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The places of the death body of III count Fernán Núñez (1644-1721). Family memory or memories?

In recent years, a different picture of family, house and kinship has arisen in the Early Modern historiography. New methods and sources have questioned the “nuclear and modern family” model by looking at lineage and the use and meaning of blood, kinship and personal ties, which includes real/fictive/spiritual kinship together with other social bond based on affinity or dependence, such as patronage and clientelage. Scholars have also analysed the transmission of property, marriage alliances, and the different forms in which family memory was performed, specially among the elites, as element which shaped the “reason of family”. The public dimension of aristocratic families in Early Modern period has been emphasized and *strategy* has been placed at the centre. Family actions and motivations were determined by family interest. Some scholars however have started to look at the role played by emotions and to see family as a place in which negotiations took place.

The discourse on nobility of that period established that the sources of nobility and thus virtue -two inseparable elements- were royal blood or, failing that, antiquity and merits linked to public services. In this context, tracing the family history and the genealogy were key elements through which the family memory was preserve, something which contributed to legitimate nobility as a social group but which was also used by each family for the inside competition for the political space.

The discourse of lineage (an ancient, vertical and agnatic line of descendants with a virtuous life) influenced many of the family practices as it was a way to assure the reproduction of the noble house through time. It was so important to belong to an ancient lineage for the social and political competition that the boundary between reality and fiction in genealogical histories was not so clear and manipulation was very common.

However, the shaping of a noble family experience cannot be reduced to the lineage discourse. The vertical and agnatic line coexisted with an horizontal one which was very important in the configuration of the family identity and experience. Moreover, the discourse of lineage leaves away women or placed them in a very marginal place. The introduction of gender in family history has given a much more complex picture of family practices introducing tension on the unilateral vision of patriarchal lineage. Women introduced “disorder” in the agnatic and vertical picture because of their position in-between two lineages. Recent historiography has underlined

that women, although the patriarchal legal system which place them under the control and subjection of men, in practice they have and found places for agency and played an active role in the family. Women participate in the administration of noble houses, in the education of the offspring, and they open new possibilities for socialization and sociability to the new lineage. Sometimes they bring to the new lineage patterns of patronage which came from her lineage of origin, which in many cases passed through a female line. Aside the dowry, women also receive patrimony and donations from different kin which worked as a network of solidarity. They were not passive nexus but active agents in the family constellation. So family was not only shape by the vertical and agnatic line, cognates also played an important role in shaping family experience and identity.¹

Nobles used this long family in their daily life and mobilize their memory depending on different purposes and contexts. Within this extensive family network personal bonds were also forged. Family interest co-existed with affection, affinity and emotions which introduces tension and complexity to the analysis of family experience.²

Case study

In 1717, four years before he died, III count Fernán Núñez (Francisco Gutiérrez de los Ríos) wrote his will and in it he arranged things for afterlife. Testaments were very important legal documents in which the testator established the way the patrimony was to be divided and transmitted. Wills were also spaces in which the person could display gratitude towards dependants, relatives and friends, leaving to them objects or cloths. They could ask to settle up debts and claim the heirs to put an end to projects they started. It was common to arrange the founding of a chapel, a hospital or any other pious bequest. The successors were morally obliged to carry out their ancestor's last wills because the memory of the death legitimate the social identity of the alive. However, lawsuits and conflicts were common within the family and not always the last wills were immediately carry out.

In this paper I suggest to focus on one aspect: the arrangement of the death body of the count. III count asked to be embalmed and clothed with the formal dress of the military order he belonged to, *Alcántara*, and then be buried in the family vault placed

¹ Grace E. Coolidge, "'Neither dumb, deaf, nor destitute of understanding': Women as Guardians in Early Modern Spain," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XXXVI (2005), S. Chojnacki, *Women and men in Renaissance Venice: twelve essays on patrician society* (Baltimore, 2000), Helen Nader, *Power and gender in Renaissance Spain : eight women of the Mendoza family, 1450-1650* (Urbana, 2004), Clarissa Campbell Orr, *Queenship in Europe, 1660-1815 : the role of the consort* (Cambridge University Press, 2004 [cited).

² Medick and Sabeau, *Interest and emotion : essays on the study of family and kinship* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire], 1984).

in the new major chapel of the parochial church of the village of Fernán Núñez. The III count took the initiative to built up this family vault, which was still under construction when he wrote the will. He said that in case the vault was not finish in time his body in its coffin should be temporarily buried in the chapel were his wife was (Catalina Zapata died in 1681) until both can be moved to the family vault. He explicitly claimed his heirs to finish the vault as soon as they could. His heart and entrails were to be put in a lead box which was to be taken to the city of Cordoba and be given to the abbess of the convent of *La Concepción* who might put the box in Beatriz Carrillo's tomb, his 6th grandmother. He added that he decided this "because of the love I always have had and have to this place and to my sister Inés, abbess of the convent."

The count chose two places and two different architectures. The two were founded by members of the house -so the house had the patronage- to place his body. He was using two spaces which already were part of the *pious geography* of the house but which had not always been used as places of the death. Let's start with the church.

The church of Fernán Núñez dates from 1385, two years after the king gave mercy to the 6th lords of Fernán Núñez to found a *mayorazgo* (inalienable patrimony which passed through generations). However, we have to wait until 1531 to found the first member of the house who decided to be buried in the church. Before, many of them used a as place of burial a chapel which was given to the family by the chapter of the church of Córdoba in 1393. Some of them chose other spaces, such as Urraca Venegas (the 9th lord's wife) who wanted to be buried in the convent were her parents were, highlighting that after marrying she was still tied with the lineage of origin, something which became visible in the moment of her death. Among the last wishes it was also common to arrange requiem masses for the souls of other people. María de Bocanegra (7th lord's sister) chose as place of burial the Córdoba's chapel and ask for requiem masses for her death sister who was buried in the convent of San Francisco in Córdoba, as was their maternal aunt. Alonso (the 10th lord) was who inaugurated the church of Fernán Núñez as burial in 1531, and in 1546 his wife (Beatriz de Carrillo) was the first one to be buried in the convent of *La Concepción*.

The convent of *La Concepción* was founded by Beatriz de los Ríos, as appears in her will in 1487. She establish that in the convent could enter women from her lineage (los Ríos and Montemayor, paternal and maternal lines) which do not need to bring any dowry because she left to the convent different incomes in order to afford the daily expenses. In her will she said that her mother and she herself have to be buried in the church of the convent, but this never happened. As I said before was Beatriz Carrillo the first person who was buried in it. Probably she took this decision because during the 15 years of her widowhood she was close to this religious space to which she sent two of her daughters.

III count choosing the church and the convent was following the initiative of two of his ancestors. In the church was also buried the I count, his great-grand father. The promotion of the building of a family vault was part of a family memory policy which reinforced the identification of the family with the territory in which they had jurisdiction and through which the social position and the glory of the whole house could be communicated. This was not an isolated initiative among nobles (Pastrana family did the same in the same period) which were imitating royal practices (the royal burial in El Escorial). A family vault communicate cohesion and unity and establishes a place for the memory of the ancestors through which the alive could support their noble identity. Moreover, the embalmed body dressed with the military suit added symbolic meaning to the funeral as it represented in a very clear way his noble condition. It was also a recall of his military services, - he ended his military career as General Captain of the Army. Embalming the body avoid the corruption of the human body so we can say that the mummy of the count was the representation of the political body; that part which did not disappeared but was transmitted, as was defined by the political theology of the period. Embalming the death body was also a common practice among kings.

The political body was thus gravated in the church of the village of Fernán Núñez in which the funeral ceremony took place. However, he wanted his heart and entrails to be place in the convent of *La Concepción* in Córdoba. Treatises on embalming explain that the heart was the part of the body which receive a special treatment, and normally was put in a lead box with a heart shape which was given to the close family. In the case of Fernán Núñez he sent the heart to his sister who was the abbess of the convent, a place to which he was emotionally bond. The bond with the convent probably was transmitted to III count by his mother (II countess as she inherited the title from his grandfather) who wrote in her will that if any of her daughters Ana, Inés, Isabel and Antonia wanted to follow a religious life they should enter into the convent. She also asked to buy the house which was on the border of the convent to enlarge it, something that did carry out III count Fernán Núñez. She also arranged that if her servants wanted to enter to the convent they should do it with the support of the house. Her daughter Inés, the sister the count mentioned in the will, became the abbess of the convent.

From 1711 dates an agreement between the convent and Fernán Núñez in which the rules established by the founder Beatriz were changed. With this changes the convent benefited and the house of Fernán Núñez was oblige to give each year an amount of money to the convent so they have the chance to name the abbess. The count bought the house his mother mentioned in which he built a cloister, cells and a garden with a fountain. This house could be used by all the women, legitimate and illegitimate, of the house who wanted to stay in the convent. In that house lived a natural daughter of the count.

Convents were female spaces of sociability and female refuges which were not isolated from the profane world; as has been studied cloisters were permeable.³ What was the motivation which moved the count to place his heart in the chorus of the convent? Why he benefited this institution with a renewed patronage? Probably the incomes of the convents were not very high and he wanted to assure an honourable life for the women of the house who decided to go there. This hypothesis points out that within the family policy the III count also looked after non agnatic interests as they were part of the family community. Francisco did not only carry out the legacy of his mother but he took a personal initiative since, as he said, he loved that place and his sister. The personal glory and memory was also displayed with this initiative.

The role played by the convent was different from the role played by the church but both were two important spaces for the family community: the church with the burial place in the village of Fernán Núñez contributed to the discourse of agnatic lineage, and the convent in Córdoba was another family and political space in which the women of the house could carry out a religious life, have a place to practice spiritual retreats, find a refuge during their widowhood, send their daughters to be educated, and thus contribute to the honour of the family; in short, have a space of sociability.

The discourse of lineage was a central aspect for the survival of noble houses. It was used as a weapon in the competition for the political space and legitimised their privileged position within society. However the family community was broader than the agnatic line. The way III count Fernán Núñez arranged his burial shows this. Choosing the family vault in the church of Fernán Núñez and the convent *La Concepción* in Córdoba as places for his death body he was leaving a double memory of his family experience: one which underlines the lineage ties and the other one which refers to the cognate side of the family.

The two initiatives the count took in the church and in the convent were transmitted to the future generations who actively received and used this legacy. The church collapse and had to be rebuilt. At a certain point the works were paralyzed because of lack of money, so his son Pedro had to give some money. The family vault was finished, but not in the exact way the count planned it. Pedro died in Cadix and his brother, who succeeded him, in Cartagena, and both bodies were not buried in the family vault until 1787, when the VI count Fernán Núñez ordered the move the death bodies to the vault which were followed by a pompous funeral in the village. Regarding the convent, the changes made by the count caused a lawsuit and conflicts between the house and convent during the XVIIIth century. The new agreement was a weapon the follow abbesses used to negotiate the continuation of the patronage by the house of Fernán Núñez.

³ Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious women in golden age Spain: the permeable cloister* (2005).