

Women and Spaces of Transgression in Early Modern Valencia

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Introduction

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the city of Valencia was the largest city in the peninsular territories of the Crown of Aragon and experienced great economic prosperity and cultural vitality, as well as profound social inequalities and political tensions. This article examines the social scenarios of the early modern city by tracing those urban spaces in which everyday reality most clearly exceeded the precepts of a moral literature that preached domestic retreat to women and reserved for men the right to walk the streets and squares and engage in public activity in the sphere of business. This rigid division never existed as such in social practices. However, as a prescriptive ideal, it profoundly conditioned the perspective of civil and religious authorities, as revealed by available historical sources, many of them produced by urban courts of justice (Escobedo 2019).

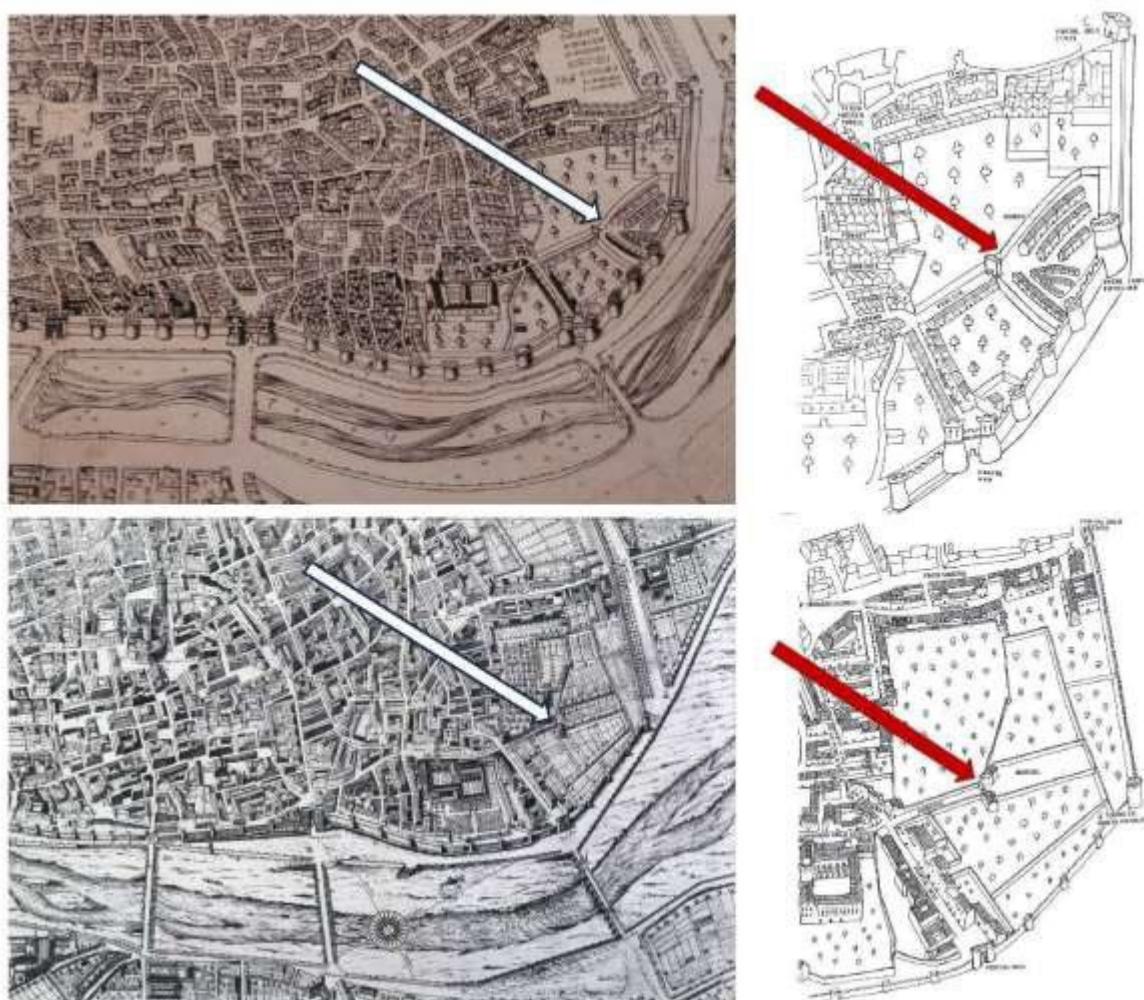
In this sense, when we use the concept of transgression, we are not referring to a deliberate desire on the part of individuals to rebel against the rules, but rather to the view and judgement of the institutions responsible for scrutinising behaviour and eventually punishing disturbances of the peace. From this perspective, in the first section of the article we will examine the spaces where venal sexuality was practised and its regulation; in the second and third sections, we will deal with those spaces of confinement (from houses of repentance to prisons) where women considered guilty of crimes were indoctrinated or imprisoned, while in the fourth and final section we will review the public sphere of the market where female vendors engaged in small-scale trade. In all cases, we are interested in the distribution of these activities on the urban map and how they were understood in terms of gender, since the presence of women in these public spaces was both commonplace and morally suspect.

Spaces of female transgression: the urban faces of prostitution

If we are to believe their opinions, one of the attractions of the city for foreigners such as Nikolaus von Popplau (1485), Hyeronimus Münzer (1494), Antoine de Lalaing (1501) and Johann M. Warschitz (1520), who visited Valencia between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (García 1999, Diago 2023, 477), was its brothel. Oblivious to the sordidness, misery and exploitation suffered by the women confined there, travellers who entered the brothel in search of pleasure and distraction not only fuelled a carnal trade that had been practised in a regulated manner since the early fourteenth century, but also contributed to the city's boom and its reputation as a cosmopolitan emporium. *La pobla de les fembres pecadrius*, or simply *el públic*, as the brothel was called, was a space of tolerated transgression enclosed by a wall, within which prostitution was practised in accordance with detailed regulations enforced by the municipal authorities (Graullera 1980, 1990, 2006). Although no one was proud of this trade except its direct beneficiaries, especially pimps and innkeepers, it was not strongly condemned either, in perfect harmony with the old principle of the 'lesser evil', according to which it was preferable, given that its prohibition was ineffective, to institutionalise prostitution rather than encourage its secret practice in an attempt to eradicate it from the streets and squares (Jiménez 1994). That is why, in criminal records and in many court cases of the time, women appear to be involved in crimes against order and honesty related to prostitution. The abundant references to brothels and other spaces that competed with or complemented them, such as hostels, taverns,

inns, gardens, discreet corners or private houses, prove that the sex trade was the female transgression that caused the greatest concern among the authorities in Valencia.¹

Although the urban space of venal sex, whether legal or clandestine, can be precisely located during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from the seventeenth century onwards, its nerve centre, the brothel, underwent a process of decline, which would lead to its definitive closure at the end of the century. One need only compare the map of Valencia drawn by Antonio Mancelli in 1608 with that of Tomás Vicente Tosca from 1704 to see the disappearance of houses and hostels in the city brothel. By the early eighteenth century, prostitution had become an ordinary phenomenon, difficult for historians to unravel, as the bodies that had previously punished its irregular practice were dissolved after Philip V's victory in the War of Succession and the abolition of the political institutions of the Kingdom of Valencia, which had been in operation since the dynastic union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon at the end of the fifteenth century and during the reigns of the Habsburg monarchs. As a result, in contrast to the thousands of reports we have on the phenomenon of prostitution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Guillot 2015), only a few dozen ordinary criminal proceedings after 1707 have been preserved (Guereña 1995, Catalá-Urzainqui 2011).²



Top left: fragment of the map (1608) of the city of Valencia by cartographer Antonio Mancelli (1575–1645?) showing the location of the brothel or *Pobla*.

Top right: schematic representation of the same fragment and enclave drawn by Vicente Graullera Sanz (2006)
Bottom left: fragment of the map (1705) of the city of Valencia by mathematician Tomás Vicente Tosca (1651–1723) showing the location of the brothel or *Pobla*.

Bottom right: schematic representation of the same fragment and enclave drawn by Vicente Graullera Sanz (2006).

¹ Archivo del Reino de Valencia (ARV), Maestre Racional, Justicia Criminal, 6113 (1479) a 6437 (1704).

² See, for instance, ARV, Escribanías de Cámara, 1713, 141; 1719, 187 and 1737, 123.

On another note, it should be borne in mind that urban areas of female transgression, including squares and markets where women committed fraud and theft, were closely linked to other areas that could be considered spaces for contrition, redemption, seclusion and correction. The council tolerated, monitored and even benefited financially from the daily pulse of the brothel, but, to a lesser extent, it also closed it on solemn occasions, took care of the religious education of prostitutes and sometimes helped them to start a new life, either as legitimately married women or as residents and nuns of the *Casa-Convento de San Gregorio* or the *Arrepentidas* [The House and Convent of Repentant Women of St Gregory] (Vidal 2001). Only a few lucky ones, due to their youth, character, beauty or other unique trait, managed to achieve a certain degree of independence. The rest, some more than others, were painfully tied to moneylenders, pimps, innkeepers or abusive husbands.

The records of the criminal justice of Valencia show that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were guilty of only a quarter of the crimes punished, very few of which were violent or property-related. On the contrary, they were victims of more than half of the extortions, assaults and crimes that took place in the city during those two hundred years. Among the offences committed by women, prostitution, especially clandestine prostitution, was the main reason why they were fined by the court and sometimes whipped by the executioner (Pérez 1991a). Brothel prostitutes did not always differ from those who roamed the streets in search of clients. Sometimes, necessity or debts owed to their protectors forced them to share the stage with the *dones cantoneres* [streetwalkers]. The urban distribution of illegal prostitution did not undergo major changes. It coincided with uninhabited thoroughfares, where it was easy to find a garden or some hiding place. Night-time and the absence of lighting were these women's best allies. A few managed to take their clients to an inn, a house or a pre-arranged room, but most had no choice but to endure, in addition to the usual abuse, the inclement weather.

The phenomenon did not affect the entire city centre. In the oldest and most noble part of Valencia, in the streets and squares surrounding the town hall, the headquarters of the Provincial Council, the cathedral and the palaces and residences of the nobility, women were hardly ever seen hanging around pedestrians. On the other hand, in the vicinity of the city walls and their towers and turrets, some of the large squares, such as Predicadores, main roads such as Calle de San Vicente, the area around the convent of San Francisco, and favourable enclaves such as Calle de las Barcas and Calle del *Bordellet dels Negres* [the Negros brothel] in the parish of San Andrés, or the so-called towers of Macià Martí and Calle del *Bany d'en Lázzer* [Lazarus' bath] in the parish of San Martín, as well as the area adjacent to the brothel, were the preferred locations for prostitutes and their clients. Throughout the sixteenth century, numerous women were fined for practicing prostitution in hostels, inns and taverns outside the brothel. More than twenty such establishments are repeatedly mentioned in the archives of the criminal justice: the one in Plaza de Serranos, the *Gamell* hostel, the *Izquierdo* hostel, the one behind the convent of Las Magdalenas, the "two-door" hostel, the San Francisco hostel, the "lantern" hostel, the *Conejero* hostel, and so on. However, during the seventeenth century, clandestine prostitution began to gradually disappear from the records, partly because the local authorities, lacking personnel and resources, concentrated on the repression of crimes that provided greater income through the imposition of financial penalties, losing interest in the unregulated practice of prostitution, but also because the activity itself went into decline (Pérez 1991b).

Now, if prostitution had a distinctive space in Valencia, it was that of the *pobla de les fembres pecadrius* [the village of sinful women] or *fembres àvols* [bad women], a large walled enclosure within the parish of Santa Cruz, which could only be accessed by crossing the long street that led to a gate guarded by the brothel's manager, where the heads of recently executed criminals were sometimes displayed. According to the accounts that have come down to us, in order to enter, it was necessary to pay a small amount of money, which entitled the visitor to a drink. The remaining services had to be paid for separately. Among them, sex was the main

one, but not the only one. Inside the brothel, one could eat and drink, as well as gamble. Shows were offered, the vihuela and flute were played, there was singing, and raffles and lotteries of all kinds took place. Thanks to Antonio Mancelli's map (1608), it is possible to appreciate the layout and dimensions of this ghetto where women who engaged in prostitution were theoretically forced to live in seclusion: three streets with inns or hostels parallel to the wall, another perpendicular to it at the western end, and between these, three converging streets with small houses where the wealthier prostitutes could attend to their clients. Most of the buildings in the brothel were owned by private owners, who rented them to innkeepers and prostitutes (Pérez 1990).

The fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century were the most prosperous period for brothels in Valencia. In the 1520s, there were around 25 hostels and some 200 women available to visitors. Among the most famous establishments were that of Leonor Vives, where more than thirty women worked as prostitutes, that of Diego de Ureña, also known as 'Cardero' and 'Sevillano' [from Seville], that of Caterina Vitoria, alias 'la Sarda' [the Sardinian woman], and those of Joan Jordi and Ana Caterina Navarro, each with more than twenty prostitutes (Pérez 1999). By 1580, the number of establishments had fallen to nine, and by the early seventeenth century, only two remained. During his visit to Valencia in 1660, the French chevalier Des Essarts did not write a single word about the brothel: he only referred to a building, the 'holy house', which was small and divided into small rooms where the prostitutes met their clients and reported to their pimps.

Spaces of contrition, repentance, redemption and retreat

The policy of controlling and punishing prostitution, whether legal or clandestine, implemented by the city of Valencia was counterbalanced by a strategy aimed at the repentance and redemption of prostitutes. To implement this strategy, the city council enlisted the collaboration of private individuals, brotherhoods, religious orders and figures, as well as the support and supervision of the highest authorities in the diocese, especially during the time of Juan de Ribera, Archbishop of Valencia between 1569 and 1611 (Ehlers 2006). We do not know in detail how the women were transferred from the brothel to the temples where they were forced to follow the most solemn festivities, including the celebrations in honour of the Virgin Mary. For some time after their activity was suspended, prostitutes under municipal protection received religious instruction at the chapel of Santa Lucía – which still exists and can be visited – built in 1276 at the behest of Constance of Sicily in a sparsely populated area within the city walls, very close to the site where the Hospital de los Inocentes would be built at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and, in 1512, the General Hospital, in the popular parish of San Martín.

The chapel remained in use until 1345, when Na Soriana, a pious Franciscan tertiary penitent, founded, with the support of the council, the Casa de las Arrepentidas de San Gregorio Magno [House of the Repentant Women of St. Gregory the Great], where she proposed to live "together with the sinful women whom she, with God's help, will try to turn away from sin". The aim was to take advantage of the forced confinement of Holy Week to persuade prostitutes to leave the brothel and enter the institution, either permanently or until a man married one of them, in exchange for a dowry from the municipality. The foundation enjoyed significant financial and institutional contributions from the mid-fourteenth century onwards. Before Juan de Ribera was ordained as prelate of Valencia in 1569, it had a chapel dedicated to two saints belonging to the tradition of the 'repentant', Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary of Egypt, and allocated a municipal donation of thirty pounds a year to the care of six women (Seguí 2015).

The building was connected to others on the block between San Vicente and Virgen María de Gracia streets. In 1600, on the initiative of the Discalced Carmelite Francisco del Niño Jesús and with the support of Archbishop Ribera, the institution was transformed into the Convent of the Repentant Women of St. Gregory the Great. A typically post-Tridentine refoundation, in line with the monastic standardisation of other houses of penitents and recluse

women, it received substantial financial aid, thanks to which it was able to acquire the surrounding houses and become the magnificent building with two cloisters, one for inmates and one for the temporary confinement of prostitutes, which can be seen in Father Tomás Vicente Tosca's plan of 1704. Its first constitutions date back to 1601. Apart from the patronage and administration of the community, the female authorities of San Gregorio included the mother superior, the teacher, and the gatekeeper, who were responsible for the governance and discipline of the residents. In 1617, the number of nuns rose to 34, of whom 30 had just taken their vows that same year. Although abused wives were admitted to similar institutions, the centre's regulations insisted on repentance as a distinguishing factor: "it being clear and evident that they leave the world, and not the world them", which is why they refused admission to women who were ill, pregnant, under 12, or over 45 years of age. Those who wished to remain confined had only two options: religious profession or marriage (Vidal 2001, Seguí 2015).

The disappearance of brothels at the end of the seventeenth century did not alter the purpose or modus operandi of the Convent House, which continued to admit women who wished to abandon prostitution, although it sometimes also served as a reformatory for troubled women locked up there by their guardians or families. The institution's constitution was reformed in 1742 and 1744. Thanks to a document from 1793, we know that the "repentant sisters" had been spinning yarn with spinning wheels for some time to contribute to their livelihood. In the nineteenth century, the town council ceded the Convent House to a community of nuns who worshipped the Mother Sacrament, but at the end of the century, the building was converted into a women's prison and demolished in 1913 (Montoya 2020).

Prison and punishment spaces

Until 1651, when Archbishop Pedro de Urbina was viceroy, the Galera, a women's prison established at the Quart gate, began operating (Pingarrón 2007). It was modelled on the '*casas galera*' (galley houses) that had been built in Valladolid and Madrid at the beginning of the century to punish and reform 'evil women' (Martínez 2002, Jiménez 2014). In Valencia, all prisoners, regardless of sex, were sent to the same prison facilities, which does not mean that they shared the same spaces. The authorities were well aware of the need to ensure that women had their own prison or separate facilities from men. The *fueros* (charters) stipulated this: "*estiga presa [la dona] en altra part que los hòmens*" ["the woman shall be imprisoned in a different place from the men"], which is why, since the fourteenth century, men and women were kept in separate departments, but equally unhealthy and gloomy, in the city's house or prison, soon known as the commune (Graullera 1982, Serna 1990). However, over time, the increase in the number of prisoners, despite the precautionary and non-punitive nature of the prison, and the shortcomings of the building, which the construction of new rooms did not alleviate, led to increasingly frequent situations of overcrowding and, as a result, abuse against female prisoners. An example of this is the trial that began in 1554 against the jailer Bartolomé Escales for extorting the poorest prisoners and allowing his assistant to enter the women's cell and sexually assault them.³

The fire that devastated the prison in 1586, started by inmates attempting to escape (Escartí-Ribera 2019), led to the prisoners being distributed among several different facilities: the Serranos towers, reserved for nobles and dangerous criminals; the San Narciso prison, named after the brotherhood of the same name in whose old building and other nearby buildings it was installed, intended for commoners, both men and women; and, from 1626 onwards, the Quart towers, which had already been used to house prisoners temporarily (Pingarrón 2007).

A perfect connoisseur of the Valencian prison world, the jurist Tomás Cerdán de Tallada outlined in his *Visita de la cárcel y de los presos* (1574) a design for a penitentiary institution with which he sought to avoid the deficiencies and discomforts of the city's prisons. In 1604, when he published an expanded version of the text, he still considered them "harsher than the

³ ARV, Real Audiencia, Procesos, Parte Tercera, Apéndice, 1311 bis.

baths [prisons] of Algiers". In its pages, he addresses the imprisonment of women, which in the legislation of the Kingdom of Valencia was limited to serious crimes, in order to avoid problems of cohabitation between male and female inmates, although it was common to "throw women in jail" in criminal cases. However, as the Council of Trent prohibited, under excommunication, the confinement in convents of those who did not wish to take vows (which prevented them from continuing to be used to guard suspicious or convicted women), it became necessary to create prison spaces for women that were separate from those for men, with no possibility of communication. Not only that, but in Cerdán's opinion, it was necessary to separate decent women who were imprisoned for any misfortune or as a result of malicious accusations from those who led dishonest lives, so that they would not leave prison "as shameless as those in the public" (Canet, 2008, 2008a).

The project promoted in the middle of the century by Archbishop-Viceroy Urbina to create a prison-galley for "lost" women in the towers of Quart is in line with Cerdán's ideas, although the influence on the prelate of the writings of the nun Magdalena de San Jerónimo, founder of the first "galleys" for "vagrant, thieving, pimping and other similar" women in Castile, is undoubtedly more evident (Barbeito 1991). It is no coincidence that one of the first measures he took shortly after being appointed viceroy in 1650 was to issue a decree expelling prostitutes from the city. However, although he obtained the transfer of the Quart gate to house the prison, Urbina was left to finance its maintenance alone. Less than a decade after the opening of this women's prison, in 1658, the same year that Urbina moved to Seville to take up his new post, the local authorities and the new viceroy, the Count of Oropesa, recognised that the only difference between that prison and those of San Narciso or Serranos was "the horror that the title of Galera inspires" (Graullera 1982).



Detail of the map of the city of Valencia by Tomás Vicente Tosca (1704). Created by the authors based on a public domain image. Map legend: 1. Brothel; 2. House of the Repentant Women of St. Gregory the Great; 3. La Galera-Quart towers; 4. La Comuna-City Hall; 5. Serranos Prison; 6. San Narciso Prison; 7. Market Square.

One of the duties of the officers who ran the prisons was to register the individuals who entered prison, recording the date, the circumstances of their arrest, and the court that had ordered it. Although very few records of this kind have been preserved, two notable facts can be inferred from them: that the number of women imprisoned was, as might be expected, much lower than that of men; and that, despite the provisions of the *furs* (the legislation of the Kingdom of Valencia), Cerdán was correct in stating that it was common practice in the kingdom to send women accused of minor crimes to prison (Pérez Marcos 2005). This reality also emerges in proceedings brought against women guilty of crimes such as theft, prostitution, or vagrancy, which were usually punished with fines, banishment, or both.

Those convicted of heinous crimes faced death. Of the nearly 3.000 people executed in Valencia between 1450 and 1700 for which there is documentary evidence, just over a tenth, 318, were women. However, excluding those burned for heresy (most of them before 1533, accused of being Jewish converts), the number of women who died by execution is reduced to 40: seventeen in the second half of the fifth century, thirteen throughout the sixteenth century, and ten in the seventeenth century. Only six suffered aggravated punishment, that is, their bodies were dismembered after they were hanged, in all cases except one, for parricide. In fact, this crime stands out above the others as a reason for sentencing, given that twelve women were sent to the scaffold for killing their husbands violently or deliberately, another for killing a daughter, and one for killing her daughter-in-law. Famous executions were those of Leonor Badal, hanged, dragged and quartered in 1573 for the murder of her husband, the notary Josep Xindarra; Barbara Ferri, who is said to have bewitched her first husband and was found guilty of killing her second husband with a sword thrust in 1630; and María Escobedo in 1698, whose ascent to the gallows attracted such crowds of spectators to the market that they overflowed into the adjacent streets (Pérez-Catalá 1998, Catalá-Pérez 2000, 2021).

Until the early eighteenth century, most executions took place in the Market Square, leaving aside the *autos-da-fé*, whose execution rituals were different and required isolated locations, preferably the burning ground under the Trinity Bridge, among other things, because of the danger of the pyres catching fire in the nearby houses. Only a few took place on mobile gallows in other areas of the city, such as the squares of Santa Catalina and Serranos, the streets of La Nave and San Vicente, and the General Hospital. The Plaza de la Seo [Cathedral Square] was the setting par excellence for deaths by decapitation or beheading, reserved for the privileged classes. There were also exceptional cases in which the body of an executed person was then taken to the burning ground. This happened in 1698 with María Escobedo; after she was garrotted in the market, her body was transported to the cathedral square and finally to the stretch of the Turia River known as the Rambla, where it was incinerated (Catalá-Pérez 2022).

Spaces for fraud and theft: the market

The streets and squares of Valencia were the scene of various types of female transgressions, as has been made clear. Among them, the market square stood out as a public space par excellence and the commercial heart of the city, where a multitude of women carried out their work and their lives, involved in various economic activities, among which the food circuits were particularly notable (Fontaine 2014, Montenach 2009). Despite the modest and, in many cases, marginal nature of many of them, their economic role was crucial to the city's daily economy (Muñoz 2023). This is not an exception, but part of a structural reality evident in European cities in medieval and early modern times (Wiesner 1981, Thwaites 1984, Rial 1995, Ogilvie 2003, Pennington 2015). Despite this, it is challenging to address this social fact due to the underrepresentation of women in archival sources. The everyday and, at times, informal nature of their work means that it is not always reflected in the documentation.

However, using an analytical methodology that prioritises history from below, a number of historical references emerge that highlight the socio-economic relevance of women in pre-industrial Valencia, as well as their participation in everyday transgressions in the market space, such as theft and fraud.

The constant redefinition of the boundaries between what was lawful and unlawful in the regulation of market operations in early modern Valencia was reflected in a large body of municipal ordinances, which were superimposed over the centuries in an attempt to adapt, control, and shape (with little success) a dynamic and changing socio-economic reality in which women and men participated and collaborated indiscriminately. The repetition of provisions in municipal sources of an institutional nature highlights the tension between the regulatory framework, which is always open to interpretation and subject to negotiation and resistance, and social reality. The book *Establiments e capítols de la ciutat de València* (1500-1660) reflects this process, particularly in relation to urban supply and the market. Through this regulatory source, we have access to a wide range of ordinances that refer to the fraudulent activity of female vendors, resellers, hawkers, and other women in the market, indicating that their participation was not marginal but rather an integral part of these commercial circuits.

The city council tried, by various means, to control the excesses and abuses that were frequently committed in the market square. The resale of foodstuffs (mainly fruit and vegetables, but also eggs, chickens, partridges, and other poultry, among other provisions) was one of the main problems that, in their eyes, disrupted the common good and harmed the public interest and that of consumers. In this regard, on 15 July 1518, female resellers were identified as the main offenders of the rule, who "under the pretext of selling for others, all resellers sell to the detriment of the said city and republic".⁴ References to fraud and transgressions committed by women were frequent, with women being accused of selling without a licence, tampering with weights in their favour, or contravening the pre-established schedules and spaces for their activity. For all these reasons, they were targeted by the court of the *Mustassaf* or Almotacén, whose powers were assumed by the *Tribunal del Repeso* after the *Nueva Planta* Decrees at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁵ Despite political efforts, the recurrence of these resale practices (not exclusively female) indicates their structural nature, to the point that authorities had to accept the need for this commercial redistribution activity as a necessary evil for the city of Valencia's food supply chains (Muñoz 2020). By the eighteenth century, the *autos de buen gobierno* (decrees of good government) attempted to systematise the regulation of the Valencian market from different angles, allowing us to glimpse the continued presence of women in its operation and the impunity with which contraventions and abuses were committed by sellers (both men and women), so that "every day new ways are invented to defraud the people and make food more expensive".⁶

Despite the dispersion of the funds generated by the institutions responsible for regulating the market (the *Mustassaf* court until 1707 and the *Repeso* court during the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century), the documentation generated reflects the role played by women in urban markets in modern Valencia, seen as spaces of opportunity in which to carry out not only economic activities, both legal and illegal, that reinforced the domestic economy, but also to deploy family survival strategies that allowed them to earn a living through their extensive experience in the markets (De Vries 1994, Fontaine 2012).

The few records of penalties imposed by the *mustassaf* of the city of Valencia that have been preserved or located reflect the most common illegal practices and frauds that took place in the main square and its surroundings, allowing us to gain an insight into the functioning of the everyday economy of the markets, of which these small but constant female transgressions

⁴ Archivo Histórico Municipal de Valencia (AHMV), C-1, 15/07/1518.

⁵ The *Mustassaf* was the municipal official responsible for controlling markets, weights and measures in the cities of the Crown of Aragon during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period (Colom 1953).

⁶ AHMV, C-1, f. 146r. Ordinance on resellers of 10 December 1552.

were a part. As in criminal justice, these records also corroborate a lower proportion of punishments for women, which usually fluctuated between 20-25% of the total penalties imposed by this court, although the percentage varied depending on the time of year (it was generally higher in spring and summer, given women's specialisation in the sale of fruit and vegetables) and the attention or rigour of the councillors or commissioners when it came to monitoring certain activities and imposing sanctions. It would be impossible to establish a definitive typology of fraud, but the most frequent cases are those involving alterations in weights and measures, price speculation, possible damage to public health, trading without a licence, or failure to observe the time and space limits set by the city.

It is striking that the types of female transgressions reflected in the documentation hardly changed over the centuries, highlighting the centrality and structural functionality of the Valencia market as a key economic and social space within the pre-industrial urban economy (García Marsilla 1993). These were common offenses arising from fraud or minor crimes, but they were widespread, highlighting the institutions' inability to impose their authority effectively. However, there was a noticeable evolution in the social profile of the women punished as the city developed, and also as a result of the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609. In the mid-sixteenth century, it was not unusual for the Moorish population from towns near Valencia to participate in urban supply, among whom we can distinguish some women. This is the case of Anna "la Negra" [the Black], who was reported for selling without a licence on 3 December 1560. However, most of the women present in the market came from the city or its particular contribution (territory subject to the city's jurisdiction). They were engaged in a wide range of activities, among which the trade of reseller stood out, but also fishermen, egg sellers, bakers, shopkeepers and tavern keepers, among others. Some of these women were widows, but most were married, and in some cases, there were also maids or servants, which highlights the diversity of the vendors' personal situations and the importance of family ties in integrating into the market through pre-established social networks that sometimes went back generations. However, by the seventeenth century, this social and occupational heterogeneity had diminished considerably, with a progressive trend towards greater female specialisation in the sale and resale of foodstuffs, within the prevailing social modesty among these vendors and resellers.

In general, women did not work (or commit crimes) alone, but carried out their work based on collaborative strategies, which usually relied on family or personal ties. The desire to obtain greater profits from their work was the main cause underlying most of these petty crimes, which took advantage of loopholes in municipal ordinances or directly exploited the habitual impunity towards this type of behaviour. The authorities' actions were generally hampered by the crowds and disorder in the market, as well as by the presence of minors (usually the daughters and sons of the vendors) who warned of the authorities' arrival in the square, alerting potential offenders. Recidivism is another characteristic associated with these female transgressions, as evidenced by the repetition of women's names on the lists of penalties (which were generally of little financial value and did not mean imprisonment, although they did involve the seizure and loss of the goods for sale). This female contumacy is not surprising, considering that these women's earnings were often essential to the family's livelihood, sometimes even the main source of income, as was often argued in applications for licences to sell or resell in the market.

We do not have many accounts of everyday life in Valencia's Market Square, especially regarding women, although it is clear that it was once a place of constant confrontation and social tension. Their presence in the judicial records of the Government of Valencia was relatively frequent, in the form of lawsuits of a very diverse nature (Baixaulli 2022). However, the conflict did not always originate between individuals, but sometimes involved collective opposition to the presence of women in certain work or commercial spaces. Various Valencian guilds, through their ordinances, regulated or expressly prohibited the sale of their products on the city's streets. This was the case of the turners' guild in 1606, which expressly prohibited "*les*

mullers, filles o criades del mestre de dit offici, o altres qualsevol dones" [the wives, daughters or maids of the master of said guild, or any other women] from setting up stalls in the market, justifying this measure on the grounds of the possible scandals or offences against God that might result from it. Similarly, the guild of rope weavers, esparto grass weavers and espadrille makers prohibited in 1660 the sale of their products to anyone who was not a master of the trade, in the face of growing competition from non-guild members, including some women, such as Josepa Boatella, whose dowry in 1645 consisted mainly of raw materials and tools for working with esparto and hemp. Despite the prohibitions, the documentation reveals the complementary nature of work within the family, with many master craftsmen leaving the marketing of their products to the women of their households, as was the case in trade-oriented professions such as fishermen and shopkeepers.

However, the illegal practices carried out by women in the Valencia market were not limited to economic crimes, but also included other transgressions, resulting from violent conflicts or moral or sexual disorders. This female labour was giving rise to envy, quarrels, or altercations, which led to public riots, forcing the justice system to intervene. An example of this atmosphere of social conflict can be found in the 1545 court case between Joana Guzmán and María Vázquez, "women who used to sell in the market and live off what they sold",

following a complaint filed by the former and her daughter as a result of the harassment and physical abuse they suffered at the hands of the latter and other people close to her (specifically two men).⁷ The account given by the complainants reflected a previous enmity, which had led to clashes and verbal confrontations between the litigants, with insulting words, accusing them of being "*bagases, males dones, embriagues*" [prostitutes, bad women, drunkards] and that

"every nine months gave birth to her lovers' children, and after giving birth threw the babies into the ditches". The complaint led to the arrest and imprisonment of María Vázquez, which heightened the confrontation until it resulted in physical aggression on the part of Joan de Sevilla, María Vázquez's lover, who "came to the market and found the aforementioned Johana Gusmana in the market selling grapes, and with his sword unsheathed, stabbed her in the face".

Returning once again to the market square, we do not know to what extent the archetype of the poor market vendor, associated with ragged women from the slums, often involved in heated disputes, resorting to loud voices and vulgar language, corresponds to historical reality. However, it is clear that not all of them were marginalised or poor, as demonstrated by their ability to act with a certain degree of economic agency or to represent themselves, individually or collectively, before the authorities. It is common to find court cases that reflect female participation in altercations and disputes. In Valencia, the fisherwomen stood out, travelling daily from the Albufera to the city to sell their husbands' catches. They actively participated on several occasions in defence of their interests or prerogatives. This was the case in 1677, in a conflict of jurisdiction between the *mustassaf* and the *baile general* (the official in charge of administering the king's estate), when the former attempted to arrest the jury of the fishing community of Valencia. The detention was thwarted by the violent intervention of the fisherwomen, armed with their work tools.

In short, the presence of women in Valencia's market square was a constant, as they lawfully engaged in commercial activity on a regular basis, at least since the late Middle Ages. However, their integration into these sales circuits was not always peaceful and was conditioned by various municipal and guild regulations that limited their activity, leading to frequent violations, some of which resulted in legal disputes. Social tensions over street vending were a constant, and the authorities tried on several occasions to regulate and even eradicate these practices without success. The appropriation of public space by street vendors was one of the main concerns, as the authorities linked this activity to poverty and crime, when the situation led to open conflicts. In this regard, female participation was fundamental, and vendors and

⁷ ARV, Procesos de Real Audiencia, Part III, Appendix, no. 368.

resellers asserted their honesty and their right to sell on the streets, as they had been doing since time immemorial, continuing this presence even into the Modern Age (Ramón 2023).

The documentation generated by urban institutions in the Early Modern period reveals an effort to monitor and punish, to use Michel Foucault's famous expression, which in the case of public spaces denotes a biased naturalisation in terms of gender. This can be seen in the case of the sex trade, tolerated and even run by those institutions in accordance with the idea that male desires inevitably exceeded the limits of Christian morality and therefore had to be channelled into prostitution, but the burden of sin fell on women. Female activity in streets and markets was commonplace among the urban and rural working classes, but at the same time their daily retail tasks caused some concern. In this sense, the authorities' view reveals both a certain mistrust of their public presence, which tended to be associated with sexual immorality, and, in contrast, the liveliness of their movements around the city to earn a living and attend to their business.

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