

EXPERIENCING FOOD IN ANNE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW (1549-1626)

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ABSTRACT: The Blessed Ana de San Bartolomé (1549-1626) is a famous disciple of Saint Teresa of Avila who devoted much attention to food in her prolific writings (letters, autobiographies, declarations, meditations, prayers...). The role that food plays in her life interests us in several ways: her conception of the prioress as a breastfeeding mother; her cannibal understanding of Saint Teresa's relics; her ambivalent relationship with fasting; and finally, her broad description of conventual food, which help us to better understand how 16th to 17th centuries diets were conformed.

KEYWORDS: Anne of Saint Bartholomew; Food Studies; Visionary Women; 16th-17th Centuries Spirituality.

To Pablo Acosta-García,
amicitia animae alma

Recent studies have been interested in food-related texts, and newer projects such as *Alimentopia* have explored the ways in which food functions utopically¹. In the field of religious history, works such as Labère's delve into medieval times, Curran's on convent food, and Bell, Bynum, and Mazzoni's on food related to female mysticism, to name but a few important examples². A few years ago, in *La comida visionaria*, I studied various ways of presenting food in the visionary discourse of 16th century nuns³. I then realized the richness of Anne of

¹ See BOTELHO, Teresa; RAMALHETE GOMES, Miguel; and REIS, José Eduardo (orgs.) - *Utopian Foodways: Critical Essays*. Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2019 (Coleção Transversal, serie Alimentopia 4).

² LABÈRE, Nelly (ed.) - *Être à table au moyen âge*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010 (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 115). CURRAN, Patricia - *Grace Before Meals: Food Ritual and Body Discipline in Convent Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989; BELL, Rudolph M. - *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985; BYNUM, Caroline Walker - *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; MAZZONI, Cristina, *The Women in God's Kitchen: Cooking, Eating and Spiritual Writing*. New York/ London: Continuum, 2005.

³ Most of the information I gather here is to be found in SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca - *La comida visionaria: Formas de alimentación en el discurso carismático femenino del siglo XVI*, prologue by Catherine Davies. London: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2015; reed., with corrections, London: SPLASH, 2017.

Saint Bartholomew's work on this subject. In this article I shall prove it by summarizing the different aspects of food that she illuminates in her prose, which let us reflect on the ways in which food and utopia are related in her work regarding aspects such as: food as intercultural conversation and form of sociability; utopia, food and gender; dystopia, food disorders and transgressions; and food ethics and utopian diets⁴.

The Blessed Ana de San Bartolomé (1549-1626), here called Anne of Saint Bartholomew, is a famous disciple of Saint Teresa of Ávila who devoted much attention to food in her prolific *corpus*: letters, autobiographies, declarations, meditations, or prayers.⁵ The role that food plays in her life interests us on several levels: her conception of the prioress as a breastfeeding mother; her cannibal understanding of Saint Teresa's relics; her ambivalent relationship with fasting; and finally, her broad description of conventual food, which help us to better understand how 16th to 17th centuries diets were conformed.

First, I would start dealing with this broad issue: conventual diets. Regarding this field, I should state that Anne of Saint Bartholomew is a great source of information about meals in convents, which, incidentally, were more varied than those of monasteries, though they were more affected by the vagaries of economy. If information about conventual diets has been extracted from theater plays of visionary women such as Francisca de Santa Teresa, carols sung at Christmas, or from nuns' epistolaries, Anne of Saint Bartholomew's letters have not yet been studied in this regard, but they tell us a lot about the food tasted in Carmelite convents of her times, and this may be due to her occasional occupation as a kitchen supply lady⁶.

As Anne traveled much as a founder of Carmelite convents in Europe, her letters provide us with important information about diverse menus and establish differences between nationalities' tastes, for example those of Dutch and French women. Anne declares that she advises her nuns to eat everything they need, but indeed French nuns prefer their casseroles cold, differing in this from

⁴ These are the issues addressed at the International Conference «More Meals to Come» (11-13 April 2019), held at the Universidade do Porto (Faculty of Arts and Humanities), where I presented this work in a reduced format. I am grateful to Paula Almeida and María Luísa Malato for encouraging me to develop this paper and publish it here.

⁵ For a brief biography of the Carmelite nun, see POUTRIN, Isabelle - *Le voile et la plume: autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l'Espagne moderne*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995, p. 289-290. From Anne's time we have both versions of her *Autobiography* (Bologna, ca. 1622-1623, and Amberg, ca. 1624) and the life composed by Crisóstomo Enríquez in 1632 (*Le voile et la plume*, p. 441).

⁶ See SOR FRANCISCA DE SANTA TERESA - *Coloquios*, ed. by M. Carmen Alarcón Román. Sevilla: Arcibel, 2007, p. 125. As regards Christmas carols, see *La comida visionaria*, p. 26-27. Anne of Saint Bartholomew states in one of her autobiographies that at some moment in her life she worked at the kitchen: see BEATA ANA DE SAN BARTOLOMÉ - *Obras completas*, ed. by Julián Urkiza. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1998, p. 346 (Maestros Espirituales Cristianos 16). From now on, all my quotes of Anne come from this edition.

the Dutch, and Anne proceeds to describe their astonishment when they saw onions in their garden, whose use they ignored since they even questioned if onions were eatable. Anne also assures that Dutch nuns eat their herbs with just salt, butter, milk, and boiled eggs, and that she and her Spanish fellow nuns kindly accept these habits since they live for the time being in Antwerp⁷.

Yo les hago comer todo lo que han menester para la comida y que lo guisen, porque los guisados son diferentes las unas de las otras; las francesas todo ha de ser frío, y las flamencas no han menester eso. (...) Y cuando vieron las cebollas en nuestro jardín, me dijo: «¿Y de qué sirven éstos? ¿Es posible que las comen?». Ellas comen sus hierbas con solo sal y manteca y leche y huevos cocidos, con esto están tan contentas; y nosotras todas las queremos y mostramos buena gracia, que lo merece su virtud.

[I let them eat everything they need for their meals and cook it, because the stews are different for each of them; for the French ones everything must be cold, but the Flemish have not need for that. (...) And when they saw the onions in our garden, one said to me: «And what good are these? Is it possible that they eat them?». They eat their herbs with only salt and butter and milk and boiled eggs, with this they are so happy; and we all love them and show them good grace, which their virtue deserves.]

On the other hand, diet was important in the medical theory of humours that was still in force in the 16th century, especially to combat illnesses such as melancholy (and I will return to this issue later), and thus we can find Anne advising against eating salty or spicy foods, as all this inflame the blood⁸. Furthermore, we can also deduce from Anne's writings that Carmelites privileged herbs in their diets: she graciously points out that once that she was in great need, she went to the garden and thought that if those animals were maintained exclusively with grass, she could also do it, and accepted to graze to get through her work⁹.

⁷ *Obras completas*, p. 1444. All translations in this article are mine.

⁸ «(...) guárdese de no comer cosas saladas ni de especias, que todo eso la enciende la sangre», *Obras completas*, p. 1112. Regarding melancholy as a disease, see CARRERA, Elena - *Understanding Mental Disturbance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spain: Medical Approaches*. «Bulletin of Spanish Studies», vol. LXXXVII.8 (2010a), p. 105-136.

⁹ «Las bestias se sustentan con hierba, yo lo soy también» («The beasts are sustained by grass, so am I»), thinks Anne of St. Bartholomew (*Obras completas*, p. 644). Also, in one of her poems, the Carmelite María de San José (I shall deal with her now), acknowledges that her conventual food is poor, composed of herbs and vile things, so that the nun could humble and perfect herself (*La comida visionaria*, p. 108, n. 16).

Anne's letters to Ana de la Ascensión welcome many culinary tips spattered through hundreds of papers, where we can learn the ingredients that went into their everyday meals¹⁰. As a mode of example, here is a quotation: «Ahí le envío unas poquitas de guindas negras. Si no tiene manzanas enviarle he unas pocas para que coman cocidas, que aunque no estén bien maduras, para esto están buenas y secan con este aire» [«Here I send you a few black cherries. If you don't have apples, I've got to send you some for cooking; even if they aren't well ripe, they work fine and can dry with this air»]¹¹.

Culinary habits of the Carmelites are also shown in the *Libro de recreaciones* (Book for the Hour of Recreation) by María de San José (1548-1603; in English called Mary of Saint Joseph), also a disciple of Saint Teresa and Anne of Saint Bartholomew's companion in some of her vicissitudes. In this work, which shows us with wit and humour the daily life among Carmelites, María gives us an account of the complaints about food: in the refectory nuns are given eggs with a lot of breadcrumbs, and although it is intended to be one for each one, it does not even come to that, and some of them scrape the plate when their stomachs are faint¹². And in her *Instrucción de novicias* (Instruction for novices), María de San José promotes the vegetarian diet by comparing those who eat meat to crows and those who eat bread to angels and stressing that vegetables can make men much more beautiful and stouter than those who eat delicatessen at the royal table. This Carmelite encourages her nuns, therefore, to pay no attention to the food when it is given to them in the refectory, and to take it as if it came from angels¹³.

Certainly, sometimes it seems that they were told to do so: according to Anne, on occasions food was offered miraculously in her Carmelite convents, for it appears suddenly when the nuns are subject to severe fasts and do not even have bread. Anne recounts other episodes, such as when a couple of loaves of bread were brought to them by surprise, or when she felt ill, and someone miraculously appeared at the lathe with jam and at another time with three sweet oranges that were much craved by her¹⁴.

Expanding on the information given by Anne, the epistolary of the Augustinian nun Mariana de San José (1568-1638) show culinary customs that would

not be very different from those of the Carmelite convents of Anne's time: there is talk of legumes and vegetables mixed with oil, peaches, vinegar, melons, black hens, chestnuts, sugar pills, preserves, salmon, dogfish, conger eel, cheeses, bacon, chocolate, etc¹⁵. From these notes one can deduce that nuns of the 16th and 17th centuries had a much more favorable diet for a healthy life than friars: though there was a lack of dairy products, which caused bone problems, and of wine, which was considered detrimental to women's understanding, women eat fish rather than meat, as well as fruit, vegetables, cocoa, and sweets made of sugar with no butter¹⁶. Indeed, Anne proves that the early 17th century conventual sweets are made with sugar rather than with honey, and she even provides in one of her letters to Beatriz de la Concepción the recipe for «miel rosada» («pink honey»), which is made with plenty of sugar, and offers her fellow nun to make the dessert herself, since, though not having good sugar, she expects it to arrive soon: «Si V.R. quiere que yo se lo haga acá, dígamelo, que aunque no tengo buen azúcar, mas lo espero ahora» («If Your Reverend want me to do it for you here, tell me, since even if I don't have good sugar, I expect it soon»)¹⁷.

Knowing that these practices do not astonish us for the nuns of those times, I would like to quickly move to a more extravagant habit and thus finish this first topic with a matter that has fuelled my curiosity. María de Santo Domingo (1486-1524), a Dominican visionary who was judged by four ecclesiastical courts, was asked in one of the trials which was the amount of incense she was taking, to which she responded that three or four grains a day, on the advice of doctors and due, apparently, to her headaches¹⁸. Almost a century later, Anne of Saint Bartholomew also claims to have mixed her food with bitter and minced incense, as a sort of discipline, trying not to be seen by others¹⁹. Perhaps she was inspired by Saint Catherine of Siena, who apparently inhaled incense when very young in local churches²⁰. If plants and bread at the time could have hallucinogenic as well as curative properties, as demonstrated by Piero Camporesi, I must say that incense could also have them²¹. Incense was

¹⁵ SÁNCHEZ HERNÁNDEZ, María Leticia - *Vida cotidiana y coordenadas socio-religiosas en el epistolario de Mariana de San José (1603-1638)*. In ZARRI, Gabriella; BARANDA LETURIO, Nieves (coords.) *Memoria e comunità femminili: Spagna e Italia, secc. XV-XVII*. Firenze: Firenze University Press/ UNED, 2011, p. 99 (Biblioteca di Storia, 12).

¹⁶ I will not dwell here on the symbolic significance of meat, but it was certainly important in the choice of food.

¹⁷ *Obras completas*, p. 1505. One century before, in the times of another famous visionary woman, Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534), sweets were still made with honey, as she shows in her visions of Paradise. See SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca - *Juana de la Cruz's Heavenly Banquet: A Utopian Way of Thinking about Food*. In *Utopian Foodways: Critical Essays*, p. 221-239.

¹⁸ SASTRE VARAS, Lázaro - *Proceso de la Beata de Piedrahíta (II)*. «Archivo Dominicano», vol. 12 (1991), p. 357.

¹⁹ *Obras completas*, p. 338.

²⁰ *Holy anorexia*, p. 35.

²¹ CAMPORESI, Piero - *El pan salvaje*, trad. Margarita Vivanco. Madrid: Editorial Mondibérica, 1986, p. 160-

¹⁰ For more allusions to food, see *Obras completas*, p. 1252-1253, 1309, 1331, 1346-1347, 1396, 1399 & 1490.

¹¹ *Obras completas*, p. 1244.

¹² María DE SAN JOSÉ (SALAZAR) - *Escritos espirituales*, ed. and notes by Simeón de la Sagrada Familia. Roma: Postulación General O. C. D., 1979, p. 59. The *Book for the Hour of Recreation* has been edited by Alison Weber (also introduction and notes) and translated into English by Amanda Powell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹³ *Escritos espirituales*, p. 421-422.

¹⁴ *Obras completas*, p. 367, 644 (cf. 492).

prescribed because it had medical properties: it was considered an antiparasitic medicine for the digestive system, but its uncontrolled use could cause vomiting, dizziness, convulsions, hallucinations, sensitivity disorders and other severe affections of the central nervous system²². Since this could explain many visionary raptures, the habit of eating incense deserves a detailed study, which would take us to address the possible link between this act and the supernatural experiences lived by some women, but I will not dwell on this issue because it is not my purpose to guess the reasons of some charismatic experiences (which could be several and complex), and I want to move on now to a second topic: how Anne of Saint Bartholomew connects food with the dead body.

Indeed, Anne not only informs us of conventual diets, but also of a sort of culinary cannibalism: I will explain further. Undoubtedly, the highest aspiration of a nun is, as Anne tells her fellow nun Ana Elvira de San Angelo, to be so holy as to become a relic²³. In this regard, it must be said that Anne makes abundant references to the power of Saint Teresa's dead flesh, even in her letters²⁴. Anne leads us to the association between body, food and cooking after Teresa's death, in her *Declaración en el Proceso de beatificación de Teresa de Jesús (Declaration in the process of beatification of Teresa of Ávila)*, dated 1595. The passage where Anne speaks of the treatment of Teresa's holy body arouses a certain amazement at the relationship established between scents and tastes. Anne tells us first that Saint Teresa expires in Alba de Tormes leaving a great smell throughout the room, and this, in principle, does not surprise us because it is a well-established belief that the good odour of relics is essential to corroborate sanctity. Everyone who was in the cell felt that smell, which was so powerful that even the sauce dishes where Teresa had been given some ratatouille were contaminated with it, smelling all of them so well that left the nuns admired²⁵.

We know, then, that the last thing Teresa took was a hot ratatouille, made with poultry meat (which was given at that time to the sick), since she could only swallow liquid, but it is curious that mention is made of the mixture of the smell of ratatouille with the miraculous body odour of the saint. Shortly afterwards, Anne describes how she found the incorrupt body of the foundress after it has been buried under lime in Alba de Tormes once it has been brought to the convent of San José in Ávila. There, in a linen that had been used to cover

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²² Juana de la Cruz (see note 18 above), sometimes wore, as a penitence, bitter wormwood in her mouth, which could also have hallucinogenic qualities. See the different versions of Juana de la Cruz's hagiography in http://catalogodesantasvivas.visionarias.es/index.php/Juana_de_la_Cruz [accessed 29/06/2021].

²³ *Obras completas*, p. 1149.

²⁴ See *Obras completas*, p. 1067.

²⁵ *Obras completas*, p. 95.

her blood after her death, that blood was as fresh as if distilling, and it soaked all the cloths as if it were fresh blood. Afterwards, Anne touched Teresa's stomach with all its guts, and Teresa's head with all her hair, as when she was buried; and all that produced a great and good smell. But the uncanny part comes later, because in her declaration Anne goes from the smell of ratatouille to the colour of dates: Teresa was just missing an arm, but the flesh around this amputation was in such a good condition that it took the colour of dates²⁶.

Some days later, Anne again sees the body of Teresa in Alba de Tormes, in the ark where she was laid, but the body lacked a great amount of flesh in the back and the belly (since it has been cut), and yet there was no bad smell, but a much better one than at the beginning, with the same oil sweat the body had previously produced²⁷. Of course, oil used to flow from relics, sometimes mixed with wine as a sacred liquid: this is not a new phenomenon if we recall the relevance of holy oil for the Catholic doctrine. But after insisting on this miracle, she proceeds to expose another striking aspect: the smell coming from Teresian flesh served to find a piece of her body when this relic is lost, leaving its owner, an ill nun, in great distress²⁸.

This peculiar odour, Anne says, also spread along the roads where the body of the saint was taken, and Anne recognizes that it constantly accompanies her, as if Teresa was always besides her²⁹. But most interesting of all is that this body odour is later mixed with the smell of food, once more invading the culinary sphere. One day when Anne was very tired, she went to the kitchen and opened the oven where her fellow nuns had cooked, and it was filled with ash; and as if Teresa were there, the scent of her body in the ashes was so great that strengthened her spirit, and her tiredness went away. In fact, Anne adds, pans and everything she touched in the kitchen often smelled like the relics of Teresa's body, as if she were holding them with her hands³⁰.

Thus, Anne of Saint Bartholomew shows us that Saint Teresa, who said that in the kitchen God moves among pots, continues, after her death, to flood the discourse of sanctity with elements of cooking³¹. And she does so through the smell of her body mixed with stews and kitchen items. Finally, Anne teaches us that many of the miracles performed by a dead Teresa have to do with feeding others. In this sense, Saint Teresa is one more link in a long chain of visionary

²⁶ *Obras completas*, p. 96-97.

²⁷ *Obras completas*, p. 99.

²⁸ *Obras completas*, p. 104.

²⁹ *Obras completas*, p. 119.

³⁰ *Obras completas*, p. 359.

³¹ SANTA TERESA - *Obras completas*, ed. by Tomás Álvarez, 13ª ed. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2004, p. 898 (Maestros Espirituales Carmelitas, 1).

women who focused part of their miraculous lives on food³².

Let us now move on to the next subject of this article: how a long tradition of food metaphor appears in Anne's writings: I am referring here to milk as a sign of love and to mystical lactation or nursing visions³³. Visionary and theologians develop some images in which God / Christ-Mother breastfeeds the soul: milk can become divine food for those infant souls initiated into the faith, as stated by Saint Paul, Saint Peter, or Origen of Alexandria (and this is also one of Saint John of the Cross' arguments)³⁴. Or either milk can be used to describe the relationship of tenderness of the soul with his Creator, if we follow Saint Bernard's interpretation of a famous verse (1.2) from one of the *Song of Solomon's* versions: «thy breasts are better than wine»³⁵.

Having said this, I should point out that Anne of Saint Bartholomew is unique in her visions of breastfeeding, because she does not refer to the figure of the mother, but to that of the wet nurse. And her discourse also differs from the Humanist authors of the 16th century, who, in their interpretation of the Classics in treatises on how to govern families, advocate the breastfeeding by the mother, since outperforms the wet nurse³⁶. Thus, Anne of Saint Bartholomew's identification of the maternal figure not with God but with the mistress of novices and the prioress, calls our attention. She is joining here another explanation given by Saint Bernard in his commentary to the *Song of Solomon*, not employed by any other Spanish visionary women. Saint Bernard states that the abbot should be like a mother who teaches tenderness with authority and illustrates this through breastfeeding. For Anne, the soul of the novice receives the milk from a nursing mistress of novices, who acts as a loving wet nurse. In her text *Formación de novicias y ejercicios de piedad (Training novices and exercises of piety)*, she displays a great power of observation, as Saint Teresa does in her breastfeeding visions, relating maternal love with authority.

Ha de pensar la que tuviere este oficio, que es como un ama que cría a un niño a los pechos; y que es tan tierno, que no puede sufrir otros manjares más que leche (...), y que con paciencia le ha de ir criando de día en día, esperándole a que crezca (...) y se ha de hacer niño y hacer que llora y ríe

³² See *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*.

³³ For a thorough study of Anne of Saint Bartholomew's lactating visions, comparing them with John of the Cross's, see SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca - *La lactancia en el imaginario religioso: Los discursos diferentes de Juan de la Cruz y Anne de Bartolomé*. In HIREL, Sophie; THIELUIN PARDO, Hélène (coords.) - *La leche polifónica: Estudios sobre las nodrizas en la Península Ibérica (siglos XIII-XVI)*. Madrid: La Ergástula, 2021, p. 207-222.

³⁴ For all this see *La comida visionaria*, p. 42-65.

³⁵ Cf. *Song of Solomon*, 1.4, 4.10, 8.1. For Bernard of Clairvaux and Teresa of Ávila's explanations of this suggestive biblical verse, see p. 44-46 & 72-85. Saint Teresa introduces an erotic desire in her explanation of the verse.

³⁶ See *La comida visionaria*, p. 65-72.

*con él; y esto con más cuidado por no ser su hijo propio sino del rey a que desea tener contento y criarle su hijo (...). De esta manera ha de hacer una madre de novicias, que se ha de haber con ellas (...) con una dulzura y blandura de leche para aficionarlas a la virtud (...)*³⁷.

[The nun who has this office (mistress of novices) must think that she is like a wet nurse raising a child with her breasts, and that this child is so tender that he cannot bear other delicacies than her milk (...) and that with her patience she has to raise him day by day, waiting for him to grow (...); and she has to be like this baby herself and pretend to cry and laugh with him; and this with much care because he is not her son but that of the king whom she desires to make happy while raising his child (...). A mistress of novices must behave in this way, she must behave with these souls (...) with such a sweetness and softness of milk to make them fond of virtue (...).

Anne of Saint Bartholomew, again, in her work on the *Noticias sobre los comienzos del Carmelo teresiano (On the beginnings of the Teresian Carmel)*, draws the figure of a prioress Saint Teresa as the wet nurse who gives her milk for the nuns.

*En este recato las va criando nuestra madre, y ellas, las que hasta aquí han venido, son escogidas de la mano de Dios. Y así como a un niño que conforme a la leche que mama del ama va recibiendo las fuerzas y la salud o enfermedad conforme a la que ella tiene, así a estos ángeles se les va imprimiendo lo que ven como si no hubieran visto ni entendido otra cosa sino que ahora salían al mundo*³⁸.

[Our mother raises the nuns in this modesty, and they, those who have come here, are chosen by the hand of God. And as a child who with the milk of her wet nurse receives the strength and health or disease which she happens to have, so these angels are imprinted with what they see as if they had not seen or understood anything but that they were now born.]

Likewise, speaking of Saint Paul's virtues and the attention he devoted to his disciples in his letters of encouragement, Anne uses the same image to speak of

³⁷ *Obras completas*, p. 708.

³⁸ *Obras completas*, p. 149.

love connected with authority, as if Saint Paul was a mother breastfeeding his children in order to help them grow: «Que como si fuera una madre que trae a sus niños a los pechos dándoles su leche para que crezcan, así lo hacía [Saint Paul] con sus discípulos» («As if he were a mother bringing her children to her breasts and giving them her milk so that they may grow, so he did with his disciples»)³⁹. Interestingly, milk for Anne is always related to spiritual growth, as in the case of Saint Paul, Saint Peter, Origen, or John of the Cross, but she does never refer to the famous image of the Virgin of the Milk. Although Anne has visions of Mary with Child, breastfeeding does not appear in them, and she scarcely refers to a baby Jesus, preferring, as Saint Teresa, the adult Christ, who on the cross says to her: «No me busques más niño» («Seek me no more as child»), and who offers her both drink and nourishment through his wounds⁴⁰. Finally, this Carmelite also shows us her belief in the miraculous power of milk: in her *Conferencias espirituales (Spiritual Lectures)*, speaking of Henry Suso, she reminds us of a famous episode in which «Nuestra Señora le vino a echar unas gotas de leche sobre la lengua porque se ahogaba» («Our Lady went on to pour a few drops of milk on his tongue when he was choking»)⁴¹. A Virgin mother whom she addresses scarcely, but who is nevertheless present in her prayers, as seen in her *Meditaciones sobre el camino de Cristo (Meditations on the Path of Christ)*: «y después de engendrado de vuestras entrañas y nacido a este mundo, había de mamar vuestra leche y le habíais de traer en vuestros brazos, tan unido a vos como parecido» («and after he was begotten of your womb and born into this world, he was to suckle your milk and you were to bring him in your arms, as united to you as he resembled you»)⁴².

Summarizing, she distances herself from Teresa of Ávila, who addresses breastfeeding from the contemplation of a maternal God. Anne, as we have seen, aligns her lactating pictures with the Cistercian image of a nursing abbot, establishing, thus, a new concept of authority when she considers the mistress of novices or the prioress as a wet nurse of her sisters. Perhaps the relevance given

³⁹ *Obras completas*, p. 673.

⁴⁰ *Obras completas*, p. 337. For visions of Mary with Jesus see p. 329, 423, 426, 566 & 581; for Christ's quotation, see p. 337. For Christ offering nourishment through his wounds, see p. 618 & 619. The differentiation between Christ as a child and Christ as an adult is made explicit in a festivity near Christmas Eve, when Anne asks while adoring Jesus' wounds, «Ahora, Señor, venis niño; y Vos, en la cruz. ¿qué haré de veros? ¿Siempre así, o niño?» («Now, Lord, you come as a child; and You, on the cross. How shall I see you? Always like this, or as a child?») (p. 426; cf. 566). On the other hand, Anne uses another image of the *Song of Solomon* to refer to Christ's blood from his wounds as drink: «Miren que anda Su Majestad (...) convidando a unas y a otras a que entren en su cueva del vino adobado de sus manzanas, que es la sangre preciosa de sus llagas» («Look that His Majesty walks (...) inviting some souls and others to enter into his cave of wine marinated with apples, which is the precious blood of his wounds») (p. 617-618).

⁴¹ *Obras completas*, p. 669.

⁴² *Obras completas*, p. 728.

to the prioress can be framed in terms of Anne's desire to present Teresa as a spiritual mother above other authority.⁴³

Let us now turn to the third topic that we are dealing with here: the fasting of visionary women, which, when taken to extremities, has led to the expression «holy anorexia», coined by Rudolph Bell to explain cases like that of Catherine of Siena. Anne of Saint Bartholomew's writings are relevant since they give us arguments for not classifying Saint Teresa as anorexic, as some previous studies have done. If in analysing the behaviour of the visionary María Vela y Cueto (1561-1617) in my book *La comida visionaria*, I defended that her obsession with food and her tricks to hide it (bordering on deceit) could correspond to an anorexic personality, the same cannot be said for Saint Teresa or Anne of Saint Bartholomew⁴⁴.

In her text *Últimos años de la Madre Teresa de Jesús (The last years of Mother Teresa of Ávila)*, and, to a lesser extent, in her autobiographies, Anne shows us a late Teresa who is granted any culinary desire, giving us a detailed account of what Teresa ate during her last days⁴⁵. As Anne justifies eating to give strength to the body in her *Autobiography*, her spiritual teacher, Teresa of Ávila, recognizes her need for food to overcome prostration, which both interpret as caused by fasting or a deficient diet⁴⁶. Even Christ himself feeds Teresa, telling her, according to Anne of Saint Bartholomew: «Come, hija, que ya veo que pasas mucho; toma ánimo, que no puede ser menos» («Come, daughter, I see that you are going through a lot; take courage, it cannot be less»), thereby showing that in times of weakness (in this case caused by the discouragement caused by the Nuncio chasing the Discalced) what helps is to eat, even if it is a slice of bread⁴⁷. Thus, in one of the trips made with Saint Teresa, Anne tries every effort to find decent food (for example, some eggs), and she complains of not even being able

⁴³ LEWANDOWSKA, Julia - *Escritoras monjas: Autoridad y autoría en la escritura conventual femenina de los Siglo de Oro*. Madrid/ Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/ Vervuert, p. 267.

⁴⁴ See the third chapter of *La comida visionaria*, p. 109-148. See also SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca - *El caso de María Vela y Cueto: De la 'media milagrosa' al trastorno físico-mental*. In MASSIP, Francesc (ed.) *Repensar el sombrío Medioevo! Those Dark Ages Revisited: Nuevas perspectivas para el estudio de la cultura medieval y de la temprana Edad Moderna/ New Perspectives for the Study of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*. Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2014, p. 177-195. I must say that I am not convinced by approaches to this subject that tend to interpret the attitudes of visionary women as mental disorders.

⁴⁵ See especially chapter 3 of her *Autobiography* of Bologna and Antwerp. See also *Escritos espirituales*, p. 195, 198 & 366.

⁴⁶ *Obras completas*, p. 349 & 352. See also SANTA TERESA - *Obras completas*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ For the quotation, see *Obras completas*, p. 357. In this sense, I do not think Saint Teresa was anorexic, as proposed by Cristina Segura, who considers this condition as a determinant of her behavior (with the same determinism attributed for decades to her converse ancestry), framing it in a concept of anorexia as rebellion. SEGURA GRAÍÑO, Cristina - *Teresa de Jesús. Una vida sin vivir*. In MUÑOZ FERNÁNDEZ, Ángela (ed.) - *La escritura femenina. De leer a escribir II*. Madrid: Asociación Al-Mudayna, p. 131-48. See also for this subject *La comida visionaria*, p. 130-136.

to feed Teresa, as her growing weakness cannot be solved with some dry figs; the recognition of these constraints and of the need for protein is not to be found in María Vela⁴⁸.

Additionally, Anne shows that in her difficult travels the Carmelite saint is offered plenty of food, and even if she distributes it among the poor, yet she eats knowing the necessity to stay strong, although some food gives her a stomachache (for example, «las berzas cocidas con harta cebolla» («cabbage cooked with lots of onions»)⁴⁹. However, sometimes the distribution of food as an act of charity may contribute to some degree of deception. Anne recognizes once to her confessor that she lied to her brothers when she said that she ate; instead, she was choosing to substitute the feeding of her body for the feeding of her soul and by doing so to deliver her food to the poor⁵⁰. In any case, fasting to feed others is not a possible equation in anorexics like María Vela: in her case, fasting has not the purpose of feeding the other.

Finally, to conclude this subject, I should say that sometimes fasting was associated with the disease of melancholy, a sort of black bile which was manifested often by a lack of appetite for food: the proliferation of this disease in the 16th and 17th centuries led to mistrust, affecting even Teresa of Ávila⁵¹. In the 16th century there was a debate about whether the capacity for visions and prophecy of certain people could be attributed to black bile, although in the 17th century melancholy is taken more as a weakness than as a pathology⁵². Somehow, this is an issue that worries Anne, who comments, in several of her letters from Antwerp, on Angélique du St.-Esprit's malady, without specifying whether she considers it as melancholy⁵³. But she might refer to melancholy when in her second letter on this subject she speaks of her scruples at learning that this young nun neither sleeps nor is given the Eucharist, for she cannot swallow water or any substance, and that Angélique suffers intermittent fevers that are considered supernatural and miraculous. Anne points out: «Podrá ser que sea, mas yo soy mala y pecadora y no entiendo caminos trasordinarios» («It may be, but I'm bad and sinful since I don't understand these extraordinary ways»)⁵⁴. That is, Anne distrust Angélique du St.-Esprit's extreme fasting, and this should come as no surprise after what we have seen previously.

⁴⁸ See *Obras completas*, p. 66 & 352. This attitude also contrasts with the example given by Margaret of Cortona, a holy anorexic saint who once felt guilty for having taken cooked figs (*Holy anorexia*, p. 100).

⁴⁹ *Obras completas*, p. 61 & 66.

⁵⁰ *Obras completas*, p. 340.

⁵¹ See CARRERA, Elena - *Madness and Melancholy in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Spain: New Evidence, New Approaches*. «Bulletin of Spanish Studies», vol. LXXXVII.8 (2010b), p. 1-15.

⁵² *Madness and Melancholy*, p. 5.

⁵³ See *Obras completas*, p. 1414, 1420 & 1581.

⁵⁴ *Obras completas*, p. 1420.

To end this article, I would like to summarize all the observations gathered here. From all these topics I have discussed we can draw some conclusions that may affect our understanding of some of the issues outlined at the beginning of my work: food as intercultural conversation and form of sociability (through Anne's letters); utopia, food and gender (regarding Anne's conception of milking the soul); dystopia, food disorders and transgressions (through Anne's view of the cannibalism of relics); and food ethics and utopian diets (with regards to holy fasting).

Illustrating this, I may also state that: first, Anne of Saint Bartholomew describes the diets of her convents, which provide valuable information about food and how to cook it, conceiving this activity as a way of sociability through her letters. In addition, she speaks of food in a utopian way through its contact with a holy dead body, and through milk, which provides wisdom and learning within female communities, relating authority to love. Third, Anne treats food disorders through her approach to fasting in convents, rejecting extremes that could affect the health and proper functioning of the body (thus becoming transgressions), although accepting them when eating incense, which she hides from others. All in all, unlike some fellow visionaries and nuns of her time, Anne of Saint Bartholomew generally has a positive ethic of eating, without giving up, I should say, a utopian meal that she knows waits for her in Heaven.

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