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Two Centuries of Nun Musicians in Spain's Imperial City

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio de documentación de archivo relativo a unas ciento veinte monjas músicas toledanas durante los siglos XVII y XVIII, todas ellas beneficiarias de una exención de la dote a cambio de su servicio musical en el convento. Se examinan datos demográficos como la edad media de entrada en religión, procedencia geográfica de las monjas músicas, así como su parentesco con los músicos que ejercían su profesión en la catedral de Toledo y en otros centros. Se consideran también los motivos que existían para que algunas monjas músicas decidiesen abonar la dote para así poder ser relevadas de su cargo musical.

Palabras clave

Convento, Monjas, Toledo

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study of archival documentation relating to some one hundred twenty nun musicians known to have received dowry waivers at Toledo convents during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Included are demographic data such as the average age of entrance into religion and the geographic provenance of Toledo's nun musicians as well as family relationships between nun musicians and professional musicians at the Toledo cathedral and elsewhere. The study also considers the circumstances that led some nun musicians to pay off their dowries in order to be able to relieved of their duties as convent musician.

Key words

Convent, Nuns, Toledo

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Two Centuries of Nun Musicians in Spain's Imperial City

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1. Introduction: A case in point

Manuela Martín de Eugenio received the novice's habit on the Feast of Saint James the Greater in 1701 and, upon completion of the obligatory year in the novitiate, made her final vows on 30 July 1702 at Toledo's Monasterio de la Concepción Francisca. The *libro de profesiones* that registers Manuela's profession also records the dowry waiver she was granted in exchange for having entered the convent on the merits of her talent as a musician; beneath the entry stating that Manuela professed "without bringing any dowry whatsoever, nor fees nor trousseau," her attractively-penned signature reads: "D^a Manuela Martín de Eugenio/Organista".¹ (See Image 1) The legal documents or *escrituras* that authorize Manuela's entrance into religious life tell that her parents—Esteban Martín de Eugenio and María de Sanz, natives of nearby Puebla de Montalbán and Azofrín, respectively—had come to reside in Toledo, where Manuela was born on 1 June 1686 and baptized a week later at the parish church of San Andrés; thus, Manuela was just sixteen years old (the minimum age for taking final vows) when she was conferred permanent tenure as organist at La Concepción.²



Image 1

Signature of Manuela Martín de Eugenio, 30 July 1702.

Toledo, Archivo del Convento de la Concepción Francisca, *Libro de profesiones*

¹ Archivo del Convento de la Concepción Francisca (Toledo). Archivo digital de la Real Fundación de Toledo, sig. CC_Libro_089_082.

² Documents relating to Manuela's *recepción* and *profesión* are preserved in Toledo, Archivo Histórico Provincial (hereafter AHPT), Protocolos 417 and 621.

Manuela Martín de Eugenio and the other nuns who serve here as examples represent the hundreds of Spanish convent musicians who labored under a system in which musical ability served as a kind of currency, granting access to monastic life to girls whose families could not have afforded it otherwise, and permitting entrance into the ranks of choir nun (*monja de coro* or *monja de velo negro*) to those who might only have been able to pay the lesser dowry of a lay sister (*lega* or *monja de velo blanco*). By searching in monastery account books, *libros de profesiones* and *protocolos*, I have so far been able to identify some one hundred twenty nun musicians at Toledo convents between about 1600 and 1800, all of whom, like Manuela Martín de Eugenio, were granted dowry waivers—a practice that can be documented for at least a dozen of the convents that existed in Toledo during the period. The present study aims to shed light upon the identities of the cloistered women and girls whose music-making figured prominently in the urban soundscape of early modern Spain.

2. Dowry waivers for Toledo's nun musicians

At the time of Manuela Martín de Eugenio's profession at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the number of female houses packed into Toledo's old city center (a space of about 2.25 square kilometers) was just shy of two dozen, at least half of which are known to have granted dowry waivers to nun musicians. (See Table 1) Gaps in records and the inaccessibility of some documentation make it difficult to draw comparisons between the various Toledo convents or to arrive at definitive conclusions about the pervasiveness of the practice in each religious order; however, a few general trends can be noted. There is substantial documentation of dowry waivers having been granted to nun musicians at Toledo's oldest monasteries—the Cistercian nuns of San Clemente and Santo Domingo el Antiguo, both founded in the twelfth century. Similarly fruitful has been the search for dowry waivers at the various houses of mendicant orders established in Toledo during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with multiple instances uncovered at houses of Augustinian nuns—Santa Úrsula and San Torcuato—and in particular, at the Dominican convent of Santo Domingo el Real; the practice is likewise well documented at the Franciscan houses that begin to appear in Toledo during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Santa Clara, Santa Isabel de los Reyes, San Miguel de los Ángeles, San Juan de la Penitencia and San Antonio de Padua.

Table 1: Toledo convents ca. 1700 (surviving in 2010), chronological by date of founding

	religious order	date	*	**
1. San Clemente	Cistercian	12C	16	ü
2. Santo Domingo el Antiguo	Cistercian	12C	7	ü
3. Santa Úrsula	Augustinian	1360	10	ü
4. Santo Domingo el Real	Dominican	1364	18	ü
5. La Visitación “Jerónimas de la Reina”	Hieronymite	1370	x	x
6. Santa Clara	Franciscan	1373	11	ü
7. Beatas de San Jerónimo/San Pablo	Hieronymite	1374/1510	3	ü
8. Sancta Mater Dei (beatas)/ Inmaculada Concepción “Gaitanas”	Augustinian	1451/1627	x	ü
9. Santa Isabel de los Reyes	Franciscan	1477	8	ü
10. Madre de Dios (closed and transferred to S. Domingo el Real in 1993)	Dominican	1483	x	ü
11. Concepción Francisca	Conceptionist	1484	23	ü
12. S. Pedro (beatas)/Purísima Concepción	Recollect Benedictine	1487/1652	x	§
13. San Miguel de los Ángeles	Franciscan	1492	8	ü
14. La Encarnación “Vida Pobre”	Hieronymite	1493	x	ü
15. Santa Ana	Franciscan	late 15C	x	x
16. Santa Fe “Comendadoras de Santiago”	Military Order St. James	1504	x	x
17. San Juan de la Penitencia	Franciscan	1514	4	ü
18. San Antonio de Padua	Franciscan	1514	6	ü
19. Santa Mónica (beatas)/San Torcuato	Augustinian	1520/1592	5	ü
20. San José	Discalced Carmelite	1569	x	x
21. Jesús y María	Recollect Dominican	1601	1	ü
22. La Asunción “Bernarditas”	Recollect Cistercian	1605	x	§
23. Inmaculada Concepción	Capuchin	1632	x	x

*Number of dowry waivers known to have been granted to nun musicians between ca. 1600 – 1800

**Found additional archival evidence of nuns’ music-making (ü); Found documentation for hiring music from outside but not for nuns’ music (§); Found no documentation related to music (x)

Scarcity of documentation makes it difficult to determine the extent to which dowry waivers might have been authorized for nun musicians at the Dominican Madre de Dios or at the Augustinian Inmaculada Concepción, popularly known as “Las Gaitanas”, though there is some evidence for nuns’ music-making at both houses (see below). It seems fair to conclude that, with

the probable exception of the Franciscans at Santa Ana—a convent known for its austerity—the practice of granting dowry waivers to nun musicians was a common occurrence at all Toledo houses belonging to the mendicant orders, as it was at the old Cistercian foundations. Dowry waivers were also granted quite liberally at María Martín de Eugenio's La Concepción Francisca—the inaugural foundation of the new Spanish Conceptionist order established in 1484 by Beatriz de Silva and soon thereafter placed under Franciscan jurisdiction—where I have been able to identify a nearly continuous succession of twenty-three nun musicians with dowry waivers between the end of the sixteenth century and the French invasion.

Thus far, I have been unable to encounter any notice of musical activity at Santa Fe, the convent of the Comendadoras de Santiago. Toledo's three Hieronymite foundations likewise present a difficult case: documentation for the now defunct Monastery of la Visitación or "Jerónimas de la Reina" is extremely scarce (but see below) and account books for La Encarnación, also called "La Vida Pobre," and for San Pablo contain no record of dowry waivers; however, I have managed to locate *escrituras* for dowry waivers of three nun musicians from San Pablo. There also exists evidence for nuns' musical activity at "La Vida Pobre": in his last will and testament, Toledo organist José Solana (1643–1712) bequeathed half of his organ music and a *clavicordio* (likely a harpsichord) made in Antwerp to a nun at "La Vida Pobre" named Juana de Soria. The eventual discovery of Juana de Soria's *carta de recepción* or *carta de profesión* could reveal an instance of a nun musician's dowry waiver there. Solana's bequests also present evidence for nuns' music-making at "Las Gaitanas": in an earlier draft of his will, Solana expressed his intent to leave a *monacordio* (clavichord) to his niece Josepha Sánchez Solana, identified in the will as a nun at "Las Gaitanas".³ Nun musicians must have played organs at "Las Gaitanas", as its *coro alto* still contains today an instrument made in 1762 by Francisco Antonio Díaz.⁴ The nuns' choir at the Dominican convent of Madre de Dios also possessed an organ by the late sixteenth century, for which they contracted in 1567 with organ builder Francisco Gómez, and so it would not be surprising to learn that they, too, offered dowry waivers to girls who could play it.⁵

Finally, a group of Toledo convents for which I have been able to find little or no evidence

³ José Solana's other niece and likely a sister of Josepha Sánchez Solana, Doña María Paciencia Sanchez Solana, was granted a dowry waiver as organist at Santa Úrsula; in his final will, Solana left the other half of his organ music to her. Discussion of the various versions of José Solana's will and a transcription of his final will and testament are found in Jambou 1981: 97-99, 109-11.

⁴ Reference to the organ at Las Gaitanas is found in Martínez Caviro 1990: 381.

⁵ A transcription of the contract for the organ at Madre de Dios is found in Jambou 1988, doc. 17: 7.

of dowry waivers or of nuns' musical activity are those monastic communities established in response to the reform movements that swept through Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The most famous of these campaigns is the reform of the Carmelite order carried out by Saint Teresa of Ávila, whose monastery of Discalced Carmelite nuns (yet another named for Saint Joseph) was founded at Toledo in 1569. Likewise responding to the impetus towards reform are the seventeenth-century foundations of the Dominicas Recoletas of Jesús y María, the "Bernarditas" or Recollect Cistercians of La Asunción and the Capuchinas of La Inmaculada Concepción, this last belonging to a reformed branch of the Franciscan order. Toledo's only Benedictine monastery—the so-called "Benitas"—also belongs to this group: founded in the late fifteenth century as a *beaterio* bearing the name of San Pedro, it became a cloistered community in 1629, adopting the rule of St. Benedict. Finally in 1652 San Pedro became a house of Benitas Recoletas or Recollect Benedictines, taking the name of La Purísima Concepción de Nuestra Señora, making it yet one more Toledo house named for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception so zealously defended by early modern Spain. These five reformed houses, which constitute Toledo's newest foundations (the early origins of San Pedro/La Concepción notwithstanding), were all established in response to reformers' desires to live a more austere vision of monastic life that prized a stricter adherence to religious rule, a greater observance of poverty and enclosure and an emphasis on contemplation, with extended periods of the day devoted to silence and mental prayer. It is to be expected that reformed houses such as these would have refrained from engaging in the kinds of musical practices that cultivated and encouraged contact with the outside world, thereby obviating the need for offering dowry waivers to nun musicians.⁶ Nonetheless, it should be noted that traces of music-making and even musician's dowry waivers have been found for at least one of these reformed houses: in 1735 the Recollect Dominicans at Jesús y María contracted for the building of two organs, and in 1737, a nun whose name in religion was Sor Isabel de San Pedro entered as organist, apparently without payment of dowry.⁷ It remains to be discovered whether these developments were new, and if so, what might have occasioned the change in policy.

What seems likely is that most convents where nuns sang polyphony and played organ and other instruments sooner or later ended up offering dowry waivers in order to attract the best

⁶ For further discussion of the effects of religious reform on nuns' music see Baade 2008.

⁷ The reference to Sor Isabel de San Pedro appears in Peñas Serrano *et al.* 2005, 278. The article also discusses a collection of chantbooks made for Jesús y María during the years 1736-1739.

musical talent they could, so to compete with other musical convents. The present survey of dowry waivers for nun musicians in Toledo may indicate that, apart from the new reformed houses, nuns were performing polyphony at the majority of Toledo convents during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I am reluctant, however, to view dowry waivers for nun musicians as definitive evidence for the performance of polyphony at particular convents, especially in light of the increase during the eighteenth century of nuns who were granted dowry waivers as *cantollanistas*. It is also difficult to ascertain whether the fact that the overwhelming majority (approximately 85%) of dowry waivers I have been able to find for Toledo date from after 1700 owes to an increase in competition between convents for musical talent or simply to the state of available documentation. Certainly one gets the impression that, over the course of the two centuries under consideration here, the task of producing music in the cloister fell increasingly to nun musicians working under contractual obligation.

3. Who were Toledo's contracted nun musicians?⁸

Although the *escrituras* that authorized nuns' admission into religious life are highly formulaic, they sometimes offer glimpses into various aspects of the identities of Toledo's contracted convent musicians. The data presented here is based on *escrituras de recepción* and/or *escrituras de profesión* I have been able to locate for roughly one hundred (83%) of one hundred twenty Toledo nun musicians known to have received dowry waivers between 1599 and 1801.⁹ The average age of the girls who entered Toledo convents with a musician's dowry waiver was seventeen, with ages ranging from the rare instance of one girl who entered when she was only nine years old to another uncommon case of a woman who entered at age twenty-six. The largest number of girls—among them, Manuela Martín de Eugenio—entered at age fifteen, allowing them to complete the required year in the novitiate prior to professing at the minimum age of sixteen.

⁸ Here and throughout, each nun musician referenced is identified by her secular name, followed in parenthesis by year of birth if known, the name of the convent at which she served as musician, the date at which she entered the novitiate (*recepción*) or made final profession (*profesión*), and year of death if known. Religious names appear only infrequently in the documentation and are given only if the secular name is unknown. Preference is given to date of *recepción* over *profesión*; in most cases the date of final profession is the following year or the year in which the girl turned sixteen. The year of birth comes from the *fe de bautismo* where found; otherwise, it has been calculated backwards from girls' ages and dates as supplied in the *escrituras*.

⁹ Contracted nun musicians whose *escrituras* have not been found have been identified as such in account book entries and in *libros de profesiones*; the search for additional information about them continues.

For those few girls who took the novice's habit prior to age fifteen, the stay in the novitiate would be extended beyond the typical year, since the regulations set down by the final session of the Council of Trent prohibited girls younger than age sixteen from making a final profession.

A survey of the geographic origins of Toledo's contracted nun musicians shows that Manuela Martín de Eugenio represents the norm for her time in that she was a native of the city in which she also spent her life in religion. Up until 1725, over eighty percent of the Toledo nun musicians whose place of birth is known were citizens of Toledo or of towns within a radius of 70 kilometers (Magán, Orgaz, La Puebla de Montalbán, Carmena, Villa del Álamo, San Bartolomé de las Abiertas and Madrid); during this period, three girls came from Pamplona, and just one girl from Salamanca. Starting in 1726, however, Toledo's contracted nun musicians began to hail from much further afield: that same year Francisca González de Guzmán (1705 – Santo Domingo el Real, 1726) traveled some 650 kilometers from Ceuta across the Strait of Gibraltar to her post as *música de voz*; María Josepha Joaquín (Santa Úrsula, 1726) journeyed even further (689 kilometers on today's roads) from her hometown of Pontevedra to take advantage of one of two dowry waivers being offered to girls with "good health and with good voices."¹⁰ More typical, however, is the trend toward migration from the north. Between 1726 and 1800, eleven girls came from Aragón (Calatayud, Zaragoza and Teruel) and another eleven from the Basque Provinces (Labastida, Bilbao and Leza) and Navarra (Pamplona). Especially notable is the number of "recruits"—sixteen in all—from La Rioja and northeastern Castilla la Vieja (Haro, Navarrete, Logroño, Santo Domingo de la Calzada and others).¹¹ Fifteen musicians came from León (Salamanca, Astorga and various *pueblos*) and remarkably between 1751 and 1762 eight nun musicians made the 218 kilometer journey to Toledo from the city of Toro. During the period between 1726 and 1800, more than eighty percent of "hired" nun musicians migrated from distances of over 160 kilometers (100 miles). The preceding information raises new questions that remain to be explored, such as how the influx of nun musicians from the north and northeast relates generally to mobility in eighteenth-century Spain, or how the geographic provenance of Toledo's nun musicians compares with that of the general population of Toledo nuns. One wonders about the concentration of nun musicians from the La Rioja region and in the city of Toro: was there a particular tradition of training female organists or were there specific teachers who were sought out by families who

¹⁰ "Se determinó que se resiven sin dote dos doncellas de buena salud y buena voz que pudiesen servir en el coro" (AHPT Protocolo 677).

¹¹ Geographic designations used here are based on period maps including Nicolas Sanson and Vicolae Visscher.

wanted their daughters to become convent musicians?

We know that prospective nun musicians trained with church organists, *ministriles* and *maestros de capilla*, for whom teaching was a source of supplemental income. Manuela Martín de Eugenio, for example, may well have been a student of Mathías Miguel Solana, assistant organist at the Toledo cathedral, whose brief (if not overly enthusiastic) *aval* or letter of recommendation accompanies her *escritura de recepción*. (See Image 2) Many of Toledo's "hired" nun musicians must have been trained by fathers, uncles and brothers who worked as musicians at Spain's cathedral and churches. *Bajón*-player Teodora de Lozoya (1625 – Santa Isabel, 1638) was the daughter of Pedro Lozoya, cornetist at the Toledo cathedral. Manuela de Salazar (1639 – San Clemente, 1646), daughter of cathedral organist Juan Bautista Gascón de Salazar, appears to have been received "a plaza de organista" at San Clemente at the age of nine. Singer Francisca González de Guzmán (1705 – Santo Domingo el Real, 1726) was the sister of Pedro González de Guzmán, *maestro de capilla* at the Ceuta cathedral. Bernarda Agustina Picazarri (1748 – La Concepción, 1770), contracted to sing and to teach singing at La Concepción, was the daughter of Juan Andrés de Picazarri, organist and *maestro de niños* at the town of Clavijo. Organist Paula Ravella (1758 – Santa Clara, 1773) surely trained with her father Miguel Ravella, a Toledo cathedral musician who played oboe, flute and violin. María Josefa Martínez y Villanueva (1759 – San Clemente, 1774 – 1829) was the daughter and granddaughter, respectively, of Manuel Martínez and Juan Antonio Martínez, successive organists at the Capilla de San Pedro, a large chapel within the Toledo cathedral.¹²

¹² Male musician relatives are sometimes identified as such in nuns' *escrituras*; others are identified in Reynaud 1996 and Martínez Gil 2003.

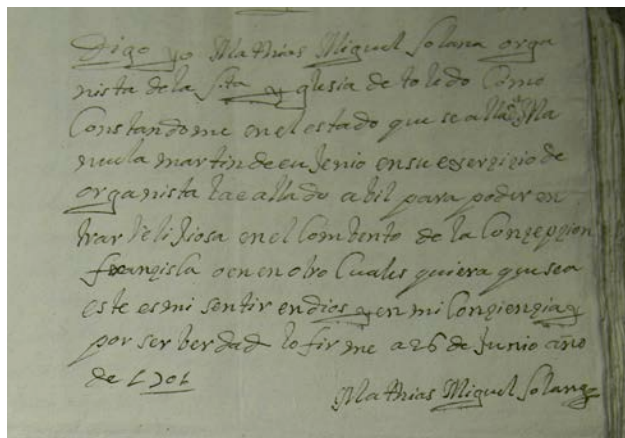


Image 2

Mathias Miguel Solana's *aval* for Manuela Martín de Eugenio, 26 June 1701.
Toledo, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Protocolo 417.

It was not uncommon for female members of the same family to find a musician's post in Toledo, whether together in the same convent or in separate houses: organists Teresa de Tovera y Gayangos (1715? – Santa Úrsula, 1730) and her younger sister Josepha María Tovera y Gayangos (1730 – Santa Clara, 1749) came to Toledo from the town of Haro (La Rioja); sisters Ramona Ligeró (1733 – 1751 – 1809) and Rita Ligeró (1741 – 1755 – 1818) played organ, harp and violin at Santo Domingo el Real, and may well have been cousins of organist Bernarda Estévez Ligeró (1742 – La Concepción, 1757); all three were natives of Toro (León). It appears likely that organist María Antonia Prestamero (Santa Isabel, c. 1732) and *cantollanista* Francisca Viviana Prestamero (1717 – La Concepción, 1737) were sisters (Francisca's uncle was Francisco Urbina, organist at the cathedral's Capilla de San Blas); still unconfirmed are the possible familial ties between Bernarda Muñoz Crespo (Santa Úrsula, c. 1675), Francisca Muñoz Sánchez (1654 – La Concepción, 1676) and Juana Muñoz Crespo (San Torcuato, c. 1680). The Cistercian convent of San Clemente granted dowry waivers to three pairs of sister organists. María Alberta Martínez Serrano (1707 – 1726 – 1775) and younger sister Lucía (1711 – 1726 – 1771), daughters of Zaragoza native and organist at the Toledo cathedral Joaquín Martínez de la Roca, entered the convent together as organists and singers in 1726; their brother Joaquín Martínez Serrano was also employed as assistant to the organist and later as second organist at the cathedral. The Martínez Serrano sisters were succeeded at San Clemente by Isidora San Martín y Martínez (1733 – 1752 – 1788) and her younger sister María (1739 – 1753 – 1780), who both were granted dowry waivers as organist, harpist, and *cantollanista* (Isidora also played violón); the girls' uncle Sebastián de San Martín was *maestro de capilla* at the Calatayud cathedral. Near the end of the century, two sisters

from the La Rioja town of Cuzcurrita, Antonia Micaela Álvarez de Sandoval (1777 – 1796 – 1814) and the younger Cecilia (1780 – 1796 – 1808) entered San Clemente together, both with the obligation to serve as organist and to sing and teach plainchant.

It is evident from the preceding examples that musicianship was a trade passed on to daughters as well as sons, and that musical ability was cultivated in families. In some instances, a girl's appointment as convent musician might have paved the way for a brother to seek musical employment in the same city: Oviedo native Josepha Pérez Noriega (1710 – 1727 – c. 1749) was granted a dowry waiver as organist and *cantora* at Santa Clara and thirteen years later, her elder brother Bernardo Pérez Noriega came to Toledo by way of a previous post at Segovia to sing as contralto at the cathedral; similarly, Calera natives Isabel Gertrudis (1725 – 1741 – 1769) and Nicolasa (1729 – 1745 – 1761) de Palacios y Sánchez both received musicians' dowry waivers at Santo Domingo el Real, and in 1747, their nineteen-year-old brother Pedro Silvestre Palacios was hired as a contralto at the Toledo cathedral. One imagines there existed "schools" of nun musicians who studied with a particular teacher, as might have been the case with José Solana, principal organist of the Toledo cathedral from 1678 to 1711. Solana's organ students at nun musicians' posts in Toledo appear to have included his two nieces María Paciencia Sánchez Solana (1674 – Santa Úrsula, 1692) and Josepha Sánchez Solana ("Las Gaitanas" [dates unknown]), as well as Juana de Soria ("La Vida Pobre" [dates unknown]) and María de Miranda (1689 – Santa Clara, 1700 – 1727); María de Miranda's younger sister Juana (1690 – Santa Clara, 1712 – 1749), may also have studied with Solana. All in all, about ten percent of Toledo's "hired" nun musicians are known to have been relatives of professional musicians, and another ten percent or so had at least one sister who was also a nun musician (naturally, there is some overlap between these two groups). Doubtless, further investigation of Toledo's musicians will uncover additional ties among teachers, students and family members.

Apart from occasionally noting male relatives' employment as professional musicians, *escrituras* for dowry waivers rarely make any mention of the occupations of nun musicians' fathers; indeed, the only other profession I have seen referenced is that of *escribano*. Eulalia de Abascal (1699 – Santo Domingo el Real, 1714), was the daughter of Salamanca *escribano del número* Juan Martínez de Abascal (deceased at the time of her entrance into religion); she ultimately left the novitiate after eight months because she was determined to be "insufficiently

skilled” to receive a dowry waiver as organist, harpist and singer.¹³ Antonia María Montero de Hoz, orphan daughter of *escribano real* Manuel Montero de Hoz of Toledo and María García de Rojas (her uncles Carlos Montero de la Hoz and Pedro García de Rojas were also Toledo *escribanos*) was offered two chances at a musician’s dowry waiver. Born in Toledo in 1725 and baptized at the parish church of San Vicente, in 1742 Antonia María entered the novitiate at the Hieronymite convent of La Visitación (“Jerónimas de la Reina”), where she had been offered a complete waiver of her dowry and all other related expenses in exchange for serving as organist and *cantora*. The document authorizing her entry into La Visitación states that because she suffered from what is described as “un defecto de la vista”, she would be required to pay one and one half *reales* per day for the services of a *criada* who would assist her.¹⁴ It is not clear what happened at La Visitación, but eight years later in 1750, Antonia María appeared before witnesses at the *locutorio* of the Franciscan convent of San Juan de la Penitencia, now described as having “total falta de vista corporal.”¹⁵ According to the *escrituras*, her blindness normally would require that she pay two dowries, but the nuns at San Juan de la Penitencia agreed to accept her as organist for the price of only one dowry (one thousand *ducados*). This arrangement appears to have been successful, for Antonia María made her final profession at San Juan de la Penitencia in 1751 at age twenty-six. For a blind and orphaned young woman (and approximately twenty percent of Toledo’s nun musicians were orphaned of one or both parents), a post as convent musician must have offered rare opportunity for a self-sufficiency of a sort, and one imagines that it was a relief to members of Antonia’s María extended family that she should have a secure home for the remainder of her life. One can only hope that the arrangement was also acceptable to Antonia María.¹⁶

Because the documentation upon which this study is based typically does not provide information about the occupation of nuns’ fathers, one hesitates to draw conclusions regarding the socioeconomic conditions of families whose daughters became nun musicians in Toledo. It is easy to imagine that girls who were contracted as convent musicians must have come from households that lacked the means to provide proper dowries for their daughters. References to

¹³ Archivo del Monasterio de Santo Domingo el Real. Archivo digital de la Real Fundación de Toledo, sig. SDR_Libro_3108.

¹⁴ *Escritura* for Antonia María Montero de Hoz at La Visitación in AHPT Protocolo 4088.

¹⁵ *Escritura* for Antonia María Montero de Hoz at San Juan de la Penitencia in AHPT Protocolo 694.

¹⁶ I have also encountered *escrituras* for one other blind nun organist, Antonia Ruiz de la Llave (1763 – San Antonio de Padua, 1779) in AHPT Protocolos 900 and 901.

the practice in the literature of the time suggest as much. María Pinel's manuscript account of seventeenth-century life at Ávila's Monasterio de la Encarnación tells of two sisters whose parents were so poor they could not afford even nuns' dowries for their daughters, and so arranged for them to learn music, thus enabling them both—the elder as a player of organ and harp and the younger as a player of the *bajón*—to enter the convent “free of charge”.¹⁷ A character in the seventh novel of Mariana de Carvajal's *Navidades de Madrid* is likewise given music lessons in hopes that a post as a choir nun will provide her with a suitable standard of living (“para que a título de corista gozara en un convento las conveniencias acostumbradas”).¹⁸ This latter case, though fictional, surely presents a situation with which contemporary readers would have been familiar, and appears to indicate that the chance to secure a musician's post for one's daughter appealed not only to members of the professional classes (such as scribes and musicians), but also to persons of greater affluence. The father of Carvajal's character is a *caballero* and holder of an entailed estate (“gozaba un corto mayorazgo”), the education he provides for his children is described as necessary learning for upper-class persons (“llegóse el tiempo de aprender las urbanidades que deben saber las personas principales”), and the father's primary concern for his daughter seems to be that he cannot provide her with a dowry sufficient to entice a suitor of her own class (“no tenía dote igual a su calidad para casar a su hija”).¹⁹ Furthermore, Carvajal hints that, for her character, life in the convent offers more of the amenities to which she is accustomed (“las conveniencias acostumbradas”) than a marriage beneath her station might have held. Similar language appears in Franciscan chronicler Alfonso de Torres's brief account of the life of a sixteenth-century nun named Sor Ana de San Andrés, which also features parents who lacked the means to offer their daughter the “necessary comforts” (“faltándoles a los padres medios para darle conveniencias”) and so provided her with musical instruction, thereby making her an

¹⁷ Pinel, *Retablo de Carmelitas*: 200. The original reads: “[Los] padres virtuosos y pobres, que, deseosos de dar a nuestro Señor dos hijas que su Magestad les había dado, no teniendo dote que poder darlas para que padres virtuosos y pobres, que, deseosos de dar a nuestro Señor dos hijas que su Magestad les había dado, no teniendo dote que poder darlas para que entrasen religiosas, con la ayuda de un hermano que tenía en un curato, las enseñó música. Doña Clara Eugenia, que era la mayor aprendió órgano y arpa; y la menor, que era doña Eugenia Clara, bajón. Por estos instrumentos las recibieron de valde en el convento de la Encarnación.”

¹⁸ Carvajal 1663, 177. The original reads: “En la ciudad de Úbeda vivía un caballero llamado don Fernando de Medrano; gozaba un corto mayorazgo que llamaban vínculo. Casóse con una dama igual a su calidad, tan hermosa que la sirvió de dote su belleza. A poco tiempo de casados se reconoció preñada, a llegando el tiempo parió dos criaturas, varón y hembra. Al niño le pusieron Pedro, por su abuelo de parte de padre y a la niña Jacinta. Criáronse estas dos criaturas creciendo en ellos el amor al paso de la edad y llegóse el tiempo de aprender las urbanidades que deben saber las personas principales; les dieron maestros suficientes y pareciéndolo a don Fernando que no tenía dote igual a su calidad para casar a su hija, la enseñó todo el arte de la música para que a título de corista gozara en un convento las conveniencias acostumbradas.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

attractive candidate for multiple convents (“la apetećían muchos conventos”).²⁰

Surely we can surmise that the ranks of Toledo’s contracted nun musicians included daughters of parents who belonged to a variety of socioeconomic situations, from working professionals to aristocratic landholders. Doubtless, social and economic considerations both played significant roles in many a decision to place a daughter in a convent, whether in a musician’s post or otherwise.²¹ Regarding the question of nobility, however, caution must be taken in attempting to base any judgments on the presence or absence of the honorific *don* and *doña* in nuns’ *escrituras*. Although the titles had once been reserved for members of the upper nobility, already by the early sixteenth century their significance was becoming blurred, as persons of lesser stations gradually appropriated their use. The most that can be said of the titles’ use in nuns’ *escrituras* is that they appear to be applied inconsistently to the parents of nun musicians. Fairly consistent, however, is the use of the title *doña* to designate choir nuns (*monjas de velo negro, monjas de coro* or *coristas*) in houses of nearly all religious orders, whether Augustinian, Benedictine, Conceptionist, Dominican, Franciscan, or Hieronymite, while the title *sor* is generally applied in the *escrituras* to girls who entered religion as lay sisters (*monjas de velo blanco, legas* or *freilas*). Traditionally, lay sisters—who were admitted with much smaller dowries than choir nuns—were responsible for doing domestic chores in the convent and were exempted from the duty of performing the canonical hours in Latin. This dual class system existed in male and female monasteries from the Middle Ages, and although reformers such as Teresa of Ávila attempted to eradicate it, it persisted even into the twentieth century. What can be affirmed about the practice of granting dowry waivers to nun musicians is that it allowed entrance into the ranks of the *coristas* girls whose economic circumstances would have otherwise consigned them to the status of *lega*, and permitted many whose pedigree did not so warrant to identify themselves as “doña”.

²⁰ Torres 1683: 662. The original reads: “Sor Ana de San Andrés. Tuvo su nacimiento en Portugal, y faltádoles a los padres medios para darle conveniencias, le enseñaron el arte de música, por tener sobresaliente voz; en que salió tan diestra, que la apetećían muchos monasterios, por su habilidad...”

²¹ See, for example, Sperling 1999, which puts forth the theory that the drastic increase in female monachization that occurred in late sixteenth century Venice owed more to a desire to preserve the integrity of noble bloodlines than to financial constraints.

4. Changes and chances

Despite the financial incentives it offered, not every girl who entered the cloister with a musician's dowry waiver found life as a convent musician to her liking. Águeda Rodríguez (1725) entered Santo Domingo el Real as singer and violinist but left after only ten days because, as the *libro de profesiones* puts it, "no quiso estar". No reason is given for the departure of Agustina Lucas García (1770 – La Concepción, 1792) after seven weeks at the convent where she had been contracted to serve as *cantora* and *vicaria de coro*. So far, I have been able to determine that roughly fifteen percent of the nuns on my list of contracted nun musicians abandoned their musical duties for one reason or another, at various stages of religious life. Several girls received into the novitiate as musicians were found wanting in their musical ability and therefore were offered the option of remaining in the religious community in exchange for paying a full dowry at the time of profession. That is what happened, for example, to Narcisa de Aranda y Olalde (1730 – Santo Domingo el Real, 1744): her father Lorenzo de Aranda, *bajonista* at the Toledo cathedral, attempted in 1744 to secure a musician's post with reduced dowry for his fourteen-year-old daughter; however, at the time of her final vows in 1747, it was agreed that Narcisa would be allowed to profess only upon payment of the full dowry of 800 ducats, because "she [did] not possess the musical abilities with which her father had entered her and claimed that she had at the time she was received." The delay in settling the matter of Narcisa's dowry (she took her final vows at age seventeen, after a full three years in the novitiate) is likely explained by the fact that her father, a widower since 1743 with four daughters to support, had suffered periodic bouts of ill health that had caused his salary as cathedral musician to be cut in half since 1745. It was not until 1747, not long before his daughter's final profession at Santo Domingo el Real, that Lorenzo de Aranda contracted matrimony with his second wife, a successful business woman named María Andrés de la Encina.²² Similar circumstances applied in the cases of Francisca Viviana Prestamero, who entered la Concepción as a *cantollanista* but paid a dowry of 400 *ducados* at the time of her profession because a defective voice ("un defecto en la voz") prevented her from fulfilling her contracted duties; likewise Catalina de la Fuente agreed to pay a dowry of 500 *ducados* at Santo Domingo el Real after it was determined that as a musician she was no more than moderately

²² The case of Lorenzo de Aranda is detailed in Martínez Gil 2003: 328-331 but without reference to its bearing upon the situation of his daughter Narcisa.

skilled (“medianamente hábil”).²³

For a handful of girls, fortune played a role in bringing about their emancipation from musical duties: these girls’ dowries were paid after they were chosen in a *suerte*—a kind of lottery that determined the beneficiary of memorial funds designated to pay for marriage dowries and religious dowries of orphaned girls. Francisca Codina (1723 – 1744), just two months after her final profession as nun musician won a *suerte* that enabled her to pay a dowry and be released from her duties singer and *bajonista* at Santo Domingo el Real. Another such recipient of money from *suertes* was Teresa Antonia de Velasco, who initially was received as organist and singer at San Miguel de los Ángeles in November 1731, having been promised a complete waiver of dowry and all expenses, including the cost of her journey from Logroño. According to an account book from San Miguel, Teresa left the monastery two years later, in December 1733, without having made her final vows. Toledo *protocolos* for January, 1734, contain *cartas de pago* or receipts showing that the same Teresa de Velasco, daughter of the now deceased Lorenzo de Velasco, had been awarded a total of some 400 ducats from five different *suertes*, the sum of which was to be applied toward the payment of her dowry not at San Miguel, but at Santa Clara, Toledo’s oldest Franciscan foundation. It is unclear why Teresa wound up entering a different convent, rather than applying the money towards payment of a dowry at San Miguel where she had entered initially. Perhaps San Miguel did not have space for her if she wasn’t going to serve as a musician; perhaps Teresa’s preference was for the wealthier and more prestigious Monasterio de Santa Clara, and now with money available for a dowry, she found herself free to profess at the convent of her choosing.

²³ AHPT Protocolos 628 and 800, respectively.

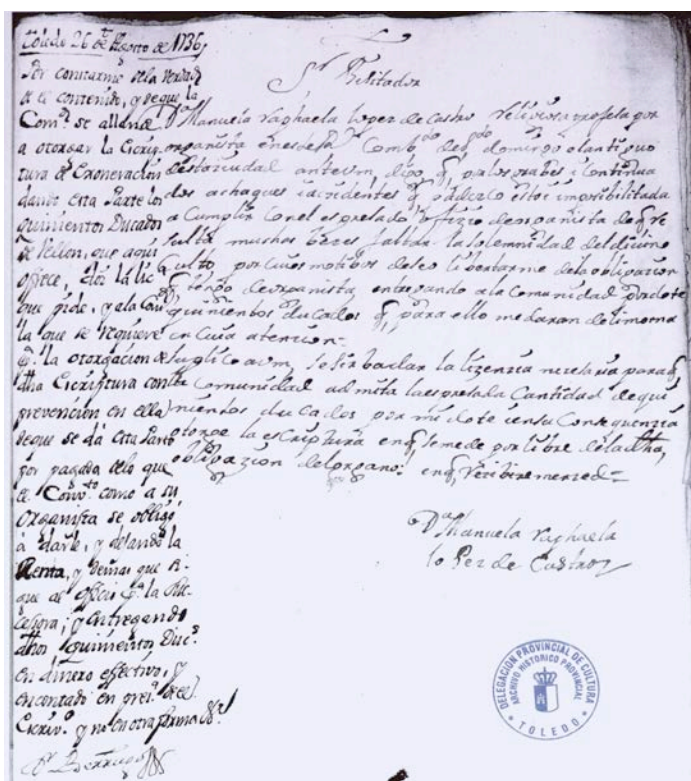


Image 3

Document detailing Manuela Rafaela López de Castro's release from organist duties at Santo Domingo el Antiguo, 26 August 1736. Toledo, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Protocolo 4083.

It is not difficult to imagine that, given the option, a prospective nun would elect to pay a dowry rather than be obligated to a lifetime of labor as a convent musician. The demands placed upon contracted nun musicians appear to have been fairly rigorous: in addition to being in charge of music for the daily offices and for special feast day celebrations, in many convents, nun musicians were also responsible for teaching music to other nuns and, in some instances, for supplying musical entertainment during the community's recreation hour. At San Clemente, the duties of nun organists even included the teaching of *reading*. In the case of women whose health permitted them to exercise their musical duties until the end of life, I have been able to document nun musicians whose tenures lasted four and even five decades. Contracted nun musicians who gave up their posts because of illness or infirmity were routinely required to pay back part of the dowry that had been waived at their entrance. For instance, when Manuela Rafaela López de Castro retired in August 1736 after a decade as organist at Santo Domingo el Antiguo because of what she described as "grave and continuous pains and attacks," her release from duties was

contingent upon payment of a dowry of 500 ducats. (See Image 3)

A “hired” nun musician could serve for decades, and still be required to pay at least a partial dowry in order to be relieved of duties; one gets the sense that a nun’s years of musical service were prorated, and their value deducted from the normal dowry price. One fascinating such case is that of María Suárez de Robles, who entered San Clemente in 1636 on her father’s promise to pay a dowry of 1.300 ducats at her final profession. According to the monastery’s *libro de profesiones* María’s final profession did not occur until 1649, some thirteen years later. If one can assume that María made her final profession at the minimum age of sixteen, then she would have been just three years old when she entered the cloister.²⁴ As it happened, when the time came for María’s profession, the money that had been promised for her dowry was no longer available, presumably owing to the fact that María’s father Fernando de Robles had died during the intervening years. Consequently, María offered to serve as convent organist at San Clemente—a skill she must have acquired while a child growing up in the cloister—until such time as the money for her dowry might become available. At her profession in 1649, the nuns at San Clemente reserved the right to collect the dowry from María’s father’s estate, which apparently was tied up in litigation for many years. Finally, on 22 January 1674, after nearly twenty-five years of service as convent organist, now complaining of health problems and other “impediments” that prevented her from continuing her musical duties, María Suárez de Robles was authorized pay a dowry of just 400 ducats, and thereby was relieved of her musical duties, contingent upon the satisfactory performance of her successor, María Gertrudis Sanz, whose *escritura de recepción* also dates from 22 January 1674. By my previous calculations, María Suárez would have been forty-one when she was relieved of her musical duties, and sixty-six when in 1699, she was elected abbess of San Clemente, according to a note in the monastery’s *libro de profesiones*.

The office of abbess is one María Suárez likely would not have been eligible to hold had she continued in her musical service at San Clemente. Many of the *recepción* agreements I have seen specify that nun musicians were exempted from occupying other community offices. In fact, the documents authorizing the release of Manuela López de Castro from her musical duties at Santo Domingo el Antiguo state not only that she was thus “exonerated” from her occupation as singer and organist, but also her new status “left her able and capable for the governance of the other

²⁴ At San Clemente, it was certainly not unheard of for very young girls to be left to be looked after and educated with the understanding that they would eventually become nuns. AHPT 2837 contains *escrituras* for two little girls ages two and six years who entered the novitiate at San Clemente in 1635.

offices of the community.”²⁵ Likewise, Teresa Velasco—the nun whose *suerte* allowed her to forgo a musician’s post at San Miguel in favor of taking the habit at Santa Clara—appears as abbess of that community in 1762. And although I have not yet found record of it, I suspect that Manuela Martín de Eugenio may also have paid a dowry in order to gain release from her musical responsibilities, possibly by 1718, when a new organist named Josepha de Alarcón was received at la Concepción. Manuela surely had left off her duties as organist by the time she appears as abbess at la Concepción in 1731; she also served a second turn, from 1752 to 1755.

At this stage in my research I remain unable to determine the extent to which the decision of contracted nun musicians to pay a dowry in order to be relieved of musical duties might have related to matters of class or identity within the cloister. Louise Stein has noted that in Spanish society in general, “professional composers did not come from the upper reaches of society, and even the best could not rise to that level” (Stein 1994, 329). It seems likely that inside the cloister nun musicians—many of whom were daughters of professional male musicians—would not have been regarded as social equals by their sisters in religion, especially by those of aristocratic breeding. One wonders whether some nun musicians who sought to be relieved of their musical obligations did so because they aspired to positions of greater influence or prestige within their cloistered communities.

Elsewhere I have written about the question of whether or not life as a cloistered nun musician can rightly be understood as a rare “career option” for early modern women (Baade 2005). In most cases, the decision to live one’s life as a convent musician probably rested with parents or guardians, and not with fifteen-year-old girls. However, we cannot discount entirely the notion that there were girls and young women for whom a life of playing and singing in the cloister held significant appeal. In a society that effectively kept women cloistered in the home as in the convent, there were surely many good reasons why a young woman might willingly become a nun. In light of the evidence presented here, I think it’s accurate to say that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we witness an increasing professionalization of the work of the convent musician, whose “profession” may well have had more to do with musical talent than with religious vocation.

²⁵ “...dan por exonerada a la dicha D^a Manuela Rafaela de la carga y gravamen de cantora y organista y la dejan ábil y capaz para la regencia de los demás oficios de comunidad según su regla y constituciones...”. AHPT 4083.

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