

6. Bills in Poetry

The Life of St. Millán (Gonzalo de Berceo) (1234)

Monasteries in various parts of Spain give a quiet place and time for relaxation for those traveling hastily. Away from the noise of the city, you will enjoy the slow and luxurious pace in relaxed and calm surroundings. When I go to such places I often dream of just staying there and reading all day.

Despite the imagination of unconcerned travelers, it is assumed that the monasteries in Medieval Spain suffered financial difficulties. We can understand the situation from the literary works of Gonzalo de Berceo (1185?-1264). Let me begin with a brief introduction to the author and his works, and we will discuss the issue of monastic finances later.

Gonzalo de Berceo was born in Berceo, a village of Logroño prefecture, or today's autonomous state of Rioja, and was the first renowned poet in Medieval Spain. He left a lot of poetical works described as "well-educated literature" (Mester de Clerecía). His masterpieces include "Miracles of Our Holy Mother" (Milagros de Nuestra Señora) and "Life of St. Millán" (Vida de San Millán). San Millán is the founder of the St.

Millán Monastery (picture 1) located near Berceo village. According to the legend, this saint was a man of virtue, and died in 574. It is said that even beyond his death, he accomplished many miracles. "Vida de San Millán" is divided into three chapters



【Picture 1: San Millán, Monasterio de Suso】

with 489 series of relatively short works. Chapter 1 is on his childhood as a shepherd boy, Chapter 2 on many miracles accomplished at this monastery, and Chapter 3 on the miracles that occurred after his death.