



Federico Garza Carvajal: *Vir. Perceptions of Manliness in Andalucía and México 1561-1699*

Amsterdam (Amsterdamse Historische Reeks, Kleine Serie, Deel 41),
2000, 306 pp., ISBN 907394 124 5

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- 1 Carvajal pretends to analyse the discourses on sodomy and the repression of sodomites in 16th- and 17th-century Spain and Mexico. His main focus is on the link between the «new» image of man – called «vir» by the author – as it developed during these centuries with the imperial politics of mainland Spain. He reports having counted and analysed 300 trials in different archives in Spain and Mexico city. 5% of the inquisitorial cases concerned sodomy, which thus qualifies for second place behind heresy. The number of cases and the degree of repression (death penalty, banishment or other) varied from court to court. Records of the 1658/1659 wave of prosecutions subsist in the archives of Mexico only.
- 2 Starting with a case of gender change, Carvajal outlines specific conditions under which such behaviour was not prosecuted: The woman in question had fought like a man in the colonies, killed several **indios** and as such behaved in an almost manly fashion. She/He declared her/his problem at the appropriate moment of an imminent criminal trial to a representative of the church, who sheltered her from that time onwards. She later received a pension from the Spanish crown. The published «autobiography» used by Carvajal sheds light on the martial self-image. Carvajal stresses, against Trumbach,

that a homosocial culture existed in Spain long before the cases reported in the north-west European metropolises in the late 17th century – as did the discourse on effeminacy (since the 16th century), which is considered by some authors in masculinity studies as a new tendency which appeared in 18th-century England.

- 3 The second chapter details the entire Spanish legislation on sodomites since the Middle Ages. Various associations of this reproach with Jews are referred to. No reason for the promulgation of the decisive law of 1497, which initiated the repressive turn, is given: A study of the law-making process would have been useful here. The growing repressive tendency of the 17th-century legislation is deduced from the ever-lower requirements for judicial proof of the crime. Foreigners on the ships to new Spain are considered to be crucial to the expanding number of sodomy cases in the 17th century. This reinforces an older idea that the nefarious crime might be imported. In particular on ship and in port, same-sex relations occurred between young boys around their puberty; and between younger sailors and elder ship's officers abusing their position. The 16 inquisitorial cases in Seville between 1560 and 1698 were persecuted only because of denunciation. This shows, in my opinion, the little interest public authorities took in the matter.
- 4 The Spanish discourse on New Spain always integrated the idea that the indios, caraiques and others were not only cannibals but also sodomites. Carvajal gives a couple examples. Interested associations of sodomy with the religious cult of the indigenous population were useful for justifying the Spanish colonial enterprise. After an earlier wave of repression in 1596, a second wave concerned some 125 individuals, showing a well-established homosocial sub-culture in which cross-dressing played an important role. A very useful annex provides quotations from different Andalusian and Mexican trials.
- 5 The book enriches our knowledge of same-sex culture in early-modern Spain and Mexico. But the claim for the importance of sodomy in shaping a new image of masculinity which is functional to the empire does not convince me: As Carvajal does not tell us about images of masculinity in the later Middle Ages, we can not be sure, that for example traditional chivalric masculinity was not as idiosyncratic to same-sex practices as later legislation. Laws existed during the Middle Ages, but they were not enforced – as was the case of much legislation in these centuries. Perhaps the impression of earlier libertinage is due simply to the lack of documentation. On the other hand, the explicit preference for heterosexual masculinity may be a pan-European phenomenon which had to do with early-modern state-building and purity, and had much wider connections than merely Spanish imperialism. Methodologically the book paraphrases official texts in the manner of the earlier history of ideas, and Carvajal endlessly cites some cases. This leaves us with all the many ways of speaking about same-sex relations in the terms of the participants. This might be a way to give a voice to the «colonialized other», but another hand at a sailor's «prick» (Carvajal insists on the methodological importance to render the vulgar language of the epoch) does not prove the relevance of the discourse on sodomites for Spanish imperial ideology. And it certainly has little to do with discourse analysis in the sense of Michel Foucault, which the author claims in his introduction to practice.

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