



Spirituality and Monasticism, East and West

# **WOMEN RELIGIOUS CROSSING BETWEEN CLOISTER AND THE WORLD**

## **NUNNERIES IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS, ca. 1200–1700**

Edited by

**MERCEDES PÉREZ VIDAL**

**ARC** HUMANITIES PRESS



## **SPIRITUALITY AND MONASTICISM, EAST AND WEST**

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# INTRODUCTION

MERCEDES PÉREZ VIDAL

**THIS VOLUME IS** the product of a collaborative research program undertaken since 2014 by the *Société d'Études Interdisciplinaires sur les Femmes au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance* (SEIFMAR). This program has focused on various aspects of the relationship between women and the religious in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern era, as well as how this interaction expanded across the Atlantic.

Studies dedicated to the impact of women on the social, intellectual, and religious affairs of their era have grown in popularity over the past few decades. Research on these issues, however, has not progressed in an altogether coherently. On the contrary, it has presented considerable discrepancies in context and geography, as well as in the various aspects, themes, and research angles that this exceptionally broad domain encompasses. Moreover, there has been a profound lack of dialogue between researchers. Evidence of a communication breakdown is threefold: spatial, between different countries, and between the two sides of the Atlantic; temporal, between specialists of different time periods, in particular between medievalists and early-modernists; and lastly what can be called a lack of intra/interdisciplinary communication. The above-mentioned research program was designed to eschew these traditional limitations.

The starting point for this book was the one-day conference *Femmes Cloîtrées, femmes dans le Monde*, held in Paris on July 30, 2015 and organized by Laura Cayrol Bernardo and myself, as co-founding members of SEIFMAR. Laura Cayrol made it possible for this event to take place in the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, and to have the support of the Institut du Genre. The conference focused on female monastic enclosure, on the relationship between religious women and men (and, in a broader sense, on their relationship with the world beyond the cloister). Two of the articles published here (Pérez Vidal and Müller) developed out of papers delivered at that conference, and they have been complemented with original contributions that enlarge the overall picture. Following the research objectives of SEIFMAR, this volume conducts a long-term inquiry regarding the differences and similarities, the continuities and discontinuities in various aspects of the active role of women in monastic and religious life during a long chronological framework (from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century). Such a transhistorical approach highlights the continuities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. This volume also explores the transregionality and the fluidity of transatlantic exchange of models between Europe and America, and the continuities and

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\* I am grateful to Lydia Gulick for revising the English version of this essay, to Jaime Reyes Monroy and Juan Carlos Jiménez Abarca for permission to use the image of the “Traslado de las monjas dominicas a su nuevo convento de Valladolid” on the book cover, and to all the contributors for making this publication possible, despite all the struggles we faced.

connections between several geographical areas. Finally, the interdisciplinary dialogue established between scholars from different backgrounds such as literature, history, and art history allows a more comprehensive approach to seeing religious women (nuns, tertiaries, or *mulieres religiosae*) organizing their life inside their communities and their relationship with the world.

As the volume's title emphasizes, the main issues of this book are two: the transatlantic paradigm in the study of religious women; and the fluidity or permeability of enclosure and the relationship between these monasteries and the social *milieu* of their era. The transatlantic paradigm, which takes Europe and the Americas as one coherent area of study, is deemed by some historians as constituting a field in its own right. It has opened a fruitful discussion on studying the communities and territories on both sides of the Atlantic beyond national or imperial histories. Regarding the second issue, studies from recent decades have focused on documents of practice rather than on normative ones, and therefore have demonstrated the fluidity of female religious communities' relationships with authority and society of their time. In both cases, as we will see in further detail, spatial considerations are a significant element of the analysis, and the common thread of the different studies here presented.

### **The Transatlantic Paradigm in the Study of Women Religious: Overcoming National, Chronological, and Disciplinary Boundaries**

In 1989 Arenal and Schlau published one of the first books devoted to the study of religious women (in this case nuns) from both sides of the Atlantic, focusing in particular on literary production.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, since the 1980s, research on religious women and female monasticism has flourished in both Europe and America. This has overcome the topic's previous neglect, other than a few pioneering works.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we still encounter a lack of dialogue among scholars, a comparative approach between continents, and of interdisciplinary cooperation. Recent attention to the so-called "cultural turn" in Atlantic Studies has led many scholars to analyze the exchange of ideas between the two worlds. The traditional centre/metropole versus periphery/colony dichotomy has been recomposed into a more multipolar interpretative frame. For example, in the particular case of the Spanish Empire, or Catholic Monarchy,<sup>3</sup> historians like Óscar Mazín have pointed out the need to avoid nationalistic approaches and have advocated for a wider perspective that analyzes the close relationship between the territories under the control of the Iberian Crowns.<sup>4</sup> Recent research has reconsidered the national bor-

<sup>1</sup> Arenal and Schlau, eds., *Untold Sisters*.

<sup>2</sup> Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*; Muriel, *Conventos de Monjas en la Nueva España*.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the concept of Spanish Empire, see Hausser and Pietschmann. "Empire." The official title was the Catholic Monarchy, as in 1494 Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon were granted by Pope Alexander VI the privilege to bear the title of Catholic Monarchs.

<sup>4</sup> Mazín Gómez, *Una ventana al Mundo Hispánico, Ensayo bibliográfico* (2006) and his subsequent *Ensayo bibliográfico II* (2013). This has been also the aim of the international research network on the Iberian monarchies, *Red Columnaria*: <https://www.um.es/redcolumnaria/>.

ders within these wider political entities, and the geography of the Catholic expansion, and has moved from the traditional unidirectional viewpoint to show how the cultural exchange was actually bi- or even multi-directional.<sup>5</sup> This has resulted in an increasing number of studies on a wide range of topics, including race, gender, and religion,<sup>6</sup> as well as new initiatives and conferences. For example, the colloquium organized by the Center of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles in 2004 and its proceedings entitled *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*<sup>7</sup> showed how gender and religion could be placed at the centre of study into the Atlantic World.<sup>8</sup> Despite this book and other works and international meetings with a similar comparative and transatlantic approach,<sup>9</sup> in most cases the timeframe has encompassed only the Early Modern period.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, most research on the transatlantic paradigm and networks still focus on later periods.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional periodization of history and the organization of university departments by these chronological boundaries have seriously hampered the analysis of continuities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Overcoming these confines is necessary in order to correctly understand certain issues and processes, such as devotional and liturgical practices, visual culture, religious enclosure, or religious reform. The long-term approach in these essays intersect conventionally isolated historical periods, sharing the idea of Jacques Le Goff's "long Moyen Âge."<sup>12</sup> This affects both the European and the American continents, inasmuch as the arrival of Europeans to America is not interpreted as a start date. On the contrary, their arrival implied a continuity of practices that had been developing in the Late Middle Ages. A longer timeframe will allow us to determine to what extent the evolving norms regarding religious life and liturgy (before and after the Council of Trent in 1545–1563) had an impact on different aspects of religious women's lives. Our analysis will focus on the Catholic world, with the Protestant religious communities in both Europe and North America excluded, since the dynamics are different, and the latter are simply post-medieval.

**5** See the introductory essay by Gaudin and Valenzuela Márquez, "Empires ibéricas," 13–24, available online at <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/358>.

**6** Braun, Hooper, and Vollendorf, eds., *Theorising the Ibero-American Atlantic*; Po-chia Hsia and Palomo, "Religious Identities in the Iberian Worlds."

**7** Kostroun and Vollendorf, eds., *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World*.

**8** Stolcke, "A New World Engendered."

**9** Viforcós Marinas and Paniagua Pérez, eds., *I Congreso internacional del Monacato Femenino*; Ramos Medina, ed., *El Monacato femenino en el Imperio Español*; Dinan and Meyers, eds., *Women and Religion in Old and New Worlds*; Viforcós Marinas and Loreto López, eds., *Historias compartidas*.

**10** For volumes with more contributions on the Middle Ages, see Viforcós Marinas and Campos Sánchez-Bordona, eds., *Fundadores, fundaciones y espacios de vida conventual*; Campos y Fernández de Sevilla, ed., *La clausura femenina en el Mundo Hispánico*.

**11** For instance, the research group: *Grupo de investigación Redes transatlánticas: Relaciones intelectuales y literarias*, <http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/redestransatlanticas/>.

**12** Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*.

We have also had to confront gaps in research. Earlier studies on both sides of the Atlantic had focused largely on economic and institutional aspects of the history of these foundations, whereas the literary and mystical writings of nuns,<sup>13</sup> and to a lesser degree libraries in female monasteries, have enjoyed greater appreciation only more recently.<sup>14</sup> Scholars of Hispanic Studies, Comparative Literature, and Gender Studies have looked at religious women in this transatlantic paradigm and focused mainly on women's writings.<sup>15</sup> We still need to know more about the circulation and exchange of books among different monasteries, nationally and internationally, and on the role of women in these networks. Books were objects in motion with an outstanding cultural impact on monastic life.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, although female monasteries founded in the Americas were clearly heirs of their European counterparts in many aspects of monastic life, their role in transatlantic exchanges deserves further exploration. Particularly, art and architecture have been disregarded in many overviews of female monasticism in these territories.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, art historians have only seldom transcended stylistic and nationalist approaches when studying these female monasteries.<sup>18</sup>

An example of such voids can be found in the two-volume proceedings of a recent conference, held in 2015 in Castellón, Spain, on transatlantic artistic traffic or exchange (*Arte y patrimonio: tráfico transoceánicos*).<sup>19</sup> Women's role features in just two articles. One of them explored the role of Juana de Austria, sister of Felipe II, as collector of exotic artefacts from both the West and East Indies, but without any focus on her monastic foundation of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid.<sup>20</sup> Only one article analyzed the transmission of cultural models and monastic spaces from female monasteries in Spain and Portugal to The Americas. Angel Peña studied the so-called "salas del Belén" or rooms of the crib which existed in both Iberian and American monasteries. Peña analyzed the similarities with European monasteries, as well as the peculiarities of these spaces in female monasteries in Quito. He concludes that, whereas some Spanish monasteries built monumental "salas relicario" (reliquary rooms),<sup>21</sup> the "salas del belén" in Quito monasteries took on a similar role, and both kinds of rooms functioned as a kind of Wunderkammer.<sup>22</sup>

**13** Poutrin, *Le voile et la plume*; Surtz, *Writing Women*; Cirlot and Garí, *La mirada interior*; Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography*; Lavrin and Loreto, eds., *Diálogos espirituales*; Baranda Leturio and Marín Pina, eds., *Letras en la Celda*.

**14** Cátedra, *Liturgia, poesía y teatro*; Pérez Vidal, "Creación, destrucción y dispersión; Suárez González and Baurý, "La culture écrite dans les monastères cisterciens."

**15** Díaz and Kirk, "Theorizing Transatlantic Women's Writing."

**16** Pérez Vidal, "Female Aristocratic Networks."

**17** Lavrín, *Brides of Christ*.

**18** Pérez Vidal, "Arte y liturgia de los monasterios femeninos," 61.

**19** Rodríguez Moya, Fernández Valle, and López Calderón, eds., *Arte y Patrimonio en Iberoamérica and Iberoamérica en perspectiva artística*.

**20** Bosch Moreno, "Juana de Austria."

**21** The most outstanding example is probably the reliquary of las Descalzas Reales. See Bosch Moreno, "Para que el pueblo vea y goce de este santo tesoro."

**22** Peña Martín, "La Sala del Belén."

This is not the only example of a transfer and reinterpretation of particular monastic spaces from Europe to America. Other examples have been analyzed in my contribution to this volume, as well as in other publications. I have addressed art and architecture in relation to liturgy within an Atlantic framework, thereby avoiding previous nationalistic approaches,<sup>23</sup> as well as traditional formalist and stylistic types of analysis.<sup>24</sup> Over the last thirty years, research on female monasteries, in particular German and Italian, have explored how gender within monastic life influenced liturgy and produced a material articulation in the buildings.<sup>25</sup>

In the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere, however, studies on sacred topography and spatial functionality in female monasteries remain scarce, with a few exceptions. One research line in *Spiritual Landscapes*, a multidisciplinary project at the University of Barcelona (2015–2017) on female monasticism,<sup>26</sup> examined the topography of female monasteries, although it only looked at four foundations, all in Iberia. Apart from my own research on Dominican nunneries,<sup>27</sup> space in Cistercian nunneries in the Iberian kingdoms has been explored by *Aragonia Cisterciensis* (2016–2019), and by a new project on the monastery of Lorvão (2021–2024),<sup>28</sup> as well as by some publications.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, this kind of approach is more or less entirely absent in studying the architecture of female monasteries in the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru.<sup>30</sup>

### Religious Women's Agency inside and outside the Cloister

Liturgy was determined by the spaces in which it was performed: large or small, publicly accessible or enclosed, defined by physical barriers or borders.<sup>31</sup> In the case of nuns, it has been thought that the liturgical spaces were conditioned to a large extent by enclosure and by their reliance on the administration of the sacraments by priests, especially after the monastic and ecclesiastical reforms of the Central Middle Ages. As stated by Duval in this volume, the division of roles then was organized not so much on

<sup>23</sup> Pérez Vidal, "Algunas consideraciones."

<sup>24</sup> Pérez Vidal, "Arte y liturgia de los monasterios femeninos," 58–71.

<sup>25</sup> Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing"; Jäggi, *Frauenklöster im Spätmittelalter*; Hamburger and Schlotheuber, *The Liber ordinarius of Nivelles*.

<sup>26</sup> *Spiritual Landscapes* (HAR2014–52198–P) was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. It has been succeeded by the research project *Paisajes monásticos. Representaciones y virtualizaciones de las realidades espirituales y materiales medievales en el Mediterráneo Occidental (siglos VI–XVI)*, for the period 2019–2022 (PGC2018–095350–B–I00).

<sup>27</sup> Pérez Vidal, "El espacio litúrgico."

<sup>28</sup> *Livros, rituais e espaço num Mosteiro Cisterciense feminino. Viver, ler e rezar em Lorvão nos séculos XIII a XVI*, for the period 2021–2024 (PTDC/ART-HIS/0739/2020). The principal investigator is Catarina Fernandes Barreira. It is funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia in Portugal.

<sup>29</sup> Carrero Santamaría, "The Creation and Use of Space"; Catalunya, "The Customary of the Royal Convent."

<sup>30</sup> There are a few exceptions, particularly in Mexico: Ratto, "El convento de San Jerónimo."

<sup>31</sup> Muschiol, "Gender and Monastic Liturgy," 806.

the basis of gender, but between clerics and lay people. Women could not be clerics, and were therefore physically segregated from the altar and from the sacramental and pastoral services. Focusing on the particular case of Dominican nuns, Duval analyzes how this greatly conditioned nuns' identity. However, despite the limitations imposed on women's authority by conciliar legislation, there is evidence of women fulfilling ministerial roles during the Central and Late Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup>

Regulations on enclosure grew to be particularly strict over the thirteenth century, starting with those imposed in the early 1220s by the mendicant orders, and ending with the *Periculoso*, a papal decretal of Pope Boniface VIII issued in 1298. Although this marked a gendered difference in the use of spaces, the legislation on enclosure has to be considered critically and in comparison with the reality of each religious community. Its enforcement varied significantly from place to place and enclosure was far from always being observed. Thus, the relationships between convents and their local context were more complex than previously thought. As the contributions of García Fernández and Sutter in this volume discuss, many communities did not live in the degree of isolation that statutes and chronicles seem to indicate. On the contrary, the monastic walls were quite permeable, even after the implementation of the Observant reform and the Council of Trent.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly true in those monasteries ruled by aristocratic and powerful abbesses, who were involved in different religious and social networks, either in late medieval Galicia (García Fernández), or in the Order of Fontevraud (Müller). Many of these "elite" female monasteries worked as bastions of dynastic familial memory and political power (Müller).

Not seldomly, nuns negotiated a more flexible interpretation of enclosure (Pérez Vidal), or they confronted the reformers (García Fernández). This had consequences not only in the nuns' relationship with the outside world, but also inside the cloister. Indeed, as the Apostolic visitations cited in my article in this volume prove, liturgical and theatrical performances continued to be celebrated in many female monasteries in both New Spain and Peru until the eighteenth century.

Traditional periodization with a strict division between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period has not only made it difficult to understand these continuities, but has also led to the attribution of early modern features to the earlier period. For instance, as demonstrated by Müller's article in this volume, Fontevraud's identity as the order in which women lead and men serve, which still persists in contemporary historiography, has no medieval origins. On the contrary, it was abbess Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon (1637–1670) who deliberately manipulated the historical memory of Fontevraud. Medieval sources indicate no ascetic nor ideological submission of men to women; the hierarchy was rather based on social status.

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**32** Buggyis, *The Care of Nuns*.

**33** Lehfelddt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*.



## Gender, Race, and Status among Religious Women

Gender had an impact on women's religious encounter, starting with their religious identity (Duval's contribution in this volume), with the observance of enclosure (García Fernández), and, related to this, with reform movements (Duval, Sutter, Pérez Vidal), with transatlantic exchanges, and also with the ethnic differences established in America (Benoist). However, women's relationship with religion was far from restrictive nor monolithic. On the contrary, the concept of "intersectionality" can be useful:<sup>34</sup> that is to say, gender's relationship with other markers of difference such as status, race, place, religious order, and "gender performativity," as defined by Judith Butler. Gender performativity explains that gender identities were constructed in performance; thus they cannot be understood separately from the "cultural intersections" that produced and maintained gender.<sup>35</sup> All the agents involved and these cultural intersections differed from one nunnery to another, and had consequences in all aspects of monastic life, reflected in the diversity of gendered responses.

Whereas friars were always sent directly from Spain to establish new male convents, no female monastery in New Spain was founded by nuns from Spain until 1665. Some *beatas* and tertiaries were sent by the second quarter of the sixteenth century to instruct religious women of already established foundations (see the contributions of Pérez Vidal and Bieñko in this volume), but no Spanish nun undertook transoceanic trips in the 1500s.<sup>36</sup>

However, some nuns were able to travel across the Atlantic by use of their imagination. Nuns like Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534), María de Ágreda (1602–1665), or Ana María de San Joseph (1581–1632), actually performed transatlantic spiritual journeys without leaving their cloisters.<sup>37</sup> We could link this to the well-documented late medieval tradition of performing virtual pilgrimages to places that were unreachable due to enclosure or other restrictions. We can count numerous examples from monasteries across Europe of nuns who travelled virtually, receiving the same indulgences obtained by pilgrims who actually travelled to Rome or Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

The first Spanish nuns arrived in New Spain in 1620. That year, Jerónima de la Asunción and her sisters from the Poor Clares monastery of Santa Isabel de Toledo stayed in Mexico for a few months before resuming their journey to Manila in the Philippines, where they established a new house. Jerónima's travel companion and later abbess of the Manila convent, Ana de Cristo, recorded their travel experiences in a manuscript,

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**34** This concept was introduced to displace hegemonic and reductive discourses based on the equation women = gender. The term is commonly attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

**35** Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6–7.

**36** Both Pérez Vidal and Bieñko deal in their respective contributions with the foundations of the first *beaterios* or *recogimientos* for religious women in New Spain. For an analysis of the process of transculturation or adaptation of *recogimientos* from Spain to Peru see Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*.

**37** Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*, 186–214; Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*.

**38** Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent*; Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 236–39.

now kept in Toledo, along with a hagiography of Jerónima.<sup>39</sup> In this case, the exchanges were not only transatlantic, but also transpacific.<sup>40</sup> Some years later, in 1665, the first Capuchin foundation in New Spain received nuns from Toledo, and in 1712 five Capuchin nuns from Madrid travelled to Lima in Peru. In this instance, one of the nuns wrote an account of their journey.<sup>41</sup>

The scarcity of direct contact with Spain during the sixteenth century caused, as pointed out by Bieñko, a rapid “creolization” of female monastic communities, marking a gender difference between male and female convents. This means that there was a predominance of *criollas*,<sup>42</sup> that is Spanish descendants, in the nunneries. Until the eighteenth century, in New Spain only *criollas* and some *mestizas* (women of European and indigenous blood), were allowed to profess (take the vows of holy orders) in the onasteries of New Spain. Neither indigenous women nor African women were considered to possess the qualities needed to become nuns (Benoist). Peruvian sixteenth-century convents were slightly more flexible, as they accepted indigenous women as novices, although not as professed nuns.<sup>43</sup> Thus, indigenous women were doubly discriminated against in the spiritual hierarchy established in Spanish America, for both their gender and their ethnicity.<sup>44</sup> The animated controversy surrounding the spiritual nature of indigenous people that took place during the early years of the Spanish conquest reemerged in the eighteenth century with the introduction of a proposal to create a convent exclusively for indigenous noble women (see Bieñko in this volume). The first convent of this type was the Corpus Christi in Mexico City, established in 1724, followed by another foundation in Antequera (now Oaxaca) and Valladolid (now Morelia) in 1737.<sup>45</sup> Paradoxically, as Mónica Díaz has argued, eighteenth-century indigenous nuns employed some of the stereotypes from colonial ethnic discourse in order to define themselves in clear opposition to Spanish nuns. Their purpose was to assert themselves as both indigenous and noble, claiming ethnic independence.<sup>46</sup>

The *casta* system established in early modern Spanish America was, however, much more fluid than the later classification based on race, taken as a fixed biological marker, which became widespread in the nineteenth century. In addition to the indigenous peo-

39 Owens, *Nuns Navigating the Spanish Empire*.

40 On this emerging field see, for instance Lee, ed., *Western Visions of the Far East*.

41 María Rosa, *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*, ed. Owens.

42 Originally the term *criollo* referred to enslaved people of African ancestry born in America. Its meaning expanded later to cover Spaniards born in the colonies, and it was frequently used exclusively with solely this meaning in the final decades of the Hispanic dominion. For an analysis of the complexity of the terms *creole* and Creolization, see Gundaker, “Discussion: Creolization, Complexity, and Time.”

43 Burns, *Colonial Habits*, 125.

44 The first studies devoted to female monasteries in America focused on those founded by white—either Spanish or *creole*—women.

45 Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*; Hernández de Olarte, “Controversia en torno a la fundación de conventos.”

46 Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, 41 and 109.



ples, by the seventeenth century Afro-descendants also constituted a significant part of the population in colonial Mexico and Peru. The majority were enslaved women and entered some convents as servants. However, very few Afro-descendant women were accepted as nuns, let alone classified as *beatas* (blessed) due to their extraordinary and exemplary life, a first step towards sanctity. This was however the case of the two Afro-descendant women studied by Benoist in this volume: Esperanza de San Alberto, who entered San José de Puebla as a servant and professed before her death, and Estefanía de San Joseph, who became a *beata* of the Franciscan Order in Lima. The lives of both women were recorded. However, as analyzed by Benoist, the biographers attempted to “whiten” both Esperanza and Estefanía by stressing their exceptionality. The biographers also used both women’s lives with the clear purpose of glorifying their *criollo* convents and orders.<sup>47</sup>

### Cultural Exchange and Objects in Motion through Transatlantic Networks

Although nuns did not travel between the two continents during the sixteenth century, intense cultural interaction did operate through different networks and different agents.<sup>48</sup> Among these agents we should include religious women, lay patrons and patronesses, but also religious men, whose role in Atlantic cultural transmission was significant, especially in the years just after the Spanish conquest. As discussed in my article in this volume, Cardinal Cisneros’ religious reform was introduced in the Americas by Spanish friars like the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga (1468–1548) or the Dominican Bernardo de Alburquerque (1558–1579). This led, for instance, to the dedication to the *Madre de Dios* of some of the first female monasteries in New Spain, in particular in Mexico City and Oaxaca. Both Zumárraga and Alburquerque were bishops. We might note here that, in both the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, many female monasteries had been under episcopal jurisdiction since their origin and were quite independent from their respective religious orders (Pérez Vidal).

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship on the role of women’s networks in building and performing women’s power in the premodern world has also considered the role of books, together with other artefacts such as relics, images, or artistic objects. They were objects in motion and circulated through different types of networks: female networks, networks based on kinship, and also those of the religious orders.<sup>49</sup> These networks operated at a local, national, and international level. This international exchange and circulation, in this case transatlantic, of books and other artefacts, provides a necessary

<sup>47</sup> For a study of New World hagiographies as tools of *criollo* pride, see Rubial García, *La Santidad Controvertida*.

<sup>48</sup> On representation and networks in creating an “imperial space” see “Empires ibériques. De la péninsule au global,” ed. Guillaume Gaudin and Jaime Valenzuela Márquez, a special issue of *Diasporas* 25 (2015), <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/352>.

<sup>49</sup> See for instance the contributions in the recently published volume Dumitrescu, Hardie, and O’Loughlin Bérat, eds., *Relations of Power*. Also see Armstrong-Partida, Guerson, and Wessell Lightfoot, eds., *Women and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*.

counterpoint to nation-biased narratives. Our collection here will allow a more nuanced definition of multidirectional processes such as religious and liturgical reforms carried out at different times, cultural and artistic exchanges linked to these reforms, as well as a more refined definition of gendered boundaries, like monastic enclosure.

In her article in this volume, Doris Bieñko analyzes the presence of books on European religious women or even female saints in New Spain's nunneries and their reception among *creole* religious women. As the case of St. Gertrude the Great (1256–1302) shows, the lives of some of these saints were reinterpreted in New Spain with different political, religious, and propagandistic purposes.<sup>50</sup> Devotion to St. Gertrude was widespread across the territories of the Catholic Monarchy from the early sixteenth century, made even more popular in the Counter Reformation as her works were translated and printed. Her life also had an impact on many nuns' writings; for example, she served as a model for St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), who became the paradigm for nuns' autobiographies.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, more studies on the circulation of books among different female monasteries are needed. Scholarship on the transmission of and trade in books between Europe and America has mainly focused on male religious houses as agents and consumers.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, mainly due to their dispersal and loss, liturgical manuscripts and fragments have not received the same amount of attention as devotional writings.<sup>52</sup> Other than lavishly illuminated manuscripts they have been largely neglected by philologists, historians, and art historians. Musicologists have paid attention to these sources in recent years, but the imbalance between different territories and religious orders is significant.<sup>53</sup> Finally, a gendered analysis of manuscripts as a whole in relationship to monastic spaces in America has yet to be undertaken.

Bieñko's article in this volume shows how images (present in imported books) inspired visions, while nuns' visions, described in their autobiographical writings, helped to develop new iconographies, as we find in the depictions of St. Gertrude the Great. There was therefore a close, two-way relationship between images and visions.<sup>54</sup>

Bieñko's article also provides evidence of the circulation of artistic objects from Spain to America. An example of this is the request made by Sr. María de Jesús Tomellín (ca. 1579–1637) to her sister living in Seville for an image of the infant Jesus made by

**50** See Bilinkoff and Greer, eds., *Colonial Saints*.

**51** For instance, in his monograph on Dutch printed books in New Spain, César Manrique mentions only the convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns of San José and Santa Teresa in Puebla. Manrique, *El libro flamenco para lectores novohispanos*. On female monasteries we can mention the paper presented by Beatriz Ferrús Antón, "Miradas transoceánicas a la tradición literaria conventual de los siglos XVII y XVIII," at the international congress, *Transocéanos: Cultura y mundos ibéricos en los siglos XVI–XVIII*, held in Barcelona on May 9–10, 2019.

**52** The transmission of liturgical books from Europe to America has been also analyzed in the aforementioned congress (*Transocéanos*) by Dominiki Jurczak: "Il Libro liturgico come prodotto d'esportazione europeo: l'importanza dei testi liturgici nella formazione della cultura in America."

**53** Lledías and Muriel, *La música en las instituciones femeninas novohispanas*; Pérez Vidal, "Creación, destrucción y dispersión."

**54** Sanmartín Bastida, "En torno al arte y las visionarias."

the “best artisan.” Once the image arrived at the convent in Puebla, it was named “*Niño Gachupín*” due to its Spanish origin. This recorded example reveals the role of Mexican nuns in commissioning these devotional images from the Metropolis. From the end of the sixteenth century, Seville became the main centre for the production of sculptures to export to the Americas. Although not mentioned in Bieńko’s article, the “best artisan” was at the moment Juan Martínez Montañés (1568–1649). Some of his sculptures were in fact sent to America, such as the so-called “*Niño Cautivo*” from the Cathedral of Mexico City, a production that was continued by his disciple, Juan de Mesa y Velasco (1583–1627).<sup>55</sup> However, due to the increasing demand from Spain and the Americas, many of these images were mass-produced through high-quality lead casts of wood sculptures by Martínez Montañés, Mesa, and others. Diego de Oliver, who called himself “*maestro baciador de niños de plomo*” was one of the most successful artisans producing these casts and was based in Seville from 1612. In 1619, Oliver sent a total of twenty-six images to America,<sup>56</sup> some of which are still preserved in female monasteries. They were the focus of nuns’ devotions, showing a continuity in these practices between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, as well as transatlantic cultural transmission. Images of the Infant Christ used in personal devotions and in liturgical performances were described in nuns’ visions and autobiographies during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of these images still exist, mainly from German nunneries, such as the Christ Child from Walsrode, ca. 1500,<sup>57</sup> together with cribs, like the one from the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne, ca. 1340–1350, or a South Netherlandish fifteenth-century crib now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.<sup>58</sup> Whereas medieval images of the Christ Child from Spanish female monasteries are unknown, those made between the sixteenth and eighteenth century are quite numerous. Furthermore, a late fifteenth-century crib from Santo Domingo de Toledo has been also preserved.<sup>59</sup>

Such artistic objects and images were a means of transferring culture across the Atlantic, in both directions. Although less known, several examples prove that Spanish nuns were commissioning or acquiring artworks from America, such as the so-called *imágenes de caña* or maize imagery. These images were a syncretic product<sup>60</sup> obtained through the amalgamation of native religion and manufacturing techniques with Catholic beliefs and European imagery.<sup>61</sup> Due to this sacred symbolism, but also its light weight, parts of the maize plant were used around Lake Pátzcuaro to produce sculp-

55 Amador Marrero and Pérez Morales, “Un debate sempiterno.

56 Palomero Páramo, “El mercado escultórico entre Sevilla y Nueva España,” 110–11; Marcos Villán, “Modelos compartidos.”

57 Knüvener, “Christusknabe.”

58 LeZotte, “Cradling Power.”

59 Pérez Vidal, “‘Descendit de caelis,’” 86–87.

60 Pedro Germano Leal (“Hybridism, Purity and Syncretism”) has argued for using “syncretism” instead of “hybridism.” The latter has etymologically racial connotations and can lead to errors, like assuming that only two cultures were involved in the process of creating these artefacts.

61 Amador Marrero, “Imaginería ligera novohispana,” 41–48 and 67–73.

tures representing deities.<sup>62</sup> Together with these pre-Hispanic precedents, lightweight sculptures produced in New Spain also had European precedents, such as late medieval sculptures made of wood, skin, and other materials to add realism, like the so-called Cristo de Burgos. These syncretic images were well appreciated in the mother country, as attested by chroniclers like Jerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604) and Agustín de Vetancurt (1620–1700).<sup>63</sup> Their weight made them particularly valued for processional purposes. So, many belonged to Confraternities of the Vera Cruz (True Cross) both in New Spain and Spain, but they were also commissioned or donated to female monasteries.<sup>64</sup> A head, now at the Marés Museum in Barcelona, was made in New Spain and was part of an image of Christ from Santa Isabel de los Reyes de Toledo.<sup>65</sup> Other images are preserved in las Descalzas Reales (Madrid), San José de Ávila, Porta Coeli in Valladolid, Santa María de Jesús in Sevilla, and beyond. Although these images have been studied by Amador Marrero, an analysis of their function in relation to nuns' devotions and liturgy has yet to be undertaken.

\* \* \*

The contributions in this volume have underlined how cross-boundary research on religious women can greatly contribute to surpassing the theoretical and methodological limitations of this large field. The contributions overcome anachronistic epistemological boundaries and bridge conventionally isolated sub-fields, historical periods, and geographical areas. In this way, this volume not only enhances our global understanding of female monasticism, but it also aims at better integrating the history of religious women into cultural history at a global scale. It should contribute to animating current debates on the role of women in international religious and political networks, as well as in cultural transfer. Finally, this volume is an invitation to continue dialogue among international scholars, to open new horizons, and to raise new research questions that will inspire future scholarship.

**62** Brito Benítez, "Symbolism and Use of Maize."

**63** Amador Marrero, "Imaginería ligera novohispana," 41–45, 98–126 and 139.

**64** Another example of an "artistic syncretic product" from female monasteries, combining medieval Euro-Christian and Mesoamerican notions of the sacred were the so-called crowned-nuns portraits. James Córdova has shown how the agency of nuns and their patrons was fundamental to their production. They made use of pictorial traditions and normative gender signs to create artworks with a clear meaning in the context of eighteenth-century Bourbon monastic reforms. Córdova, *The Art of Professing in Bourbon Mexico*.

**65** <http://www.bcn.cat/museumares/interactiu/escultura/pas10.html>; Amador Marrero, "Imaginería ligera novohispana," 320–21.

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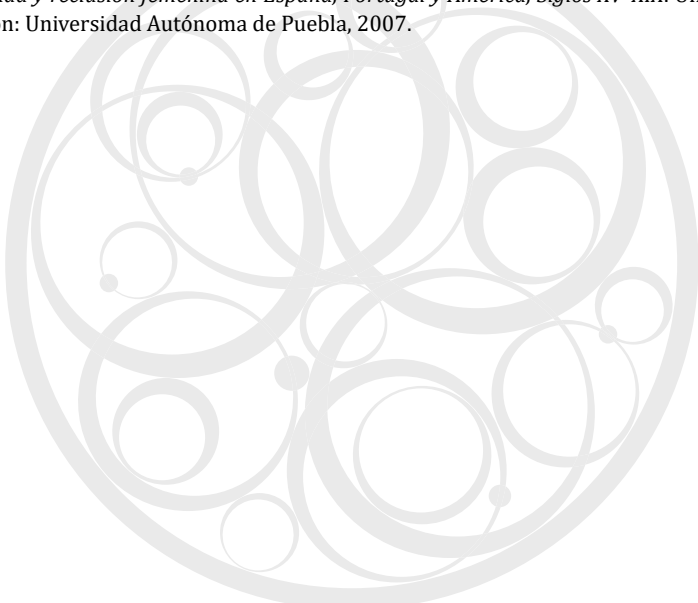


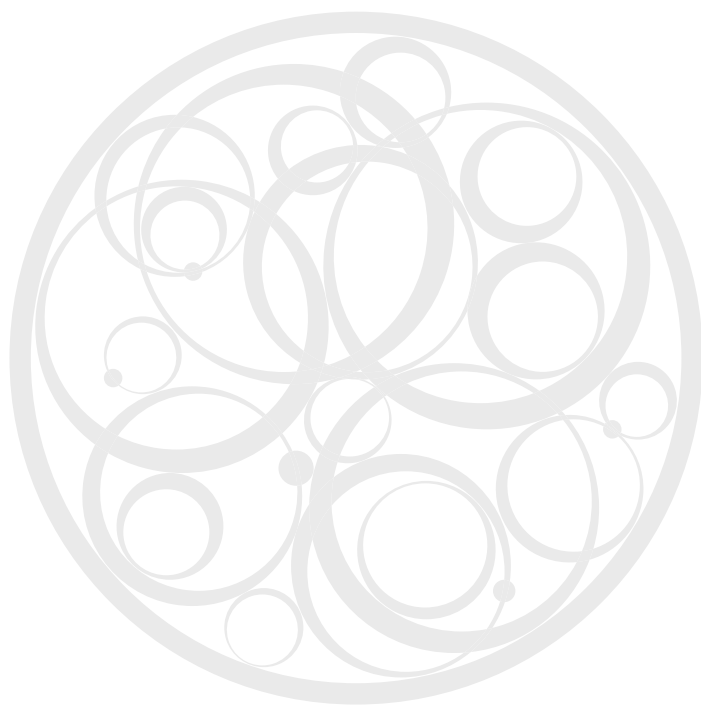
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