

Alcahuetas de Oro The Women of the Spanish Golden Age

This summer I spent ten weeks studying the literature evidence of one of the richest historical periods in medieval Europe. The purpose of my internship was to explore the Spanish Golden Age with a focus on the 17th century. I helped Professor Sanchez find articles and books written during or about that particular historical period. I obtained those books most often from the University library and organized them according to their specific topic. I also read a number of primary and secondary sources on Spanish history so that I could get better acquainted with the period. As I was learning more exciting facts about Spain in the 17th century, it was very hard to select a specific topic of interest on which to focus my personal research, but after several books, I decided to limit myself to the role of women in the Spanish society.

I began my internship the week by exploring the library in search for all books somehow related to the Golden Age of Spain. I found a total of more than eighty books on the subject, including old historical books written in Spanish. My job then was to organize them according to type of information, primary or secondary, and topic of information, ranging from cultural to economic. I had to bring most of these books to Professor Sanchez so she could look through them and design a general survey of the history of the 17th century which she would later use for building up the class she wants to begin offering in Sewanee. She gave me a number of these books which I read in the next two-three weeks. I took notes of the history, politics, and society of Spain in that period and I learned valuable information which as of now is not taught in any history class in the university.

Since I am majoring in International and Global Studies, with focus on Global Politics, the political games of the Catholic rulers of Spain were certainly fascinating for me. At first, I

was preparing to focus my research on Spain's foreign politics during their highest economic growth. Later, however, I encountered a series of forgotten plays and novels written during the Golden Age. Among these were *La Celestina*, *La Lozana andaluza* y *La monja Alférez*. These texts sparked my interest and made me turn my research in a different direction. They were typical of the period, with a very medieval, conservative setting, yet rich with unrestrained dialogue and scandalous characters. The major protagonists were all women, very strong and utterly resolute, completely out of place and time. As it often happens, history is studied through observation of that which did not fit in and was frowned up. Thus, the uniqueness of these female characters and their incompatibility with the historical period was precisely what defined this period for me.

At the same time, however, these books were written by male writers, so it was important to find more information on how women were viewed by that part of society which had a voice, i.e. the male society, during the Spanish Golden age. With the help of Professor Sanchez I was able to learn more about women's role in society. Thus, I built my research around the significance of women of and for the Spanish Golden age. I found that they were not always the weakest members of society. Often, the women were the ones who most successfully managed to manipulate the oppressive and discriminatory gender norms and made them work in their favor. The female protagonists I read about inspired me to analyze and write, the finished product of which is a research paper in Spanish that explores the figure of the woman in Spain's most vivid historical period.

The results of this internship are multifold in terms of the skills it helped me develop. First of all it was a great opportunity to practice and improve my research skills. I had to work with the library website, search for books and old manuscripts, and at the same time, find relevant and reliable internet sources that could help me with the historical components. I have plenty of experience researching scientific topics, as well as political ones. Literature

and research, however, were two areas that I had not converged before. Politics is usually much more straightforward and evidence-rich than literature, and thus, this internship helped me adopt research techniques that I have rarely used before. As a researcher, one needs to be adaptable, and this project definitely helped me expand my abilities.

Moreover, this internship greatly developed my reading skills in Spanish. The knowledge that I acquired on the Golden Age of Spain was far beyond what is thought in regular Spanish classes for the sole reason that in such classes, the texts are usually well-known and easier to decipher or analyze. This was not the case with my internship, since most of the books I read were original, hardly-known texts from that period. At first it was very hard to understand the language, but as I was reading book after book, I managed to get used to the outdated, Shakespearean Spanish literary language. Furthermore, I think this was a great practice at reading historical texts in Spanish. Finally, writing a long research report in Spanish was definitely a challenging experience.

Lastly, my internship was parallel to Professor Sanchez' research on the Spanish Golden Age, which she is planning to use to start a Spanish course that focuses on the history and literature of the period. It will be a new and exciting course that will introduce students to the political and literary kings and queens of this period. Some of the books I found the library on Spanish history were far better suited for the class than others, so I believe that I contributed in choosing part of the texts that will be studied in the class. I also spent time discussing with Professor Sanchez the different aspects of the period that would be interesting to students.

One of the low points of the internship was probably in the second half of it, when I had to limit my topic of research after reading several texts on the history of the Golden Age. I wanted to focus on too many elements and thus, was struggling to find the best primary

documents for my research. After several days of skimming over possible points of interest, I decided to approach the problem from a different angle. I turned to the 'field': went to the library and let myself get lost in the section dedicated to seventeenth-century Spain. Then I picked several texts and let the plot and the characters select the research topic for me. I knew that I wanted to focus on something that has not been explored extensively before, and after I read about the wild adventures of the female protagonists, I finally decided that I should write about the women of the Golden Age.

It is interesting to note that before this internship I only had a general interest in Spanish history. However, now I am eager to learn more and to explore other parts of its colorful history. This semester I am taking Spanish Culture and Civilization and I am excited to continue my studies on the language and culture of Spain. Thus, I believe that this internship has added greatly to my otherwise limited Spanish minor and has given me the opportunity to be more freely academic outside the rigid world of academia.

My favorite aspect of this internship was that I had the freedom to explore my own interests and apply them in an academic sphere of knowledge. I am rather indecisive about my career plans, but after this internship, I can definitely see myself become a research assistant, particularly in areas that include social sciences, history, and literature. Furthermore, this was perhaps the best opportunity I have had to improve my Spanish outside class. I am very thankful to Professor Sanchez for guiding me through this internship and for the duPont library for providing me with plenty of documents on the Spanish Golden Age.