

Spanish Habsburg Women: Objects, Ritual, and Religion in the Early Modern World

April 17-18, 2025

Abstracts

Session I: Religious Patronage and Habsburg Women

Chair: Elizabeth Neary (Newberry Library)

Laura Bass (Brown University): “Instructing a French Queen: Local Knowledge and Royal Devotion in Lope de Vega's *Virgen de la Almudena* for Isabel de Borbón”

Isabel de Borbón's devotion to the Madrid patroness, the Virgen de la Almudena, was the inspiration for the first written account of the sacred image, Lope de Vega's eponymous *poema histórico*. While Lope's persistent attempts to win the king's favor are well known, the poem reveals his sophisticated cultivation of queenly patronage. The poet offers the French-born queen instruction in local history, positioning himself as chronicler and cultural mediator. Through a close reading of the work's dedication and key passages, I demonstrate how Lope celebrates the young queen at the same time that he assumes the role of authoritative historian of Madrid's sacred past (and its present).

Walter Melion (Emory University): “Isabella Clara Eugenia as Progenitor of Petrus Bivero, S.J.'s *Sacrum oratorium* and *Sacrum sanctuarium* of 1634”

My paper discusses a magnificent pair of emblem books composed by the Spanish Jesuit Petrus Bivero in 1634 to pay homage to Isabella Clara Eugenia. Dedicated to the memory of the Archduchess, erstwhile ruler of the Spanish Netherlands, as well as to her consort, Archduke Albert, the *Sacrum oratorium* (Sacred Oratory) consists in the first instance of three interlocking books focusing respectively on the sacraments of Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist as the chief means whereby the dedicatees led lives as godly as their hallowed deaths. Likewise published by the Officina Plantiniana in Antwerp, this time with a dedication to Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Austria, the *Sacrum sanctuarium* (Sacred Sanctuary), as Bivero avows in his preface, was again inspired by Isabella Clara Eugenia, whose desire to build a temple consecrated to the patient suffering of crucified martyrs and cross-bearers of every kind Bivero claims to fulfill by building his emblematic paper sanctuary. This emblem book, too, consists of three interlocking parts, the first on crucified apostles and church fathers, the second on male martyrs who imitated these proponents of the cross, the third on crucified female saints. The *Oratorium* and the *Sanctuarium*, since the edifices they propound are virtual, devote ample time and energy to explaining the form, function, and meaning of the images that constitute the main building blocks of their respective building programs. These images are seen implicitly to originate in the iconophile Isabella's love of sacred images and awareness of their various representational kinds and degrees. In this sense, the two emblem books together offer a coded prosopographical portrait of the Archduchess, whose commitment to the holy image as a crucial instrument of spiritual reform the *Oratorium* and *Sanctuarium* jointly celebrate.

Marina Sánchez Montero (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid): “A Transnational Approach to Mariana of Austria’s Artistic and Religious Patronage in the Court of Madrid”

This paper aims to explore the artistic and religious patronage of Queen Mariana of Austria (1634-1696) during her time as Queen Mother (1677-1696), a period that is somewhat less known in her life, but of great importance for her political and artistic trajectory, and that of the monarchy. To this end, the research will focus on the Madrid court. The object of study that will be addressed is the church and hospital formerly known as San Antonio de los Portugueses which, from 1689, following the transfer of the patronage of the church to the queen, was renamed as San Antonio de los Alemanes, as it is known today. Based on the study of the queen’s intervention in the institution and the church, I aim to consider how Doña Mariana, as Queen Mother, used religious patronage as an authorized space of political agency in a period when she was no longer at the head of the government of the monarchy.

Session II: The Descalzas Reales and Sacred Space

Chair: Silvia Mitchell (Purdue University)

Rosilie Hernández (University of Illinois Chicago): “Mirrors, Self-Portraits, and Visionary Exemplarity: An Analysis of the Guadalupe Chapel, Royal Discalced Convent, Madrid”

The Royal Discalced Convent in Madrid was home to many of the Habsburg family whose personal dowries and family wealth, added to the protections offered by the crown, allowed for elaborate projects and lavish commissions. One such inhabitant was Sor Ana Dorotea de la Concepción, Marquise of Austria and the illegitimate daughter of Rudolph II and Catalina Strada, who arrived at the Descalzas Reales in 1624 at age 12, professed in 1628 at the age of 16 and remained interned until her death at the age of 82 in 1694. In this talk, I focus on the mirrored paintings of the Guadalupe Chapel, commissioned and designed by Ana Dorotea. I argue that the spatial replication of the nun’s reflection upon the mirrored paintings blurs the limit between the self, her spiritual foremothers, and the eternal Mother, offering a fascinating entrance to the religious visionary imagination of the early modern period.

Erin Giffin (Hamilton College): “The Casita de Nazaret at the Descalzas Reales, Madrid: A Habsburg Whodunit”

The Descalzas Reales is a religious center replete with venerable attributions: nearly every artistic intervention has been conspicuously claimed by prestigious patrons since its foundation in the 1550s. But at the heart of this well-ascribed complex, the Casita de Nazaret stands alone, without explicit patronage. The Descalzas Reales replica of the Santa Casa di Loreto, or Holy House of the Virgin Mary, has been associated vaguely in the past with the convent’s founder, Joanna of Austria. But could that actually be true? This presentation delves into the history of this enigmatic structure in light of Santa Casa replication, a devotional phenomenon popular across early modern European and colonial territories. By examining the history of replicas, and the chains of information informing structural recreations, this presentation posits a new Habsburg attribution for the Casita

de Nazaret, and traces the structure's evolution and situation as a means to reconstruct this long-overlooked history.

Cécile Vincent-Cassy (Cergy Paris Université): “Marian Cult and Votive Offering. The ‘Portrait’ of the Virgen de los Desamparados of Valencia by Tomás Yepes (1644) in the Convent of the Descalzas Reales, Madrid”

As we know, the convent of the Descalzas Reales played a major role in the religious politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Spanish monarchy was ruled by the Habsburgs, in keeping with the *pietas austriaca* described by Anna Coreth in her trailblazing study. The Descalzas Reales was both a model for the Escorial, the famous Hieronymite Monastery founded by Philip II some 10 years later, and a spiritual and devotional extension of the royal palace. The nuns of the Descalzas Reales hailed from the upper nobility and from the Habsburg family itself, and the community was in charge of watching over the Habsburg lineage with continuous prayer. Inside the convent, the nuns also housed Catholic cult objects and images that had suffered attack – whether figuratively or physically – across the dynasty's domains, especially its Spanish domains. Considering all these elements, we will discuss the presence and meaning of Yepes's painting, which is currently displayed among a group of religious, mostly Marian images, in the antecoro of the Descalzas Reales. This image, which is undocumented, challenges our understanding of Marian Cult by the Habsburg Women. It represents the Virgen de los Desamparados of Valencia, and is painted using a technique of optical illusion, endowing the image with a hyper-realistic quality which makes the Valencian image become as present as if the viewer were in front of the original one. The reasons for its arrival at the convent can be explored by considering its material qualities, composition and context.

Session III: Ritual Objects and Empire

Chair: Sheryl Reiss (Newberry Library)

María Cruz de Carlos Varona (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid): “Habsburg Women and Pan-European Images and Cults: the Case of the Nine Feasts of the Virgin”

This talk will analyze the key role played by Spanish Habsburg women in the creation and circulation of cultural practices in Europe via the analysis of certain images and works of art. Focusing on the royal oratories and religious rituals associated with maternity that took place in those spaces, I will use the example of the devotion dedicated to the Nine Feasts of the Virgin Mary, expanded from the Court of Madrid to other cities in the continent. Habsburg women commissioned pictorial cycles of the Nine Feasts in their oratories in Madrid, Vienna and Brussels, and performed religious and courtly rituals to honor these series of Marian feasts. The cycles show differences among them, providing an opportunity for reflection on the idea of “transfer”: not as a passive act of replicating something in a different place, but as an active one which includes manipulating; adding and deleting; adapting to a new environment and circumstances.

Tanya Tiffany (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee): “Sor Margarita de la Cruz's *Exercicios de devocion y oracion* and Habsburg Piety”

This paper examines the *Exercicios de devocion y oracion* by Margarita de la Cruz (1567–1633), a Habsburg archduchess and Poor Clare in the Madrid convent of the Descalzas Reales. Margarita's *Exercicios* were published in several editions, foremost among them a lavishly illustrated volume printed by the Plantin Press in 1622. Like the *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* by the Jesuit Jerónimo Nadal, the Plantin *Exercicios* featured a combination of texts and images meant to guide the reader's spiritual contemplation. Yet the *Exercicios*—in distinction to the manuals by Nadal and most Catholic Reformers—were rooted in women's devotion. They codified religious ceremony at the Descalzas, where Margarita and other highborn nuns performed rituals formulated in concert with the sacred practice of women at the Spanish Habsburg court. Disseminated throughout Europe, Margarita's *Exercicios* testified to the exemplary nature of Habsburg piety and, by extension, affirmed the sacred nature of the dynasty's rule over much of the Catholic world.

Kate Holohan (Syracuse University Art Museum): “Catherine of Austria and her Featherwork *Ecce Homo*: Devotion in Mexico, Iberia, and Southeastern Africa”

My paper examines a devotional featherwork *Ecce Homo* in the collection of Catherine of Austria. Made in New Spain by an Indigenous artist, Catherine presented the *Ecce Homo* to Jesuits accompanying a Portuguese mission to Mutapa, a vast kingdom that encompassed parts of present-day Zimbabwe and Mozambique, in 1569. According to one of the Jesuits, Francisco de Monclaro, Catherine told the missionaries that they were to give the featherwork to the Mutapa emperor “if he is converted” to Christianity. No mere diplomatic nicety, Catherine conceived of the *Ecce Homo* as a gift from one Catholic monarch to another, for use in personal devotion. I was initially drawn to this story for its seeming strangeness—a Mexican devotional featherwork in southeastern Africa! However, I have found that Monclaro's account brings the featherwork to life in a way that is rarely seen in archival accounts of Habsburg art collections, demonstrating that such objects acted as tangible connections among distant kingdoms in the Habsburg orbit.

Bios for Participants, Chairs, and Presenters

Mercedes Alcalá Galán is Professor of Spanish Literature and Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she is a H.I. Romnes Fellow and a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities (2023-2027). From 2022 to 2024, she served as President of the Cervantes Society of America. Her research focuses primarily on poetics and gender studies, with a special emphasis on visual culture. She is the author of “*Con esta carga nacemos las mujeres*”: *Discursos sobre el cuerpo femenino en la España de Cervantes* (Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2022); *Escritura desatada: poéticas de la representación en Cervantes* (Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2009); and *La silva curiosa de Julián de Medrano. Estudio y edición crítica*. She also edited a volume as guest editor of *eHumanista/Cervantes*, “*Si ya por atrevido no sale con las manos en la cabeza*”: *el legado poético del Persiles cuatrocientos años después* (2016). Her scholarly work includes approximately seventy articles on early modern Spanish literature. In 2019, she co-edited, with Esther Fernández, the volume

Sex and Gender in Cervantes. She is in the final stages of revising a book project on visuality and ekphrasis in early modern Spain, tentatively titled *Archaeology of the Invisible: Painting and Popular Culture in Early Modern Spain*.

Carole Levin is Willa Cather Professor of History Emerita at the University of Nebraska. She specializes in early modern English cultural, political, and women's history. She is the author or editor of twenty books, most recently *The Reign and Life of Queen Elizabeth I: Politics, Culture, and Society* (2022). She has held fellowships at the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Newberry Library, and the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Warwick. She was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of York. More recently she has been a visiting Professor at the University of Catania and at the Catholic University of Milan. She co-edits the series, *Queenship and Power*, for Palgrave and the *New Interdisciplinary Approaches to Early Modern Culture* for Routledge. In August 2024 her play, *Elizabeth I: In Her Own Words* was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Rebecca J. Long is the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Curator in Painting and Sculpture of Europe at the Art Institute of Chicago, where she oversees Spanish and Italian art before 1750. She is curator of *Among Friends and Rivals: Caravaggio in Rome* (2023) and also served as curator of *El Greco: Ambition and Defiance*, presented at both the Art Institute (2020) and the Musée du Louvre/Grand Palais, Paris (2019). Before joining the Art Institute in 2015, she served as associate curator of European painting and sculpture before 1800 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She has held research fellowships from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, NYU's Villa La Pietra, and Harvard University's Villa I Tatti and has served as an adjunct professor at institutions including Indiana University, Purdue University, University of Louisville, and Northwestern University.

Silvia Z. Mitchell is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University. She is a historian of Renaissance and early modern European history, queenship, and Habsburg and royal court studies. Based on substantial archival research, Professor Mitchell's work is written in a clear and accessible style to the general reader. She has published extensively on the reign of Carlos II of Spain (r. 1665-1700) and is an expert on his mother, Queen Mariana of Austria (1634 Vienna – 1696 Madrid), a critical figure in the history of Spain and Europe. Her book, *Queen, Mother, and Stateswoman: Mariana of Austria and the Government of Spain* (Penn State University, 2019, paperback 2020) is simultaneously a political biography of Queen Mariana of Austria and an analysis of the role of Spain in European international politics. The Spanish edition was published in a fully illustrated and extended edition (2023) by the Centro de Estudios de Europa Hispánica in their prestigious series *The Habsburgs*. She is currently preparing a history on "The Spanish Habsburgs, 1500-1700: The Men and the Women that Ruled the First Global Empire of the World" and a co-authored biography of the Spanish-born Queen of France, Marie-Thérèse of Austria (1638-1683), who has lived in the historical shadows of her famous husband, Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715).

Elizabeth Neary is the Associate Director of Fellowships and Academic Programs at the Newberry Library. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Spanish Literature. Her research examines marriage between Moriscos and Old Christians as represented in both literary and archival sources.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks is Distinguished Professor of History and Women's and Gender Studies Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is the long-time senior editor of the *Sixteenth Century Journal*, former editor of the *Journal of Global History*, editor-in-chief of the seven-volume *Cambridge World History* (2015), and co-editor, with Mathew Kuefler, of the four-volume *Cambridge World History of Sexualities* (2024). She is the author or editor of many articles and forty books that have appeared in ten European and Asian languages, including most recently *Women and the Reformation: A Global History* (Yale 2024), *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789* (3rd edition, Cambridge 2023), *Gender in History: Global Perspectives* (3rd edition, Blackwell 2022), *What Is Early Modern History?* (Polity 2021), and *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (4th edition, Cambridge 2020).