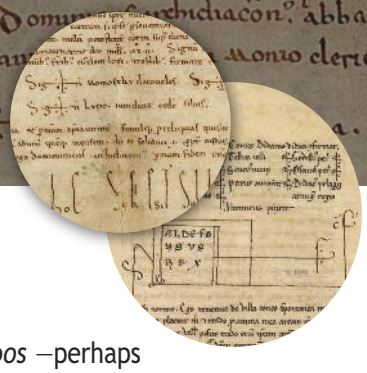

Cartulary of Valpuesta

Cartularies, which in Castile were better known as *becerros*, or in León and Galicia as *tumbos* —perhaps because of the fact that they had to be kept lying down due to their large size— are the codices in which many monasteries, cathedrals, councils or universities collected what we might call back-up copies of the originals in their respective archives.

Although more than a cartulary in the traditional sense of the term, a gothic cartulary would be a factitious codex, with documents covering a protected historical period and with the exceptional intervention of 34 different hands in its production. The Galican cartulary, on the other hand, would correspond to the typical concept thereof.

The Royal Academy has sanctioned the ***Cartulary of Valpuesta*** as **the oldest document that contains the first babblings of the language of Castile**.

A fundamental piece of work and an exceptional source of information **for a better knowledge and study of early Castilian Romance**, it was to be, in its own right, on the philology and history shelves of the best libraries in the world.

The small town of Santa María de Valpuesta played an important role in the ancient county of Castile. It was an archdeaconry with archives of considerable documentary wealth. In the early days of the Reconquest, it was even to become an important episcopal see.

This cartulary, a transcendental linguistic document, therefore snatches the banner of the maximum antiquity of written Castilian Spanish from the Emilianense and the Silense Glosses.

The bulk of the 187 Valpostan documents cover the 10th to 13th centuries, but 8 of them date back to the 9th century —the 4 oldest are from 804, 844, 864 and 875— which reveals their enormous antiquity and provides the document with an exceptional patrimonial value.

The Becerro Gótico or *Gothic Cartulary* —so called because it is written mainly in Visigothic script— with 117 folios is, the most important of them all. *The Galican Cartulary* —named in this way because it is written in Carolinian or Gallican script— consists of 64 folios and is, for the most part, a faithful copy of Gothic Cartulary.

According to the experts, **these documents** (19 x 26 cm) **are written in a Romance Latin** or, as others point out, in a Latin that has been corrupted or invaded by **a new living language that we would later call Castilian**.

Most of these documents are on donations, exchanges, sales, judgements, confessions, oaths, inventories, church repair contracts, etc., but, beyond their subject matter, their true importance lies in the eloquent trace they leave of the slow evolution of Latin into Castilian Romance.

Even apart from these philological aspects, these documents are fundamental pieces for the reconstruction of the Spanish peninsular historical past.

In ancient Autrigonia, and more specifically in what would later was to become the primitive county of Castile and, to be more precise, in the diocese of Valpuesta and its area of influence, Latin was increasingly becoming colonised by Romance expressions that would form the embryo of the future Castilian Romance. From there, and hand in hand with the re-conquest, the new language travelled southwards, towards the capital, Burgos and its alfoz, where it was polished, settled and acquired a powerful personality of its own which, finally, with the political and territorial expansion of the county of Burgos and its surroundings, was to become a language of its own. With the political and territorial expansion of the county and later of the kingdom of Castile, it would impose itself on the peninsula, giving rise to what we know today as Castilian or Spanish. The famous Cartularies of Valpuesta, bear witness to these early beginnings. They are now in the National Historical Archive, of which **Siloé has produced the demanding and difficult facsimile presented here.**