Introduction

In this work I propose to discuss ecstatic and utopian visions of the heavenly banquet, focusing on the figure of Juana de la Cruz. This visionary Spanish woman, who was born in 1481 and died in 1534 in Toledo, was a Franciscan tertiary (and later nun) in the beaterio of Cubas de la Sagra. She had the fame of being a “living saint,” a term coined by Gabriella Zarri (1990 & 1996) to refer to certain Italian women whose influence at the Court helped delineate a model of feminine holiness between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Sor Juana’s contemporaries (including King Fernando II and the Great Captain Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, who came to visit her) and later generations considered her holy; in fact, she received the title of Venerable.1

Although today figures like Juana de la Cruz are quite unknown outside the scope of the Church and Women’s History, in their time visionary beata (or tertiaries) were recognised as people of great spiritual authority. Juana composed a book of visionary sermons, Libro del conorte (ca. 1509), transcribed by her fellow nun María Evangelista with some help from other Franciscans, who contributed as well to compile the book of Juana’s life (Vida y fin de la bienabenturada virgen sancta Juana de la Cruz, first half of the sixteenth century).2 Also surviving is a work written by nuns from her convent, the Libro de la casa y monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Cruz (second half of the sixteenth century). But it is especially in her book of revelations, Libro del conorte, where Juana speaks extensively of the heavenly banquet. Indeed, in her visionary sermons she describes a paradise filled with celestial agape meals, dances, and musician angels playing trumpets. Thus, I would like to consider here how utopian heavenly banquets are depicted in this formidable text, and ultimately to contrast them with the demands that extreme fasting made on visionary women’s bodies.
The imagery of the heavenly or Messianic feast comes from the Holy Scriptures and is an influential concept in Christian theology. Banquets were described both in the Old Testament, such as the famous episode of the quails and manna that rained from heaven (Exodus 16:1-36) and others that involved sharing food with God (Genesis 18:1-8), and in the New Testament, where we find scenes of common meals like the wedding at Cana, the Last Supper and the meal that preceded the Ascension. As stated by Aragüés Aldaz (2010: 47), these feasts legitimated and sacralised the idea of a festive celebration around the table. Elsewhere, Jesus mentions eating and drinking in the heavenly kingdom (Matthew 8:11, 22:4, 26:29; Luke 13:29, 14:15, 22:28-30, 24:41-43), and we can find allusions also in other texts from the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:3-4, cf. Romans 14:17; Revelation 2:7, 2:177, 19:9, 22:1-2).4

Frequently depicted in early Christian art but nowadays used sparingly except when explaining the Eucharist, the heavenly banquet refers to a place in heaven where the faithful go after death, in particular the martyrs. Correlated with times of deprivation and fasting, the liturgical calendar and the Spanish versions of the Golden Legend, the Flós Sanctorum, fixed the existence of various moments for joy and feast to savour what the saints of the Flós already were enjoying (Aragués Aldaz 2010: 48). If in this mortal life Christmas and the period between Easter and the Pentecost moments for joy and feast to savour what the saints of the Church's authority.

Nevertheless, these scenes of feasting did not depict that food excess which accompanied some common meals outside the convent, described with carnivalesque humour by shepherds in Juan del Encina's plays.5 In heaven they were bound to be not untidy but orderly pleasures, and the celebration of the Eucharistic meal was a heavenly treat expected to be enjoyed as a harmonic eternal banquet, as for example happened to Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297), an extreme faster tortured by the other punishments, to ingest bitter things instead of sweet (2004: 310). Instead, the heaven with serenity and without guilt: good taste would not then wake any sinful temptations, becoming the habits of Catherine of Siena “holy anorexia,” because the Italian Dominican learned to live practically without eating to achieve an ideal of fasting that ultimately challenged the Church’s authority.6

Because of this ideal, for many of these women a delicious and hearty meal is imagined in heaven with serenity and without guilt: good taste would not then wake any sinful temptations, as for example happened to Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297), an extreme faster tortured by the devil with sensitive odours that came from foods she had never seen before (Bynum 1987: 142). Far from the heavenly meal is the culinary vision of hell of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282), who imagined those who engage in binge eating and binge drinking as thus condemned, among other punishments, to ingest bitter things instead of sweet (2004: 310). Instead, the heaven envisioned by these women is full of sugary foods, a place where eating and drinking are not measured, and they do not constitute a sin when excessive (as raised by Ecclesiasticus 37:29-31, or the fifteenth-century treatises Castigos y doctrinas que un sabio dava a sus hijas, Hernando de Talavera’s Tratado provechoso de vestir y calzar, and Enseñamiento de los religiosos, which criticise any delight of the senses induced by delicacies).7

Contemplating the imagery of a heaven full of sweet and fragrant food in abundance (Camposers 1988: 240 & 244-45) was then allowed and encouraged, and we should not wonder

The living proof of this are female visionary texts. It is certainly striking to realise how some visionary women combined this imaginary with the extreme fasting that usually characterised their spiritual path. For medieval women's spirituality, fasting is a central element which, together with devotion to the Eucharist, frequently leads to mystical ecstasy. Ascetic exercises are omnipresent in hagiographies and revelations, and deprivation of food becomes in women's discourses a powerful symbol of their spirituality.

In hagiographies the effects of fasting certainly contribute to the visibility of these women, helping to read them as holy: in short, fasting allows the possibility of spiritual leadership. Traces of fasting on the female body, as traces of self-imposed penance, are signs of the divine presence, forms of externalising the intense and privileged experience of God, so that through their feeding practices women externalise the interior marked by the divine (Biddick 1993: 414). And so the new saints show interest in medieval hagiographies of Mary Magdalene and (later on) Catherine of Siena’s (1347-1380) example of lengthy abstinence: visionary women thus agree in not seeing ordinary food as necessary (Sanmartín Bastida 2015: 95-96 & 103). Indeed, they become self-starving women who follow the example of their predecessors. For example, Rudolph Bell has called the habits of Catherine of Siena “holy anorexia,” because the Italian Dominican learned to live practically without eating to achieve an ideal of fasting that ultimately challenged the Church's authority.

In those very years, filled with the cries of famine, with climactic upheavals, with nature's calamities, unending rains, poverty, atrocities committed on wayfarers and children, cannibalistic excesses, there grew apace, across a web of forbidden dreams, descriptions of a sweet and beatifically serene life, ecstatic images of havens so scented as to stun the brain; of aromatic baths in celestial spiceries, of countries in which there is no need to eat, where “sweet and celestial food” trickles in a dew down gummy, resinous, honeyed and sweating trees, bestowing comfort and ineffable delight upon the privileged occupants of the sacred precinct.8
that this food paradise caught the attention of fasting nuns in general and visionary women who exercised extreme abstinence in particular. The heavenly feast was no longer just about extolling the pleasures of the Eucharist but expanded the field of culinary enjoyment and recognised the good taste of other foods, not only spiritual but material.9

Juana de la Cruz’s heavenly banquet

The most interesting example of this food figuration, the heavenly banquet, belongs to a Spanish visionary woman and extreme faster, Juana de la Cruz. This Castilian woman, as stated earlier, is not a saint recognised by the Church: in the year 1610 the process of her beatification began in Rome, but it was thwarted by the censors of both Juana’s work, the Libro del conorte, and of the biography written by Father Daza.10

The Libro del conorte, written around 1509, responds to Cardinal Cisneros’s command of getting Juana’s visionary sermons copied, sermons that we are told were delivered over thirteen years. It seems that these speeches were collected at her cell by fellow tertiarys and, especially, by María Evangelista, who was also probably the main author of her manuscript hagiography (Vida y fin de la bienaventurada virgen sancta Juana de la Cruz). Juana’s preachings usually lasted three or four hours during which she described and interpreted aloud the allegories of their imaginary visions, assuming the voice of each celestial character in a very dramatic way (Cortés Timoner 2004: 26; 2005: 612). Whoever attended the public disclosures of Juana (the audience of the trances was formed in part by important personages of the Court) would see the visionary beata interacting with scenes from sacred history in a time and space that reached toward transcendence.

Having said this, I must underline that a key element of Juana de la Cruz’s holy performance was her ascetic behaviour. Juana had carried out extreme fasting since childhood that went back to no less than the stage of lactation (Daza 1613: 68). To help her, she placed in her mouth “ajenos amargos” [bitter wormwood] to remember “el amargor de la yel e vinagre que dieron a nuestro Señor Jesucristo” [the bitterness of gall and vinegar which was given to our Lord Jesus Christ]; she also sometimes held in her mouth “una piedra algo grande que le dava dolor” [a somewhat large stone that gave her pain] and another time “un candelero mediano” [a medium candlestick], holding it “por la parte donde se pone la candela hasta que le dolían las quijadas” [by the part where one puts the candle until her jaws were aching] (Vida... fol. 14r).11 Her hagiographer María Evangelista also informs us that her early fasts were accompanied by a lack of sleep (an insomnia found in other visionary women):

Heran sus ayunos muy perfectos, e mucho asi espiritual como corporalmente, que no sólo usava dende su niñez ayunar ordinariamente comiendo una vez al dia, mas aún estar tres días con sus noches sin tomar ningún mantenimiento corporal; y no solamente ayunava de comer, mas aún de dormir hazía penitençia e ayunava. (Vida... fol. 14r)

[Her fasts were very perfect, as spiritual as they were bodily, since she not only used to fast since her childhood, eating just once a day in the ordinary manner, but would even spend three days and nights without taking any bodily sustenance; and not only did she fast, but even did penitence and fasted instead of sleeping.]

However, this does not prevent Juana from describing the heavenly banquet with a remarkable enthusiasm. Perhaps because she was able to establish a strong connection between food and God, we are told that she eats thinking of God and claims meals as a way to reach the divinity.

Dezia muchas veçes esta bienaventurada que, quando comia o veivia, tomava gusto en aquel manjar corporal pues savia ella Dios hera todas las cosas y en todas las cosas le podía hallar y con este pensamiento y contemplación que siempre tenía puesto en Dios en cada bocado que comia o trago que veivia hallava dulcesumbres y gustos divinales, tanto que estando muchas vezes comiendo corporalmente se arrojava en spiritu hasta ver los secretos celestiales y la visión de Dios e los espíritus angelicos. (Vida... fol. 21v)

[This blessed woman often used to say that while eating or drinking she enjoyed the taste of material delicacies since she knew that God was all things and in all things she could find him. And with this thought and contemplation which she had always focused on God, in every bite she ate or drank she used to find sweetness and divine tastes, so intensely that frequently while she was eating she entered into a trance and got to see the heavenly secrets and the vision of God and the angelic spirits.]

The correspondence between the quality of the soul and tasting is thus very present in her work:

Porque, así como la persona que está enferma y malsuppera tiene el gusto de la boca muy amargo, y todo cuanto come, por dulce y bien guisado que sea, le amarga y le sabe mal, que así, por semejante, cualquier persona que tuviere el ánima enferma de pecados y el gusto amargo de incredulidad y dureza y malicia y envidia y otros pecados semejantes, no le sabrá bien esta santa escritura, porque cuanto ella es más excelente tanto menos la sabrán gustar los malos. (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 1472)

[For, as the person who is sick and bad tempered has a very bitter taste in the mouth, and all he eats, even when sweet and well-stewed, tastes bitter and bad, so any such person, having their soul sick with sins and the bitter taste of unbelief and hardness and malice and envy and other similar sins, will not taste this holy scripture as good, because the more excellent it is the less the bad ones will know how to savour it.]

For Juana to taste depends directly on the soul. Certainly this sensitivity towards food, shown in the central comparison between her work and a delicacy that can only be savoured by those who are close to God (II, 1472-73), could be due to her work as an assistant cook at her convent
This ability to convert food into spiritual reason, so that every day becomes a daily feast, is also seen in Juana's life:

If during her speeches Juana offered a dramatisation of evangelical episodes and a narrative description of the joyous and musical celebrations held in heaven, this festive atmosphere becomes

Nevertheless, what calls our attention is the fact that Juana demonstrates on several occasions (not always related to the Eucharist) a great ability to relate parts of the human body with food. As she says in one of her revelations:

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constantly rewritten in her work during the extensive space devoted to heavenly celebrations. All her sermons represent the positive side of food, which plays a key role in many of them in explaining doctrine and making it available to the laity. Thus there are frequent episodes in which the celestial beings, after a game, a performance, or a procession, sit at a table with the blessed and are offered various filling foods that they consume happily, a meal both sweet and sacred if the food offered happens to be eucharistic.

The overflowing tables of platters establish a direct identification between food and heaven, and it is God/Christ himself who, probably thinking of their past fasting, gives license to eat all they want to compensate for their hardships in life.

 uninsured food and wine and platters, they never got full or tired of eating.

And Christ can also become the waiter who divides his sweet body to others: “los mandó él mismo asentar [...] y se arremangó él y los sirvió a todos, y fue el manjar de los convidados” [he ordered them to sit down and he rolled up his sleeves and served everyone, and he was the food of the guests] (II, 1044). This body with which God feeds the blessed will make them full of food, since until Christ’s body is eaten the feast does not seem complete.
Thus, throughout the Libro del Conorte, Christ is always inviting the blessed to enjoy, be satiated by, and get drunk on the sweets and delicacies of his body (II, 841, 862-63, 1065-66 & 1181), which he distributes in turn among the saints around him. Of course all this came from Christ’s claim that he is the bread who comes down from heaven (John 6:35), an image repeatedly developed by Juana when he opens the wound in his side to spill water and spiced wine, and when food and spirits emerge from the sores of his feet, hands, and head. But sometimes the explicitness with which Christ himself is dismembered to encourage diners calls out for our attention:

Y dijo el Señor que […] llegaron todos los Bienaventurados, y uno tomaba la una mano y otro otra y un pie y el otro pie, y cada uno de los otros tomaba una llaga de las espinas de su sagrada cabeza y de las llagas de los azotes de su sagrado cuerpo, y ponían las bocas en todas aquellas sagradas llagas, y que así manaban dulceumbres y manjares y bebidas y líquores de ellas […] (II, 1299-1300)

[And the Lord said that all the blessed came, and one took one hand and another took the other and another one foot and the other foot another, and each of the others took a sore from the thorns in his sacred head and the wounds of the scourges on his sacred body, and they put their mouths on all those sacred wounds, and thus flowed sweets and food and drink and liquors.]

If, as we have seen, Juana focuses on occasion on the typical food of the Last Supper, in others her focus is directed to tables loaded with sweets and rich treasures that seem to play an ornamental role: delicacies which make the blessed get drunk and gorge themselves at highly adorned tables enriched with golden and jewelled cups. Thus, reading the Libro del conorte, it appears that Juana’s heaven is mainly comprised of delicious and varied meals, with a touch of luxury in a well laid table and a whole atrezzo (set of theatre props) of palatial objects and precious jewels.

Y dijo el Señor, que después que él hubo servido a su preciosa Madre y Señora nuestra con muchedumbre de manjares y frutas y licores y aguas y vinos muy dulces y olorosos y suaves, y después que él hubo – él mismo – puesto delante su trono muchedumbre de mesas muy adornadas y enriquecidas y abastadas, tornaba él con aquella muchedumbre de pajes a servir a nuestra Señora, trayéndole infinitas arcas llenas de tesoros y riquezas y joyas delante de ella, y haciendo muchas reverencias y cortesías se le ofrecía […] (II, 945)

[And the Lord said that after he had served his precious Mother and Our Lady with a great number of fruits and delicacies and spirits and waters and wines that were very sweet and fragrant and delicate, and after he had himself set before his throne many highly adorned and enriched and full tables, he and that crowd of pageboys again served Our Lady, bringing her endless chests full of treasures and riches and jewels, and he offered them to her while making many bows and saying courtesies.]
At this well-prepared table, Christ acts like a knight who serves his lady (his mother), offering her treasures and riches "para vuestro servicio" [for your service] (945). These celestial tables with gold plates are likewise found in Mechthild of Magdeburg and we also encounter them in the third revelation of the Blessed Lucy of Narni (1476-1544), who was very influential upon the "living saints" of this era. In Lucy's text, Christ shows her four places to sit, giving great importance to the setting on the table, which is framed by a paradise with palaces, gardens, angels, maidsens holding cups, altars covered with tablecloths, and heavenly chairs (Matter, Maggi & Lehmiijoki-Gardner 2001: 325; Matter 2001: 7).

I believe that to understand this imagery it is important to realise that the sixteenth century was marked by the development of a Mannerist culture of feast and meal manners, including the use of expensive utensils, decorated dishes, golden glasses or embroidered tablecloths (Jeaneret 1987: 56-57). As Roy Strong (1987: 75) states, during the Renaissance food became a key element of a vast theatrical production, displaying that era's penchant for the deployment of wealth through giving banquets (138-209; Camporesi 1988: 67). This culture is found in the Iberian Peninsula in fictional texts such as the famous Tirant lo Blanch by Joannot Martorell, where one can find ostentatious banquets that include vessels of gold and silver (see, for example, Martorell 1990: 549); food there serves as a metaphor for social communication and erotic love (Anton Ferrús 2010: 12) in a display strikingly similar to the heavenly treats envisioned by our visionary women.

In the heavenly table contemplated by Juana de la Cruz, sweet foods are especially common. Even from the branches of the Cross, "frutos muy dulces y suaves" [very sweet and delicate fruits] (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 1160) flow, and on one occasion the blessed see the following things in the sun:

Una masa muy grande y blanca [...] de la cual [...] salieron a deshora infinitas hostias y rosquillas y panecitos más dulces y blancos y sabrosos que de avena y azúcar y alcorzas, y más olerosos y preciosos que todos los olores y preciosidades del mundo ni del cielo, por cuanto eran manjares divinales que procedían del poderoso y eterno Dios. Las cuales hostias y rosquillas y panecitos tan saborosos manaban y procedían de la suavísima y purísima masa, y caían a las bocas de todos los Bienaventurados de la corte del cielo, desde Nuestra Señora, la Virgen María, hasta el más pequeño. (II, 839-40)

[A very large white dough from which at that moment endless communion wafers and little pastries and little loaves sweeter and whiter and tastier than nougat or sugar or ices, and more odorous and precious than all the smells and platters in the world or heaven, because they were divine delicacies that came from the Almighty and eternal God. These more than excellent hosts and pastries and little breads flowed and came from that most gentle and pure dough, and they fell into the mouths of all the blessed from the court of heaven, from Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, even to the least of the blessed.]

This predilection for sweetness, evident in this allegorical representation of the Holy Trinity, is very typical of the recipes of Juana's time. According to Javier Martínez Monzó's (2011: 26) discussion of the massive presence of sugar in this century, when reading the texts of the sixteenth-century kitchen one can infer that the dominant taste was sweet, even though one cannot forget that this ingredient could be an element of social distinction. Indeed, according to studies dealing with food in its diachronic dimension, in the Renaissance there was a growing taste for sugar (Strong 2003: 84). And if cane sugar replaced honey as a sweeter in the Western world at the end of the fifteenth century, and sweets made with sugar were no longer exotic luxury items at the beginning of the following century but became an everyday product, it is not surprising that foods such as bread, wine, water, fish, meat or eggs are likely to be dusted with this substance, which is employed in this period for flavouring as much as salt (Fernandez-Armesto 2009: 190 & 239).

Neither should we feel wonder at realising that epistolaries from the early seventeenth century proved that conventual sweets were all made of sugar. However, in Juana's culinary paradise chocolate is not yet mentioned: we must await the seventeenth century to find this food in abundance, as we see in many poems and colloquies composed by the visionary Francisco de Santa Teresa (1654-1709) or in Christmas carols. In conventual songs, chocolate constituted a constant presence, and we can also run into round cakes (Francisca de Santa Teresa 2007: 125), though not framed in the heavenly treat as Juana had envisioned, who undoubtedly is the visionary woman who developed the most original vision of the sacred banquet.

Finally, I must say that Juana de la Cruz was not the only Spanish visionary and fasting woman that imagined celestial treats with pleasure: María Vela y Cueto (1561-1614), who made food abstinence a major focus in her life, has the heavenly agape meal in mind as well. On the Day of the Dead, as told in her Libro de las mercedes, she prays for the soul of a companion to rise to the heights, and to gather together with her in heaven, "en aquella eterna mesa. Representoséme que esta mesa era redonda, que es el ser de Dios que no tiene principio ni fin, y que los manjares eran sus divinas perfecciones" [at that eternal table. I envisioned that this table was round, which is the being of God who has no beginning nor end, and that the dishes were his divine perfections] (Vela y Cueto 1961: 257).

I believe the interesting thing about all this is that these heavenly banquets where food is shared fomented the joy of conviviality against the lonely and elitist practice of fasting (which sometimes gave rise to the deceiving of others with the simulation of eating, as in Vela y Cueto 1961: 218-19). Precisely for this reason, it is most striking to find these heavenly rich meals in the writings of extreme fasters (near to starving) such as Juana de la Cruz and María Vela y Cueto rather than in women who practiced moderate food abstinence like Teresa of Avila. But perhaps it all makes sense, since food in Juana's texts is mostly read as a reward given to the blessed to reinforce the idea that penance in the world will be offset by the Saviour with delicacies in heaven sometimes gave rise to the deceiving of others with the simulation of eating, as in Vela y Cueto (1654-1709) or in Christmas carols. In conventual songs, chocolate constituted a constant presence, and we can also run into round cakes (Francisca de Santa Teresa 2007: 125), though not framed in the heavenly treat as Juana had envisioned, who undoubtedly is the visionary woman who developed the most original vision of the sacred banquet.

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In this sense, we can assume that Juana would identify fully with Christ in this passage that recounts his fasting in the desert, or perhaps I should say that Christ utters these words precisely because they are pronounced through a fasting Juana (the instrument of God's voice):
y cuando había hambre y sed y desmayo, contemplaba en las harturas y manjares celestiales, y así me parecía estar en espiritu que veía allí, en el mismo desierto, puestas mesas muy adornadas y llenas de manjares de diversas maneras de sabores – y hasta pan reciente y mojado en leche me parecía veía en las mesas –, que el olor de ellos me parecía me hablaba y conquistaba en mi necesidad, y el gusto y sabor me daba esfuerzo para poder ayunar tantos días y noches sin comer ninguna cosa. […]

- Porque el mundo se puede comparar y partir en dos partes. A los buenos y contemplativos les es paraiso y refriego muy grande, porque, ayunando y nunca comiendo sino poco, pueden contemplar y gustar y tener delante de sí presentes todos los manjares y dulcedumbres divinales; y pueden gustar y comer y hartarse y embriagarse de Dios y de sus excelentes gustos y suavidades que son más sabrosos al gusto del ánima que puede ser, al gusto del cuerpo, pan reciente mojado en leche. Así, por semejante, los manjares celestiales hartan y gobiernan y esfuerzan al espíritu y el ánima de todos los contemplativos que, por amor de mí, ayunan y dan sus cuerpos a muchas penitencias y abstinencias y vigilias. (Juan de la Cruz 1999: I, 548 & 549)

[And when I was hungry and thirsty and fainting, I used to contemplate heavenly abundance and delicacies, and so, after that, it seemed to me that my spirit saw displayed in that same desert very ornate tables, filled with dishes with many different types of flavours – I even saw fresh bread dipped in milk on the tables – and it seemed that the smell of them filled me up and comforted me in my need, and the taste and flavour gave me the strength to be able to fast for so many days and nights without eating anything. […]

- Because the world can be split into two parts and be good. To good people and to contemplatives it is paradise and a great refreshment, because, fasting and only ever eating but little, they can see and taste and have before them all the divine platters and sweets; and they can taste and eat and gorge themselves and overindulge in God and his excellent tastes and delicacies that are tastier to the soul than fresh bread dipped in milk may be to the body. Thus, for such people, the heavenly platters satisfy and govern and reinforce the spirit and the soul of all contemplatives who, for love of me, fast and inflict many penances and abstinences and vigilas on their bodies.]

Perhaps the most poignant of the arguments of the Franciscan tertiary, who promises to others a great feast in the afterlife after abstaining in the earthly life from rich foods, is precisely this penchant revealed by the visionary for fresh bread dipped in milk. After reading this fragment of her book of sermons, one can conclude that a sweets-filled heaven was indeed a utopian place for extreme fasters like this visionary woman from the early fifteen-hundreds.23

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Notes

1. This article is an adaptation, expansion, and re-writing of sections 1.3 and of 1.4 in Sanmartín Bastida 2015: 18-28 & 32-35; I thank MacDonald Daly (editor of CCCP, SPLASH) for letting me translate whole passages of this book. This work is framed in the research project “La conformación de la autoridad espiritual femenina en Castilla” (Ref. FFI2015-63625-C2-2-P; 2016-2019), financed by the Spanish Government and the FEDER funds.

2. I should clarify that at first Juana lived with her companions in the beaterio of Cubas de la Sagra, so they were all originally tertiaries, and could not be considered technically nuns because they had not taken vows. But eventually they joined the Clarisan order under Juana’s leadership and became nuns. At the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth Spanish visionary women with fame of “living saints” were mainly tertiaries who ended up their lives as nuns.

3. Roy Strong (2003: 55) stresses how Christianity affected the secular table because the Bible offered many examples (from the wedding at Cana to the miracle of the five loaves and two fish) of eating together as a profound expression of love, communion and fellowship.

4. The Gospel of Matthew, which repeatedly describes feasts occurring in the kingdom of heaven, in one reference conceives the banquet as including the company of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac (Matthew 8:11).

5. Rustic shepherds in Encina’s theater are presented as indulging the vice of gluttony while dedicated to joyous dance. This is especially seen in the Églopa representada la misma noche de Antruejo (Encina 1991: 151-60), where there is an invitation to eat ravenously before the fasting season.

6. Faced with this poverty, Camporesi says, hell is for starving people, among other things, to get tremendously hungry and then reach cannibalistic excess. Camporesi highlights how popular imagination places the joy of delighting the senses, so repressed and absent in the earthly life, in heaven (1988: 254-55). On the other hand, Paradise in the quotation above makes us remember Camporesi’s description of the fantastic land of Jauja (1988: 83).

7. For an extensive study of holy anorexia in Catherine of Siena, see Bell (1985: 22-53).
8. See Sánchez Martínez de Pinillos 2000: 102 and Gómez Redondo 2012: I, 793, 118. Ecclesiasticus or Sirach 37:29-31: "Don't feel that you just have to have all sorts of fancy food, and don't be a glutton over any food. If you eat too much, you'll get sick; if you do it all the time, you'll always have stomach trouble. Gluttony has been the death of many people. Avoid it and live longer". For medieval texts about moderation in food and drink, see a good summary in Sánchez Martínez de Pinillos 2000: 232-39.

9. See Mazzoni 2005 for European visionary women and the enjoyment of food, often employed as a metaphor for devotional pleasures.

10. On the vicissitudes of the process, see García de Andrés 1999: 43-53; for an overview of the problems of the beatification of Juana, despite the discovering of her incorrupt body, see Giles 1999: 288-89. Juana's fame in the century after her death is brought by her life taken to the stage by Tirso de Molina, Francisco Bernaldo de Quirós and José de Cañizares (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries). As for the judgment made about her work, controversial passages were found, such as the appearance of a feminized Jesus (e.g., when the Lord tells to little girls: "You are also a girl like you, because I am the son of a woman") (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 401; see García de Andrés 1999: 92). On Jesus claiming to be a woman in Juana's text, see Graña Cid 2009: 499; Boon 2018: 279-81.

11. From now on, all translations of the Spanish quotations are mine. I quote here from the unpublished manuscript of her life preserved in the library of El Escorial (see bibliography), respecting the spellings and only punctuating and accentuating the text. For an English translation of six sermons of Juana, see Boon & Surtz 2016, unfortunately, the sermons quoted here have not been translated in this work.

12. Noting the importance of food in the life and spirituality of Juana de la Cruz, one can remember Noëlle Châtelet's conception of the cooking space as the allegorical figure of the universe that needs nothing else to express itself (1985: 202). We can also be reminded of the words of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582): "Entended que, si es en la cocina, entre los pucheros anda el Señor" [You should understand that, if you are in the kitchen, God dwells among the pots] (Teresa de Jesús 2004: 898).

13. Christ commands them to stand up because they have fallen (as if) asleep due to all the delicious food.

14. We can find a similar passage at Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 740, in which Christ stands at the beautiful table and fills it with delicacies coming from his wounds onto the plates and golden chalices. Also from the wound of his sacred side a stream flows with clear and fragrant water and delicate and precious liquor (more than all the liquors and flavored wines in this world, Juana says). The blessed eat and drink them with a growing desire. On this passage, see Cortés Timoner 2005: 621, who relates it to the use of food in John of the Cross.

15. For the culture of feasting in this period, see also Strong 2003. The growing interest in food abundance contrasts with the overall pictures drawn by Piero Camporesi's studies (1986, 1988), which show us a bourgeois diners.

16. This episode reminds us of the manna rained from heaven, alluded to above, Juana continues this passage asserting that the more the blessed ate, the more sweet and precious delicacies flowed from that very soft dough into their mouths. This dough was the Holy Trinity, which was united and kneaded with human nature. Juana once again presents here the blessed eating and enjoying and gorging themselves with great hunger and thirst for God, receiving such great delights that they forget themselves and get drunk (II, 840).

17. Sugar (and chocolate) discovered in America produced an entire industry, something which had not previously occurred when this substance came from India. Fernández Armesto (2009: 188) highlights the possible Arab influence in this taste for sugar from the thirteenth century onwards, because in medieval Muslim courts sugar was already a favorite ingredient. However, until the end of the fourteenth century in the Christian world sugar had been used mainly in medicine and only sparingly for cooking, more as a spice than as an ingredient. Strong (2003: 85) points out that in the sixteenth century, "The fashion for sugar in food echoed the fashion for sweet wines in drink", and a desire to give shape and color to the food intervened in the wish to produce that particular sweet taste.

18. See Fernández-Armesto 2009: 190-91. For this scholar, the renunciation of the exoticism found in Muslim food meant that the food of kings and aristocrats became more accessible to bourgeois diners.


20. Sánchez Hernández (2011: 99) shows that chocolate was also given as a remedy for upset stomach, according to an Augustinian nun's letter. For the study of the growing taste for chocolate see Schivelbusch 1993: 85-96.

21. References to chocolate are found in several of her colloquia, along with cocoa, biscuits and wine (Francisca de Santa Teresa 2007: 131-32), but also in her poetry, along with other sweet food like buns and French toast. For the presence of chocolate in carols sung by nuns in Madrid on Christmas Eve, see BNE, sign. R. 34988.

22. For a reading of her extreme fast as a sort of holy anorexia see Sanmartín Bastida 2015: 109-29.

23. I thank Maria Luísa Malato for encouraging me to work on the heavenly banquet for this volume and Jessica Boon for aiding with the translation into English.
Inés de la Cruz's life and texts that engages all three stages of her life: her girlhood on the haciendas of Nepantla and Panoaya; her life as a young adult in the viceregal court in New Spain's capital surrounded her in this process. I analyze Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's life and writings from a gender perspective employing two feminist methodological approaches. The first is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist historical reconstruction methodology. The second is Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist liberationist methodological approach. In a special way, Radford Ruether's methodology also orders me the opportunity to examine Sor Juana's unique contribution to the disciplines of feminism and ecofeminism. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, O.S.H. (English: Sister Joan Agnes of the Cross; 12 November 1648 – 17 April 1695), was a writer, philosopher, composer, poet of the Baroque school, and Hieronymite nun of New Spain (Mexico). Her outspoken opinions granted her lifelong names such as "The Tenth Muse" and "The Phoenix of Mexico", for she was a flame that rose from the ashes of "religious authoritarianism".
Juana Ramírez thirsted for knowledge from her earliest years and throughout her life. As a female, she had little access to formal education and... Author of Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and The Spectacular See Article History. 

Alternative Title: Juana Ramírez de Asbaje. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, original name Juana Ramírez de Asbaje, (born November 12, 1651?, San Miguel Nepantla, Viceroyalty of New Spain [now in Mexico]—died April 17, 1695, Mexico City), poet, dramatist, scholar, and nun, an outstanding writer of the Latin American colonial period and of the Hispanic Baroque. Top Questions. What were Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s accomplishments?