Monastic Space as Educative Space in Visigothic Iberia[1]

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores how writers on monasticism from the Visigothic period in Iberia (mainly the seventh century) conceived of the relationship between ascetic formation and the spatial organization of their communities. It suggests that, in addition to articulating a strong sense of opposition between the monastery and 'the world', writers such as Isidore of Seville and Fructuosus of Braga devised strategies for managing interaction between the monastery and its surroundings. They also had a good sense of how space might be organized within the monastery to further the ascetic formation of the monks and nuns as members of a community. Finally, I suggest that writings about ascetic formation provide interesting models for thinking more generally about processes of identity formulation and dissemination in late antiquity and the early medieval period.

ESSAY

The writers of monastic rules from the Visigothic period in Iberia (sixth and seventh centuries) proposed varied regimes of physical and mental discipline for training individual ascetics and forming communities of monks and nuns. The texts that writers such as Leander of Seville (c. AD 534-600), Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), and Fructuosus of Braga (d. 665) put together also articulate a clear vision of the monastery as a bounded space separated from the 'world'. As well as their separation from what lay outside, it is also possible to observe in the texts an understanding that space was divided up for specific purposes *within* the monastery. In many instances, models for managing the relationship between the community's relations with outsiders and for organizing internal space were connected explicitly to the training of the monks and nuns.

A good example is the first chapter of Isidore's *Monastic Rule*, written at the start of the seventh century, which states that:

> The walls of the monastery will have one main entrance, with an additional small back entrance that leads into the garden. Any settlement must ideally be distant from the monastery, in case if it were near then it might bring the distress of danger or taint the monastery's honorable reputation. The cells of the monks should be located next to the church so that they can go as quickly as possible to the Divine Office.[2]

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[2] Isidore, *Regula Monastica* 1: "Monasterii autem munitio tantum januam extrinsecus habeat, unumque posticum, per quem eatur ad hortum. Villa sane longe remota debet esse a monasterio, ne vicinius posita aut labis inferat periculum, aut famam inficiat dignitatis. Cellulae fratribus juxta eccclesiam constituatur, ut possint properare quantocius ad officium."

Isidore thus envisaged the monastery as separated by a suitable distance from neighboring settlements and bounded by a wall and gates that channeled interaction with the surrounding world. Internally, the site was supposed to be organized in order to facilitate the liturgical activities of the monks. This imagined space kept the 'world' out, secured the reputation of the monastery, and enabled the monks to continue their spiritual formation undisturbed.

This essay suggests that these imagined monastic spaces functioned as sites of identity formation. The monasteries described by Isidore and his peers were, after all, the spaces in which formation was supposed to take place – where the identities of monks and nuns *as* individual ascetics *and as* members of ascetic communities were established. Exploring their varying conceptualizations of the relationship between monastic and educative space thus offers a potential a window onto how contemporaries thought more broadly about how subjectivities might be cultivated in early medieval Iberia. It was, after all, writers like Isidore and his peers who wrote the texts that have most often been examined as evidence for evolving visions of identity in post-Roman Spain.[3]

Identity

Historically, scholarship on late antique and early medieval Iberia has, to a large extent, focused on the issue of identity. Often this has been filtered through the lens of contemporary social, political and religious concerns,[4] with attention frequently

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[3] Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1981); Suzanne Teillet, *Des Goths à la nation Gothique. Les origines de l'idée de nation en Occident du Ve au VIIe siècle* (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1984); Jamie Wood, *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain: Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
[4] Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, *The Visigoths in History and Legend* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010).

focused on binary oppositions, for example between 'Goths' and 'Romans' (or 'Byzantines'), 'Arians' and 'Catholics', and 'Christians' and 'Jews' (or 'pagans'). Recent scholarship, informed by work done on other regions of the post-Roman West, has begun to challenge the dominance of such oppositional understandings and recognized the multiple, cross cutting and highly contingent nature of community and individual identity in the period.[5]

Royal and some ecclesiastical elites promoted vigorously the ideal of a unified Gothic-Catholic polity within the confines of *Hispania*. However, this ideology seems to have been developed because the Visigothic monarchy had to struggle continually to make its power felt in the provinces, at the same time as its institutional authority was persistently undermined by the actions of ambitious factions within the nobility. Strength and stability were advertised in a context in which political leaders felt their power to be open to challenge.

Yet the identity frameworks that were proposed by the writers of Visigothic-era Iberia extended beyond those that operated at the level of the kingdom or the church as a whole ('Goths' and/or 'Catholics' within 'Spain'). A wide range of other texts propose models for various forms of Christian living. These include advice on adopting, improving, or perfecting a subject's roles as a bishop, a priest, an ascetic, or an 'ordinary' Christian. Other texts focus on how specific elements of Christian theology might be applied in practice.[6]

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[5] Erica Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities in Spain and Gaul: From Romans to Goths and Franks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).
[6] Pierre Cazier, *Isidore de Séville et la Naissance de l'Espagne Catholique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994).

In addition to the texts that were actually produced in Visigothic Iberia, it is clear that Christian advice texts and rules that were produced in previous centuries were circulating actively in the Peninsula. Within this context, the monastic rules thus offer an extremely well developed vision of an ideal identity – that of a perfect monk (or nun) living in harmony with a community of their peers. They also offer detailed advice on how such an identity profile might be attained – through an all-encompassing regime of bodily and spiritual discipline, communal policing, and education.

Education

Scholarship on the Iberian Peninsula in the post-Roman period has often focused on issues connected to its intellectual culture. Such studies often derived from an interest in the later theological influence of writers such as Isidore, Taio of Zaragoza (c. 600-683), Ildefonsus of Toledo (c. 607-667), Julian of Toledo (d. 690), and others, while the writings of Isidore have been mined for what they reveal about the survival of classical culture in Visigothic Iberia.[7] This work has revealed a great deal about the formation and culture of episcopal elites, many of whom were trained in monasteries. Elite writers of the Visigothic period fashioned images of themselves and their contemporaries as recipients of a Patristic inheritance that they transformed for practical use in the present: to inculcate Nicene Christianity into contemporary society by training the clergy well so that they might educate the population.

It is generally accepted that, by the end of the sixth century, the ancient schools had probably disappeared from the Iberian Peninsula. Monastic and episcopal schools

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[7] See the classic study on Isidore by Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Seville et la culture classique dans L'Espagne wisigothique*, 3 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959-1984).

seem, by this point, to have become key sites of learning, although whether these can really be distinguished as separate educational institutions is open to question in all but a few cases.[8] Indeed, the picture of almost total ecclesiastical dominance of literate culture within Visigothic Iberia can be challenged because it is becoming increasingly clear that late Roman institutions that would have required at least basic levels of literacy and numeracy continued within some cities and in the royal bureaucracy, while King Sisebut (d. 621) engaged in literary exchanges with Isidore of Seville.[9] The slate *Pizarras* from the Meseta, which date across the late antique period, also point towards more widespread literacy among rural populations than has traditionally been acknowledged.[10]

Ecclesiastical elites devised systems to ensure that the faithful received adequate pastoral care. For example, a process of pre- and post-baptismal instruction was devised, while resources were provided for those entrusted with catechesis, preaching, and the liturgy.[11] Studies of monastic education in Visigothic Iberia have generally focused on the more illustrious institutions, such as Agali, a foundation of the late sixth

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[8] Pierre Riché, "L'education a l'époque wisigothique: les Institutionum Disciplinae," *Anales Toledanos* 3 (1971): 171-80; Consuela Maries Aherne*, "Late Visigothic bishops, their schools*, and the transmission of culture," *Traditio* 22 (1966): 435-43; Roger Collins, "Literacy and the laity in early mediaeval Spain," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 109-133.

[9] Céline Martin, *La géographie du pouvoir dan l'Espagne visigothique* (Paris: Septentrion, 2003); Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Yitzhak Hen, "A Visigothic King in Search of His Identity - *Sisebutus Gothorum Gloriosissimus Princeps*," in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini, Matthew Gillis, Rosamond McKitteric and Irene Van Renswoud (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 89-99.

[10] On the *Pizarras*, see Isabel Velázquez Soriano, *Las pizarras visigodas* (Madrid; Burgos: Real Academia Española; Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, 2004).

[11] E.g. Jamie Wood, "Religious Strategies of Distinction: Baptism in Visigothic Spain," in *Elite and Popular Religion*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 3-17; Jamie Wood, "Predicación, pedagogía y persuasión: la educación cristiana en Occidente durante la Antigüedad tardía," in *La Iglesia como sistema de dominación en la Antigüedad Tardía*, Jorge Fernández Ubiña, Alberto Quiroga Puertas and Purifiación Ubric Rabaneda (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2015), 231-53.

century near Toledo, on those bishops who were educated in monastic contexts, such as Leander of Seville and Isidore of Seville, and on the overtly pedagogic content of the monastic rules, such as the references that are made to teachers or books.[12] Such work has helped to establish a framework for understanding elite intellectual culture in the period, particularly the intense level of engagement with texts from the early Christian period, including writings about the organization of ascetic living, both individually and communally.

Studies of other regions of the late antique world have demonstrated the extent to which monasteries as a whole were designed as sites for the formation of the ideal ascetic subject within a community.[13] In this context, monastic rules can be read as guidelines for the organization of the community, intended to govern the relationship between the individual and the group, and between the entire community and the outside world. There have been few efforts, however, to understand the broader functioning of Iberian monasteries as 'total institutions' devoted to the formation of ideal ascetic subjects through routinely ordered processes of discipline and punishment.[14] Specific educative elements of monastic rules have thus been explored, but not the broader framework of the rules as a whole or their relationship to the institution or the community as a whole.

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[12] Luis A. García Moreno, "Los monjes y monasterios en las ciudades de las Españas tardorromanos y visigodas," *Habis* 24 (1993): 179-92.

[13] E.g. Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007); Lynda Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*: *Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

[14] On the concept of the total institution, see Christie Davies, "Goffman's Concept of the Total Institution: Criticisms and Revisions," *Human Studies* 12 (1989): 77-95.

Space

Over the past decade or so, the 'spatial turn' has begun to take increasing effect in work
on the late antique and the early medieval periods. Some studies have looked at the
ways in which contemporaries conceived space, while others have examined the
relationship between textual descriptions and physical realities. Such analyses have
operated at a variety of scales, from the level of the empire and the kingdom to the
household and its constituent parts.

Monastic and, to a lesser extent, ascetic spaces more generally have proven a fruitful
field of inquiry due to the way in which they are conceived of as definitively separate
from the rest of society (as evidenced by the quote from Isidore at the start of this essay),
the plentiful records that remain, and the fact that a significant number of monasteries
are extant.[15] Despite the rhetorical emphasis that is placed on the separation of
monasteries from the world, institutions were frequently deeply embedded in local
economic and social relationships. Indeed, the rules may have been articulated at least
partially in response to episodes in which the world had encroached on the monastery.
By reading 'against' normative texts and comparing them to other sources, such as
hagiographies and the archaeological record, it is possible to see that monasteries were,
in fact, almost without exception, deeply embedded in local societies, all the while
proclaiming their independence.

Research into texts associated with Visigothic-era monasticism aligns well with work
done elsewhere in the post-Roman West, demonstrating that the rhetoric of separation

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[15] E.g. *Western Monasticism ante litteram: The Spaces of Monastic Observance in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Hendrik Dey and Elizabeth Fentress (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

from the world masks a reality in which monasteries of different types all across the Iberian Peninsula served a variety of religious, social, economic and political functions for local, regional and national communities.[16] Archaeological work has reached similar conclusions, demonstrating that monastic sites were often situated in order to facilitate the efforts of elites to control the countryside.[17] The exact scale of such efforts to exploit the landscape using monasteries is not clear due to the difficulty of identifying monastic sites (as opposed to rural estates with churches attached) from the sixth and seventh centuries.

Monasteric Spaces and Educative Spaces

Focus on the relationship between Visigothic-era monasteries and their surroundings has meant that less attention has been paid to their internal organization. Although contemporaries seem to have had a very clear idea that monasteries were institutions that were separate from the world, they often also stressed the need to provide services, including charity. The fact that monasteries would, due to their ascetic function, struggle to reproduce themselves over time without an input of new human resources also meant that they had to devise means of welcoming in new members to the community. In addition, the need to advertise their status as exemplary ascetic communities in order to attract suitable initiates and donations created another impetus to displaying the monastery to the world. All of these factors means that we would be far better imagining monasteries – and especially their rules – as efforts to create the

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[16] Pablo C. Díaz, "*Regula Communis*: Monastic Space and Social Context," in *Western Monasticism ante litteram: The Spaces of Monastic Observance in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Hendrik Dey and Elizabeth Fentress (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 117-35.
[17] Jorge Lopez Quiroga, "Monasterios altomedievales hispanos. Lugares de emplazamiento y ordenación de sus espacios," *XXIX Seminario sobre Historia del Monacato* (2016): 66-99.

conditions for managed interaction with the world, rather than as documents that sought to partition off monastic space from what lay outside.

Dealing with the arrival and integration of new members of a community brought its own potential challenges, meaning that the writers of monastic rules had to think not just about separating the community spatially from outsiders, but also about how space might be organized internally in order to ensure that new monks were made into functioning members of the group as soon as possible. The desire to maintain the monastery's vision of itself as a group of ascetic high achievers would also, at least in theory, have driven forward efforts to organize the community. We shall see in what follows that one of the key means by which the authors of monastic rules thought that this could be done was through organizing space in such a way as it supported the initial formation of new monks and nuns at the same time as it continued to meet the formative requirements of their more advanced peers.

The final part of this essay analyzes several examples of the different ways in which writers of monastic rules and para-monastic texts thought that space could be manipulated to encourage the formation of specific ascetic subjects in communal contexts. We begin by examining the idea that by simply living *within* the monastic community, one's chances of becoming a successful ascetic are increased. The second section explores how specific spaces within the monasteries of early medieval Iberia – particularly those in core and, surprisingly, boundary areas – were envisaged as fulfilling a particularly important formative function. Finally, the article closes by considering how communal spaces were viewed as vital for learning about the monastic craft, enabling individuals to learn from one another in both a positive (i.e. what to do

and to believe, who to be) and a negative sense (i.e. what not to do and not to believe, who not to be).

Living Within a Community and Monastic Formation

Isidore of Seville's *Monastic Rule*, written in the early seventh century, makes plain that the best means of forming an ideal monastic subject is to live within a community. The mutual surveillance that occurs in such a situation means that vices and virtues are foregrounded. The former can be corrected, while the latter can provide a model for imitation for other monks:

> It is therefore necessary to reside amongst a holy community and to spend life under observation, so that if there is any vice in anyone it can be cured whilst it is not hidden. If there is indeed any virtue, it can assist others through its imitation, since whilst the others consider the examples of their humility, they are instructed.[18]

Isidore's sentiments on the emulation of positive exemplars reflect those expressed in the sayings collection of Martin of Braga, translated from Greek into Latin in a monastic context in *Gallaecia* in the mid-to-late sixth century:

> A brother asked an old man: "Other brothers live with me and they want me to instruct them; how do you suggest that I act?" He replied: "First, do what you preach, that you may offer them not only advice, but a model."[19]

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[18] Isidore of Seville, *Regula Monastica*, 19: "Oportet ergo tales in sancta societate commorari, atque sub testimonio vitam suam transigere, ut si quid in eis vitiorum est, dum non celatur, curetur; si quid vero virtutum, ad imitamentum proficiat aliorum, dum humilitatis eorum exempla alii contuentes, erudiuntur."

[19] Martin of Braga, *Apothegmata*, 107: "Frater requisivit senem, dicens: Fratres alii mecum cohabitant, et volunt ipsi ut ego illis praecipiam; quomodo iubes ut faciam? Respondit: Fac tu prius quod praecipis, ut non tantum illis praecepta, sed et formulam praebeas."

Again, it is the fact that the brothers live together that provides a context in which instruction could take place, both through the offering of advice and the provision of positive role models. While this common ideal of monastic education does not imply that such training would necessarily have to take place within a physical space, the conceptualization of instruction as taking place via processes of example-setting and emulation does suggest that the communal context was necessary for successful identity formation. We may therefore assume, given the understanding of the monastery as a bounded space, that either the institution as a whole (as the physical location within which the community was largely meant to exist), or sub-sections within it, was viewed as a formative space.

A Space for Instruction

The rules designate specific spaces within the monastery as appropriate for formative activities. In Isidore's *Rule*, the monastic refectory was imagined as a space in which edificatory reading could take place for the instruction of the entire community. Those monks who were eating should listen attentively and thereby receive spiritual nourishment from the scriptural reading:

> one monk sitting in the middle, with grace having been received, will read a passage of scripture; the rest will be silent whilst eating, listening most attentively to the reading. And just as the corporeal food fulfills the feeding of the body, so will the spiritual sermon restore their minds.[20]

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[20] Isidore of Seville, *Regula Monastica*, 9: "Unus tamen in medio residens, benedictione accepta, de Scripturis aliquid legat, caeteri vescentes tacebunt, lectionem attentissime audientes, ut sicut illis corporalis cibus refectionem carnis praestat, ita mentem eorum spiritualis sermo reficiat."

Just as in the examples explored above of one exemplary monk informing the conduct

of the many, so in this instance the reading of an individual has the potential to instruct

the entire community.

The pedagogical framework in operation in these texts is hierarchical. The sense that

the one instructs the many is reinforced by another extract from Isidore, which states

that those who do not comprehend the abbot's teaching should consult him *in loco*

lectione so that the whole community can listen to the explanation.[21] In addition, this

reference suggests that there was a specific place within the monastery in which reading

was meant to occur, although it is impossible to know whether this room was dedicated

to reading (aloud) or was viewed as a multi-purpose space in which other activities

occurred (such as the place where meals were taken, in which the monks were meant

to listen to edificatory readings). In a monastic rule written in the middle of the seventh

century, Fructuosus of Braga outlines what appears to be a very similar process when

discussing the instructional regime in the monasteries with which he was associated in

Gallaecia:

> after midnight in winter, all shall sit down and one shall sit in the middle
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> [*unus medio residens*] and read a book, and what is read shall be
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> explained by the abbot or prior to those who understand less well.[22]

One member of the community was entrusted with reading aloud, although in this case

the abbot or prior was supposed to explain its meaning to those who lacked

understanding.

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[21] Isidore of Seville, *Regula Monastica* 8: "De his autem quaestionibus, quae leguntur, nec forte intelliguntur, unusquisque fratrum aut in collatione aut post vesperam abbatem interroget, et, recitata in loco lectione, ab eo expositionem suscipiat ita ut, dum uni exponitur, caeteri audiant."
[22] Fructuosus of Braga, *Regula Monachorum*, 3: "Sic post mediam noctem, si hiemis tempus est, sedentibus cunctis, unus medio residens releget librum, et ab abate, vel a praeposito, disserente caeteris simplicioribus quod legitur patetiat."

The fact that the monk who read the book was situated in the middle of the group is significant because it points towards the idea that instruction took place at the centre of the learning community. Such activities were carefully timetabled as part of the daily routine of the monastery and certain spaces seem to have been designated as particularly appropriate for learning to take place, although it is important to note that the monks were also supposed to sing – and inevitably listen to – psalms when they were engaged in manual labor, especially in the gardens or fields. Visigothic-era Iberian monasteries, as imagined by the rules, may not have had schools, but it is clear that instruction was meant to take place in specific locations within the monastic space. Some sources suggest that this was in a room that was designated for teaching and learning,[23] although it is perhaps more likely that spaces could serve multiple purposes, as in the case of the refectory used for reading scripture aloud.

Formative activities thus took place at the centre of the monastic site at designated times of day and possibly in specific spaces. However, the fact that the monks and nuns were also supposed to listen to and reflect on scripture during work time points towards the fact that learning took place elsewhere too. Interestingly, the rules suggest that it was also at the boundary of the community that monks and nuns had formative experiences.[24] Core and liminal spaces thus served to inculcate monastic praxes into both trainee and experienced monks and nuns.

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[23] Isidore, *Regula Monastica* 8, 17, 21, who allocates the role of caring for the monastery's books to the sacristan, who will loan them – one at a time – to individual monks at specific times of the day; monks who use books negligently are to be punished with three days of excommunication (it is judged to be a 'mild crime').

[24] E.g. Isidore, *Regula Monastica* 4; Fructuosus, *Regula Monachorum* 21-22.

Communal Instruction and Correction

We have already seen how the monks and nuns were understood to learn best through having positive and negative exemplars placed in front of them and that the entire community was meant to come together at designated times during the day or the week in a specific space in order to receive instruction. Another class of entries on monastic formation reinforces these points, at the same time nuancing our understanding of the monastic curriculum by demonstrating that the formation of individuals into functioning members of the community was envisaged as taking place iteratively, that teaching and discipline (and punishment) were envisaged as mutually reinforcing, and that such pedagogic practices were tied intimately to understandings of how individuals and groups were to manage the boundaries of communal space.

Isidore's *Monastic Rule* and Fructuosus of Braga's *Rule for Monks* both emphasize the importance of direct instruction through preaching, reinforcing the impression gained above that listening was a vital element of learning. Fructuosus, for example, states that:

> Three times a week, a general gathering shall be held and the rules of the Fathers are to be read; a lecture is to be given or a speech for the correction and edification of the brothers is to be read by an elder; wrongs are to be corrected; the excommunicated may be shown pardon; and the stubborn and hard-hearted once again censured.[25]

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[25] Fructuosus of Braga, *Regula Monachorum*, 20: "Ter per omnem hebdomadam collecta facienda est, et regulae Patrum legendae, disserendum, vel a seniore et castigatio ac sermo aedificationis proferenda ad fratres: negligentiae emendandae; excommunicatis miserendum, et procacibus sive durecervicibus iterum irroganda censura."

What we might term 'positive' learning and correction of errors (actual or potential) were thus supposed to take place simultaneously. The regularity of the process is made plain by the fact that it was meant to take place three times per week and that those who had failed to amend their ways were to be admonished again (*iterum*). Isidore of Seville's rule also stresses that communal assemblies were moments for repeated instruction and correction of sins by senior monks or the abbot:

> They will listen to the abbot with silence, demonstrating the attention of their minds with sighs and groans. […] The same assembly will also serve for the correcting of sins and the instruction of customs, and for any other causes pertaining to the use of the monastery. [...] the teachings of the rules of the Fathers must be recited, so that those who did not learn them will understand what they follow. Anyone who did indeed learn them, reminded of them with frequent memory, will preserve diligently what they know.[26]

The reference in Fructuosus's rule to those who had been excommunicated – that is, temporarily suspended from communal membership, rather than expelled from the monastery – points towards the boundary-policing role of the assembly. Assemblies were envisaged as spaces in which entry into and, potentially, suspension and expulsion from the community could take place. Those who were learning from their superiors, their peers, and the approved texts moved on in their ascetic formation, while those who

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[26] Isidore of Seville, *Regula Monastica*, 7: "audient patrem studio summo, et silentio, intentionem animorum suorum suspiriis et gemitibus demonstrantes. Ipsa quoque collatio erit vel pro corrigendis vitiis, instruendisque moribus, vel pro reliquis causis ad utilitatem coenobii pertinentibus. Quod si talia desunt, pro consuetudine tamen disciplinae nequaquam erit omittenda collatio, sed in praefinitis diebus, cunctis pariter congregantes, praecepta Patrum regularia recensenda sunt, ut qui necdum didicerunt percipiant quod sequantur; qui vero didicerunt, frequenti memoria admoniti, sollicite custodiant quod noverunt. Sedentes autem omnes in collatione tacebunt, nisi forte quem auctoritas patris praeceperit, ut loquatur."

were at risk of sinning – and thus movement away from the core of the group – due to their failure to learn could be disciplined into line.

Conclusion

The monasteries of Visigothic Iberia were envisaged by those who wrote about them as spaces in which ideal monastic subjects could be formed by a range of educative procedures, including listening to edifying works being read aloud, questioning peers with greater knowledge and expertise, and learning from the examples of those who were closer to perfecting their ascetic craft in a community. Discipline and punishment were to be deployed within the monastery as a means of teaching the monks what 'not to do' and forcing them back onto the correct path. I have attempted to demonstrate in this essay that such formative procedures were closely connected to how rule-makers understood the monastery as a bounded space. Formation took place at both the core and the actual – and conceptual – edge of the community, although the ideal was for the monk to occupy a space at the centre of the monastery, far from the enemies that circled outside, and thus achieve the ideal identity as a cenobite.

Examination of a wider range of sources, such as hagiographies of ascetics, would no doubt nuance this picture and reveal something about how such formative regimes might (or might not) have worked in practice, how the monastic curriculum related to other elements of the educational landscape of Visigothic Iberia, and the extent to which the situation there bears comparison with monastic regimes elsewhere in the early medieval West. More broadly, I have suggested that, as idealized frameworks for constituting clearly defined subjectivities, monastic rules may be able to give us broader insights into how elite authors in the early Middle Ages thought that specific identity

profiles might be cultivated, reinforced and defended. Given that the writers of monastic rules are often from very similar backgrounds to the authors of texts that sought to define communities according to ethnic, religious, or political labels, their conceptualizations of how identity formation might work in the abstract world of the monastic rules are worthy of further examination.

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