

A manuscript about the village of Alcocer found in the USA

It deals with the convent of Santa Clara and it has been discovered at the University of Massachusetts by a person from the village

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(TRANSL.: DAVID ARBESÚ)

Doña Mayor Guilén de Guzman has always been—and will always be—a disquieting historical character deeply rooted in the history of Guadalajara's Alcarria. Alcocer, Sigüenza, Cifuentes, and many other villages and towns in Guadalajara are living proof of her significance.

She was born to a prominent family of the court of king Fernando III. The daughter of Guillén Pérez de Guzmán, who was the *adelantado mayor* in Andalusia's frontier, her brother was Pedro de Guzmán, the father of the famous *Guzmán the Good*, who was the *adelantado* of Castile. As it was customary for other girls at that time, doña Mayor spent her adolescence at court, where she met the—then—prince don Alfonso.

Doña Mayor was a very beautiful woman with blond hair, blue eyes and a slim body. Prince Alfonso felt quickly in love with her, but much to his distress, he was soon betrothed to doña Violante of Aragón. Nevertheless, doña Mayor was Alfonso X's adolescent love, and from this relationship a daughter—Beatriz—was born. Although she was an illegitimate child, the king did not hesitate to make her a *princess*, betrothing her to prince Alfonso III of Portugal, thus making

Beatriz the future queen of the neighbouring country.

King Alfonso X would never forget the pleasant moments he had spent with doña Mayor. He gave her the villages of Alcocer, Salmerón, Valdeolivias, etc., villages belonging to what was later known as the *Hoya del Infantado*. This is when doña Mayor's spiritual retreat begins. Trying to forget about her past life she founded the convent of the Clarian Nuns of Alcocer to spend the rest of her life there.

Doña Mayor was so generous and kind to the nuns that they kept a pious devotion to the founder of the convent over the centuries.

One hundred years after doña Mayor's death, the nuns decide to set down in writing everything that had taken place in the convent since its foundation. Therefore, they narrate the history of the convent, its possessions, its papal and royal privileges, etc. year after year, century after century.

This manuscript, written by different hands throughout the centuries, disappeared during the [Spanish] Civil War, and so did doña Mayor's sepulchre, a splendid wooden sarcophagus made in the thirteenth century. Don Juan Catalina García, in his *Aumentos a las relaciones topográficas enviadas al rey Felipe II* (1903) [Additions to the

David Arbesú says the Santa Clara manuscript is a 'jewel'

topographical relations sent to king Philip II], is aware of the existence of this manuscript, which he calls "*el quaderno*" (the quire) and which, according to him, contained valuable information about doña Mayor, the history of the convent, and its royal and papal privileges. It was a copy made in 1720 by the priest Gregorio de Heredia from a 1656 original.

Ricardo de Orueta, in his book entitled *La escultura funeraria de España* (1919) [Spain's funerary sculptures] believed that the manuscript was, indeed, lost: "It is very likely that this precious document has disappeared by now, because I have tried to gather information from the Province, and nobody was able to give me any answers." Nevertheless, almost one hundred years later the manuscript reappears in the United States, more specifically at the University of



Massachusetts. It was bought in 2003 by this University¹ in an antiquarian bookshop, *Librería Valdés*, located in Oviedo [Spain]. We cannot know how the manuscript ended up there, but as it has already happened before with many other important heritage, this was to be expected.²

By mere chance—or maybe it was destiny?—I read an article written by David Arbesú Fernández in a journal of that university.³ He refers to the manuscript as the "jewel" of the [Spanish] collection of the Center: "*The last 'jewel' of the late convent of Santa Clara de Alcocer (Guadalajara, Spain) is a manuscript who belongs now to the Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies. A few years ago I had the opportunity to examine the manuscripts of the Center, and in 2003 I wrote a very general catalogue of its Spanish manuscripts. Most of them were acquired approximately ten years*

ago at the Librería Valdés in Oviedo (Asturias), and among them is the vanished manuscript of the Clarian convent. Approximately one year ago I was contacted by Jaime Illanes Cortés, an enthusiastic of the history of Guadalajara. His strong commitment to locating the pieces of our historical heritage made him find it—at last—in the pages of my catalogue. So far, what I believed to be just one more of the manuscripts of the Library of the University of Massachusetts, for little could have I imagined the interest of the local researchers for this document."⁴

What we have here is another example of what has happened to so many of the manuscripts, works of art, and historical documents of our land. They are all now in foreign hands. Leaving aside how sad this makes me, we should be thankful that at least one Spaniard is currently taking care of it.⁵

All images courtesy of the Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies. University of Massachusetts.

¹ T.N.: It was actually bought by the Renaissance Center's Director.

² T.N.: Actually, now we do know how the manuscript reappeared in Oviedo. It belonged to the Marquis of Valderrazo. After his death it was sold to an antiquarian in the Basque Country, from whom the bookstore in Oviedo acquired it.

³ T.N.: The catalogue is not published in a journal, but in the *Newsletter of the Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies* (Autumn 2003, p. 2).

⁴ T.N.: This quotation is not taken from my catalogue, but from some information I wrote on-line once.

⁵ T.N.: This is also misleading. The manuscript is kept at the Renaissance Center. Its staff is in charge of its preservation.