CHAPTER 3

The Importation of Books into New Spain During the Seventeenth Century

_Idalia García_

Tell me – the man who disposes of his property and carries merchandise to the Indies, what does he seek but riches? For he who will become wealthy does not carry the word of God, and some will be lost, others drowned in the sea, others will die on land, and others will be despoiled by pirates or defaulted by their debtors.

_Julio Caro Baroja, Las formas complejas de la vida religiosa._

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The Book Trade between Europe and New Spain

Exploiting trade networks that linked the Old with the New World, many crates of books were shipped across the Atlantic to fulfill the needs and interests of private as well as institutional libraries in New Spain. We can still trace the contents of these imports using lists preserved in the General Archive of the Nation in Mexico (AGN). The following extracts give some illustration of the sort of information that can be found.

With the bearer, Joan Santoyo Almazan, owner of his own mule train of Puebla, is carried four crates of books with three hundred items entitled _Templo militante y bidas de santos_, written by Bartholome Cayrasco and printed in Valladolid in 1603. Stamped with marks on the outside. To be delivered to Pedro Francisco Montoyo, merchant. May our Lord keep your Illustrious Lordship for many years. Nueva Veracruz, 9 November 1620.¹

Here we have an application dated 1601 by Father Joseph Vidal, Attorney General of the Society of Jesus in New Spain, who reported that:

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¹ Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 5486, fol. 1r. This chapter is written in memory of Liborio Villagómez.
Ordinarily in every fleet some crates of books arrive for the schools of this Society, examined and approved, and licensed by the Inquisition of the city of Seville, and then the said crates are usually opened in the city of Veracruz by the officer that the Inquisition has placed there. His opening of these crates has been the cause of much denouncement, inconvenience and vexation.\textsuperscript{2}

We can also find scattered evidence on the books themselves. The following was written in a Bible printed in Paris in 1540.

This Bible came in crates of books sent from Valencia, and it was delivered by Don Ceferino Martínez.\textsuperscript{3}

While this text appeared in a book once owned by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, with a handwritten annotation on the cover:

Don Carlos de Siguenza y Gongora, 1678 7 p.4. Shipped to me from Flanders with a price in Mexico of 7p. 4r.\textsuperscript{4}

Such sources confirm that books arrived from Europe for distribution to virtually all bookstores and bookstalls in the cities and towns of New Spain.\textsuperscript{5} However, they can also offer other important insights – not least in expanding our knowledge of those involved in the book trade, and the connections between them. A 1612 list of boxes of books,\textsuperscript{6} for instance, tells us not only about booksellers such as Juan Treviño, Diego Navarro Maldonado and Antón de la

\textsuperscript{2} AGN, Inquisición 1579A, exp. 6, fol. 1r.
\textsuperscript{3} Note on the front flyleaf, \textit{Biblia hebraea, Chaldaea, Graeca & Latina} (Parisii: Ex Officina Roberti Sthepani Typographi Regii, 1540) (USTC 182365). Biblioteca Eusebio Francisco Kino 13230.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Francisci Leuerae Romani Prodromus vniuersae astronomiae restitutae de anni solaris, & siderei, ac dierum magnitudine in omni aeuo, & de reliquis periodis, motibus, & circulationibus solaribus admirandis, adhuc incognitis, ac etiam sidereis, ab authore exploratis, & inuentis} (Romae: ex typographia Angeli Bernabò, 1663). Biblioteca Nacional de México Inv 1991–15081.
\textsuperscript{6} Mentioned by Fernández del Castillo, \textit{Libros y libreros en el siglo XVI}, pp. 535–536.