

***Women in Convent Spaces and the Music Networks of Early Modern Barcelona.* Ascensión Mazuela-Anguita. Routledge, 2023. 316 pp. \$43.99. ISBN 9781032273631.**

Ascensión Mazuela-Anguita's *Women in Convent Spaces and the Music Networks of Early Modern Barcelona* is organized into five chapters, complemented by five appendices that are available through a digital eResource page; it presents an up-to-date bibliography and useful figures and tables to complement the main body of the text. In the introduction, the author places her research within both European and South American contexts, presenting it as the first study focused on the musical activity of nunneries in a Hispanic city, Barcelona, in the sixteenth century. Her goal is to explore how these nunneries interacted with the urban environment through music, viewing musical networks as reflections of social and economic structures. The author uses an interdisciplinary and intersectional method to highlight women's roles in shaping musical networks and stresses the influence of popular and oral traditions.

Chapter 1, "Mapping Convents' Sound in the City," maps Barcelona's seventeen nunneries in the sixteenth century, outlining their varied origins and examining the methodological challenges posed by lost or damaged archives. Mazuela-Anguita highlights key sources such as the *Dietaris de la Generalitat de Catalunya, 1411–1713* (Diaries of the Generalitat of Catalonia, 1411–1713), which reproduces the handwritten notes recorded by the official chroniclers of the Palau de la Generalitat concerning political, economic, social, cultural, and military events that took place in Barcelona and Catalonia in a continuous chronicle spanning more than three centuries. In addition, she uses the *Dietari del Antich Consell Barceloní* (Dietary of the Ancient Council of Barcelona), which registers daily entries in the city, the dispatch of messengers and couriers, the departures and arrivals of councilors or the militia, and, in general, news (*ardits*) that could serve as explanations for an expense, as well as other matters that the scribes considered useful or sufficiently significant to be recorded therein. These sources link nunneries to the broader urban context. Yet aside from plainchant books, few sixteenth-century musical sources have survived, and there is no evidence of women composers. The chapter connects the social background of nuns to music, noting that many nunneries housed noblewomen who lived semi-independent lives with enslaved servants, likely shaping musical practices as in aristocratic households. Prestigious nunneries reflected the intersection of religion, family, and social rank: Cross-referenced documents,

including *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) inquiries and wills, trace nuns' genealogies and mention rare instruments (harps, clavichords, and books) passed among female relatives.

Chapter 2, "Music as a Commodity: Music, Convents, and the Economy of the City," connects the city's economy with communities' musical life. Through notarial and accounting records, the author shows that nunneries paid organ builders, organists, and teachers (often foreigners), as well as hired singers for royal events and craftsmen who made or repaired choir books. The chapter also examines choir books, scribes, and printers: Inventories reveal ornate illuminated manuscripts and the gradual adoption of the Tridentine liturgy. The author argues that the permeability of nunneries is evident in the role of confraternities and guilds, which established chapels and altars in churches. Nuns joined these groups, sang, played the organ, and helped organize processions and festivities with shared expenses. Nunneries became spaces of social interaction, connecting different urban sectors through music, book circulation, and liturgical patronage.

Chapter 3, "Music as a Symbol of Political Power and Social Status," explores music's ties to the crown and church in cities seen as "theatres of ceremony." Nunneries held political and ceremonial importance, hosting royal visits and events accompanied by music performed in spaces designed for sound projection, and funeral rites for abbesses drew civic and ecclesiastical authorities in public processions. While their musical participation is uncertain in these last events (playing instruments, singing), processions inside the cloister may have replicated those outside the convent: Some were informal, consisting of the recitation of litanies, while others were solemn, requiring specific garments and objects distinguishing the different offices. The author emphasizes the existence and significance of conventual books detailing the ceremonial procedures and itineraries followed within the nunneries, though their influence on external practices remains to be determined. Nunneries' ceremonial books document these practices, but gender restrictions limited nuns' public roles compared to those of male clergy.

Chapter 4, "Music to Reach Heaven," shows how citizens viewed nunneries' music as celestial and salvific, linking earth and heaven through sound, sustaining their economies, and reflecting beliefs about purgatory. Mazuela-Anguita argues that nuns were both patrons and active music makers within their cloisters, fulfilling vital social and spiritual roles. The idea of *invisibilis melodia* (angelic voices believed to shorten time in purgatory) attracted large crowds and drew criticism from reformers like Cardinal Cisneros, who tried to regulate convent liturgy.

The Council of Trent's twenty-fifth session banned polyphony and instruments in convents but left enforcement to superiors, and local customs often ignored the rule. At the same time, some local writers like Pérez de Valdivia warned against nuns performing music, associating the female voice with immorality or temptation, a belief sometimes reinforced by the Inquisition.

In Chapter 5, "Beyond the City: Religious Orders as National and International Music Networks," the author argues that music transcended language, enabling cultural exchange, and that Iberian and peripheral cultures, long neglected, must be reconsidered. Early modern Spain formed part of a vast political and cultural web linking Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, and the New World, facilitating the spread of musicians, chapels, books, and instruments, even across confessional lines. Mazuela-Anguita presents music as a marker of cultural identity, emphasizing orality and suggesting that the absence of written polyphony reflects oral transmission. Religious orders thus became key agents in preserving and spreading musical traditions beyond borders. She also raises the idea of a transatlantic rivalry between European and South American nunneries, citing the exceptional musical splendor of Lima's La Encarnación. Given the fragmented sources, the author calls for future research using cartographic tools to map nunneries' soundscapes.

In the epilogue, Mazuela-Anguita concludes that it is possible to reconstruct the music of sixteenth-century Barcelona nunneries despite scarce sources, using devotional poetry, oral traditions, and visitation records to highlight women's historically silenced voices. The study demonstrates that nunneries were vital to Barcelona's soundscape and urban culture. Through an interdisciplinary approach, Mazuela-Anguita reveals that nunneries were hubs of musical exchange linking devotion, social networks, and civic identity. The work redefines women's place in music history, illustrating how their religious and cultural contributions bridged sacred and secular spheres. It stands as a landmark study for understanding the musical and social life of early modern Barcelona and its global connections. It is particularly significant that the author advocates for future research to adopt a wider Iberian perspective, which could naturally extend to the Americas or Asia—a line of inquiry that could be further developed while using *Women in Convent Spaces and the Music Networks of Early Modern Barcelona* as a valuable reference study.

ANTÓNIA FIALHO CONDE
UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA