

**Review / Reseña**

Andrango-Walker, Catalina. *La construcción de la santidad en la región andina: la vida de la beata Juana de Jesús (1662-1703)*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2023. 322 pp.

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The richness of literary production in colonial Latin America often remains obscured, accessible only to a privileged few able to study rare print editions and manuscripts behind the archive's doors. In *La construcción de la santidad en la región andina*, literary scholar Catalina Andrango-Walker edits one such manuscript, Antonio Fernández Sierra's hagiographic biography of beata Juana de Jesús, thereby making available a fascinating text that illuminates convent spirituality, conceptions of holiness, and daily life in early eighteenth-century Quito. Andrango-Walker's extensive introductory study provides necessary background information on colonial Quito's economic, political, spiritual, and social contexts, as well as a critical analysis of the role of Juana de Jesús's hagiographies in *criollo*—and specifically, *quiteño*—consciousness. A handful of color photos document Juana's cell and posthumous portrait, the few material links we have to the beata herself, whose record of existence is otherwise limited to the hagiographic conventions of male-authored *vidas*.

As Andrango-Walker explains in her critical introduction, Juana de Jesús (1662-1703) took simple vows as a Third-Order Franciscan and spent the rest of her life in the convent of Santa Clara, where she experienced mystical phenomena, acquired a reputation of sanctity, and advocated for convent reform. Fernández Sierra, Juana's

confessor during her final years of life, used confessors' notes and eyewitness testimony to reconstruct Juana's life story and posthumous miracles; this manuscript, written in the years immediately following Juana's death but unpublished until Andrango-Walker's current edition, is titled *Resumen brebe... de la vida, virtudes y exercisios de Soror Joana de Jhs Maria y Joseph* (henceforth, *Resumen breve*). Fernández Sierra followed the conventions of early modern hagiography, hoping to inspire readers and probably anticipating a cause for beatification that never materialized. A later version of Juana's life, *Vida prodigiosa de la venerable virgen Juana de Jesús*, composed by Franciscan Francisco Xavier Antonio de Santa María and published in Lima in 1756, revived the beata as one of Quito's holy women. Santa María used *Resumen breve* as source material, but he edited the text for clarity and employed a higher literary style to extol both Juana and her birthplace as paragons of holiness. Juana herself did not leave behind any writings, but through her male-authored biographies we view many of the problems Quito faced during the late 1600s and early 1700s, including epidemics, earthquakes, and economic collapse of the local textile industry. A close reading of Fernández Sierra's *Resumen breve*, as well as the manuscript and published edition of Santa María's *Vida prodigiosa*, further reveals the political, social, and religious realities underlying these texts.

Andrango-Walker divides *La construcción de la santidad* into three parts: an introductory study, a comparative study of Juana's *Vidas*, and the text of Fernández Sierra's *Resumen breve*. In Part I, Andrango-Walker immerses us in the world of colonial Quito and the challenges it faced: the devastating earthquake of 1698, multiple epidemics, competition with Lima, and the decline of its thriving textile industry as a result of Bourbon trade policies. This historical framing is key to understanding the local circumstances that influenced Juana's story. Andrango-Walker also guides the reader in understanding the *vida* genre and examines the editorial processes by which Juana's *Vida* (Santa María's final version) eventually came to be published. Andrango-Walker argues that Juana's *Vidas*—Fernández Sierra's *Resumen breve* but especially Santa María's *Vida prodigiosa*—demonstrate a “retórica de reivindicación” (25) to place Quito within the context of salvation history and claim the city as a vital locus of holiness. In understanding how these authors used Juana to construct a model of sanctity, Andrango-Walker contends, we perceive the rise of local and regional consciousness; a comparative reading of the texts allows us to “trazar la evolución del pensamiento criollo de los intelectuales quiteños” for whom “el discurso hagiográfico se convirtió en un importante vehículo de expresión” (5-6). The Juana to which we have access is not so much a historical woman as she is “un objeto de la imaginación criolla” (39).

In Part II, Andrango-Walker delves more deeply into the different *Vidas* and their paratexts, primarily the approvals and introductions. She begins with a walk-through of Fernández Sierra's narrative, a relatively straightforward hagiographic account of Juana's life. Although this section sometimes feels repetitive as it hearkens back to topics presented in Part I, and the extensive summaries of *Resumen breve* are unnecessary when we await the text itself in Part III, Andrango-Walker does provide useful additional information, such as a detailed account of the epidemics as well as emphasis on Juana as mediator in a society hungry for miracles and divine intervention. Indeed, Andrango-Walker begins Part II with a description of Juana's wake, when so many devotees cut pieces from her habit to use as relics that the holy woman's body was nearly left bare (51). Most valuably, in Part II Andrango-Walker offers a comparative analysis between Santa María's manuscript (1747?) and his published *Vida prodigiosa* (1756). With rhetorical embellishment and biblical parallels, in both these texts Santa María elevates Juana's story as a key episode in God's providential plan, but the published text represents a particularly bombastic version in which Santa María extols the greatness of Quito and the Franciscan order.

Part III, Fernández Sierra's *Resumen breve*, is a captivating work that transports us into Juana's world (as constructed by Fernández Sierra) and is sure to offer many points of interest to scholars of the colonial/early modern Hispanic world. Andrango-Walker has modernized the language and added occasional footnotes to include clarifying details and preserve marginalia from the original manuscript. Her notes are especially helpful in establishing connections between Juana and the better-known Sor Gertrudis de San Ildefonso, a black-veiled nun who spearheaded the convent reform but whose presence is completely omitted from Fernández Sierra's account, and in clarifying the limited reach of the reform, which Fernández Sierra portrays as a resounding success.

Fernández Sierra's text, as one would expect from the *vida* genre, details Juana's early life, vocation, exemplary virtue, spiritual exercises, religious practices, visions, other mystical experiences, and her miracles, both during life and after death. We read about Juana's efforts to convince her religious sisters to adopt an austere habit, free of worldly adornments. We also get a glimpse of the varied experiences of convent life, from endearing anecdotes such as the fact that Juana spent her nights carrying a small child to see images of Christ (124), to the shocking violence when a little girl is almost strangled to death (the girl is saved by Juana's miraculous intervention) (285). We see snippets of colonial Quito that Andrango-Walker has highlighted in her analysis (Parts

I and II); for example, when Juana took communion on Thursdays, she specifically prayed for corrupt judges (147), probably a reflection of the bribery and scandal for which the Real Audiencia de Quito was known (30-31). The extensive accounts of Juana's miracles reveal common ailments of the time and their typical treatments; this information will be a useful complement to recent scholarship on illness and medicine in the early modern period.

Because *Resumen breve* primarily serves the author's narrative purposes rather than representing an objective, reliable account of the beata's life, Andrango-Walker explicitly avoids an analysis of Juana herself in the introductory study. The narration should not be naively conflated with the "facts" of a modern biography. Indeed, one hopes, for the sake of the actual woman who lived, that Fernández Sierra's description of Juana's extreme penitential regime, which included thousands of lashings (244-55), is primarily a hagiographic construction for the rhetorical purpose of galvanizing lukewarm readers and extolling Juana's exceptional sanctity. However, as a result of this approach, Andrango-Walker omits from her study analyses of Juana's religious life, even when the unique particularities of the text would warrant closer attention. For example, Fernández Sierra records the Rule that Juana followed and purportedly received directly from God in prayer (143-7); the twenty-two points of this Rule, which preserve key aspects of Juana's religious practice and the concerns of her spiritual life, likely provide a valuable vestige of Juana's agency. We see important prayers and practices—for example, Juana frequently recites the *Magnificat* when interceding for a person's healing (278, 280, 285)—as well as unexpected spiritual models: a vision suggests that the beata viewed herself as a new John the Baptist, preaching reform as Jesus's "precursora" (197). These narrations are mediated and must be treated with care, but neither must we dismiss them completely, considering that they ostensibly originate from confessors' notes and may reflect Juana's original spoken accounts. Although we cannot guarantee with absolute certainty what Juana may have thought or experienced, disregarding Fernández Sierra's portrayal of the beata's devotional life as merely a masculine appropriation leads Andrango-Walker to eclipse the spiritual paradigms that were likely of utmost importance to Juana herself. That said, any compelling study will leave us with ideas for further inquiry, and *La construcción de la santidad en la región andina* provides extensive material for future analysis.

Andrango-Walker's critical edition constitutes an invaluable contribution to colonial and convent studies, and her work will be of interest to scholars of many disciplines whose research relates to these topics. Through the example of Juana de

Jesús, as portrayed in Fernández Sierra's detailed *Resumen breve* and Santa María's later *Vida* with its paratexts, we gain understanding of *beatas* and their role in the colonial imaginary. In examining Juana's role as a local holy figure, we access the concerns and hopes of eighteenth-century Quito. The life narrative of Juana, elucidated through Andrango-Walker's compelling study, provides a key point of contact with Latin America's colonial past and its people.