

# **The Relationship between Fraternities and the Government in Spain during the XVIIIth Century.**

A Research Project

INMACULADA ARIAS DE SAAVEDRA

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For an overall picture of the fraternities in modern Spain, it is essential to study the "Expediente General de Cofradías del Reino" (Report into the Fraternities in the Kingdom), enforced by the Borbón administration during the reign of Carlos III (r. 1759-88), which at the national level constitutes an invaluable source of information.<sup>1</sup> To date this report has not been extensively or systematically analyzed. At the moment, we are conducting a joint study of the documents in question, supported by a grant from the Ministry of Education and Science.

## THE GENERAL REPORT ON FRATERNITIES

The report was drawn up within the ambience of state intervention into religious societies that formed an important part of royal policy during the reign of Carlos III. This was a policy which affirmed the authority of the king against that of Rome, invoked a reform of the Baroque religious beliefs held by most of the populace, and reflected a general tendency towards a more inward and less ritualistic expression of belief, something which was to become a characteristic of the Enlightenment in Spain. It represents the widest and most determined culmination of measures that had gradually developed from the time of King Enrique IV (1454-74) and the Emperor Carlos V (1519-57), directed at controlling the leisure activities and economic excesses of the fraternities, thereby controlling their power as well.

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1. The report consists of seventeen bundles of documents (No. 7090-7106) held in the National History Archive (Council Section).

The Count of Aranda and the Count of Campomanes, ministers of Carlos III, were particularly involved in these measures. Despite the fact that arguments advanced for the reform of fraternities were often of a religious nature, the basic preoccupation of reformers verged more on economics and politics. In other words, reforms sought to check the power of confraternities, diminish their spending power, and avoid potentially dangerous situations touching on public order.

The process began with a 1768 report by Cayetano Cuadrillero, bishop of Ciudad Rodrigo (Salamanca), on the excesses of certain fraternities in his diocese. As a result, the Council of Castile, which at that time was the most important institution of internal affairs, decided to intervene and control the power of fraternities as a whole. Having received a damaging report from his legal advisor, Campomanes, the king requested information on all fraternities in their areas from all archbishops and local religious and political authorities (1769). The replies to this request constitute the text of the "General Report on Fraternities," which covers the entire country except for the provinces of Cuenca, Granada, Jaén, Salamanca, the Canary Islands, and Madrid (Madrid was subject to a special inquiry).

According to the report, there were 25,581 fraternities in Spain, spending a total of 11.5 million *reales* per year. In light of this situation, the president of the Council, the Count of Aranda, proposed a severe reduction in the number of fraternities. After a long procedure, which ended on 28 April 1783, the legal advisors to the Council proposed the abolition of guild brotherhoods and all fraternities that did not have either the approval and support of a sacramental fraternity, the Church, or the Crown. In Madrid these propositions were applied by the *Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte* (the Court of the Lord Mayor), while in the rest of the kingdom they were applied by the Reales Chancillerías (Valladolid and Granada). Charitable groups were set up in all dioceses to take over the financial affairs of abolished fraternities. Finally, on 17 March 1784, a royal decree was published confirming and establishing all the proposals presented by the Council. Although the policy was not enacted equally throughout the land, it did have considerable effect in such areas as Albacete, Santander, and Valladolid.

## STUDY PLAN

The documents comprising the "General Report on Fraternities" offer an exceptional insight into the condition of fraternities in general at the end of the old regime in Spain. Our overall aims and objectives in studying these documents are as follows:

1. to analyze all the elements that contributed to the nature of fraternities and to establish any subtle differences which may have existed between them;
2. to determine their activities in different fields, such as in offering financial assistance or funding members, social functions, or public festivities;
3. to chart the social influence of lay fraternities in Spain during the XVIIIth century, paying special attention to the similarities and diversities between areas;
4. to explain the motives, aims, and interests that came together to bring about reforms of fraternities and other displays of popular religion during the reign of Carlos III;
5. to determine the amount of resistance to the proposed reforms, taking into account its origins, and in particular the extent to which it originated from the fraternities themselves, bishops, members of religious orders, priests, or civil authorities.

In order to carry out this study, we are using a *Clipper* computer data base especially adapted to our needs. Information relative to every fraternity is contained in a file divided into subject sections depending on the questions set by the Council of Castile for the fraternities in each area of the country. These sections are:

1. General information: the name of the fraternity, its nature (sacramental; of Jesus Christ; of the Virgin Mary; of the saints; of souls; mixed; etc.), under whose authority it existed, its seat and situation (parochial, convent, hermitage, hospital, etc.), and the author of the report.
2. Foundation and official consent: the date of its foundation and the type of official approval it received (ecclesiastical or civil), the authority that approved it (pope, bishop, superior of an order, etc.).
3. Internal organization: the number of brothers and the administrative posts in existence, whether they were open only to members, conditions of admission (such as occupation, social status, gender), frequency of meetings, etc.
4. Economics: the source of income for each fraternity, property holdings (lands, houses, industry, etc.), other incomes (tithes, annuities, rights, religious memorials, etc.), fraternity fees (for admittance, regular membership fees, extra contributions), outside contributions from non-members or charities paid in kind, institutional payments, etc. Expenses incurred, including those for wax and oil, its manage-

ment and administration, works of charity, and other miscellaneous expenses (feasts, gunpowder, bullfights, etc.).

5. Religious worship: this is a fundamental item in the study of popular religion. We distinguish between worship in general (mass, private or public recitation of the rosary, the *Via crucis*, Easter processions, administration of last rites, Corpus Christi processions, saints' days, pilgrimages, etc.) and ceremonies pertaining to commemoration of the dead (burials, funerals, masses, anniversaries, services for the redemption of souls, etc.).
6. Conclusion on the closure of a fraternity: abolishment, amalgamation with another fraternity, or proposal for its continuance.

## CONCLUSION

This study will lead to an understanding of fraternities in Spain in both rural and urban areas, their economic and social importance, their religious leanings, and the mentality they represented.

In general, we detect a tendency towards increased worship of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus Christ in both a sacramental and a penitential manner. We also note the role of fraternities in providing important rites, especially in the honouring and commemoration of the deceased, and in fostering a social life within the community through their sponsorship or support of festive occasions such as holidays, pilgrimages, etc. The Church's control over the faithful at times of religious festivities or commemorative moments is also noteworthy, as is the role of the fraternities themselves in the continuance of ancient popular traditions, and in blending them with current religious ritual.