

Wunder, Amanda. *Baroque Seville: Sacred Art in a Century of Crisis*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017. Pp. xviii + 209 + 95 illustrations. \$84.95, cloth.

The baroque period in Seville was a fertile field for the fine arts. Thanks to the royal decree awarding the city the monopoly of trade with the new world, Seville experienced the increasing importance that commerce and management of all the issues related to the colonies brought, and it became the biggest and most important city in Spain. These conditions motivated noble citizens and the Seville Cathedral chapter to commission artistic works for processions and masses to protect the city by strengthening the faith of its inhabitants. Artists like Juan de Mesa (1583-1627), Juan Martínez Montañes (1568-1649), Bartolomé Estéban Murillo (1617-1682), Juan de Valdés Leal (1622-1690), and Pedro Roldán (1624-1699), among many others, were the beneficiaries and developed their work in the city.

The book by Amanda Wunder explores what she calls these *medios divinos* (divine methods), which at this time were widespread in the city, in the words of the author "as an authoritarian effort to preserve a conservative regime and divert the masses from their real problems". In contrast to *medios humanos* (human methods) for which the rulers of the city showed no great interest, these sacred artworks received enormous amounts of money to promote unity and civic identity around the creed. Not only did they serve to revitalize a depressed local economy, but they also helped to define the particular identity of the sponsors of these works and to inspire the population to hope for an improvement of their conditions, which had been harmed by the decisions of their rulers. There is no doubt that "divine and human methods" coexisted during this time to achieve the same goal of welfare for Seville, although it is also clear that the former had a more

prominent role that is still recognizable today in the city. The value of this book lies in the research and extraordinary documentation the author has uncovered by extensively digging through various Spanish archives and in her concentration on the social function of religious art created in the city during the seventeenth century.

The volume is divided into five chapters each devoted to a significant event that took place in the city of Seville, chosen to cover all the central decades of the seventeenth century as well as all inner-city neighborhoods. The first chapter focuses on the conversion of the archdeacon of Carmona Mateo Vázquez de Leca and how he drove a change in artistic patronage from the private and secular to the public and sacred. The second chapter describes the renovation of the Church of Santa María la Blanca and the great effort in the city to consolidate the thesis of the sinless Marian birth and concludes with the procession on the occasion of the celebration of Pope Alexander VII's papal bull *Sollicitudo Omnium Ecclesiarum*.

The reasons that led to celebrate a procession in honor of the beatification of San Fernando in 1671 center the third chapter, presenting the city's efforts to obtain the canonization of the thirteenth-century king, in order to have one more powerful divine tool in support of the defense of the city. The author highlights the relationship between the political and religious bodies that financed the event and the personal interests outside the strict religious creed and identifies a connection between the decision made at that time in Rome not to canonize the king and the power of the city of Seville in the second half of the century. It is followed by an account of the works carried out in the church and in the hospital of Sta. Caridad, headquarters of the brotherhood dedicated to the care of the large number of poor living in the city. The temple, completed in the year 1670, became one of the most important social spaces of the city. Being a member of the

brotherhood and being buried in this church became signs of social distinction for the nobility who could reach an even more prestigious position through humility and dedication to the poor. In this chapter, Wunder demonstrates how the decorative and artistic program of the temple attracted a greater volume of donations by a sector of the nobility that joined the brotherhood thus extending the charitable efforts towards the poor.

The last chapter focuses on the reconstruction of the Church of San Salvador, the most ambitious project carried out during the seventeenth century in the city at the same time that the maritime monopoly, which had made Seville the richest city of the peninsula, was transferred to Cadiz, because of its better defenses and the difficulties the biggest ships faced in navigating the Guadalquivir River. This construction project encountered great difficulties and required a different model of financing that was open to all social classes and included such unusual contributions as personal jewels that were auctioned and converted into wages for workers. Through this project, the author links the challenges of cost and quality control in the selection of building materials, the complexity of the construction process, and the crisis of the end of the century.

The first thing that emerges after reading this volume is the exhaustive documentation amassed over approximately a decade, which underpins this comprehensive story of the actions and specific needs of seventeenth-century Seville. Wunder cohesively links many quotations and references to texts and pamphlets published during that period with the projects and characters described in the different chapters. The stories of the events that drove the works discussed – some ephemeral and therefore more difficult to document and evaluate – lead us to understand the society that fostered the *medios divinos* as a tool for the consolidation of a nobility around piety and humility, the promotion of the productive activities of Seville in a period of waning economic

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strength, and finally the construction of a collective identity critical to the confrontation of the political and social decadence of the late seventeenth century.

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