

*THE RIGHT KIND OF CATHOLICS: IRISH  
SETTLEMENT IN THE CROWN OF ARAGON,  
1590-1700.*<sup>1</sup>

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During the early modern period the English colonisation of Ireland meant that many Irish migrated to Spain, anticipating a positive reception based on a shared religion and pre-existing military and trading alliances. By the early 1590s much of Ireland was under royal control, with the exception of Ulster, whose Gaelic lords remained independent, and some of the southern ports, particularly Sligo, which was maintained as a base for native merchant dynasties.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to halt the advance of crown authority, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and Red Hugh O'Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell, formed a confederacy. They sought support from their Gaelic peers and solicited aid from Queen Elizabeth's enemy, Philip II, the King of Spain. They also lobbied for Papal approval as loyal defenders of the Roman Catholic faith. However, the confederates' defeat at Kinsale in early 1602 finished the confederacy. Stripped of authority and property they looked to Europe. This and the later exodus during 1606 became known as the flight of the earls. O'Neill, O'Donnell and their retinue travelled around moving across Europe, from the Netherlands, to Rome, France and some to Spain. A calculated temporary, strategic exile became permanent. This chapter will explore the experiences of Irish women who moved to Spain, in order to provide a gendered analysis of assimilation and also understand the contribution they made to a society they moved to, and established a permanent base in.<sup>3</sup> Case studies

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1. Used Abbreviations: AGS, Archivo General de Simancas; AHAT, Arxiu Historic Arxidiocesà de Tarragona, AHN, Archivo Histórico Nacional; TNA, The National Archives (Ireland).

2. See Mary O'Dowd, *Power, Politics and Land: Early Modern Sligo 1568-1688*, Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast, 1991, p. 146, 149 and 151.

3. Recent studies which focus upon the relationship between Irish migrants in Spain include: Declan DOWNEY, Julio CRESPO MACLENNON (eds.), *Spanish-Irish Relations Through the Ages*, Four Courts Press, Dublin,

will be drawn from the Crown of Aragon in the period 1590 to 1700, and will focus upon women from across the social spectrum, as well as women from both secular and religious communities.<sup>4</sup>

Links between Ireland and Spain had been forged over many centuries. Trade with Spain had always been more important than trade with England.<sup>5</sup> Waterford, Cork, Galway, Wexford and Sligo had links with ports in the north west of Spain including Bayona, Bilbao, Ferrol, La Coruña and Santiago de Compostela.<sup>6</sup> Continued close links within the military and navy, and religious and educational communities also buttressed assimilation and acceptance of Irish communities in Spain. Karin Schüller has numerated 36,000 Irish in the Spanish military during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Salary and pension lists are reliable sources regarding payments. By 1698 Spain had created three Irish regiments, Irlanda, Hibernia and Ultonia.<sup>8</sup> Military orders were issued in dual language, Castilian and Gaelic. This is important, as it reveals no hostility to Irish communities retaining their linguistic traditions, provided they used Spanish too. The Irish regiments were not disbanded until 1818. Within Spain military service was fused with the cause of a Catholic re-conquest of Europe, a cause Irish Catholics were equally committed to. The Irish continued to make up the numbers in the Spanish armies in Flanders, France and Milan, anywhere where Spain had territories. Later, when the Spanish Empire was established in South America Irish military, clergy and officials were amongst the colonisers.<sup>9</sup>

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2008; Igor PÉREZ TOSTADO, *Irish Influence at the Court of Spain in the Seventeenth-Century*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2008; Enrique GARCÍA HERNÁN, *Ireland and Spain in the Reign of Philip II*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2009; Óscar RECIO MORALES, *Ireland and the Spanish Empire, 1600-1825*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2010; Ciaran O'SCEA, *Surviving Kinsale: Irish Emigration and Identity Formation in Early Modern Spain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2015. These studies are all impressive in their own right, however, they pay little attention to the contribution made by Irish women.

4. Although my focus will be upon the geographical area of the Crown of Aragon, I will refer to Irish communities elsewhere in the peninsula where networks between women were established.

5. See John J. SILKE, *Kinsale: The Spanish Intervention in Ireland at the End of the Elizabethan Wars*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000, p. 77-78.

6. See Mary Anne LYONS, Thomas O'CONNOR, *From Strangers to Citizens: The Irish in Europe, 1600-1800*, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, 2008, p. 100-1.

7. See Karin SCHÜLLER, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Irland im 16 und 17 Jahrhundert: Diplomatie, Handel und die Soziale Integration Katolischer Exulanten*, Aschendorff Press, Münster, 1999, p. 150-52. A total of 36,000 Irish were employed by the Spanish military between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. For a more recent study see Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGÓ, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies in the Seventeenth-Century*, Boydell and Brewer, Suffolk, 2014).

8. See Amaia BILBAO ACEDOS, *The Irish Community in the Basque Country c. 1700-1800*, Geography Publications, Dublin, 2003, p. 5.

9. Henry KAMEN, *Spain's Road to Empire: The Making of a World Power, 1492-1763*, Penguin Press, London, 2002, p. 368; Jacqueline ZUZANN HOLLER, *Escogidas Plantas: Nuns and Beatas in Mexico City, 1531-1601*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005.

From 1606 a programme of naturalisation was introduced, and many Irish were successful in securing equal citizenship, confounding the view that migration in this period was often a negative experience. The Irish were granted equal rights as citizens and endorsed as bona fide Spaniards. This was significant as Jews and Muslims were not, and even converts had to prove that they satisfied lengthy criteria including several generations of strictly observant Catholics in their family. Philip III's 1608 statute of naturalisation established that:

*Los irlandeses en estas tierras conservaran e mantendrán los privilegios que les corresponden, según los cuales se les considera como a los españoles aquí nacidos; e las pruebas e juramentos que cabe exigir a los de otras naciones no serán requeridas a los irlandeses que así deseen asentarse en España. Serán tratados como españoles, e tendrán los mismos derechos.*<sup>10</sup>

In practice Philip III and his ministers and advisers did not differentiate between Spanish and Irish in relation to employment in civil, military and religious professions. This policy was continued by his successors, and included a royal decree by Charles II, and another in 1701, by Philip V, which extended this to include all Irish living in Spanish dominions.

When this is mapped against French and Portuguese migrants, they had to swear an oath, but were not accorded equal citizenship, nor were Scottish or English Catholic exiles. Official accounts including guild and trade records show that they were all still recorded as foreigners, *extranjeros*, long after they had settled in Spain. That term was not applied to the Irish.

Why did they enjoy this special privilege? Both Philip II and Philip III really valued the huge contribution made by the Irish within the Spanish military and navy. It was not just their contribution to the naval armada in 1588, but their continued role in the Spanish territories in the Netherlands, Franche Comte and Milan. Pensions and salary lists reveal the numbers. The 1605 census taken in Valladolid, temporarily the capital city, reveals 800 Irish receiving pensions from the Spanish crown.<sup>11</sup>

10. "the Irish in these dominions shall keep and maintain the privileges which they have, by which they are made native Spaniards; and that the formalities of the oath, to which other nations have been forced to submit, shall not be exacted from the Irish due to their settling in Spain, they are accounted Spaniards and enjoy the same rights" (AGS, Estado, legajo 840).

11. Census data is notoriously poor in recording women and children. In addition, early census were regional. The 1540 census in Old Castile recorded 'foreigners' without citing their country of origin. The Castile census tended to record adult men. It is, therefore, difficult to assess the female population. The only institutions to accurately record female populations were nunneries. See for example Mary Elizabeth PERRY, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1990, p. 76-77.

This number does not numerate women and children, so a more accurate figure could be treble that. Many Irish were raised to the highest ranks of the Knights of Santiago, Calatrava and Alcántara.<sup>12</sup> Women were, however, admitted to the order of Calatrava, in particular a number of female religious, born of Irish families, but naturalised in Spain.<sup>13</sup>

Irish communities were often perceived to be loyal to the Spanish nation, and loyal to the cause of Catholicism. Knowledge of the tribulation Irish Catholics had received at the hands of English colonisers was well known throughout Spain and the Mediterranean. Irish female settlers pre-dated the influx of migrants during the 1590s by almost a century. In 1499 the first permanent Irish convent, the Dominican Convento de la Encarnación was founded in Bilbao.<sup>14</sup> This group of women were focussed upon establishing a permanent base for their own foundation, a teaching order, but also, crucially established their own Irish church within Spain. This group of female religious were neither poor, nor were they disposed, as were many of the later migrants to Spain. Although a long history of pilgrimage existed between Ireland and Spain, the Dominican Irish sisters founded a permanent mission and continued to found houses and missions throughout the peninsula. Irish Dominicans and Franciscans were active in Spain from the thirteenth century onwards, although the Irish Poor Clare order did not establish a permanent mission in Spain until after the Henrician Dissolution of the monasteries in Ireland after 1536 when small and then large convent communities were destroyed along with all other Catholic institutions. The closure of all Catholic schools in Ireland meant that many Continental Catholic countries drew educational orders from Ireland, along with many of their wealthy sponsors.<sup>15</sup> The first wave of Irish female migrants to settle in Spain in 1499 were not economic migrants, but instead were motivated to establish their own Order within another Catholic nation with which they had strong links. These early female religious and their *donatrix* were involved in active missions, and in trade and political networks. Educational links were particularly close. Ireland did not have a University until 1592 when

12. Michelene KERNEY WALSH, "The O'Neills in Spain: Spanish Knights of Irish Origin", *The Irish Sword*, 4/14 (Dublin, 1958), p. 5-15

13. AHN, Expediente 230 (contains admittances of a number of Irish adult women who had professed in Spanish orders).

14. See Andrea KNOX, "Her Book-Lined Cell: Irish Nuns and the Development of Texts, Translation, and Literacy in Late Medieval Spain", *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue*, Virginia BLANTON, Veronica O'MARA, Patricia STOOP (eds.), Brepols Press, Turnhout, 2015, p. 67-86.

15. For a concise account of the Dissolution in Ireland see Steven G. ELLIS, *Tudor Ireland: Crown, Continuity and the Conflict of Cultures, 1470-1603*, Longman, London, 1994, p. 183-227.

Trinity College Dublin was founded. However, this was established as a Protestant stronghold which did not admit any Catholics.<sup>16</sup> This level of anti-Catholic discrimination was well-known in Catholic areas of Europe, and prompted the admittance of Catholic students into European colleges. It also led to Irish Catholics being allowed to found their own colleges and institutions. Many Irish migrated to the Continent to attend Catholic Universities in Rome, Leuven, Paris and Prague, amongst other places. However, specifically Irish colleges were established across the peninsula. Between 1590 and 1649 Irish colleges were founded in Lisbon, Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela, Seville, Madrid, Alcalá de Henares, and Valladolid.<sup>17</sup> Two Scottish Catholic colleges were founded in Madrid and Salamanca, and four English Catholic colleges were established in Valladolid, Seville, Madrid and Lisbon between 1589 and 1628.<sup>18</sup> However, these institutions were exclusively for men.

Irish female religious established their own educational missions upon their arrival in Spain, starting in 1499.<sup>19</sup> Following the foundation of the Incarnación, other Irish convents were established across the peninsula, including the Convento del Corpus Christi in Valladolid in 1545, the Convento del Santa Clara in Esterra d'Àneu in 1560, the Convento del Nuestra Señora de las Angustias in La Coruña in 1589, the Convento de Santa Clara in Santiago de Compostela in 1590, the Convento del Santa María la Real de las Duenas in Zamora in 1590, the Convento de Nuestra Señora Bienaventurada de Atocha in Madrid in 1592, and the Convento de Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso in Lisbon in 1639.<sup>20</sup> All of these convents were Dominican, apart from those in Santiago de Compostela and Esterra d'Àneu, which were Poor Clares. In addition,

16. Gerard Anthony HAYES-McCOY, "The Completion of the Tudor Conquest and the Advance of the Counter-Reformation, 1571-1603", *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 3, *Early Modern Ireland, 1534-1691*, Theodore William MOODY, Francesc Xavier MARTIN, Francis John BYRNE (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976, p. 139-141 (reprint 2009).

17. See Monica HENCHY, "The Irish College at Salamanca", *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 70 (Dublin, 1981), p. 220-28; Patricia O'CONNELL, *The Irish College at Alcalá de Henares, 1649-1785*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1997; Patricia O'CONNELL, *The Irish College at Lisbon, 1590-1834*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2001 and Patricia O'CONNELL, *The Irish College at Santiago de Compostela, 1605-1769*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2007.

18. See Michael E. WILLIAMS, "The Origins of the English College, Lisbon", *Recusant History*, 20 (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), p. 478-92; Michael E. WILLIAMS, "The Library of St. Alban's English College in Valladolid: Censorship and Acquisitions", *Recusant History*, 26 (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), p. 132-42.

19. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus*, St. Anthony's College, Leuven, 1706, p. 145-47.

20. Although the Irish convent in Lisbon operated independently of those in Spain, it too had an educational mission, and networked with Irish sisters in Spanish convents over educational issues and book collections. A useful recent study of this convent is, Honor McCABE, *A Light Undimmed: The Story of the Convent of Our Lady of Bom Sucesso, Lisbon, 1639-2006*, Dominican Press, Dublin, 2007.

two convents in Tarragona, the Dominicas de la Enseñanza de la Immaculada Concepción de Tarragona, a Dominican convent founded in 1660, and las Clarisas de Santa Clara de Tarragona, a Poor Clare convent founded in 1574, recruited several Irish females, mostly from wealthy or influential families, and elected a number of Irish Abbesses.<sup>21</sup> The annals of the Irish sisters note the establishment of four convents in remote areas.<sup>22</sup> However, within the Crown of Aragon, and beyond, Tarragona was an important international port, and cannot be considered as remote. Esterra d'Àneu, in the Pyrenees was certainly considered remote, and also an area difficult to control. The Catholic Church in Aragon was always concerned about the lack of orthodoxy in the mountainous areas, and the need to check unorthodox behaviour. In this context Irish sisters were viewed as a potential holding process, ensuring that heresy in all its forms did not take hold. In addition, peasant revolts in this period were frequent, and led to Philip II sending a small royal army into the Pyrenees in 1591.<sup>23</sup> The army used to quell Pyrenean revolts included Irish populations, already established in Tarragona.<sup>24</sup> As well as Irish merchants and religious foundations, the Irish were recorded as founding their own regiment, established as an independent company in 1597.<sup>25</sup> Irish *tercios* in the Crown of Aragon were involved in operations in Fuenterrabia, Rosellón and Catalonia.<sup>26</sup> Their loyalty to Philip II came before any consideration of the Aragonese elites, and for this they were rewarded with special privileges. They were allowed to command and run their own regiments. This privilege was also awarded to Irish traders and religious. The Irish regiment was also deployed during the Catalan revolt during 1640.<sup>27</sup> The Irish had been perceived as courageous and brave since the battle of Kinsale in 1606. They were familiar with modern techniques of warfare, and their Catholicism enhanced their suitability as permanent members of the Spanish nation. Spain needed Irish military strength for expansion, but also for internal Catalan and Portuguese revolts. The Irish were not simply used as cannon fodder, but were perceived as loyal and seasoned soldiers, and devoted Catholics. Push factors in the form of Irish

21. Tarragona, AHAT, Dominiques de L'Ensenyança de la Immaculada Concepció, Instituciones, fundado, ms. 5; Clarisas de Tarragona, Receptora confratria, carpeta 1, 6.

22. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus*..., p. xvii.

23. See James CASEY, *Early Modern Spain*..., p. 170.

24. See Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGA, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies*..., p. 178.

25. Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGA, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies*..., p. 13.

26. Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGA, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies*..., p. 3.

27. Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGA, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies*..., p. 157.

colonisation by the English was interlaced with pull factors of religious and military independence allowing the colonised Irish to become part of the colonising force of the Spanish monarchs. The continued fear of possible French invasion from the Pyrenees, and intermittent warfare along the borders demanded the establishment of settled garrisons. De Mesa has numerated the Irish population in Catalonia at 1,331 in 1638.<sup>28</sup> Some of the original *tercios* were commanded by early exiles from the O'Neill, O'Donnell, Preston, Fitzgerald and McCarthy septs. These features are undoubtedly connected to another powerful pull factor which influenced the positive reception of Irish communities; that of the continuing need to replenish the low population in the Crown of Aragon. Although low population was a cause for concern across the peninsula, rural areas were often hardest hit in terms of depopulation. In addition to the military alliances Spain needed to increase its human population. Historians tend to agree that the pattern of demographic change in Spain set it apart from most other parts of Europe due to its sharp decline of the population between 1600 and 1650, a time when second wave Irish expansion due to English colonisation, the penal laws and the later Cromwellian confiscation of Irish lands drove many Irish out of Ireland. The economic and religious push factors of ethnic cleansing of native Irish Catholics coincided with an exceptional low point in Spanish population history. The severe urban as well as rural depopulation was evidenced by many factors, not least the difficulty of farming enough food for the population.<sup>29</sup> This may go some way to explaining the continued welcome offered by governments and regional officials to Irish communities.

Royal advisers such as the Conde de Caracena (1564-1626) had a pivotal role in the treatment and sponsorship of Irish migrants in Spain. It was the Conde de Caracena who advised Philip III that the Irish were, "the right kind of catholics". Don Luis de Carillo, Conde de Caracena, had a major appointment as the governor of Galicia, this put him in touch with Irish Catholics not just within Galicia, but across the peninsula. The English described him thus: "He is the chief favourer of Irish fugitives in Spain' and 'he racks his credit to the utmost to advance

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28. Eduardo DE MESA GALLEGA, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies...*, p. 192. However, this numeration does not include all of the Irish women and children within Catalonia.

29. For a discussion of Spanish depopulation in the early modern period see Alexander COWAN, *Urban Europe 1500-1700*, Arnold Press, London, 1998, p. 10-12. See also James CASEY, *Early Modern Spain...*, p. 19-24 for a longer discussion on the low level of population, as well as surveys and census data collected.

their designs".<sup>30</sup> This was the English colonisers' view of him. He was the governor of Galicia until 1608, and at one point he refused promotion at court to be near "his Irish". (His letters use the possessive tense, unusual in formal correspondence). He was by no means a singular supporter of Irish communities, and we can see observe a network of sponsors and donatrix building up to influence a positive reception for Irish communities, but also a number of practical networks which facilitated a permanent Irish base, rather than a temporary migrant experience. Direct royal sponsorship crossed the gender divide with both Spanish Kings and Queens, as well as the royal house of Braganza sponsoring Irish missions. Philip I sponsored female learning in convent schools.<sup>31</sup> Philip II was supportive of an influx of 36,000 into the Spanish armed forces, and the pensioning of many of those survivors.<sup>32</sup> Philip II introduced the statute of naturalisation of 1608, allowing equal citizenship for those Irish who had resided in Spain for ten years.<sup>33</sup> Philip IV specifically left money for the dowries of poor Irish girls who demonstrated a true vocation.<sup>34</sup> Queen Luisa de Gusmão of Portugal was a sponsor of the Convent of Bom Sucesso, and expressed a wish to retire there upon widowhood, as did her daughter, Queen Catherine of Braganza, Queen of England when married to Charles II, and later regent in Portugal.<sup>35</sup> Over a period of time this elite royal sponsorship reflected positively upon the special position which the Irish experienced.

There were different kinds of Catholics. For the Spanish the Irish were described as having fought a war for Catholicism. Advisers to the Spanish monarchy emphatically supported the Irish. Their bravery in battle was constantly alluded to. Their honour code, based on the sept system, whereby a person who was greatly admired had a retinue made up of those who identified with him, and took his name, as opposed to being in any way related. It was not typical of governors such as Caracena to mix socially with Irish communities, but that is what he did, commenting favourably upon their hosting, alcohol and entertainments. The Irish communities for their part described themselves as Spanish-Irish, and not the other way around. That was noted, and they were perceived to be

30. TNA, Calendars of State Papers, Ireland, 1601-1603, p. 438.

31. AGS, Cámara de Castilla, Diversos 1-12.

32. Pensions and allowances were often paid late, especially during periods of economic recession.

33. AGS, Estado, legajo 840.

34. Rose O'NEILL, *A Rich Inheritance: Galway Dominican Nuns*, Connacht Tribune Press, Galway, 1994, p. 13.

35. Honor McCABE, *A Light Undimmed...*, p. 244.



committed as long-term citizens, not just temporary émigrés. Caracena acted as patron to Irish communities, promoting them, ensuring that those who were merchants were awarded constitutional privileges in the towns and regions they migrated to. Caracena was also involved in making sure that elite Irish men and women were re-ennobled in Spain. Records show books of the nobility to be full of Irish men and women. (Some creatively produced genealogical tables were sometimes used, but generally the old Irish nobility retained their titles in Spain).<sup>36</sup>

A continuity of cultures and customs can be seen, in particular the retention of Irish as an active language, both spoken and written. This was preserved in the army, and in convent schools, seminaries and colleges. As late as 1639 an Irish catechism was being used in the Convent of St. Clare in Esterri, and in the Ensenyança and Clare convents in Tarragona.<sup>37</sup> The use of Irish and English in Ireland meant that using Spanish as a third language, and the dominant one, was fairly easy. Linguistic traditions were prized, and those learned Irish with Latin were at a premium in terms of employment. Translators and linguists were employed within Spain from the Irish communities, and this was an area that women often made their own, since linguists trained in Ireland were frequently women.

Marriage was actively encouraged between Spanish and Irish people. This is unusual in this period as exogamous marriage was usually the last stumbling block to assimilation. When the English were colonising Ireland they passed a statute in 1557 making inter-marriage between an English and an Irish person a capital offence.<sup>38</sup> It did not succeed, but the view remained that inter-marriage was the key to degeneration. It also bred the problem of dubious loyalty if an English man married an Irish woman. In Spain *limpieza de sangre*, purity of the blood, the prevention of any tainted Jewish or Muslim or even *converso* blood entering the family was constantly monitored. Certificates of legitimacy had to be provided prior to marriage. However, marriage between Irish and Spanish was encouraged. For many, marital alliances were astute and calculating manoeuvres intended to cement business or political ventures. This was

36. An example of this can be seen in the de Nibrien family where two sisters Juana and Maria who were both fully professed nuns in Madrid proved that both sets of grandparents were noted nobles of heraldic titles. Noble lineage had to be traced back through three generations. AHN, Expediente 230.

37. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus...*, p. xvii.

38. See Steven G. ELLIS, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447-1603*, Longman Press, London, 1998, p. 247.

not exclusive to Irish or Spanish families, however, it was not viewed negatively in terms of blood stock. Certain customs, such as fosterage were similar, and Irish and Spanish communities recognised this.<sup>39</sup> Inheritance customs in Spain and Ireland had more in common than those between England and Ireland, minimising the culture shock between the two.<sup>40</sup>

When we contrast this experience with that of sixteenth and seventeenth century Irish migrants to France we see a very stark contrast. Mary Ann Lyons' work on Irish émigrés in France reveals that their reception was often negative. They were ghettoised into the worst housing, prevented from joining guilds or competing in trade, and endogamous marriage was out of the question.<sup>41</sup> Although there were military relationships, and also elite contacts at court, ambassadorial contacts and involvement with the Guise faction, and trading links between southern Ireland and Rouen, Lyons points to a decline in positive reception of the Irish in France post 1550, with the increasing targeting of Irish communities as vagabonds and beggars. The language used to describe Irish people bears closer relation to that used by the English colonisers, phrases included "beggars" and "base people".<sup>42</sup>

In Rome there was Irish assimilation into the clergy. Because of Catholic suppression in Ireland from the reformation onwards, the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland addressed their quest for patronage directly to Rome. At least two Irish nuns, Juana de Nibrien, and Isabel O'Donnell, worked as agents for the Spanish state, travelling regularly through Rome, Madrid and London delivering information.<sup>43</sup> An Irish College was founded in Rome in 1628. The founder, Fr. Luke Wadding, an Irish Franciscan was well known to Irish communities in Spain. Educational models were shared, and there is evidence that Irish sisters networked in order to study convent teaching methods. There were Irish printing presses in Rome and Leuven. Book collections as far afield as the Corpus Christ (Irish) convent in Valladolid had a number of publications from Irish presses in their collections. However, there were no where near

39. See Matthew J. CULLIGAN, Peter CHERICI, *The Wandering Irish in Europe: Their Influence from the Dark Ages to the Present*, Constable Press, London, 2000, p. 22 and 106.

40. See James CASEY, *Early Modern Spain: A Social History*, Routledge Press, London, 1999, p. 28-29 detail inheritance customs across the peninsula. For inheritance customs in Ireland see Kenneth NICHOLLS, "Irishwomen and Property in the Sixteenth Century", *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, Margaret MACCURTAIN, Mary O'DOWD (eds.), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 17-31.

41. Mary ANN LYONS, *Franco-Irish Relations, 1500-1610*, Boydell and Brewer, Suffolk, 2003.

42. Mary ANN LYONS, *Franco-Irish Relations...*, p. 170.

43. AHN, Expediente 230: Expediente 239.

the number of Irish institutions both secular and religious in France and Italy, as there were in Spain.

In Spain a record number of Irish colleges, seminaries, and schools were founded, this included convent schools. The intention to establish an Irish foundation in Spain continued. Spain in particular was considered attractive to female religious and their supporters because of the large numbers of convents throughout the peninsula, and the relative wealth and power of female monastics.<sup>44</sup> Royal sponsorship also included the relative freedom Irish female religious experienced, despite the encroaching influence of the Holy Inquisition. Spain was considered to be an important place of religious and political refuge, particularly after the Dissolution of Catholic institutions in Ireland. This was supported by the papacy, and most notably by Pope Innocent XII (1691-1700) who called upon Catholic nations including France, Spain and Portugal to take in loyal Irish Catholics.<sup>45</sup> It has already been established that most of Spain's monarchs did not need to be encouraged to admit Irish populations. But what was the basis of choice made over place of settlement? Why did Irish women choose to establish missions in the Crown of Aragon as opposed to towns and cities where more souls could be saved, and they would be in greater proximity to courts and other sites of influence? One of the considerations made appears to have been the level of freedom to worship, and to run their missions as they had done in Ireland before colonisation by the English. Both Irish Dominican and Clare missions in Ireland had enjoyed relative freedom from interference, and crucially no tradition of enclosure. Ireland had far fewer bishops than all other European Catholic countries, and as a result the Irish Catholic church was not the top-heavy, bishop-dominated institution it was elsewhere. Irish female religious enjoyed considerable independence up until the point of the Dissolution. For all those first wave Irish female migrants the memories of those freedoms was at the forefront of their motivations and plans. Whilst cities had their appeal, they also had interfering bishops, archbishops and Inquisition functionaries. The Crown of Aragon was special because it offered more opportunities for female autonomy. Whilst Barcelona, Lleida, Girona and Vic as well as Valencia were well-served by convents, Tarragona, and much of the Pyrenees were

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44. See Elizabeth A. LEHFELDT, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister*, Ashgate Press, Aldershot, 2005, the introduction sets out emphatically the power conferred upon female monastics.

45. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus...*, p. xviii notes papal responses to the suppression of Catholicism in Ireland.

not. There were fewer male representatives of the Catholic hierarchy to observe closely what Irish women were doing in their convents, and in the wider world. Irish female Dominicans in particular had always prized their independence in Ireland where they specifically had an active mission including open air preaching and teaching missions.<sup>46</sup> The first groups of female Irish migrants had these freedoms, and their own model at the forefront of their ambitions. What buttressed this was a long tradition within Ireland of female learning.<sup>47</sup> Margaret MacCurtain maintains that in Ireland women had traditionally esteemed learning, and that this was partly evidenced in the numbers of private libraries as well as the endowment of convent libraries as places of learning.<sup>48</sup> This tradition was exported to Spain, with convent plans from St. Clare in Esterri, and L'Ensenyança de la Immaculada Concepció in Tarragona possessing formidable *bibliotecas* and *scriptorium*.<sup>49</sup> Irish nuns had established active educational missions from the inception of their orders in Ireland, including schools for girls.<sup>50</sup> The education of girls, and not just the daughters of the elite, was an expected and accepted service which nuns provided. Not all of the girls were destined for the cloister. Ireland had a total of sixty-two convents at the time of the Dissolution.<sup>51</sup> Dominican sisters enjoyed the reputation for being the order most devoted to female learning.<sup>52</sup> Autonomy can be seen in the fact that Dominican convents were not patterned on male institutions, but had a more diverse tradition. Exporting these traditions to Spain also bolstered the strategy of adopting some Jesuit styles of teaching, including keeping the classes small in number, and allowing the girls to progress with a familiar *maestra*, or teacher, rather than changing the teachers on a more frequent basis. Perhaps the most striking facet about Irish sisters, both Dominicans and Poor Clares, was that they did not have a tradition of enclosure. Gillian Kenny has made the point that in Ireland there was no explicit reference

46. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus*..., p. xv.

47. This is not to say that Spain did not have a long tradition of female learning, it most certainly did, although steps were often taken to confine this, and increasingly regulate the reading, books and other teaching material females had access to.

48. Margaret MACCURTAIN, "Women, Education and Learning in Early Modern Ireland", *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, Margaret MACCURTAIN, Mary O'DOWD (eds.), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991.

49. AHAT, Dominiques, cuestiones económicas, caps 4, ms. 2.

50. See Diane HALL, *Women and the Church in Medieval Ireland, c. 1140-1540*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2008, p. 174-175.

51. See Roberta GILCHRIST, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism*, Leicester University Press, London, 1995, p. 108-110.

52. Roberta GILCHRIST, *Contemplation and Action*..., p. 108-110.

to the cloistering of nuns, and that schools were open to girls from the merchant class.<sup>53</sup> Schools undoubtedly provided nuns with part of their income. Maeve Callan has also emphasized the lack of enclosure within the Irish female tradition.<sup>54</sup> It was these governing pre-conditions which facilitated Irish sisters' abilities to grow their own schools within Spain. Furthermore, it buttressed their resistance to any masculine interference, even from their own Dominican male hierarchy. When the Archbishop of Gerri communicated with Abbess Clara at the convent of St. Clara in Esterra d'Aneu in 1592, asking why astronomy was taught to girls, she replied that it was important that everyone in the convent understood their small place in the universe.<sup>55</sup> This deftly stonewalled the archbishop, but was nevertheless a risky reply, as senior Dominican clerics were made an example of for espousing similar knowledge. In 1600 the Dominican friar Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome for heresy because of his insistence that the earth travelled around the Sun, instead of remaining motionless at the centre of the universe. The types of texts which Irish convents in Aragon produced included their own translations of their Order's Rule.<sup>56</sup> The sisters at the Dominican convent of L'Ensenyança in Tarragona organised teaching to include the translation and copying out of the third Rule of St. Augustine, and the lengthy *Epilogus 211* which provided the detailed directions to communities of nuns on their daily life, including prayer, manual work, and reading. It also specified the final authority of the abbess, and the intention that the orders should live within the community rather than apart. It was to this Rule abbesses referred whenever their actions were criticised by religious authorities. In the convent of L'Ensenyança, as in other convents these translated texts were copied out by pupils under the instruction of their *maestra*. A broad and varied curricula appears to exist, and that may have been one of the reasons many elite and merchant families chose an Irish convent for their daughters' education.

After initial foundation Irish convents began to recruit Spanish girls into their convents, and Spanish convents welcomed a number of Irish

53. Gillian KENNY, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Women in Ireland, c. 1170-1540*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2007, p. 183.

54. Maeve CALLAN, "St. Darerca and her Sister Scholars: Women and Education in Medieval Ireland", *Gender and History*, 15 (Hoboken, 2003), p. 32-49, and especially 44.

55. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus...*, p. 135. Astronomy was a contentious subject as it challenged the superiority of God, and was tainted with heresy.

56. For Dominicans it was the *Rule of St. Augustine*, specifically the *Epilogus 211* which was adopted by Dominican sisters. The Poor Clares used *The Rule of Our Holy Mother of St. Clare*.

girls and women. This continued reciprocity further facilitated acceptance and appreciation of Irish girls' schools, but also Irish teaching methods in those Spanish convents they had moved to. Day pupils' ages were recorded as young as seven years. The languages recorded included Irish, Catalan, Spanish and Latin, with texts in those languages as well as Greek and Hebrew.<sup>57</sup> Within Spain Irish Catholics were allowed to make their own arrangements for elementary education. This was formally supported, and continued due to the level of reciprocity between Irish and Spanish women living in convents, and organising female learning therein. Just as important were those Irish donatrix who funded and otherwise supported convent building, as well as educational and medical missions. The building work at the convent of St. Clara in Esterri d'Àneu was supported by an Irish donatrix, Fionnuala O'Connor, who financed the building of distinct cells as opposed to the original shared dormitory built in 1560. This was in 1565, the year that Catalan girls were admitted to the convent and the school altering the identity, and ensuring a greater security for the convent as it broadened its admittance procedures.<sup>58</sup>

An examination of the case studies of three Irish women who entered the Dominican and Clare convents in Tarragona also reveals the level of reciprocity between Irish communities and their Catalan hosts. Sister Brigid Andrew, an Irish woman, professed at the convent of L'Ensenyança, in 1699, along with another Irish woman, Sister Stefania McHugh who professed in the same year.<sup>59</sup> Both Brigid and Stefania were teachers, and developed the Dominican curricula for girls to include translation work and a broad range of humanities. Both had spent their noviciate in the convent in Tarragona, and both were considered highly learned, with Brigid elected to the office of Prioress in 1726.<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to see the success of two Irish sisters in a convent where the majority of sisters were Catalan. However, Brigid and Stefania were not simply appreciated for their spirituality and their teaching skills. Both were well-connected, and both knew how to ensure the economic health of the Dominican convent. Brigid's father was Caspar Andrew, a surgeon in Tarragona who appears to have placed his daughter in the convent in 1690 with a dowry

57. John O'HEYNE, *Epilogus Chronologicus...*, p. 135. This compares with the ten languages which Christopher Highley maintains incomer Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English male clergy used in colleges including St. Alban's in Valladolid by 1558. See Christopher HIGHLEY, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 177.

58. John O'Heyne, *Epilogus Chronologicus...*, p. 145.

59. AHAT, Dominiques de L'Ensenyança, Llibros d'entrades, caps 7, ms. 3.

60. AHAT, Dominiques de L'Ensenyança, Elecciones, caps 2, ms. 2a.

of ten ducats, a considerable sum, which was added to in successive years as Brigid's board, clothing and profession ceremonials were paid for separately.<sup>61</sup> Doctor Andrew appears also to have had some involvement in advising the convent which also had a hospital and a beaterio.<sup>62</sup> The expansion of the Dominican orders' medical services and beaterio which accepted lay women, particularly wealthy widows, appears to have been supported by means of granting *hipotecas*, or mortgages to local enterprises such as a succession of small farms and traders who appear from the account books to have been women. The *Nexes economiques*, detail a number of mortgages granted to both Irish and Catalan women who produced foods and beverages for the convent, and also for profitable sale in the region.<sup>63</sup> Amongst a number of merchant women Maria Guash, a widow, was a beneficiary of the Dominican convent's strategy of awarding mortgages to women.<sup>64</sup> Maria was able to farm some land, and the Villa de Vinyoles in Tarragona which was described as rich agricultural land. She was already financially independent, and did not have enough cash income to run a vineyard enterprise. However, the Dominican mortgage supported the vineyard, and the title allowed the convent a proportion of profits, and a proportion of the wine produced for consumption by the convent inhabitants, the *beaterio* and the hospital. When Maria began to earn a considerable profit, she then established her intention of funding the *parroquia*, the girls' school and funding for books and materials.<sup>65</sup> In this way a reciprocal financial relationship was established between the convent and local women. This financial strategy also reveals the way in which the Dominican sisters operated their rule of poverty. They interpreted it as the rejection of individual ownership, whilst supporting communal ownership. The input of both the Andrew and the McHugh families was part of this. Stefania Hughes' family had settled in Alforja, and appear to have been wealthy merchants. A steady stream of finance went into the convent in the form of regular deposits.<sup>66</sup> Both sets of Irish parents of these two nuns donated in their own right, with names expressed separately. In addition, a number of donations are recorded from a wealthy Irish widow named Isabel White, who was given permission

61. AHAT, Dominiques, Carragmens Entrada, Llibros d'Entrada 22, folio 15.

62. AHAT, Dominiques, Carragmens Entrada, Llibros d'Entrada 22, folio 9.

63. AHAT, Dominiques, Nexes economiques, Llibros 1 to 8. (1686-1701).

64. AHAT, Dominiques, Nexes economiques, Libro 6.

65. AHAT, Dominiques, Nexes economiques, Libro 6.

66. AHAT, Dominiques, Nexes economiques, Libro 3.

to reside in the beaterio with other widows and lay-sisters.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, the freedom to control their own wealth and goods was of continuing importance to female religious and their sponsors. Tying up money in mortgages was one way of side-stepping the rule of poverty, allowing Dominican sisters a significant degree of power. The question remains, was the Clare convent in Tarragona able to act in a similar fashion, and were Irish women involved in financial strategies?

In 1694 Maria Hilaria Forester, an Irish girl born in Spain to two Irish parents who were bi-lingual, professed at the convent of St. Clare.<sup>68</sup> Maria had entered the convent seven years earlier as a schoolgirl. Her parents were wealthy merchants named Ambrose and Anna Forester, and they were generous sponsors of the convent.<sup>69</sup> The Clare convent in Tarragona was also a teaching order, and the Abbess Maria Tavassa Gosch was instrumental in producing a substantial convent history, partly recorded by the pupils and novices as well as the nuns.<sup>70</sup> Abbess Maria also moved *dotes*, or dowries about investing them in building extensions and refurbishment. Ambrose and Anna Forester had, along with many other families, provided a substantial dowry for their daughter Maria Hilaria. Most families knew, and specifically approved of dowries being used for schools, hospitals and building work. Nuns in Spain were property owners, and this included Poor Clares as well as Dominican sisters, who appeared to have rejected the poverty espoused by the Franciscan friars.<sup>71</sup> Poor Clare Abbesses were well aware that if they lived in poverty as an order they would simply have to spend time begging, and reduce their time for prayer and contemplation, as well as their teaching mission. Therefore, in practice, they appear to be rather more worldly than some of their male brethren. Irish sponsors such as the Foresters gave funds which directly contributed to the recording of Poor Clare history. This reveals the purposeful sponsorship of Irish educational and cultural initiatives, including the funding of some works which were produced in Irish, or with a partner Irish text. Irish novices were presented with a dual Catalan-Irish catechism during their novitiate, a factor which kept the Irish language as a living language throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

67. AHAT, *Dominiques, Nexes économiques*, Llibro 3.

68. AHAT, *Confradias de religiosas profesiosas y obituaries de Santa Clara*, Carpeta 1, ms. 23.

69. AHAT, *Confradias de religiosas profesiosas y obituaries de Santa Clara*, Carpeta 1, ms. 23.

70. AHAT, *Confradias de religiosas profesiosas y obituaries de Santa Clara*, Carpeta 19.

71. See Jacqueline ZUZANN HOLLER, *Escogidas Plantas...*, p. 53 which emphasises this gendered distinction.



within the Crown of Aragon. The types of texts produced within convents such as their own recorded histories, as well as catechisms shows how important it was to retain Irish as a vernacular language, as well as Catalan. The vernacular tradition proved to be a lengthy one, beloved of Dominican and Clare women, who continued to use vernacular languages to disseminate their teaching, despite risks involved, particularly during the intense periods of the Inquisition censorship when prohibition of books was applied across the peninsula. It appears that the continued use of the Irish vernacular was a motor which supported the continued development of vernaculars within convent life. However, one final comment needs to be made in respect of Irish female religious, and their control over their own finances. Maria Hilaria Forster did not remain in the Clare convent in Tarragona. Following her profession in 1694 she spent four further years in the Clare convent, and then moved to the Dominican convent in Tarragona. Why did she make this move? It was not unknown for nuns to move from convent to convent, or even from one order to another for spiritual reasons. Maria Hilaria however, wished to take a portion of her dowry as well as herself, into the Dominican convent where she would have more influence over how the money was disbursed.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the Dominican convent had a *beaterio* as well as a hospital, and they had a much more active mission. It may also have been a factor that two other Irish sisters were professed in the Dominican convent creating a more sustained female network. Nuns themselves made wills, and they were well aware that it was best to name a person who would benefit from their money, land, property and worldly goods, or other inheritance. Otherwise if a nuns' share went to God that prevented a distinct inheritance. At the time of profession nuns were entitled to a dowry, essentially an advance on a daughters' inheritance. Irish nuns were used to using their dowries to build convents, and if their dowry was substantial then it was often linked to property. This meant that in cases such as Maria Hilaria, changing convents meant the withdrawal of funds or other goods in order to take a new dowry to a new convent.

Through a system of alliances, matronage, and female inheritance customs, female religious holdings grew throughout the seventeenth century, making their orders wealthy, even during times of recession, and de-valued coinage. Similarly Irish Dominican nuns were a teaching order, establishing schools and also having involvement in hospitals, linguistics,

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72. AHAT, *Confradias de religiosas profesosias y obituaries de Santa Clara, Carpeta 2.*

and the development of pharmacies. This outreach work was important, and was appreciated. Because Irish orders were never enclosed in the way Spanish ones were, their work was well known. This can be partly explained by the assumption that Irish convents, as well as other Irish religious institutions would act as a holding process, and maintain orthodoxy. It is fair to say that Irish religious institutions never saw themselves in that way. Far from it, they had their own agenda. For Spain as a nation, the Irish educational provision underpinned their own, at times acting as a motor, particularly in the support of vernacular production. Irish colleges were famed for their learning and training. Even when conflict arose between religious and secular wings, the quality of provision ensured that no institution was closed down. Financial sponsors were often a mixture of Irish, Catalan and Spanish, even when attendees were almost exclusively Irish. The over-arching view was that Irish institutions played their part within Tridentine reforms throughout the peninsular. Though no-one could describe the Irish institutions as orthodox. During periods of Inquisition censorship of books and texts in the vernacular, and other banned material, Irish convent schools retained banned works in their collections. During one *auto-de-fé* held in Valladolid six nuns were burned for heresy —defined in their cases as harbouring banned works.<sup>73</sup> Though they were held up as examples, their orders were not disbanded, and their convents were not closed.

From 1590 onwards exogamous marriage led to a web of alliances between Irish and Spanish families. This spread to the new world where the practice included native peoples, especially where this was beneficial to business. Astute marital alliances were much more important than any squeamishness about marrying into another group.

Mercantile interests dominated many choices made by both women and men. Irish communities can be traced back to twelfth century Spain, with pilgrimage route links. Religion was all-important, although the Irish were completely committed to founding their own Church in Spain. Fighting a war for Catholicism meant that Irish groups had the right kind of reputation pre-ceding them. Irish communities played upon this, undoubtedly, revelling in the reputation of being ‘the right kind of Catholics’, whilst operating in a largely autonomous way. Sponsorship and patronage were essential, so was matronage by donatrix. This continued to be selective throughout the 1650s and the early 1700s when the influx of

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73. See Elizabeth A. LEHFELDT, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain...*, p. 199.

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Irish groups continued. Gradually, certain customs were fused with Spanish, or dropped altogether if they did not fit. Vernacular Irish catechisms and written histories were still being produced in 1700, however, revealing a testament to a much-loved language and identity. Crucially, Irish communities did not view themselves as victims. They were very assertive at enforcing their own elite status. Their tactic of having themselves re-ennobled was not repeated in other European countries. The push factors were balanced by the pull factors of Spain showing a welcome to Irish communities. Being equal citizens meant that for many they were more successful than their counterparts in France, Italy and the Netherlands. Finally, Spain's reception reveals that there was nothing automatic about a negative response to migrants in the early modern period. The overall response to Irish groups in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain reveals that there was a positive reception, as well as a significant range of opportunities for Irish women in the Crown of Aragon and beyond.