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## BRIGID'S FIFTY-SEVEN DEMONS: EXORCISM AS MIRACLE IN ZARAGOZA, 1601

### RESUMEN

Entre las relaciones de milagros atribuidos a la intercesión de la Virgen del Pilar, destaca la información sobre los exorcismos realizados en 1601 en Zaragoza a una mujer que ya había peregrinado previamente a varios monasterios en busca de remedio para su mal. Según confesión propia, Brígida estaba poseída por tres demonios y atormentada por cincuenta y cuatro más que la acosaban en forma de moscones. Aunque se trata de un relato breve, su riqueza e intensidad expresiva lo convierten en un documento excepcional para el análisis de las creencias acerca de la posesión demoníaca y la liberación de ésta entendida como milagro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Milagros—Exorcismo—Brujería—Peregrinación—Virgen del Pilar

### ABSTRACT

Among the reports of miracles attributed to the intercession of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza (Spain), the story of Brígida Pérez is particularly notable. She spent three years on pilgrimage to different holy sites seeking a remedy for her ailments. By her own avowal, Brígida had been possessed by three demons and was continually tormented by fifty-four others that had assumed the form of large flies. Although the surviving account of her story is brief, its fascinating wealth of detail makes it an exceptional source when it comes to analysing

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Early Modern Catholic beliefs about demonic possession, its relationship with witchcraft, and the supposed miracle of exorcism.

KEY WORDS: Miracles—Exorcism—Witchcraft—Pilgrimage—Virgin of the Pillar.

“La possession est une scène, alors que la sorcellerie est un combat.”<sup>2</sup>

The miracle story as an independent literary genre, distinct from the lives of the saints, began to flourish in Europe in the 12th century. At the same time, the practice of worshipping the Virgin Mary and the marvels attributed to her powers of intercession was becoming more widespread. Various compilations of tales of exceptional events, the so-called miracles of St. Mary, started to appear in different countries (England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain), although in most cases they gave accounts of the same stereotypical stories with minor variations. In the late Middle Ages, however, certain religious centres (including several in Spain, such as the Monasteries of Montserrat and Guadalupe, the Sanctuary of Peña de Francia and the Basilica of our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza) began to document stories of local miracles that had occurred much closer to home.<sup>3</sup>

Despite their depiction of extraordinary events, these *literary miracle tales*, successors to the moralising medieval *exempla*, were presented as “true stories”, in which everyday life was interrupted by the most unusual happenings. Often told in minute detail, they made a considerable impact, helping to propagate faith in the redemptive power of the church or monastery in question and thereby attracting pilgrims in ever greater numbers. Generally speaking, the clerics responsible for a particular sanctuary would write up a narrative after questioning both the person who benefited from a miracle and any witnesses to the events. Two agents, therefore, had to cooperate in the elaboration of a miracle story: on the one hand, the pilgrims, flattered by the fact that an episode in their life might be worthy of such attention, and on the other, the churchmen who, with their questions and comments, pointed narrators in a particular direction and later revised, re-ordered, and adapted their testimony before writing up a definitive version of the tale.

As time went on, miracle stories became further and further removed from the original story. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, most were primarily concerned with

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, 250.

<sup>3</sup> On miracles in medieval and Early Modern Europe, see Twelftree and Walsham. On miracles in Spain, see Crémoux, Castellote, Montoya Martínez and Vizuete-Mendoza. On miracles in Zaragoza, see Domingo Pérez y Serrano Martín.

praising the figure of Mary and demonstrating that the advocacy in question was particularly blessed with divine favour. Miracle stories were not simply records of wondrous events, they were detailed narratives of pilgrimages, from the arrival of pilgrims at their chosen sanctuary, to the moment at which they were granted the divine intervention for which they had journeyed there (Crémoux 24-29).

Among the many stories of miracles attributed to Zaragoza's Virgin of the Pillar, one in particular stands out – a handwritten account of a long series of exorcisms carried out in 1601 on a woman called Brígida Pérez. She lived in the village of Vera de Moncayo ("vera" means "side", because the village was on the side of a mountain), and had already undertaken several pilgrimages to other churches in search of a cure. According to the tale, for over two years she had been possessed by three demons and tormented by another fifty-four who had taken on the form of huge flies.<sup>4</sup>

Given that this was an exemplary tale, its primary objective was to highlight the woman's miraculous cure. However, unlike other similar testimonies, there is a certain lack of clarity about that cure because the standard happy ending is missing. Despite repeatedly stating that the demons would leave the woman's body on a given day, the narrative comes to an abrupt end while the unfortunate victim is still in the throes of possession. That said, the details that do survive are more than sufficient to allow us to establish the life story of a woman whose symptoms seemed to suggest an archetypal case of demonic possession:<sup>5</sup>

She was in the habit of fainting, first suffering a shivering around the shoulders, hands and face [...] sometimes her head and eyes were afflicted, to the point that she lost her sight; sometimes it was her stomach and heart, and on other occasions she endured very bad back pain. (ACB, 1-1-2-4, f. 1r.)

She was clearly suffering from a profound state of depression that might have led her not only to have "blasphemous fantasies," but even to contemplate the possibility of ending

<sup>4</sup> See Archivo Capitular del Pilar (A.C.P.), Zaragoza, Sig. 1-1-2-4. There is a transcription of the document in Tomás Domingo Pérez and Ester Casorrán Berges, *El milagro de Calanda y otros favores extraordinarios de Nuestra Señora del Pilar*, Zaragoza, Cabildo Metropolitano, 2013, 140-149.

<sup>5</sup> There is a wide bibliography on demonic possession and exorcism. Among them, see: Armando Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric: A Study of Renaissance Demonology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001; María Tausiet, *Los posesos de Tosos (1812-1814). Brujería y justicia popular en tiempos de revolución*, Zaragoza, Instituto Aragonés de Antropología, 2002, and Idem, "Patronage of Angels & Combat of Demons: Good versus Evil in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spain", in Peter Marshall & Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, 233-255; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2003; Charles Zika, *Exorcizing Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2003; Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*, New York, Routledge, 2004; Hilaire Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain*, Toronto, University of Toronto, 2004; Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit. Possession, Mysticism & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2007, and Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within. Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2013.

her own life. Most interestingly, however, is the fact that although she sought consolation in the church, “saying confession and receiving communion from her priest”, this was not initially assumed to be a case of demonic possession. In fact, the suspicion was that her suffering had been caused by frequent disagreements with her step-aunt.

The reason behind these rows is not entirely clear, but what we do know is that – in something of a twist on a classic fairy tale – Brígida’s widowed father had remarried, but when his second wife also died, her sister had begun to show a marked animosity towards Brígida. Reading between the lines, this was all about money and the father’s final will, because if Brígida had no children, his estate would pass to the children of his second wife. In the narrative, the “wicked step-aunt” was being demonised as a witch, in absolutely stereotypical terms: “The abovementioned woman had made a pact 35 or 40 years [ago] with the devil, who appeared to her in the shape of a pig, and in those years she served him by harming babies and carrying out other deeds associated with witchcraft” (Ib., f. 1v.). Continuing in the same vein, the account goes on to claim that she had cast a spell against Brígida:

On 3 April in the year 1599 [...] she took three or four hairs from the back of the said Brígida’s neck, and having used these to bind together some blades of grass she had plucked on the mountainside, she uttered certain words, ordering the devil to do all the harm he could to the said Brígida, until he compelled her to kill herself. (Ib., ff. 1v-2r.)

According to Brígida, her aunt had hidden the abovementioned charm –something seemingly as simple as a few hairs and blades of grass– beneath one of the roof-tiles on the house in which she lived with her husband. The proof furnished was that the couple “heard a noise on many nights” coming from a certain part of the roof. Three weeks later, the spell seems to have taken effect: the account tells us that Brígida began to be tormented by no fewer than fifty-seven demons. Three of them were lodged inside her (possession), while the others confined themselves to torturing her from without (obsession): “On 23 April, three demons entered her body; the first was called Nicol, the second Leleel, the third Natanaal, and fifty-four stayed outside, tormenting the said Brígida and generally appearing to her in the shape of large flies” (Ib., f. 2r.).

That day proved to be a pivotal moment in the young woman’s life. It was then that she left her home and began to travel to different sanctuaries with her husband. In so doing, she was continuing a tradition dating back to medieval times whereby certain women who were either visionaries or victims of possession (Margery Kempe being the most famous example) began to lead an itinerant existence in search of spiritual health and healing.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On Margery Kempe, see Kim Phillips, “Margery Kempe and the age of Woman.” *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, John Arnold and Kathleen Lewis (eds.), Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer. 2004, 17–34, and Salus-

The dates the narrative gives for the most important stages in Brígida's unhappy journey are particularly significant. It cannot be a coincidence that she is said to have become possessed on 23 April. Firstly, this is the feast-day of St. George, patron saint of the Crown of Aragon and symbol of the victory of faith over evil, as represented by his legendary defeat of the devil in the guise of a dragon. Secondly, as Chaucer notes in *The Canterbury Tales*, April is a month of gentle weather, a marked contrast with a long, hard winter. As the birds begin to make melody, so do people feel the urge to go on pilgrimages and seek out distant shrines in distant lands. Brígida, like Chaucer's pilgrims, is therefore supposed to have begun her journey in late April.

It is surely not by chance, either, that, as we are told at the start of a chronicle aimed at glorifying Our Lady of the Pillar, the young woman's "melancholy and sadness" apparently began to manifest themselves in the month of the Virgin and specifically on "the first day of the Litany". The *Litaniae lauretanae* (Litany of Loreto, after its place of origin) is comprised of a poetic series of petitions to Mary, praising her as a "tower of ivory," the "health of the sick," and "comforter of the afflicted," and so on, titles that are often added to rosary prayers. Such litanies had been proliferated by the end of the 16th century and in order to stop people from uttering inappropriate, false, or even dangerous expressions of praise, Pope Clement VIII decided to prohibit all but the "official" forms of Marian prayer (which included the Litany of Loreto). He published his decree on litanies in 1601, the same year in which Brígida's miracle story was written. As if these coincidences were not enough, the narrative also specifies that, after travelling to various other religious centres, Brígida and her husband reached Zaragoza on Thursday 1 June 1601, which just happened to be Ascension Day, forty days after Easter Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

The intent of setting the possessed woman's spiritual journey within a liturgical framework can be seen throughout the text. We are told that she spent exactly nine days in each sanctuary, absorbed in a devotional period of intense prayer, a pattern repeated on a regular basis over the space of almost two years. She is said to have offered novenas (prayers repeated for nine successive days, a practice that had become increasingly common since the late 16th century) at three prestigious centres of pilgrimage, her intention being to travel on until she reached a hermitage close to the French border. En route, however, she and her husband decided to stay in Zaragoza long enough to offer a novena to the Virgin of the Pillar. Such importance is conceded to these periods of prayer by the author of her miracle story that, in order to memorialize everything that

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tiano Moreta Velayos (ed.), *Libro de Margery Kempe. La mujer que se reinventó a sí misma*, Valencia, Universitat de València, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> On litanies, see Angelo de Santi, "Litany of Loreto", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, Nueva York, Robert Appleton Company, 1910: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09287a.htm>

happened (almost certainly over a longer timespan) to the prescribed nine days, he gets various dates and days of the week wrong.<sup>8</sup>

The spectacular nature of the exorcisms that would be performed on Brígida in Zaragoza is heightened by the fact that they became the culmination of a sequence of similar practices she had endured at the other stops on her pilgrimages. Although the manuscript lacks detail about the exorcisms carried out in other places, which were effectively just a prelude to the Zaragoza miracle, the few snippets given are absolutely fascinating. There is a hint, for example, that the couple's initial decision to go to the Monastery of Piedra was based on the fact that it was famous for possessing a relic of St Bartholomew which had the power to cure the demonically possessed (Vorágine, 524).

Ever since the early Middle Ages, St. Bartholomew had been closely associated with exorcism, but he was little known in Spain until the late 16th century. He was said to have suffered one of the cruellest martyrdoms imaginable: having converted Armenia's pagan king to Christianity, he was ordered to be flayed alive by the king's brother. Relics, in the form of what were supposedly pieces of his skin, then appeared across Europe, including, perhaps, Piedra. It may be, however, that Brígida was actually drawn to this Cistercian monastery by the fame of another relic, a piece of the host known as *Santa Duda* (Holy Doubt). According to local tradition, in 1380 it had miraculously bled when the priest officiating over communion doubted the miracle of transubstantiation. A magnificent reliquary was therefore built to house order the eucharistic host, and its doors would be opened for the many pilgrims who came to the monastery in the hope of being cured by the relic's powers (González Zymala 19).

Brígida offered up her first novena in Piedra, whose monks attempted to exorcise her. Despite the community's efforts to help, however, her condition was not to improve. After her nine days of prayer she believed she was cured and set out for home, but upon reaching her village began to suffer the same "torment" as before, especially when she went to worship at the local church. Despite the author of the account's vested interest in interpreting her suffering from a religious perspective, there is a telling note in the margin of the manuscript that offers a complementary secular reading: "Suspecting there to be an illness, they summoned two doctors, both of whom visited her on several occasions over the course of a year, more or less, giving her remedies for melancholy and other such things" (ACP, 1-1-2-4, f. 2v.).

When medicine proved no help either, Brígida left home again in search of a cure. This time she did not go very far, deciding to offer another novena at the Monastery of Veruela, just outside her village. Having been treated by its monks, she went home again, but her suffering

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<sup>8</sup> On novenas, see Joseph Hilgers, "Novena", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1911: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11141b.htm>

continued. Refusing to resign herself to her fate, a few months later she set off on a third pilgrimage, this time to the church of Saints Cosmos and Damian in Arnedo (La Rioja). These two reputed healers and martyrs were the Christianised versions of Castor and Pollux, heroes of pagan mythology in whose sanctuaries the practice of *incubatio* had been carried out since the fourth century, at least in the Byzantine world. As was true of many other saints, the level of veneration of Cosmos and Damian increased in Spain after the Council of Trent, and by the time Brígida decided to travel to La Rioja, they had already earned a considerable reputation for curing the possessed (Gonzalo Moreno 55-69).

According to the manuscript, she and her husband spent another nine-day period in Arnedo, going to the church every day for Brígida to undergo exorcism. However: “Although in the said village, through the intercession of the said martyrs, many are cured who arrive *with similar travail* [crossed out below: *with this ailment*], despite all this, in his judgement Our Lord did not bestow his mercy upon her” (ACP, 1-1-2-4., f. 2v).

Once again, therefore, the couple went back to their village, this time staying at home for three months, during which time Brígida’s state of health showed no sign of change. This period of psychological stagnation was broken in 1599 after the appointment of a new bishop to the see to which the village of Vera belonged. This was none other than Diego de Yepes, a seventy-year-old monk who had been prior of eight monasteries, confessor to St Teresa of Ávila and to king Philip II, until the latter’s death in 1598. Yepes, one of the most influential clerics in Spain at this time, wrote a memorable account of the last months of the king’s life and his exemplary death, a piece of writing that later inspired Cervantes’ description of Don Quixote’s death. In recognition of the spiritual support Yepes had given his father, Philip III named him bishop of Tarazona. This led to a period of intense activity in the diocese as Yepes established himself as a strict defender of the orthodox faith and an enthusiastic supporter of the Counter Reformation, taking a personal interest in many local matters (Mancini Giancarlo 136-58).

As it turned out, the new bishop ended up treating the two women in this story – both the demoniac (Brígida) and the witch (her step-aunt). It is worth remembering here that Yepes was appointed to this role at the height of the witch craze in Spain. While there is no surviving documentary evidence of any witchcraft trials held in his diocese, we do have a record of a pastoral visit to the village of Vera in 1601, which contains some enthralling details. That visit was to prove a turning point in the story of Brígida’s possession, because Yepes ordered that both women involved be taken to the capital of the diocese, Tarazona. The step-aunt was then incarcerated in the episcopal prison on suspicion of witchcraft, while the bishop showed great interest in helping the niece – not only did he put her in the hands of various exorcists, he even got so personally involved as to perform exorcisms on her himself.

Whatever solace Brígida may have gained from the attention paid to her in Tarazona, her travels did not end there. She and her husband decided to go back on the road and continue their search for a cure. Their next destination was a shrine dedicated to St. Juliana of Nicomedia, a fourth-century virginal martyr renowned for curing demonic possession. Tradition had it that, like St. Bartholomew, Juliana had faced the devil in a series of fierce battles during her life, but eventually defeated him and thereafter led him around by a chain like a lapdog. Juliana's story spread far and wide throughout the Middle Ages as did images of her as the archetypal strong woman, leading a winged devil by a chain. In fact, it was the idea of being cured by a similar chain rather than by a relic of the saint as such that drew pilgrims to her shrine (VoráGINE 174).

Whether Brígida ever reached St. Juliana's shrine remains a mystery, however, because our narrative focuses primarily on the time she spent in what should have been the halfway point – the city of Zaragoza, where she stayed for at least ten days. During this time, clerics from various churches and members of the city's Jesuit College did all they could to help bring her suffering to an end. Every morning she would go to the Chapel of the Basilica of our Lady of the Pillar to be exorcised. This chapel, a narrow, rectangular, windowless building was linked to the main church but functioned as an independent religious space. On her very first day there, the exorcists certified that she was indeed possessed by the devil, "because she understood very well and spoke the Hebrew tongue, because she displayed great feats of strength, and for other reasons". (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 144). On the fourth day, on the advice of several clergymen, the formulas of exorcism laid out in chapter VI of the second part of the *Malleus Maleficarum* were read out to her.

According to this notorious treatise, these were the words that must be used in the most difficult of cases, namely when exorcising those who had been bewitched. These individuals were required to make their confession, take communion, carry a lit candle and, finally, "be tied, naked, to a blessed paschal candle, of a length equal to that of the body of Christ or the holy cross" (Mackay 452). Brígida apparently complied with the first three conditions but no details are given about the fourth. Whatever the case may be, according to the manuscript, on the sixth day the fifty-four demons that had been tormenting her from without (flies!) were finally banished. The most spectacular exorcisms were yet to come, however, as the three demons possessing her from within remained.

It was on the seventh day, at three in the afternoon, that the most astonishing act of the entire ritual took place. In an attempt to channel the charismatic powers of the twelve apostles, whose gift for exorcism was acknowledged in the gospels, twelve of Zaragoza's leading clerics shut themselves away with the unfortunate Brígida and her demons in the gloomy chapel, presumably ready to use the Church's full armoury in order to defeat the three last demons. Significantly, the ceremony, orchestrated by the rector of the Jesuit



College and an assistant, boasted the presence of a number of relics of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his successor, Diego Laínez. At the start of proceedings, the rector read aloud a report about a supposed miracle performed posthumously by Ignatius, as a result of which four possessed women in Modena had been cured (Guillausseau 5-56).

Meanwhile, Brígida “was crying out and uttering loud complaints similar to those that were read about in the said miracle story” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 146). She was therefore ordered to bow down and kiss the ground, firstly “in honour of Father Ignatius and then in honour of Diego Laínez, which she duly did, albeit still with “many cries and complaints” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 146). Then, after she had been made to say confession, and the *Miserere* and various prayers to the Virgin Mary had been recited, the exorcism proper began. This entailed interrogating the afflicted woman, or more accurately – as can be seen from the manuscript – the three demons who were possessing her: Leleel, Natanael and Nicol. The first questions were directed at Leleel, the least important of the three, because the previous day he had answered more readily than the other two. When asked how he and his two companions had entered the young woman’s body, he replied that it was thanks to a spell cast by her aunt. We already know the rest of the story. What is most disturbing here is the description of Brígida’s behaviour: one moment, apparently, she was uttering loud bursts of laughter and chatting freely, the next she was exhibiting “the greatest indignation [...] with much shouting and crying aloud” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 146). The Jesuit priest therefore told her to kneel and kiss the ground again, in honour of God, Our Lady of the Pillar, St. Ignatius and Diego Laínez and also St. Ambrose of Milan. She obeyed, but “most reluctantly” and “with great recalcitrance” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 147).

The questions directed at the second demon, who “was in a fury [...] saying that he wanted to trample all those present”, focused on the charm that the step-aunt had supposedly created by taking four hairs from the back of Brígida’s neck. Having been given this information, the priests touched an image of St. Ignatius against the back of her head, to which she (or the demon) replied: “I don’t want you, I don’t want you” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 147). Every time she rejected something sacred, they told her to prostrate herself and kiss the image of Ignatius. Finally, they asked the demon when he would leave her body, and whether his two companions would leave with him. He replied, as we might have expected, that all three would leave her the following Saturday in the first hour of the morning –in other words, on the day of the week dedicated to the Virgin and the last day of the novena, during the Children’s Mass celebrated to honour Our Lady of the Pillar.

As if attempting to convince Brígida of just how important it was that she do what was expected of her, the clerics asked both the second and third demons to corroborate not only the time and place at which they would leave her body, but also the form in which they

would do it: “per secessum et sine lesione Brigidae et alicuius personæ” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 148), i.e., literally “from below” (that is, defecated) without harm to Brígida or any other person (and not “vomited”, as it was perhaps thought more typical). And they also said that the signs they would show, as proof that they had left her body, would be extinguishing a candle on the altar and giving four loud knocks on the main door of the church. As the exorcisms continued and the same questions were repeated, Brígida – or one of the demons, in this case Nicol – proved “most recalcitrant” (“Have they not already told you this?”), but the clerics used exorcism and relics over and over again until they “compelled” her to submit to the pre-established script (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 148).

Towards the end of the ceremony, Brígida was told to kneel and recite the *Magnificat*, which she did, albeit “with wild shrieks and grimaces,” especially as she said the words referring to Mary’s humility: “My soul doth magnify the Lord [...] for he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.” After this, a *Te Deum* was sung and the crowd of worshippers who had gathered on the bank of the River Ebro to watch the spectacle said an *Ave Maria*. Then Brígida was asked to return to the chapel, but she resisted so fiercely that two priests had to take her by the arms and drag her there (“she refused to the last to go back, saying that she did not want to go back”). Finally, the last sentence in the document tells us that “on entering the Chapel, she uttered several loud cries before the image of the Virgin” (Domingo Pérez and Casorrán Berges 148).

To conclude, it seems very likely that, as stated on the first page of the manuscript, the account was left unfinished. Later versions of the same miracle story say that the exorcisms continued on successive days and that Brígida was finally set free from her torment. The original source, however, suggests the opposite. More than that, it takes pains to emphasise her rebellious nature and how difficult it was for everyone who tried to make her conform. Although such resistance is typical of the behaviour expected from the possessed, the details of this particular case give us unique insight into a genuine episode in the life of a tormented pilgrim. Similarly, the narrative clearly illustrates the lack of psychological awareness and sensitivity displayed by certain clerics when it came to treating sufferers such as Brígida. Rather than helping them, exorcism simply turned these troubled individuals into the stars of theatrical and propagandistic spectacles (Dijkhuizen 146-150).

Convinced that the age of miracles had passed, Protestant writers at this time were denouncing the fakery and deception practised by the Catholic Church. To them, Brígida’s story might seem to epitomise the fact that so-called miraculous exorcisms were simply a means of protecting certain interests that were more worldly than spiritual. On the other hand, in the Zaragoza of 1601, a key moment in terms of protecting both the legend of the Virgin of the Pillar and the high status of her church, the theatrics of Brígida’s suffering and her apparent miracle cure represented the kind of cornerstone on which such precarious causes might rest.

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