

Presentation

LIVES AND LETTERS IN CLOISTERS. GLIMPSES OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN CONVENTS IN AMERICA

Convents and monasteries played a fundamental role in the social, economic and cultural life of Spain and The Indies during the Modern Age, above all –obviously– in the lives of the people who chose the path of life in community. Every city across the Spanish Monarchy's broad expanses had several sites of congregation whose edifices left indelible imprints on urban horizons, to such an extent that even after the processes of exclaustation in some localities, cities conserved the memory of ancient convents and monasteries.

From the 16th to 19th centuries, those cells and cloisters housed the daughters and sons of diverse social sectors, for practically every family that had the wherewithal to do so, sought to have at least one of their prodigy devote their life to the religious vocation in cloisters. Having a child admitted to a religious institution not only meant prestige for the entire family, it ensured that those so consecrated were guaranteed sustenance for life. With the exception of the Mendicant orders, most religious institutions wielded substantial influence over the economy, as owners of urban estates and haciendas, and lessors and moneylenders serving agricultural, mining and commercial enterprises. Also, they were patrons of the innumerable paintings and altarpieces that adorned churches, cloisters and the

refectories and oratories of convents. In other words, the social, economic and cultural impact of religious congregations in The Indies and Latin America in the 19th century is key to understanding the historical configuration of those regions.

The *Thematic Section* of this issue was coordinated by Rosalva Loreto. It takes as its *leitmotiv* writings produced by women living in the cloistered environment of convents. While this aspect of religious congregations has been widely studied for decades, it still offers alluring glimpses into that lifestyle that merit continuing explorations. One example is the truncated autobiography of María Ignacia del Niño Jesús, penned around 1803 by a teacher in the convent of Santa Clara de Querétaro, and masterfully analyzed by Asunción Lavrin. Here, Lavrin, a pioneer in the historical study of women and their religiosity in Latin America, examines an unfinished autobiography that is of particular interest because it narrates the infancy of this Clarisse nun up to the age of seven. The author skillfully places the document in a broader context so that readers can fully appreciate its uniqueness. Unlike materials conserved on the Iberian Peninsula, autobiographies by nuns that include accounts of their childhood in Spanish America and New Spain are few. What's more, this text presents the enigmatic figure of María Ignacia herself: of Spanish birth, she was abandoned and then raised in the home of Indian nobles from Irapuato. Less noteworthy is the narration of her early years, for here the autobiography follows a model common to accounts of the lives of nuns on both sides of the Atlantic, where even as a young child the women is revealed as having a special disposition towards the religious life through two phenomena: penitential ascetic practices and visionary experiences.

Shortly after its founding in Puebla, in 1604, the convent of the Barefoot Carmelites of St. Joseph received a relic in the form of a slice of meat from the arm of Santa Teresa de Jesús, an event that, apparently, caused several nuns to experience visions and apparitions that were described and transcribed in a short document of 22 folios. Rosalva Loreto analyzes several aspects of this text including, significantly, the mechanism of the formation of identities and cohesion that characterized this recently-established religious community.

The texts by Alicia Fraschina and Cynthia Folquer introduce us to writings from convents in other latitudes and other times, well into the 19th century. Fraschina examines a corpus of poems by Dominican nuns in the monastery of Santa Catalina de Sena in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after 1861. At the outset, she highlights their particularity, for they represent a novel genre of writing that emerged in the cloisters of that port city. The author selects thirty poems that refer to key moments of the religious life, such as receiving the habit and solemn professions of faith. Through her analysis of this material, she comes to propose an explanation of why this particular type of poetry emerged in that specific period: in the second half of the 19th century, the process of republican consolidation and an increasingly pronounced secularization were hostile to the Catholic Church, which chose to adopt a posture of intransigence. According to Fraschina, those Dominican nuns were provoked by this unfavorable reality to "...take up [their pens] and express themselves through poetry [and] in an adverse social context interpellate the hegemonic discourse that accused them of being victims [and] slaves, characterizing the religious profession as useless sacrifice".

Cynthia Folquer's text, meanwhile, moves us two decades forward and a few kilometers northwest of Buenos Aires to the city of Tucumán, which had just suffered the ravages and terrible after-effects of the poorly-managed cholera epidemic of 1886. Here we encounter Elmira Paz, viuda de Gallo, a woman of the sugarcane-producing elite who, at the end of that fateful year, created an asylum for orphans in her home. With time, her shelter became the base for the construction of a Dominican congregation founded by doña Elmira herself. Folquer analyzes Elmira's epistolary correspondence, written under the pen name, Sor María Dominga del Santísimo Sacramento, before delving into the intricacies of the establishment and daily life of that new congregation guided by two axes; first, the practice of reading inside the cloisters and, second, the relation between the congregation and the political and economic society of Tucumán in the context of efforts to realize the project of building a sustainable convent.

Although the diverse public and royal offices of The Indies have received broad attention, there are aspects that remain largely unex-

plored. One of these concerns the knowledge that men who aspired to such positions were expected to have. It is in this context that Concepción Gavira presents an especially valuable document: the examination with the questions and –sometimes quite detailed– answers and name of the assayer, founder and balancer of the Royal Treasury of Oruro. It is important to note that this document's value as a source of information on the requirements for public service is multiplied in light of how little is actually known about royal offices in the Southern Indies.

The *General Section* of this issue begins with a text in which Caterina Camastra follows the steps –literally, dance steps– of the Italian Girolamo Marani and his family-based theater troupe as it traversed diverse scenarios in the Old World before coming to, and settling in, New Spain. Camastra's account of the adventures of this dancer and his family allow her to lead the reader into an exploration of the theatrical practices of the late 18th century, and of the social and symbolic values of their activity, ensconced between misery and nobility.

Following this essay, Francisco Javier Crespo Sánchez and Juan Hernández Franco present a reconstruction of the model of paternity of a Spanish nation in transit from the 19th to the 20th century, based on an analysis of hemerographic sources. That process proposed new values, though without necessarily leaving behind those traditionally established. Ivonne Meza Huacuja, in turn, analyzes the contents of the book on the psychology of adolescence by Ezequiel A. Chávez (1928) and its reception in Mexican society. Finally, Cervantes, Estrada and Bello illustrate how kinship relations are imbricated in ways of conception and interaction in the space of collective life and work among the Tseltales of the coffee-producing area of Tenejapa.

Announcements

I close this brief *Presentation* with three announcements of interest to our authors, readers and other collaborators.

1. As of April of this year, all articles in the journal will be assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI). For digital academic publi-

cations, a DOI number simplifies locating contents on the Internet since, in the remote—but not entirely improbable—eventuality that the URL location of our journal were changed (currently <http://www.revistarelaciones.com>), authors and readers would be able to find articles of interest in the immense world of the Internet by performing a DOI search. Moreover, since DOI activation entails interrelating the metadata of each article, the process facilitates indexation, contents searches and the use of digital bibliographic managers (like Zotero or Mendeley) that register texts. For more information, consult the DOI System webpage: <http://www.doi.org/>

2. Also as of April of this year, *Relaciones* adopts the LOCKSS system, an automated resource that secures files and safeguards the journal's contents in media external to institutional servers. This system, devised and maintained by Stanford University, ensures the permanence and continuous safeguarding of our publication through a broad network of university servers. For more information, see: <https://www.lockss.org/>

3. In an effort to reduce the time that transpires between receiving manuscripts and evaluating and publishing them, the editorial team at *Relaciones*, with the support of its Editorial Council, has decided to suspend the *Thematic Sections* in the remaining issues of 2017 (151 and 152, volume 38). This entails no substantial change in the journal's editorial policy, only a strategy to expedite the diffusion of the knowledge generated in our disciplines. Beginning with the first issue of 2018 (no. 153), we will return to the traditional format that includes the *Thematic Section*.

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