

Final Paper:

The death of a venerable nun in 18th century Nuevo Reino de Granada (Colombia):

The case of Maria Gertrudis Teresa de Santa Inés: the “Lily of Bogotá”.



PORTRAIT MARIA GERTRUDIS TERESA DE SANTA INES. ANONYMOUS, 1730. CONVENT OF SANTA INÉS, SANTA FE DE BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA.

1. Introduction

The Counterreformation sought to strengthen the catholic devotions that were under attack by the Protestant Reformation. Catholic spirituality reached new heights, exaggerating religious trends that started before the Council of Trent,¹ specifically in relation to penitential and ascetic practices, emphasis on meditations on the Passion of Christ, Mariolatry, visionaries and mystics, and of course, the veneration of Saints. The Catholic Church found a strong ally in the Spanish Crown, and when the enterprise of conquest and colonization of the New World took place, they were side by side, conquering the lands and the souls of the native population.

¹ Payne, Stanley. Spanish Catholicism: An historical Overview. Madison: University of Winsconsin Press, 1984. p. 49.

As the colonial project was set in place, it generated an operation of duplication, establishing a mirror of the cultural world and institutions into the newly constituted social fabric in the Spanish colonies. Convents were particularly important in the process. They were viewed as holy spaces, a little part of heaven on earth; a space where Spanish cultural values could be guarded and disseminated into the social structure.² Furthermore, the role of women in the convent served greater purposes, not just to keep women safe from unsuitable marriages, but also as ideal models for the rest of the society.

After all, convents appeared as emblematic institutions where catholic religiosity and mysticism would take place, and this intrigued the secular society. Nuns were conceived as intermediaries that would devote their lives to pray for the sins and faults of the social body. The Catholic religiosity turned women who practiced self-mortification, experienced mystic visions and sacrificed their lives in the convent into holy figures. Even though the canonization of these women was more than scarce,³ “venerable nuns” populated all over the colonies. This is the case of Maria Gertrudis Teresa de Santa Inés (1668-1730) from the Dominican convent of Santa Inés in the city of Santa fe de Bogotá; a nun whose life struggles in the convent and holy death had converted her into a holy character. Due to her popularity, her confessor had gathered her writings and made a biography of her life, an “Exemplary Life”, with the hope of reaching the possibility of her canonization.

² Sampson Vera Todeta, Elisa. *Colonial Angels: Narratives of gender and spirituality in Mexico 1580-1750*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p. 40.

³ The canonization of American nuns was not common in the colonial period, even so, that the first saint in America was Santa Rosa de Lima, a lay woman that had taken vows of the third order of the Dominicans. Her secular name Isabel Flores de Oliva, later called Rosa de Santa Maria (1586-1617) was canonized in 1671 by Clement X.

I would like to look at the “*Vida Ejemplar*”⁴ of Maria Gertrudis written by her confessor Father Pedro Andrés Calvo de la Riba, in order to analyze how the death of a “venerable nun” resonated in the colonial society -inside and outside the convent-. What did the death of a “holy” nun entail in this society? What characteristics did this nun have that made her so unique? How did the social body receive the news of her death? But furthermore, what does her death say about the society of early 18th century in Santa fe de Bogotá?

2. The colonial convent.

Female convents were strictly urban structures. They were supported by the relations they established with the elite and wealthy families of the city through the dowry of the women who entered the convent. These institutions would sustain themselves by the economic relations they established with the cities populace through “censos” (credits), properties and products.⁵

Convents functioned as spaces that would preserve the Catholic and Spanish costumes in the colonial society. Consequently, women in these spaces would have been able to practice the highest forms of spiritual life and contribute to the “social edification” of their cities.⁶ Therefore, Spanish and Creole women had to be protected, and those who were not placed in strategic marriages would end up in the convent as a way to preserve the family’s patrimony and honor from any mixed or unsettling marriages.

The convent reflected the social hierarchy of the society outside the cloistered walls. They were small cities within a city. The high ranked nuns were those of black veil, their

⁴ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. “Historia de la Singular Vida, y admirables virtudes de la venerable madre Sor María Gertrudis Theresa de Santa Inés, religiosa profesada en el Sagrado Monasterio de Santa Inés, de Monte Policiano, fundado en la Ciudad de Santa Fè, del Nuevo Reyno de Granada. Compuesta, y Escrita por el Maestro Pedro Andrés Calvo de la Riba, Clérigo Presbytero, su Confesor.” Con Licencia en Madrid: En la Imprenta de Phelipe Millàn, (1752?). NOTE: The Spanish quotations have been transcribed as they appear in the manuscript.

⁵ To expand on the subject of the interrelation of the convent with the colonial city’s economy, in the concept defined as “spiritual economy” proposed by Katheryn Burns, refer to her study on the convents of Cuzco-Peru in the colonial period. Katheryn Burns. *Colonial Habits. Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco*. USA: Duke University, 1999.

⁶ Sampson Vera Todeta, Elisa. op. cit. p. 40.

functions in the convent ranked from administrative responsibilities to choir practice; whereas the white veil nuns came from not so wealthy families and were in charge of all the domestic and labor activities inside the cloister.⁷ However, nuns were also allowed to join the convent bringing with them slaves and sometimes even female family members, usually girls that would be provided education before the family decided their fate.

3. Conventual life

When nuns -such as Maria Gertrudis- entered the convent, they were not only separated from their families but also from the worldly life by taking the vows of obedience, chastity, poverty and perpetual enclosure.⁸ This last vow embodied the notion of “dead to the world” that the nun’s practiced. The ritual of the celebration of the profession was a symbolic representation of death, as Father Calvo de La Riba describes:

“The Dominican nuns dress a black cape as symbol that they had already died to the world; and all meat and blood was over for them. Living in a continuous contemplation of death; this is why the veil that is placed over their heads is black, so that their hidden faces, remained them of death continuously; an efficient antidote to loath sin, and maintain chastity and purity, which they offered, with the other vows, to their Divine Husband, in their professions as Nuns.”⁹

Likewise, this ritual of initiation required them to remove the ornaments, jewels, dresses, all elements that represented vanity. These artifacts were traded by the habit which symbolized

⁷ Ibsen, Kristine. *Women’s Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1999. p. 4.

⁸ Lavrin, Asunción. “Religiosas”. En: Schell Hoberman, Louisa y Midgen Socolow, Susan (coomp.) *Ciudades y sociedad en Latinoamérica colonial*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992. p. 4

⁹ “Las Religiosas Dominicanas, visten capa negra en señal de que yá murieron para el mundo, y que yá toda carne, y sangre se acabó para ellas, viviendo sepultadas en la continua consideracion de la muerte, que por eso es negro el velo, que se ponen en la cabeza, para que ocultos los rostros, lea continua la memoria de la muerte, antidoto eficaz para aborrecer el pecado, y conservar la castidad, y pureza, que con los demás votos ofrecieron á su Divino Esposo, en su profesion Religiosa”. Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. op. cit. p. 48 (my translation)

the death shroud, they would wear until the end of their corporeal life. The head of the professing nun would be adorned by a crown usually made out of flowers but in some cases with thorns; this symbolized their commitment with the vows they had just taken. In several parts of the colonies -but predominantly in Mexico-, a whole genre of painting was developed for this ritual act: the portraits of Crowned Nuns.¹⁰ It is believed that the nun would have two portraits made in her lifetime: one at her profession and the other at their death. The first one commissioned by their family as a symbol of pride and remembrance of the absent daughter, aunt, sister, etc. And a second portrait made by the order of the convent, which would exhibit them as exemplary remainders of life and death.

For women of elite families their celebration of profession would gather a large audience, beginning with their families, and including ecclesiastical and administrative figures from the highest positions in the city. As it was the case for Maria Gertrudis, for whose profession ritual, summoned a large number of viewers to the point that they would not fit inside the church.¹¹

4. The confessor and the nun's spiritual writings.

The role of confession in Catholic practice had a predominant position, it served as a mechanism of surveillance that allowed the confessor to enter the minds of the peoples and direct their behaviors. Confession was founded on the fears created around the afterlife and the punishments that sins conveyed; the fear of eternal damnation in the company of demons or the passage through the fires of purgatory allowed confession to be a successful practice that guided the individuals towards the imitation or veneration of exemplary models.

¹⁰ Montero Alarcon, Alma. *Monjas Coronadas*. México: Circulo del Arte, 1999.

¹¹ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. *op. cit.* pp. 73.

This was also applied for nuns; in addition, due to the unreliability of the female sex in the eyes of the Catholic Church, their spiritual lives had to be closely monitored in order to keep the orthodoxy –especially if these nuns had mystical experiences-. Socially privileged white women were trained to examine their lives and write about them under the command of their confessors, who would use these accounts to guide their spiritual journey.¹²

Nun's writing played two functions: on one hand, to justify them in the eventual case of sanctification, and on the other, to judge them in cases of heresy under the tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. If the nun was considered exemplary -a fine model of virtue and Christian moral-, the confessor would write her "*Vida*" (life); her spiritual biography as an intimate journey to God and as model for the colonial society. Father Calvo De la Riba had been the last confessor of Maria Gertrudis, and from his experience as witness of Gertrudis' spiritual battles with demons, her mystic life and exemplary death, he gathered her writings and used them to create a holy image of her as model for Santa Fe's society.

5. The Venerable nun: the life of Maria Gertrudis Teresa de Santa Inés.

Her secular name was María Gertrudis de la Purificación Orozco (1668-1730), she came from a wealthy Creole family of the city of Pamplona in the Nueva Granada (Colombia). By the age of seven she was promised to a nun from the order of Santa Clara in her native city of Pamplona to raise her in the cloister. She would later take her vows in 1683 in the Dominican convent of Santa Inés in the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá.

She became known in the religious and secular circles of the city for her constant struggles with the devil; the nature of her spiritual combats defined her as an "*obsesa*", that is, a holy soul that was tormented by demons throughout her life, but with the support of God. In

¹² Myers, Kathleen Ann. *Neither Saints nor Sinners. Writing the lives of women in Spanish America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. pp. 3-4.

opposition to those who are defined as “*possesas*” (possessed), women who were sinners and the devil had come into their bodies.¹³ Her confessor and biographer, Father Calvo de la Riba, keeps mentioning throughout the text how her spiritual battles with the Devil were not a punishment but a blessing, they were allowed in order for her to prove her strength and patience. The colonial cities would take pride in having a mystic in whose body the battle between good and evil took place.¹⁴

The battles with demons hunted Maria Gertrudis for over 40 years, and with the help of her confessor she portrayed the figure of a Christian hero, based on Christian ideals of the martyr based on hagiographical motifs. In this sense, as the battles took place, her virtues increased. I would like to recall that her battles were not only spiritual, but they also took physical and public connotations: “They (the demons) deprived her from her sight for many days, and for a year, and some months they had her mute, and for three days like dead; (her body) was scattered with all abundance of fleas, like rain, impossible to catch, she felt them and suffered them without being able to move. They (the demons) had her crucified in an iron bar that was wrapped around her arms as if it was a ribbon, throwing her under the bed so that the dust would suffocate her, and to prevent her from helping herself out of such torments: in repeated occasions, for many hours faced up, and (creating a shape) as a strong arch, with her forehead sticking to the bricks of the floor. Oh, terrible torments!”¹⁵

This is one of the many examples that the confessor describes in relation to the struggles and suffering she had to endure throughout her life. The demonic battles were a resource that highlighted her exemplary character. Her battles were not only for her own individual sake, but

¹³ Godínez, Miguel. *Practica De La Teología Mystica*. Sevilla, Spain: Juan Vejarano, 1682. p. 128-129.

¹⁴ Ramos Medina, Manuel. “Isabel de la Encarnación, monja posesada del siglo XVII” en: García Ayulardo, Clara y Ramos Medina, Manuel. *Manifestaciones religiosas en el mundo colonial americano*. Vol. 1 Espiritualidad barroca colonial. Santos y demonios en América. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1993. p. 45

¹⁵ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. *Op. cit.* p. 111

for the social body as well, through her martyrdom she became a model for the Santa Fe society, and through her sufferings the sins and transgressions of the social body would be purged. Her unique character and what she undertook inside the convent was a matter of *vox populi*, well known in the religious and secular spheres of the city. This is why at the hour of her death, all the peoples in the city would have been informed by the bells of the church and many would have rushed to catch a glimpse of her holy corpse.

6. A venerable's death: Maria Gertrudis' death.

Gertrudis' life struggle facing the devil brought her closer to sanctity, representing a model to fight temptations. At the end of her life, the struggles had made their way on her body: "... and placed on an invisible and interior crux, without being able to move, unable to move her feet or hands, and burning in an active fire full of sores; her torso side was injured and her left shoulder dislocated, she was the living example of patience, and without being able to go through her maintenance, she suffered constant fainting: when she had the light of her immediate death, she requested the Sacrament of the Eucharist and Extreme-Unction: I performed them punctually."¹⁶

A reiterative element that Father Calvo De La Riba presents is the essence of silence in the hour of her death. Maria Gertrudis kept a silence and peaceful tranquility, enjoying the spiritual graces she had been deprived from along her bitter lifetime. She had become mute during the three days after having received her last host, in order "to die with the silence with which she had lived".¹⁷ Silence was the symbol of a good, peaceful and tranquil death. Her final

¹⁶ "...pues puesta ya en la invisible y interior cruz, sin poder moverse, impedida de manos y pies, y abrasada en activo fuego llena de llagas, herido su costado, y hombro izquierdo, y dislocados los huesos de él, era un vivo ejemplar de la paciencia, y sin poder pasar lo menos de mantenimiento y así extenuada eran repetidos los desmayos que padecía: tuvo luz de que estaba muy inmediata la muerte, le dió el Viatico y la Extrema-Unction: lo executó puntual. " Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. *Op. cit.* p. 554 (my translation)

¹⁷ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. *ibid.* p. 555

hour was completely opposite of her life, there was neither horror nor intervention from her “enemies” (demons). It is with silence that death is awaited, because it is not a loss, it is not the end, but the beginning of her life with Christ, therefore, death is not sorrowful, because it is “the health of the Lord”: “It is good to wait with silence the health of the Lord: with profound silence she awaited in her enduring martyrdom, the patient Maria the health of the Lord; and with the same silence she received it, enjoying his divine assistance, and that of Holy Mary.”¹⁸

For nuns, who are defined as women consecrated to Christ, death was praised as a joyous relief from all worldly cares and sufferings.¹⁹ Death was the moment in which the soul could be finally freed from the prison of the body and united to with their husband, Christ. Heaven would await the exemplary and virtuous nun, whereas those devoted to the vanities of the world would enter purgatory.

7. The mystic death of Gertrudis.

The death of Maria Gertrudis was not a common death, as a mystic, she enjoyed visions until the last hour of her life. She saw herself being accompanied by Saints that would be assisting her in the journey, as a reward for the martyrdom she endured in her lifetime. The holy death meant the companionship of the holiest entities (the Virgin, San Michael, San Peter and Saint Teresa of Jesus) to receive and guide her soul to Heaven. Maria Gertrudis had mystic interactions with Saint Peter who promised her eternal life as a prize for her obedience in her martyrdom.²⁰ In her final moments, according to her confessor, she was able to give testimony of her vision: “Present at her transit there was her beloved Saint Teresa, who ecstatic saw her

¹⁸ “Bueno es esperar con silencio la salud del Señor: con profundo silencio espero en su prolongado martirio, la paciente maria la salud del Señor; y con el mismo silencio la recibió, gozando de su divina asistencia, y de la de Maria Santisima.” Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andrés. *ibid.* pp. 557 (my translation)

¹⁹ Lavrin, Asuncion. *Brides of Christ. Conventual life in Colonial Mexico.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. pp. 200

²⁰ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 557

joyful soul ascend to the glory, in the company of Holy Mary and all the blessed that were awaiting her, this is what she declared...”.²¹ Here we are presented with a motif that intends to prove the “venerable’s” sainthood, a holy testimony –from one of the most reliable sources: Saint Teresa de Avila- that her soul was indeed, going to ascend to heaven and enjoy in the glory of God.

Saint Teresa de Jesus’ life and death was a model for the nuns of the Spanish colonies, many had been familiar with her writings, and her rhetoric style had influenced their own spiritual writings. Teresa was the paradigm of sainthood that ruled over conventual life; her death had been adapted as a “sanctity standard” of a holy death, and as such, Pedro Calvo de la Riba compares her death with that of Gertrudis: “Before her death, Teresa de Jesus had seen a splendid company of souls with magnificent torches in their hands (...) they were the souls, that with her many suffrage had left Purgatory for Glory (...) and if the glorious Saint Gertrudis in reward for her fervent charity with the souls of Purgatory, her lover and Lord had made them accompany her in her ascend: faithful payer, had done the same for his beloved Maria Gertrudis.”²²

This passage also gives a sense of the role of the nuns in the convents and their connection with the secular society. The souls of the people of Santa Fe most probably would have gone to Purgatory; the function of the nuns was to pray for their souls in order to grant them pardon and release them from its fires. The importance of the death of Gertrudis or any

²¹ “Estaba presente a su transito su amada Teresa de Jesus, que extatica vio subir su dichosa alma a la gloria, acompañada de Maria Santísima y de todos los Bienaventurados que la esperaban, asi me lo declaró...” Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *ibid.* p. 559 (my translation)

²² “Antes de su muerte vio Teresa de Jesus una licida compañía de almas con lucidas antorchas en las manos, y una de ellas le dijo: por tu cuenta correcto, intimandole lo avisará, y declarara a su tiempo. Eran las almas, que con sus muchos sufragios havian salido del Purgatorio para la Gloria, (...)Que si a la gloriosa Santa Gertrudis en premio de su ardiente caridad para con las almas del Purgatorio, hizo su amante Señor la acompañasen en su glorioso ascenso: fiel pagador hizo lo mismo con su amada Maria Gertrudis...” Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 558

other venerable nun was their capacity, as a holy person, to release souls from purgatory along with their transit to death. This was conceived as one of their afterlife duties.

8. Gertrudis' death "en olor de santidad"

Gertrudis' body presented a supernatural transformation in the hour of her death. Her weak and unflattering color had taken a miraculous turn and the traces of death had been taken away. She had remained as beautiful and perfect as if she had never suffered any struggles in her life. Death rejuvenated her, as the virtues of her religious life expressed themselves through her body in the moment in which it had ceased to be the prison of her blessed spirit.²³ During her death bed, this transformation became a symbol of her virtues and holiness: "As a radiant glass of love she would receive the sacred fires, as a sign of free communication, came out of her modest and pure face, transforming her pale moribund look into a reddish color, as indication of the fire of God's love that actively burned her blessed spirit".²⁴ And after her death, she remained with the face of a beautiful girl, adorned with a white and purplish color.

The ultimate sign of the holiness of a person was the incorruptibility of their body. Maria Gertrudis' body was left three days without burial for two reasons: the first was to confirm that she had actually passed away. In one of her fights with the demons, these had made her seem stiff and without movement for three days, while whispering to her ear that she was going to be buried alive.²⁵ After this incident, she had told her confessor about her fear of being buried alive and requested her body to be kept without burial for three days after passing away. The second reason was that her body had not yet started the normal decomposition process, but rather remained even more beautiful than ever. As so, her vigil brought constant visitors to admire the

²³ Lavrin, Asuncion. *Op. cit.* 2008. pp. 202

²⁴ "Como vaso puro radiante de amor recibiria sagrados incendios, que en señal de que se los comunicaba liberal, salian a su modesto, y puro rostro, convirtiendo la palidez de moribunda en rojo color, indice del fuego del amor de Dios, que activo abrasaba su dichoso espiritu." Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 557 (my translation)

²⁵ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 567

perfection of her incorrupt body. Her confessor describes her corpse as follows: "...when the strip of death had set her body up for corruption, her virginal body began to manifest signs of incorruption and admirable transformations; well, after her body had been consumed by her great sufferings, breaking the color and so skinny, and her hands had dried, that without any touch in them they only dressed the skin with intense pains, these were filled with pure flesh, remaining so flexible and soft that they looked as if they belonged to someone alive."²⁶

A symbol of a saintly death, the expression of how religious virtue could express itself after death was in the sweet smell of the body that symbolized the sweetness of the spirit of the deceased.²⁷ Besides having such beautiful face, her corpse expelled a soft sent that delighted the sense of smell.²⁸

9. Attitudes towards Gertrudis' death.

The body of a dead nun would be dressed and laid in the chapel, a priest would enter the choir, blessed the grave and the body, while the rest of the community sang psalms or read biblical passages. The bodies would usually remain exposed –if no disease had taken the nun– and later buried in the choir; their bodies were laid atop of those of their predecessors. Though, once in a while bones were exhumed to create new space for burial.²⁹ The ceremony of the wake and funeral celebrations had become part of a public occasion in which others besides the nuns participated.³⁰

²⁶ "...pues quando despojo de la muerte havia de caminar a la general corrupción, empezó su virginal cuerpo a manifestar señales de incorrupcion y admirables transformaciones; pues consumido este con su grave padecer, quebrado el color y tan enjutas, y secas las manos, que ya sin tacto en ellas solo las vestía la piel con intensisimos dolores, estas se le llenaron de pura carne, quedando tan flexibles y blandas que parecian de quien estaba viva." Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 563. (my translation)

²⁷ Lavrin, Asuncion. *Op. cit.* 2008. pp. 203

²⁸ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 565

²⁹ Lavrin, Asuncion. *Op. cit.* 2008. pp. 203

³⁰ Lavrin, Asuncion. *ibid.* 2008. 203

Only for the death of a nun who came from an elite family and/or was considered a holy character, the vigil and funeral would congregate all peoples from the different social groups. Maria Gertrudis was both, and her wake and funeral gathered all kinds of people from the city to admire her incorrupt body. Furthermore, in her funeral there was a large audience participant of the last ritual of this nun's life. All the highest characters of society gathered in the church for the service: the Real Audiencia and the Cabildo –the secular and the Ecclesiastical administrative powers, as well as the populace.³¹ Gertrudis' death was a moment that unified –in a way- the city of Santa Fe. From admiration, respect, curiosity or faith, her death had moved the social body towards a Catholic devotion.

a. In the Convent.

Maria Gertrudis made miraculous apparitions within the hour of her death to two nuns, one of which was not even in the same city. At the time of Gertrudis death on the 28th of November at ten thirty in the night, a nun from the city of Villa de Leyba claimed that Maria Gertrudis appeared to her as a splendid star, and with her luminescence she bathed the choir with light; fulfilling the promise she had made of announcing her death to her.³² At the same time, a nun of the convent of The Concepcion in Santa Fe de Bogotá, with who Gertrudis had a strong spiritual connection and permanent communication, felt that Maria Gertrudis sat on her bed in the form of a sweet and beautiful little girl.³³ These afterlife apparitions in the narrative of Father Calvo de la Riba strengthen the character of Gertrudis as a holy being, who just like

³¹ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 573

³² Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 559

³³ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres, *ibid.* p. 559-560

Teresa de Avila,³⁴ was not constraint by space or time, and appeared to these nuns as prove of her transit towards God.

Inside the convent, the nuns had gathered in Gertrudis' cell, and her biographer, making use of his rhetoric skills, had connected the nuns' attitudes towards the dead body of Maria Gertrudis with biblical accounts. They would imitate biblical characters, as a way to express their sentiments towards the holy figure that has just died: "...some hugged her pure and virginal body, others kissed their benefactor's hands and others remained kissing her tormented feet, imitating the chaste Joseph, who remained next to the stiff corpse of his old father Jacob, he kissed and watered him with sweet tears".³⁵ As we can see, this biblical connection intends to justify the treatment and attitudes expressed towards the body of Gertrudis. She deserved the same treatment expressed to other holy characters because with her life struggles and exemplary life, she had earned a place among the holiest of holiest.

As soon as she had passed away, the rest of the nuns wanted to have something that had belonged or touched the venerable Maria Gertrudis. This highly religious society had placed great importance to relics as an important medium for supernatural and divine intercession: "As her virginal body was wrap in a shroud, they (the nuns) took from her nest, the chapel in which she had lived devoutly, (which she) had filled with stamps; moved out of veneration for their deceased Mother, in consecrated emulation, every single one of them, tried to get any garment for their consolation; already counting with her Rosaries, medallions, stamps, or some of her poor piece of jewelry, having among them who would be content to have taken a little piece of

³⁴ Eire, Carlos M.N. *From Madrid to Purgatory. The art and craft of dying in sixteenth-century Spain.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. pp. 472-501.

³⁵ ...Unas abrazaban su puro y virginal cuerpo, otras le besaban sus benefactoras manos y otras postradas osculaban sus atormentados pies, imitando al Casto Joseph, que postrado sobre el yerto cadáver de su amado anciano Padre Jacob, le oscilaba y regaba con tiernas lagrimas". Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 562

brick from her poor cell.”³⁶ Anything that could seem to have been part of Gertrudis’ life was taken away. One could ask why were these attitudes permitted or justified. It seems Father Calvo de la Riba understands the nun’s pillage under the justification that the holy person’s objects could eventually lead to miraculous actions. Her objects were not only a remainder of Gertrudis as a person, but of her actions and above all, of her sanctity, and devotion in the actions her holy figure would perform, as part of her afterlife duties.

b. In the city.

Soon enough after the death of Maria Gertrudis, according to her confessor’s account, “it was heard in the city the sad clamor and known death of the Venerable Maria, everybody said, the Holy Nun of the Monastery of Santa Inés had died: the one who during her long lifetime was a martyr, has died: and knowing that her incorrupt and virginal corpse, set on the lower section of the choir of the monastery, troops came down to see her and venerate her, doing this many times, because there it was not sufficient with just once or twice”.³⁷ The following day, her death would have been the most important news in the Santa Fe. Venerable nuns had the same popularity as royal or ecclesiastical figures –they were the “celebrities” of their time-. Most of what happened inside the cloisters came out through the *locutorios* –the space where nuns received visitors behind a gridiron door- and the people from the secular space would be pretty well informed of what happened inside the holy space. In this sense, the event of the death of the nun moved the social body towards this supernatural event. As I mentioned before, there was a

³⁶ “Amortajado su virginal cuerpo, le sacaron de su nido, que Oratorio en que havia vivido devota, lo tenía lleno de estampas; movidas de veneracion a su difunta Madre, consagrada emulacion, todas y cada una, procuraron lograr alguna prenda para su consuelo; ya cuentas de sus Rosarios, Medallas, Estampas, o alguna de sus pobres alahas, habiendo entre ellas, quien se contentara con llevar un podacito de ladrillo de su pobre Celda.” Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 562. (my translation)

³⁷ “Oyeronse en la Ciudad los tristes clamores y sabida la muerte de la Venerable Maria, todos decían, murió la Monja Santa del Monasterio de Santa Ines: murió la que fue martyr todo el dilatado tiempo de su vida: y sabiendo que con superior acuerdo estaba su incorrupto y virginal cuerpo, puesto en el Coro bajo del Monasterio bajaban a tropas a verle, y venerarle, haciendolo muchas veces, porque no se satisfacion con hacerlo una, ni dos.” Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* p. 565. (my translation)

close and permanent relation between the cloistered nuns and the secular world, but the possibility to view one of the nuns outside the cloister was not an everyday event and even less that of a holy one; for this reason, everyone rushed to catch a glimpse of the dead nun.

Furthermore, Gertrudis' life-story was supposed to move the sentiments of the people and increase their devotion: "...sacred magnet, she attracted all the City, all venerated her and admired her miraculous beauty, and what is more fruitful, many people hearing about her sufferings, and penitent life, moved by the pain and repentance from their sins, they shed sweet tears and asking for God's mercy, they hurt their chests, penitents...".³⁸ This was the primary purpose that inspired the construction of a holy character, such as Gertrudis, the ability to use her as an exemplary and ideal model that was able to please the religious needs of the colonial city. For the Santa Fe society of early 18th century, Gertrudis' death moved men and women equally; they all gathered to see her holy body and hear her life story -if they weren't familiar with it already- in order to learn from her life and follow her exemplary model.

As we can see, nuns were not the only ones requesting something from the venerable Maria, the people that came to see her were eager to get something that had belonged to her as well. If this was not possible they would bring their own rosaries or ribbons to have them touched by her holy body. Anything people could get their hands on was taken; from the filling in her mattress, to the broken pieces from her plates and clay glasses.³⁹ The devotion towards her holy body was so intense that priests had to carry her body, in order to protect it from the "pillage" of the people: "the priests that entered the cloister carried the virginal body on their

³⁸ "...imán sagrado atrajo a si toda la Ciudad, todos la veneran, y admiran su milagrosa hermosura y lo que mas es, muchas personas oyendo su grave padecer, e inculpable y penitente vida, movidas a dolor y arrepentimiento de sus culpas, derramaban tiernas lagrimas y pidiendo a Dios misericordia, se herian los pechos penitentes. ... Movio a muchos a que arrepentidos hiriendose los pechos, pidieran a Dios Misericordia." Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 567 (my translation)

³⁹ Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 565.

shoulders, being necessary to defend, so that by cutting parts of her habit they wouldn't strip her body naked. It was an act of shame...⁴⁰

The emotional desire on the part of nuns and lay people for the physical mementos of the deceased created a type of post-mortem ritual. The death of a holy person prompted the collection of relics from those venerable nuns who were believed to have been privileged with the grace of God.⁴¹ It was part of popular devotion to view these objects, which had been touched by the holy person, as powerful extensions of their blessed nature. It was believed that the virtues of the "venerable" would have been transferred to the artifacts, and could later be used to perform protective and miraculous actions.

9. Dead Nun's portraits: The portrait of Gertrudis.

The portrait of Maria Gertrudis' dead body was commissioned immediately after her death. This was part of a very popular genre in Nueva Granada (Colombia) in the 18th c. The tradition of these paintings can be traced back to Spain, but in contrast to the American portraits, they were much more austere. In Santa Fe de Bogotá there is an important collection of dead nun's portrait, depicted these women in their habits, with a crown of flowers –similar to the ones they would have been wearing at their profession ceremony-, holding their crucifix or other religious artifact, and a cartouche with their information. In Nueva Granada, it seems that the flower crown was primarily used for the profession of nuns of high status and for the exemplary nun's whose portrait was commissioned at their deathbed.⁴²

The portraits were intended to serve as spiritual inspiration for the remaining nuns in the convent. Even though the women depicted were not alive, they were still viewed as life

⁴⁰ "Los Sacerdotes que entraron a la Clausura, cargaron el virginal cuerpo en sus hombros, siendo necesario el defenderlo, porque no lo desnudaran cortandole particulas de su pobre habito. Fue muy digno de reparo..." Calvo de la Riba, Pedro Andres. *Op. cit.* pp. 571

⁴¹ Lavrin, Asunción. *Op. cit.* 2008. pp. 205

⁴² Montero Alarcón, Alma. *Op. cit.*

models⁴³. These paintings were commissioned exclusively for the interior of the convent, not with the purpose for them to be seen by people from outside of the convent. They were preserved as reminders of exemplary lives but also, as permanent remembrance of death. As I mentioned earlier, the whole profession and life of the nun was a constant reenactment of symbolic a death, which sought to lead them to constant meditation on death and the afterlife.

The paintings of crowned nuns lying in their coffins sought to remain other nuns of the importance of leading a faithful life to their professed vows. This meant that by following the example of life and death of the deceased nun, they too could enjoy the pleasure of a good death. For the holy nuns, this death meant the companionship of Saints and the Virgin Mary, who would guide their pure souls to heaven. The nuns then were portrait at the moment in which they were in the road towards final salvation.⁴⁴

The portrait of these nuns contrast the general sense of humility that permeated their lives, pulling away from the vanities of the world, they did not recognized the merits of a nun's spirituality during their lifetime insofar as this would go against their religious practice. In this sense, the portraits seemed to present the esteem that certain nuns earned, and the prize of a life of virtue, and in the case of Gertrudis, even heroism through the battles she underwent. This gave her the recognition of the conventual community to praise her in death.

10. Conclusion

An "Exemplary Life" sought to introduce the life and death of an ideal model of social and religious behavior. Due to the use of Gertrudis' life in the rhetoric account of Father Calvo de la Riba, he presented her existence as a constant manifestation of the supernatural and the

⁴³ Gonzales, Beatriz, and Vallín, Rodolfo. Las religiosas Monjas muertas. In: <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/todaslasartes/monmu/monmu01.htm>

⁴⁴ Gonzales, Beatriz, and Vallín, Rodolfo. Las religiosas Monjas muertas. In: <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/todaslasartes/monmu/monmu01.htm>

divine. In her body the battles of good and evil took place for the souls of the people residing outside the convent, the Santa Fe society. Her case reflected the need to create a symbol of identity for a city that could be inspired by her life and death, to create attitudes of conversion and penitence that followed the Catholic moral order. Her death attracted all types of peoples from all the social spheres of the city. Her holy image became an element of religious identity and devotion in Santa Fe de Bogotá. Also, her confessor, sought to peruse her beatification through the writing of her Vida, which could also be seen as a symbol of triumph of Catholic religiosity in the Nueva Granada.

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