CHAPTER TEN

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ACADEMIES IN THE CITY OF GRANADA: A COMPARATIST APPROACH¹

Francisco J. Álvarez, Ignacio García Aguilar, and Inmaculada Osuna

Seventeenth-century academies in Spain

Golden Age academies are considered to be one of the most interesting literary phenomena of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain.² Unfortunately, most of their records and statutes have disappeared. It may be assumed, however, that Spanish academies originated without exception in urban environments and that they were (at least in origin) a derivative of similar Italian institutions. A 1611 dictionary states that an “academia” is either “la escuela o casa donde se juntan algunos buenos ingenios a conferir,” or “los concurrentes” (“the school or house where some men of letters gather together to confer with each other,” or “the people who attend this particular type of gatherings”);³ it appears, however, that the word ‘academy’ also designated each separate meeting of an academy-like institution.

¹ The writing of the present article has been made possible thanks to the following research project: “La República de los Poetas” (I+D, HUM, 2004–02373/FILO; Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology).


Research on Spanish academies often collides with the inaccuracy of the remaining documentation. Because of their uninstitutionalized character, no sources have been preserved in official documents such as account books, court registers, resolution books, or notarial registers. Spanish learned societies were based on verbal practices, and academic production (discourses, poems, debates, etc.) was rarely written down in the form of minutes, records or unitary volumes. Information concerning statutes and sets of rules is also quite scarce. Frequently, we have only imprecise references to a person (or a group of people) who is said to belong to (or to function as) an academy. It is not possible, at times, to distinguish between a simple literary get-together and a proper academy, i.e. a much more complex institution whose members share a sense of belonging and act according to some elementary norms.

Some data concerning sixteenth-century academies in the city of Seville have been preserved; it seems, however, that many of them were simply loose circles of friends interested in literature. The effective spread of Spanish academies did not occur, in any case, until the last years of the sixteenth century. From 1590 onwards, references to academies in Madrid, Aragon and Valencia became frequent. The documentation of academies located in areas of sparse population is, on the contrary, non-existent for all practical purposes. It should not be forgotten that Spain’s area of influence included, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only South America but also Northern Europe, Portugal and Italy. Regrettably, systematic research on Spanish academies outside the Iberian Peninsula has not been done yet. However, a whole chapter of Sánchez’s classic essay deals with Spanish academies in Milan and, above all, Naples; and Kenneth Brown mentions a Spanish Academia de Amberes (Antwerp), where a Castilian vejamen (see below) was read on 3 April 1682.

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2 One of the most remarkable exceptions is the Academia de los Nocturnos that gathered in the last years of the sixteenth century in Valencia. There is a modern edition of its records; see note 8, below.