

The Original Statutes of the Ancient and Royal Brotherhood of Our Lady Saint Anne in Dos Hermanas, Spain

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Summary: After a brief introduction to the Confraternity of St. Anne in Dos Hermanas (Spain), this article offers a transcription of its original 1523 statutes and their translation into English. Aside from being the oldest surviving document from Dos Hermanas, these statutes outline the confraternity's social and devotional objectives and point to the full participation of both men and women in its administration and activities.

INTRODUCTION

We do not know for sure when the Confraternity of Our Lady Saint Anne was founded, located today in the city of Dos Hermanas, just twelve kilometers from its capital, Seville. Today the town's population surpasses 125,000 inhabitants and its economy is primarily linked to the manufacturing and service sectors. But it was not always like this. Just a hundred years ago, at the beginning of the 1900s, the city's economy was dependent on agriculture and ranching, and its population did not surpass 8,000 inhabitants.

The Confraternity of Our Lady Saint Anne drew up its oldest-known Statutes in 1523, when just a handful of locals lived in Dos Hermanas. In this town, there was only a chapel dedicated to Our Lady Saint Anne and, right next to it, the cemetery. The chapel was served by the Franciscans of the neighboring town, Alcalá de Guadaira.

The statutes of the confraternity, the city's oldest-known written document, appear to have been written by these Franciscans. They are contained in a book with leather covers and the text's gothic calligraphy is written on lined parchment in dry ink. The ink used is black for the text and red for the heading of each chapter. Each chapter is indicated by a Roman numeral, except the second, which is written out in full. Each chapter begins with adorned capital letters that are both red and purple, which gives the text a unique beauty.

The Constitution is composed of 26 sheets. The Statutes occupy sheets 4v to 20v. Sheets 2r and from 21r to 23 are dedicated to the Approvals and Modifications of the Statutes, after their presentation to the Vicar. From folios 23v to 24v there is an index of chapters and the rest of the pages are blank. The pages have been recently restored and treated. They are stored in the archive of the Very Ancient and Royal Brotherhood and Confraternity.

In the preamble to the Statutes, after the beginning of the Gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Lucas, and Saint John, written in Latin, it is said: “Here begin the Statutes of the brothers of the Confraternity and Brotherhood of Our Lady Saint Anne in the Town of Dos Hermanas”. In its first chapter, after a most beautiful Profession of Faith, the Statutes explain who asked for the Statutes to be written and why: “And because we, the good men of the town of Dos Hermanas, establish and order this confraternity and brotherhood to the honour and praise and service of God and of Our Lady Saint Anne, who is our advocate in this town of Dos Hermanas”. There follows a request to the Vicar to approve and confirm the document. After this, come the twenty-eight chapters that can be summarized as follows:

A. On the purpose of the confraternity

1. The confraternity’s fundamental objective was to worship God.
2. Its second objective was to honour Saint Anne on her 26 July feast day. It should be noted that, at the time, the feast detailed in the Statutes of 1523 had not yet been officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church; it would be so only in 1584 by Pope Gregory XIII. Therefore, in Dos Hermanas the confraternity of Saint Anne was celebrating her July feast day sixty years earlier than officially instituted by Rome.
3. As fundamental as the praises of God and Saint Anne might be, the confraternity also insisted on the need to assist members. The third objective was thus to enforce participation in the confraternity’s charitable work as a way of ensuring such reverence. Failure to assist members resulted in carefully assessed fines in three general areas:
 - a) On helping the poor: The statutes specified members’ obligation to attend to the needs of the poor (chapt. 17).
 - b) On attending to the members who were sick or had died (chaps. 20–25). This included the obligation to hold a wake both for the sick and the deceased, to bury the dead, and the possibility of exempting members who were not able to attend.
 - c) On social obligations. These included not only the standard obligation not to hold a quarrel with a fellow member (chaps. 7, 10), but also the obligation to accompany a member who was getting married (chapt. 18).

B. On governance

To oversee the daily functioning of the confraternity, a set of officials were elected annually to govern it. They included a prior (*prioste*), various mayors (*alcaldes*), deputies (*diputados*), accountants (*contadores*) and a majordomo (*mayordomo*). The confraternity also included the paid position of beadle (*muñidor*), who was to serve the prior and the confraternity loyally, to collect fees and fines, and to summon members to councils, wakes, funerals, and other obligations (chaps. 10, 12, 13, 14, 16). The statutes also detail the obligatory

meetings and functioning of the General Council, which all members were obliged to attend. The entire membership met as a council on three occasions: eight days before the celebration of the Feast of Saint Anne in order to prepare the worship (then changed to the first Sunday of July); after the Mass for the Dead (on 2 November) to elect a new slate of officers for the following year; and at an unspecified third time to review and approve the confraternity's accounts before the new officers assume office.

C. On penalties

In the same manner that the obligations of all members to attend to worship or to each other are specified, so is the manner by which one must ask for an exemption. The situations that would allow for an exemption are generally left undetermined, but the sanctions to be imposed if obligations were not met without an authorized exemption are clearly stated in several chapters (2, 11, 12, 19, 20, 25, 27) and the appended codicils.

The importance of the document

The statutes of the Confraternity of Saint Anne are important, first of all, because of their antiquity. Dating from 1523, they are the oldest known written document from the city of Dos Hermanas. Second, they are important as a witness of the institution they regulate. After almost five hundred years, the confraternity of Saint Anne continues to exist, with statutes that have evolved over the years according to the needs of the confraternity, the Church of which it is part, and of the society that it serves. Throughout the centuries, the confraternity has fallen victim to the seizure of goods, to plundering, to the ups and downs of history, and even to major ideological currents. Nothing, however, has managed to cause its demise. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it continues to be a vital entity in Dos Hermanas, a locus of devotion, and a venue for service to the community.

Lastly, it is worth noting that even in the sixteenth century, the statutes of the confraternity of Saint Anne recognized the same rights and obligations for men and women alike. Through the twenty-eight chapters of the Statutes, the expression "In addition we order and command a brother or sister to ..." is constantly repeated. Already in 1523 the brothers and sisters of the confraternity were deemed to be equal members of the sodality and to contribute equally to the confraternity and the society it served.

The confraternity currently holds to the same basic principles that saw its founding: "In honour and praise of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who are three People and one true God, and of the blessed Lady Saint Mary, from whom the Son of God took true flesh to save the human race. [...] and Lady Saint Anne, who is our advocate in this said town of Dos Hermanas". It carries out activities in accordance with the rulings of the Archdiocese, such as training courses, catechism, support services,

collaboration with the Family Counselling Centre, and providing assistance for those who are in need.

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(TRANSLATED BY BRYN STAFFORD)



Image of Saint Anne and Dos Hermanas, Seville