



Nuestra Señora de las Angustias, Granada
(from a 17th-century print)

The Establishment of *Cofradías* in Granada in the Sixteenth Century.¹

In the Middle Ages, Granada lacked a Christian tradition. This fact makes it substantially different from other European cities. When the Christian troops conquered it in 1492 and settled in its territory, the Christianization of the new kingdom was a top-priority task for the state apparatus. Christianization and *Castellanization* thus went hand in hand.

Within this process, the creation of popular religious associations such as the *cofradías* (brotherhoods) also took place. Some Granada *cofradías* dedicated to the Virgin Mary claim their origins to royal initiatives dating back to 1492—Nuestra Señora del Rosario, which is linked to the Dominican order; Limpia y Pura Concepción, linked to the Franciscans; Nuestra Señora de la Antigua, to which the court clerks belonged; Asunción de Maria, a confraternity for construction workers; and Nuestra Señora y San Roque, for Asturians.

The proliferation of *cofradías* in 16th-century Granada is an important phenomenon. The city, with a population of 40,000 persons in the first half of the 17th century, counted 120 brotherhoods and secular associations. Among the oldest there were *cofradías* connected with trade guilds, as well as penitential, sacramental, and devotional confraternities, not to mention several tertiary orders (Franciscan, Dominican, and Carmelite). Like *cofradías* in the rest of the peninsula, such organizations were primarily composed of Castillians.

Guild *cofradías* were established in Castille in the 12th century, and attained great importance in the Middle Ages.² In Granada they appeared at the beginning of the 16th century: San Sebastián for shepherds and cattlemen, Visitación de Santa Isabel for tailors (1511), a brotherhood for court clerks (around

1516); and San José for carpenters (1532). There were also brotherhoods of clothes merchants, jewelers, shoemakers, silk workers, and soldiers. The majority were established in the convents—Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Augustinian, Jesuit—that flourished in the city—thirteen by the end of the 16th century.

The confraternities of penitence promoted the worship of the Passion of Jesus Christ, as well as public discipline. The oldest, the confraternity of the Vera Cruz, was founded about 1540. Others followed, with titles such as Nuestra Señora de las Angustias (1545), or the Entierro de Cristo (1561). By 1590 there were ten penitential confraternities, almost all founded in convents. They walked in solemn penitential procession on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week.

Sacramental brotherhoods were established at the beginning of the 16th century in close association with the creation of parishes. By 1501 there were already 24 parishes in existence. Among the oldest sacramental brotherhoods there were El Sagrario, La Magdalena, and San Andrés. They were all under the authority of the local parish priest, and members took part in the offering of the *Viático* to the sick and in the regular worship of the Sacrament.

The most prolific *cofradías* in Granada and in the rest of Spain were those dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In early modern Granada there were almost one hundred, both in convents (Rosario, Concepción, Merced, Cabeza) and in parishes (Angustias, Remedios, Purificación). Some took part in processions, but for the most part they sponsored religious performances for the major festivities associated with the Virgin Mary.

There were also hospital brotherhoods, such as the Corpus Christi (1502) and the Caridad (1513).

The first archbishop of Granada, Fray Hernando de Talavera (1492-1507), promoted the creation of *cofradías* as a means of assimilating the subdued Moorish population, "como tienen los cristianos para os ayudar de ellas en muerte y en vida."³ His intentions were rooted in his tolerant approach to the Moorish population. He allowed, for example, Moorish dances

and songs in the religious services and in the Corpus Christi procession, which was the most important festivity in contemporary Granada. In fact, the worship of the Holy Sacrament, which did not involve the use of images, was seen as being in less conflict with Moorish traditions.

The presence of *moriscos*, Christians converted from Islam, in confraternities is, however, difficult to determine. Harsh religious attitudes towards them forced many to assume Castillian names and thus hide, whenever possible, their "new-Christian" status. Some must have joined *cofradías*, especially the sacramental confraternities in the parishes of the Albaicín, or peasant confraternities (such as the Resurrección de Jesucristo), or the silk-workers' brotherhood (Asuncion), or the confraternity of Nuestra Señora de las Angustias, composed at first of persons of humble and poor birth. Their presence in such organizations is, however, difficult to detect.

The Moorish problem continued at least until the mid-16th century. Archbishop Pedro Guerrero (1546-1576), a participant at the Council of Trent and an active reformer of the diocese of Granada, once again promoted such brotherhoods as a means to assimilate the Moorish population, counting in particular on their requirements of regular attendance at services, learning of Christian doctrine, prayer, and confession. He obtained some assistance in this work from the Jesuits, who had arrived in Granada in 1554 and had established their *Casa de la Doctrina* in the Albaicín. The Moorish Jesuit Juan Albotodo (1529-1578) contributed significantly to the order's work in that area, and to the creation of the Moorish *cofradía* of the Concepción de Nuestra Señora. The Jesuits' intention in creating this brotherhood was "no dejar portillo por donde pudiese el demonio hacer entrada y resuscitar la profanidad de sus fiestas y vanísimas ceremonias de su secta."⁴ As such, the brotherhood promoted both spiritual and ludic activities, "confesaban y comulgaban en ciertos días los más aprovechados y hacían sus fiestas en nuestra iglesia, con el mismo aparato y orden que las demás cofradías."⁵

All such efforts were frustrated by the *moriscos*' rebellion of 1569-1571, which ended with the expulsion of the Moorish population from Granada and their dispersion throughout the *Corona de Castilla*. If the Church had not been able to achieve their conversion, the *cofradías* could not attract them to Castilian religious traditions either.

The parallel introduction of brotherhoods into Latin America, on the contrary, was much more successful, perhaps because the native population was not burdened with the same prejudices as the *moriscos*.

The *cofradías* in Granada merely reproduced the traditional patterns of medieval Castilian brotherhoods. Besides their religious goals, there were social and economic intentions that were of extreme importance to them.⁶ They were religious associations that protected and preserved guild and class interests. Some of the oldest even resisted control from civil and church authorities and defended their self-government. They claimed old privileges, affiliation with Roman basilicas (Corpus Christi), or possession of private judges (Nuestra Señora de las Angustias).

In Granada *cofradías* experienced a second important flourishing in the 17th and 18th centuries, when their development was tied to devotions to Jesus Christ and to the Virgin Mary, and no longer to penitential movements. By the end of the 18th century the city of Granada had 165 *cofradías*, deeply attuned to baroque forms of religious expression. But the reforms of that century and the political crisis at the turn of the 19th century put an end to most of the brotherhoods. Few have survived to the present day.

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Notes

¹The following brief article is drawn from my thesis *Contrarreforma y Cofradías en Granada*, defended at the Universidad de Granada (Spain), in the academic year 1991-92.

²Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *Historia de la previsión social en España. Cofradías, Gremios, Hermandades, Montepios*. Ed. Pegaso (Madrid, 1944).

³Antonio Garrido Aranda, *Organización de la Iglesia en el reino de Granada y su proyección en Indias*. Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos (Sevilla, 1979), p. 96.

⁴Biblioteca de la Facultad de Teología de Granada, ms. Juan de Santibáñez, *Historia de la Provincia de Andalucía de la Compañía de Jesús*. Manuscrita. Book 1, p. 779.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Such *funciones latentes* are examined by Isidoro Moreno in his *Cofradías y hermandades andaluzas*. Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas (Granada, 1985), pp. 30 seqq.



Decorations for Corpus Christi, Granada, 1760