédito". *Scriptorium victoriense*, 29/1 (1982): 107.

58. Bazán, Iñaki. "La caracterización de la civilización vasca medieval (siglos XII-XV)", *Historia del País Vasco. Edad Media (siglos V-XV)*, Pedro Barruso, José Ángel Lema, eds. San Sebastian: Hiria, 2004: 444.

59. Madariaga, Juan. "Sociedad, mentalidades y cultura en Euskal Herria en los tiempos modernos", *Nosotros Los Vascos. Historia de Euskal Herria*, Joseba Agirreazkuenaga ed. Bilbao: Lur Argitaletxea, 2004: III, 186.

60. Val Valdevieso, María Isabel del. "Vizcaya frente al Obispo de Calahorra a fines de la Edad Media", *Simposio Nacional sobre ciudades episcopales*. Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1987: 82.

61. The Elders or Parientes Mayores, were a nobility oligarchy whose power emanated from controlling, among others, the tithes of the parishes. A characteristic of this oligarchy was the approach to the commerce, thus during the Early Modern Ages, they played an important role both on the commerce and on the politics of the Basque towns. Curiel, Iosu. *La parroquia en el País Vasco cantábrico durante la Baja Edad Media (1350-1530)*. Leioa: Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2009: 71.



authority of the Bishop over the parishes that they considered theirs.<sup>62</sup> It has been said that the *beaterios* did not belong to any religious Order, a situation that lasted until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the *beatas* sided with the Orders. This change coincided with the negotiations to allow the entrance of the Bishop in Biscay. Besides, in the Council of Trent it was issued that the bishops would be in charge of controlling the embrace of religious enclosure. Thus, all the controversy around the Bishop could explain not only why the *beaterios* in Biscay were so prominent but also the delay on embracing enclosure and, consequently, conventual foundation.

In addition, as it has been said, the *beaterios* were not only religious places because *beatas* could carry out social works. That is, the *beatas* made tasks that were beyond religion, which can explain the strong popularity of the *beaterios*, which were seen not only as religious places like the convents but also as something else. Likewise, even though there were *beaterios* that got extinguished, a great part of them were the origin of convents, hence the importance that they have as the origin of female conventual life in the Basque Country.

It has to be emphasised that *beatas* and *beaterios* were not only a Basque phenomenon because they also existed in other European countries. Nevertheless, it is necessary to underline the important role they played in the birth of convents. Finally, despite we can not know the exact number of *beaterios*, we can conclude that the origin of the Basque female conventual life is closely connected to the *beatas* and *beaterios*.

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62. Curiel, Iosu. *La parroquia en el País Vasco...*: 71.

