

A place of memory and oblivion: Santa Librada, the patron saint of Independence in Colombia

Jaime de Almeida*

RESUMO

Uma imagem religiosa de obscuras origens medievais tornou-se casualmente objeto de um culto cívico religioso voltado para a construção da memória da independência da Colômbia. Em meio às políticas de memória ativadas pelo Bicentenário, cabe perguntar pelos esquecimentos e silêncios que são parte constituinte e necessária desse típico lugar de memória.

Palavras-chave: Santa Librada; Memória da Independência; Colômbia.

ABSTRACT

A religious image with obscure medieval origins became by chance the core of a civic religious cult aimed to the construction of the memory of Colombian Independence. Among the policies of memory activated by the Bicentenary, the silence and oblivion as necessary components of such a typical 'place of memory', need to be examined.

Keywords: Santa Librada; memory; Colombian Independence.

The challenge of the Bicentenary allows us to return to the discussion about the singular absence of a feminine symbol of Independence in Latin America. At least in relation to Colombia the crucified image of Santa Librada suggests to us some new approaches and also projects certain nuances in a scenario of historic memory saturated by the Bolivarian solar myth.

The hagiography of Santa Librada is very controversial. Her origin is Galician-Portuguese. Her relics were brought from Sainte-Livrade-sur-Lot in Aquitaine to Sigüenza, a stronghold captured from the Moors in 1124 by Bishop Bernardo de Agen. The iconographic representation constitutes the principal motive for the hagiographic controversies related to Santa Librada. The first images related to the relics are two seals from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, from the Priory of Santa Librada, a pious feminine work

*Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Instituto de Ciências Humanas – IH – Campus Universitário Darcy Ribeiro – ICC – Ala Norte – Mezanino – sala B1-606 (minhocão norte). 70.910-900 Brasília – DF – Brasil. jaimeida@terra.com.br

linked to Sigüenza Cathedral. Shown on them are the attributes of virgins martyred by the sword: the palm and the sword. Antonio Contreras painted it with a naive technique using oil paint on wood in 1511, substituting the sword and the crown for a book and a bunch of laurel. Between 1515 and 1518 the Chapel of Santa Librada was built inside the cathedral by the order of Bishop Fadrique de Portugal, where the relics of the saint were deposited. Juan Soreda painted five scenes of the life of Santa Librada and her eight sisters in the mannerist altarpiece on the chapel altar in 1525-1526. One of the scenes is the decapitation of Santa Librada. After the inauguration of the chapel the diocese sought to print a twelfth century Lectionary in which the *Vita et Passio Sanctae Liberatae* appeared, attributed to Bishop Bernardo de Agen himself. It seems this initiative was never accomplished; however, between 1561 and 1566 an almost complete translation of the Latin text to Castilian was released as a cord book, probably by the printer Sebastián Martínez. The modality of the martyrdom of Saint Librada is well defined in a manuscript copy of the Latin original, made in 1616: “capitis abscissione martyrium consummavit.”¹

This effort to establish the iconography of the saint seems to respond to the proliferation of other versions that did not correspond to the documents kept in Sigüenza Cathedral. In many regions in Europe, a saint called Wilgefortis, Kümmeris, Comba (in Portugal), Uncumber, etc., was revered who was represented crucified and more frequently bearded: the young woman had begged God to make her ugly to maintain her vow of chastity. These images of the bearded saint possibly resulted from mistaken interpretations of the woodcuts of a famous image of Christ in his Majesty revered in Lucca, Tuscany, known as *Il Volto Santo* (The Holy Face). Supposedly sculpted in wood from the true cross by Saint Nicodemus, the image is said to have been brought from Palestine to Italy in the eight century. The oriental tunic of Lucca's *Volto Santo*, badly reproduced in the woodcuts, could have been confused with female clothes. The most visible focus of the diffusion of crucified female images (not always bearded) is Flanders, from the fifteenth century onwards.² Hieronymus Bosch was responsible for an enigmatic *Triptych of the Crucified Martyr*, now in the Ducal Palace in Venice. Some think that the central figure in the composition is Saint Julia of Carthage, patron saint of Corsica, while others see it as Saint Librada accompanied by Saint Anthony of Lisbon.

The story of Saint Librada becomes even more complicated in the epoch of the 'false chronicles'. At the end of the fourth century Saint Jerome dedicated his *De viris illustribus* to his friend from Barcelona Lucius Flavius Dexter, referring to him as the author of an extensive report about Paleo-Christian Iberia. At the end of the seventeenth century the Jesuit Jerónimo Román de la Higuera, professor of philosophy in Toledo, circulated news about the discovery of a copy of that chronicle in the Abby of Fulda and soon afterwards in 1619 published the work *Fragmentum chronici sive omnimodaе historiae Flavii Lucii Dextri* which had enormous repercussion. Amongst the information captiously introduced in the so-called *Pseudo-Dexter*, Román de la Higuera intertwined the data from the Sigüenza archives related to the saint and her eight sisters with the legends related to Wilgefortis, especially the death by crucifixion. The actual authorities in the diocese of Sigüenza soon came to identify Saint Librada and Wilgefortis, an idea confirmed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1625. Saint Librada's feast day, which until then had been 18 January, was changed to 20 July, the feast day of Saint Wilgefortis.

For this reason Diego Ladrón de Guevara, an *hidalgo* born in Cifuentes (in the diocese of Sigüenza) in 1641 and who studied in the Royal College of Alcalá de Henares and in the University of Sigüenza, must not have had any doubts about the crucified images of Saint Librada which he enthroned in the American continent when he was bishop of Panama (1689-1699), Huamanga, now Ayacucho, (1700-1704) and Quito (1706-1710), and in Lima, where he was the interim viceroy (1710-1716), before dying in Mexico in 1718. A polychrome hand-carved wooden image of Santa Librada made in an atelier in Quito was sent to the San Juan de Dios church built in Santa Fe de Bogotá in 1723. Unlike the Spanish images left by Diego Ladrón de Guevara in Saint Liberata's church in Rímac district of Lima (on the left), and in Quito Cathedral (later moved to the Concepcion Monastery's church) on the right, the image carved in Quito does not have its feet and hands nailed to the wood and is not bleeding. The wrists of the image are tied by ropes to the cross, and her hands are raised toward heaven, as if she were always ready to leave in a procession through the streets, light as a ballerina. The image appeared in an inventory made in 1726.³



A first sign of the relationship between Saint Librada and the independence of New Granada appeared in an old notebook divulged in 1922 by Eduardo Posada in *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades de la Academia Colombiana de Historia*. According to the manuscript during the night of 20 July 1810, when the patriots of Santa Fe de Bogotá had started to arrest the Spaniards, a rumor spread that they intended to burn houses to cause panic in the most populated neighborhoods, and that “they had gone out to slaughter, on behalf of the lady and defender of this kingdom, Saint Librada”⁴

She was the saint whose day was 20 July in the General Roman Calendar; her name evoked unequivocally Liberty; and we know that there was an image of Saint Librada in the San Juan de Dios Church. Perhaps the Spaniards were aware of the leading role played by the patron saint of Sigüenza in the war against the French on Spanish territory during which Bishops’ pastorals, catechisms and loose pages were passed around making the war sacred. The Spanish reacted to the sacking of the churches, a religious dimension that was echoed in the Americas: in September 1810 a standard of the Virgin of Guadalupe taken by Father Miguel Hidalgo from the sanctuary of Atotonilco led the people who had taken up arms in Mexico. News of Saint Librada and her city had been recently announced. In 1806 the dean of Sigüenza Cathedral published a book contesting the confusion between St. Librada and St. Wilgefortis caused by the *Pseudo-Dexter* of Jerónimo Ramón de la Higuera, questioning among other issues the crucifixion and the date of 20 July. More recent and with a greater impact were the news of the profanation of Sigüenza Cathedral (among others) by the French and the theft of the crowns of St. Librada and St. Sacerdote in July 1809. The famous guerrillero known as *El Empecinado* beat the French in the region where in May 1810 the Sigüenza Sharpshooter Battalion was created.⁵

A much more optimistic and enduring appeal to the patron saint of 20 July was made in Bogotá five weeks later by Manuel del Socorro Rodríguez in his ephemeral newspaper *La Constitución Feliz*. Here the close ties between the date, the saint and the destiny of New Granada were officially explained:

In the afternoon of Friday 20 July, the day of St. Librada, it seems that through an arcane mystery of Divine Providence the liberty of this capital and of the whole Kingdom was decreed.⁶

On 20 July 1811 the first anniversary of the *Junta Suprema* was commemorated with lights, a solemn mass in the cathedral and a military

parade with salvos of muskets and cannons in the suburban Huerta de Jaime. The sermon of the Augustinian José Antonio Chavarría in the mass must have related St. Librada with the meaning of the commemoration. The image, which remained in San Juan de Dios church, was not mentioned in accounts of the commemoration.⁷

A new meeting between St. Librada and the independence process in Bogotá occurred in a festive context started on Christmas Eve 1811 which ran throughout January 1812. Antonio Nariño, who had been deported in 1793 for translating the Declaration of the Rights of Man, had assumed on an interim basis the presidency of the State of Cundinamarca in September 1811, was now officially confirmed in his position. On 2 January an allegory of Liberty, similar to those from the festivities for the signing of the act of liberty in July 1811 in Caracas, was also unveiled in a hall in St. Bartholomew's College: a young Indian women with a cockade of feathers on her head and a quiver and arrows on her back. Sitting on a crocodile, beside her was a cornucopia of fruit from the country, the rising sun and the terrestrial sphere. On her shield could be seen the tiara and the keys of St. Peter and the inscription: *Religión, Patria, Libertad, Unión*. So much respect for religion and the clergy contrasts with the lay republicanism of the Venezuelan allegory in which the Indian, also sitting beside a crocodile, had a spear with a Phrygian cap.⁸ These precautions were certainly taken due to the serious conflict that broke out on 16 December with Archbishop Juan Bautista Sacristán who was declared perpetually inadmissible for refusing to recognize the patriot authorities of Bogotá.

On Saturday 3 January the *cabildo* (council) of Bogotá organized a St. Librada festival in honor of President Nariño. The Franciscan theologian Francisco Antonio Florido gave a sermon which was printed.⁹ In July José María Caballero accompanied a military expedition of President Nariño against the Federalists and did not record the commemoration of the independence of Cundinamarca (and of St. Librada) in 1812.

The image of St. Librada concentrated collective attention in Bogotá in the afternoon of 19 July and the morning of 20 July 1813, the exact moment when adherence to the declaration of the complete independence of Cundinamarca was sworn and the destruction of the symbols of monarchy began.¹⁰ Nariño successfully used images of saints in the defense of the city against the Federalist troops of the United Provinces (who, like the royalists, also used religious images in the civil war) and probably know about the French revolution's experiences with symbols and rituals, as well as about the

strength of Catholic emblems in the Iberian war against Napoleon Bonaparte. Caballero recorded in his diary:

[19 July:] The national representation left with the President [Antonio Nariño] from San Juan de Dios Church, carrying St. Librada in a procession to the cathedral, for the morning festival; everything was splendid; the community accompanied them; there were great lights. [20 July:] All the troops formed a guard of honor to watch the national representation in the cathedral on the feast of St. Librada, in which Fr. Florido offered a famous sermon, lasting an hour and a quarter, about independence. At the end of the mass, Her Majesty was uncovered and the *Te Deum* was sung ... Afterwards the oath of independence was sworn; the first to swear was the President, from the hands of the secretary; and then all the corporations, prelates, ecclesiastics, collegiates, trustees and ecclesiastic and secular councils and all the others.¹¹

In September, Antonio Nariño marched with troops from Cundinamarca and the United Provinces towards the South controlled by the monarchists, where he was defeated and captured in Pasto in May 1814. In these circumstances the next commemoration of 20 July was less enthusiastic. As in the previous year the image of St. Librada was carried in a procession to the cathedral on the eve. The Augustinian Fr. Bonilla gave the sermon in the solemn mass. In December, shortly after a flood and a relatively light earthquake, the proud capital of Cundinamarca was captured by Federalist troops led by the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar and sacked for three days.

Now as the capital of the United Provinces of New Granada, Bogotá festively commemorated 20 July 1815. Two days before, news had arrived of a great victory against the royalists in the South; the festival began with a novena composed by Miguel Antonio Escalante, presbyter of the order of San Juan de Dios. Starting with Librada the text progressed with Liberty and Liberator, and culminated with Liberal. After each verse the refrain was repeated: "Be our Liberator / In life and in death."¹² The chronicler Caballero shows the intermeshing of civism and religion, the cult of heroes, the neoclassical evocation of the Conquest and Independence, St. Librada and Our Lady of the Snows:

At 7pm ... St. Librada was brought from San Juan de Dios, with all possible ostentation; the provincial government was present; refreshments were served and there was a ball at the palace in celebration of the anniversary of our political changes. Present at the ball were 175 ladies, conservatives and supporters of the government, and the same number of men of a similar opinion. The hall of the

palace has been released that night ... Following this drinks were served at the expense of the state ... At 8pm High Mass was said in the presence of all the corporations and the governor general. Three salvos were fired by fusiliers and by cannons in the Huerta de Jaime. Dr. Sotomayor, curate of Mompós, gave a great sermon. In the afternoon there were bullfights, and in the evening the ladies staged a great comedy of conquest, something exceptional. The coliseum was illuminated with candles; there were ten crystal chandeliers. Entrance was free and by invitation, of which 2000 were distributed...¹³

The author of the sermon on St. Librada's day, Friar Juan Fernández de Sotomayor, born in Cartagena and a student of the Federalist leader Camilo Torres (the great rival of Antonio Nariño) had already published the celebrated *Catecismo o Instrucción popular*. To the contrary of the novena from the Bogotán born Miguel Antonio Escalante which was prayed for several days, St. Librada was not even mentioned in the sermon as the patron saint of 20 July.¹⁴

In June 1816 in the city re-conquered by the Spanish, the magnificent processions of reparation to Our Lady of Chiquinquirá contrasted with the furtive passage of her image nearby the city in May during the retreat of the troops of Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Roergas de Serviez, who had tried in vain to take her as protector of the patriotic cause. Aghast, Caballero recorded the execution of patriots on St. Librada's day itself.

After the victory of Boyacá in August 1819 and Simón Bolívar's triumphant entrance into Bogotá, new heroes, almost all soldiers, obscured the memory of that recent past which would afterwards be called *Patria Boba*. The symbolism and the ritualization of St. Librada, which was at the core of the centralist political project of Cundinamarca led by Antonio Nariño, did not fit into the ritual and symbolic repertoire, nor into the politics of memory of the Republic of Colombia. National festivities were concentrated in the Christmas period, far from July. From 1820 onwards 28 July became the holiday to celebrate the anniversary of the Liberator. St. Simon, whose feast day is the most important laboratory for the study of Bolivarian eulogistic vocabulary, came to have more devotees than St. Librada in Bogotá.¹⁵ Furthermore, the republican cult of the heroine Policarpa Salavarrieta started in January 1820 as the very most important female theme in the new politics of memory. However the Military Hospital in Las Aguas neighborhood in Bogotá and the republican College of Cali were dedicated to St. Librada by Vice-President Francisco de Paula Santander, perhaps because he saw that it was an useful symbol for connecting two regions of New Granada – the federalist Cauca Valley and centralist Cundinamarca – under the immense and heterogeneous canopy of the Great Bolivarian Patria.

A very short report about the procession of St. Librada was published in July 1829, after 14 years of silence about her. Bringing to an end the repression against the conspirators who had tried to assassinate him on the night of 25 September 1828, the dictator-president Simón Bolívar was concerned with the war against Peru in Ecuador, from where he would only return in the January of the following year. Perhaps in response to the procession, in a decree dated 28 July 1829, the Mayor of Cundinamarca, Pedro Alcántara Herrán, ordered rigorous mourning on 25 September in memory of

the most scandalous attack in American history ... since it is impossible to drown its memory in the darkness of oblivion, we must also preserve the memory of bitter tears of true patriots.¹⁶

After the creation of the Republic of New Granada the processions of St. Librada officially reappeared with its first president Francisco de Paula Santander. From then on a subtle game can be perceived between the actual event and how it was reported in the press. For over a century, newspapers and memoirists insist on emphasizing the traditional character of the procession, especially when breaking a new silence of many years about it. However, it would be foolhardy to say that St. Librada was regularly carried in procession every year. The following table highlights in the color ■ fifty-three years in which we found reliable news of St. Librada processions in the civic festivities on 20 July in Bogotá. The color ■ indicates significant mentions of the protagonism of St. Librada or about the historic importance of her procession:

1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
1812	1822	1832	1842	1852	1862	1872	1882	1892	1902	1912	1922	1932	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1992	2002
1813	1823	1833	1843	1853	1863	1873	1883	1893	1903	1913	1923	1933	1943	1953	1963	1973	1983	1993	2003
1814	1824	1834	1844	1854	1864	1874	1884	1894	1904	1914	1924	1934	1944	1954	1964	1974	1984	1994	2004
1815	1825	1835	1845	1855	1865	1875	1885	1895	1905	1915	1925	1935	1945	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005
1816	1826	1835	1846	1856	1866	1876	1886	1896	1906	1916	1926	1936	1946	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
1817	1827	1837	1847	1857	1867	1877	1887	1897	1907	1917	1927	1937	1947	1957	1967	1977	1987	1997	2007
1818	1828	1838	1848	1858	1868	1878	1888	1898	1908	1918	1928	1938	1948	1958	1968	1078	1988	1998	2008
1819	1829	1839	1849	1859	1869	1879	1889	1899	1909	1919	1929	1939	1949	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009

We must remember that every year until the Vatican II Council (and the 150th anniversary of Independence), St. Librada used to be prayed in Catholic mass of the 20 July. In the toponymy, as is still the case today, the name Santa Librada is very visible. Furthermore, indifferent of political conjunctures, the image of the saint must have attracted the attention of devotees in San Juan de Dios and in other churches where it was brought later, until it became part of the collection of the Museum of 20 July which opened in 1960.

We have seen that the ritual and symbolic appeal to the patron saint, created by Antonio Nariño in the middle of the civil war in the badly named *Patria Boba*, was appropriated by the political adversaries of Simón Bolívar after the fatal rupture of September 1828. A good part of the eclipses of the St. Librada procession in the chart above result from the efforts of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera (1798-1878) in the construction of the memory of Simón Bolívar. A member of the Creole aristocracy of Popayán, nephew of a president of the Spanish Regency Council, aide-de-camp, personal secretary and member of Bolívar's staff, Mosquera was president four times. In addition, his son-in-law and partner Pedro Alcántara Herrán (author of the 1828 decree for the mourning commemoration of the September Conspiracy) was president of New Granada from 1841-1845.

During his first presidency (1845-1849) the *Plaza Mayor*, the most central place of memory in Bogotá, came to be called *Plaza de Bolívar*, with its center being occupied by a statue donated by José Ignacio París. On the North patio of the National Capitol, built by Mosquera in 1847 alongside Plaza de Bolívar, the low reliefs on the statue's pedestal showed the principal achievements of his government: steam navigation along the Magdalena River, the road that linked the river port of Honda to the capital, the National Capitol, the Military Institute, the progress of the press, etc. Simón Bolívar had asked his closest companions in 1829 to defend him from liberals' critiques of the Constitution he had written for Bolivia and his *Decreto Orgánico* which created the dictatorship in the Republic of Colombia. Mosquera was in the United States in January 1831 when he heard of Bolívar's death and published an obituary in two New York newspapers, which was republished in European newspapers. He exalted the memory of the Liberator along with President Andrew Jackson and the former king of Spain José Bonaparte. In Europe he visited former colleagues from Bolívar staff, Prince Talleyrand, the French King Louis-Philippe, the former emperor of Brazil and his daughter Maria da Glória Queen of Portugal, the King of Sardinia, Pope Gregory XVI and various scientific societies, always comparing Bolívar to Napoleon Bonaparte and

rejecting the criticisms of Benjamin Constant and Francisco de Paula Santander. On 20 July 1846 when he inaugurated the monument to Bolívar, President Mosquera published *Fragmentos de la Memoria sobre la vida del General Simón Bolívar* in the Bogotá newspaper *El Día*. In 1853 he published in New York the first part of his biography of the Liberator. He finished the second part in 1870 in exile; the Academy of History published it in 1917 on the Centenary of Independence.¹⁷

The ritualism of St. Librada became visible again with new symbolic ingredients in the radicalized period between 1848 and 1854. The extense program for the 1849 20 July festival, organized by the Philanthropic Society, links the procession with the manumission of slaves, Phrygian caps, street banquets, concerts, bull fights, balloons, and free *chicha*. The recovery of St. Librada by the liberals seems to have been criticized, because a few weeks later after the conservatives were accused of the ‘grossest superstition’ because of their processions with the image of Jesus the Nazarene identified as a general of the army, during the 1840 civil war.¹⁸

In the nocturnal procession of 19 July, three different groups brought the image of St. Librada from San Juan de Dios church to the cathedral: the Society of Artisans, students from the Militar, Espirito Santo and Concordia colleges, and a ‘group of patriots’ with President José Hilario López and his secretaries of state. In the procession that brought back the image on the night of 23 July, the artisans are not mentioned. The detail suggests that the tradition created by Nariño had been appropriated by the Santanderistas or liberal *Gólgotas*, who were opposed to the liberal *Draconianos*.¹⁹

The 1850 20 July commemorations in the city of Neiva also brings to mind the civic festivities theorized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, experienced in the French Revolution, and even better recent examples from the 1848 Revolution in Paris. Under a leafy tree on the banks of a river, in a civic banquet with manumission of slaves, José María Rojas Garrido’s speech took from the 1810 *Constitución Feliz* (see note 6) the providentialist concept of St. Librada:

20 July 1810 ... left us with a monumental memory. It was St. Librada’s day and the arcane of Providence had decided to avenge the outrages of the new world and exercise the most striking act of its severe justice.²⁰

The Panegyric of Saint Librada, preached by the interim vicar Paulino Antonio Olivos in 1855, shows a radically distinct perspective of the cult of the patron saint of 20 July, a few months after the fall of the short-lived military

dictatorship of General Melo who had been supported by the *Draconians*. In the cathedral surrounded by rubble from recent combats, Olivos stated that the happiest nation is the one in which citizens fear punishment. All the violence and confusion of the independence process had been nothing other than the conscious movement of the Catholic people against the despotism of the Spanish monarch. Simón Bolívar wanted order with independence and liberty, always under the auspices of religion. What could be seen now was a young and misfortunate Republic, fratricidal wars, religion being despised, and priests persecuted. To achieve properly understood progress, everyone should be “slaves of the law, not confusing libertinism with liberty.” Doctor Paulino Olivos appeared to have revised the 1815 Novena in which Friar Miguel Antonio Escalante had intermeshed the words Librada, Liberator, Liberty, and Liberal. The nation owed its independence to the Catholic religion and especially to Simón Bolívar, however liberty had been corrupted by libertinism. St. Librada only appears as Pilate in the Creed: “Librada your Servant under whose auspices our forefathers laid the foundation of the Republic and who feast day we solemnize.” The chain of concepts of the old novena is inverted: against libertinism and for a liberty properly understood as Servitude to God.²¹

The next reappearance of the St. Librada processions has a very special protagonist: Manuel Murillo Toro (1816-1880). As a young civil servant he certainly participated in the 1835, 1836 and 1837 processions with President Santander. Later, as Secretary of Finance under President José Hilario López, he participated in the 1849 St. Librada procession. In his first presidency (1864-1866) there are no reports of processions. In compensation before, during and after his second presidency (April 1872 - April 1874), St. Librada was brought onto the streets for five consecutive years. The context was federalism, the so-called Radical Olympus, hegemony of the *Gólgota* liberals. In 1871 Bogotá was confirmed as the capital of the United States of Colombia. In May 1873, the 20 July became a national festival reaffirming the centrality of the capital and opening the way for the projection of the civic cult of St. Librada throughout the country. The triumphs of the image of St. Librada in the patriotic festivities during the first half of the 1870s coincided with the beginning of the political sunset of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, with the officialization of the symbolism of Marianne by the Third Republic in France, and with the apotheosis of the cult to Simón Bolívar in Caracas under the presidency of Guzmán Blanco.²²

At the beginning of the second presidency of Murillo Toro in 1872 the presbyters Bernardo Herrera Restrepo and Joaquín Pardo Vergara, young aides

of Archbishop Vicente Arbeláez, created a new model for the St. Librada procession, incorporating the image known as the Christ of the Martyrs of Veracruz church, which since the seventeenth century had accompanied those condemned to death from prison to the catafalque and their burial. Despite the explicit appeal to the exclusive memory of victims of Spanish repression between 1816-1819, the image concentrated the memories of all those who had gone to the scaffold in Bogotá since much before – and much after – independence: bandits, *desesperados*, adversaries defeated by one or other governing party. The Christ of the Martyrs evoked indistinctly all them in such a way that the sacred communion of all those dead, updated by the procession of St. Librada, added to the emblem of Liberty used by Antonio Nariño in 1813 a new and very powerful symbolic weight.

After the fall of Radical Olympus there are almost no records of processions of St. Librada under the strongly centralizing and conservative regime of the Regeneration set up by the former radical liberal Rafael Núñez. The centenary of the birth of Simón Bolívar (1883) was commemorated with great pomp and circumstance. According to the Concordat with the Vatican the country had to pay a perpetual indemnity to the Catholic Church because of the expropriation of its mortmain goods during the liberal reforms, the educational system was placed under clerical control, etc. Surprisingly St. Librada appears in a miracle during the Thousand Days War. A sort of Panamanian myth of origin recounts how St. Librada protected the population of Azuero province in 1900, driving away a conservative government's warship which, without her intervention, would have devastated that liberal region.²³ Las Tablas, capital of the province, is the principal center of devotion to the saint – who has four venerated images there – and was the hometown of the liberal leader Belisario Porras, who surely knew the processions of St. Librada when he studied in Bogotá in the 1870s.

The silence about St. Librada seemed a rule in the conservative and Hispanist Colombia consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1902. In 1910 the procession's program appeared in the newspapers and in the commemorative album of the Centenary, but the privilege of a photo was not even contemplated. An oil painting of St. Librada was donated to the republican College which bears its name in Cali, on the one hundredth anniversary of the first procession in Bogotá.



In this engraving by Pepe Gómez, published when the Centenary of Independence was drawing to a close, the matter are the 25 million dollars that would be paid by the United States to Colombia as compensation for the loss of Panama.

We must ask why Pepe Gómez could want to join two quite different symbolic representations: the lay allegory of the Republic, Liberty or Homeland, created by the French Revolution, and the sacred iconography of Christ on the cross.

If it were not the explicit inscription INRI, perhaps we could ignore the conscious intention of a polemical collage and ask for details such as the T shaped cross (normally Christ is represented on a Latin cross) or the tied hands, and not nailed.

However, it is clear that Pepe Gómez really wanted to shock the Colombians replacing Christ on the cross by Marianne. We still do not know if this daring political cartoon caused a scandal when it was published.

In our opinion the cartoonist was not a fool because in 1919, and until 1960, most people of Bogotá knew very well the religious image of a crucified young woman, and they could recognize her as a sort of Colombian symbol of Liberty.

Founded in 1902, the Academy of History reported for the first time in 1917 its participation in the traditional [sic] procession of St. Librada. Along

with the progressive political ascension of the liberals, the newspapers began to print photos. From 1920 onwards the Academy became responsible for the organization of the patriotic festivities. In 1922 a chronicle with eloquent engravings and photos about the 1872 procession, titled “A memorable fiftieth anniversary” stated:

The procession of St. Librada and the Christ of the Martyrs was then born, which invariably [sic] we see leaving the Veracruz church on 19 July. It was started by the current Metropolitan Archbishop.²⁴

The institutionalization of St. Librada’s procession during the next decades corresponds to the historiographical project of the Academy that, for better enthrone Nariño and Santander as the founding fathers of the Colombian nation, decided to cherish the memory of the patriotic celebrations of Golgotha liberals, concealed for 50 years since the Regeneration.²⁵ Suddenly many photos of St. Librada processions began to circulate annually in newspapers all over the country. The more modern these images seem to us – surely many readers at the time thought this as well –, the more the captions and texts described them as traditional events. They are singular elements, occasional instants of the process of the production of traditions on an industrial scale, from top down, open to certain social demands; rituals sacralizing social cohesion, explaining to thousands of recently arrived peasants the ways of emotional adhesion to the imagined national community. Film records of these processions certainly are waiting for researchers.



El Tiempo, 20 July 1931, p.12

The consensus began to break up in 1951, when the president of the National Board of Patriotic Festivities deplored the absence in the procession of many academic colleges, as well as students from the colleges, specially the Military School; he distributed a note of protest, sending a copy to the ministers of Education and War.²⁶

More than a political cleavage (even if the procession was always most visible in the liberal press), the 1951 incident suggests that the high Catholic hierarchy wanted to break the tradition. Throughout its long existence *El Catolicismo*, the official Catholic newspaper, never mentioned the patriotic rituals of St. Librada. Perhaps because Archbishop Vicente Arbeláez and his aides Joaquín Pardo Vergara and Bernardo Herrera Restrepo (who came to be Archbishop of Bogotá from 1891-1928), who had joined St. Librada and the Christ of the Martyrs in 1872 creating a new model for the 20 July commemorations, were suspected of being masons.²⁷ Note that this occurs exactly in the end of the episcopacy of Ismael Perdomo Borrero (from 1928 to 1950), when his functions were taken over by Cardinal Archbishop Crisanto Luque Sánchez (1950-1959). The processions continued until 1957.

During the dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957) the militarization of patriotic festivities emerged. Many photos, increasingly elaborated, give more attention to the Christ of the Martyrs than to the crucified image of St. Librada. In turn the Catholic press ostensibly ignored the procession, emphasizing the feast day and the image of the Virgin of Mount Carmel. In the mass of 20 July, the priests no longer prayed in memory of St. Librada, but to St. Vicente de Paul, the culmination of a silent process of substitution that began in the 1860s.



Finally St. Librada disappeared from the patriotic festivities in 1958, when the Military Junta negotiated the transition to the civilian regime of the Frente Nacional. The next year, two and a half months after the death of Cardinal Crisanto Luque, perhaps aimed at those who expected to see again the usual photos of the traditional procession of St. Librada, an important newspaper put two photos together on its front page and explained:

At the top, two small gamines holding hands, both barefoot, walk seriously alongside the students who march. The young man with glasses looks surprised these spontaneous colleagues. Below, a priest and his school band, playing with vitality the famous march “The Bridge of the River Kwai” with his trumpet.²⁸

The ritualization of the new expectations of the future –children and young people in march towards progress and modernity, guided by the Church’s trumpets on the eve of the Vatican II Council – could from now on substitute the civic-religious ritual of St. Librada deeply anchored on the experience and the memory of previous generations.

Fifty years later, in July 2009, the old Casa del Florero hosted for a few days the image of the Christ of the Martyrs, generously borrowed by the religious authority. The two central protagonists of the forgotten St. Librada’s processions, separated since July 1957, were once again joined in the exhibition *¡Santa Libertad! Memoria y olvido de una imagen femenina de la Independencia*.²⁹ Who knows, maybe they will meet again in 2013!



NOTES

¹ BISLENGHI, Attilio. *Luces y Sombras. Mil años de amor y devoción a Santa Librada*. Sigüenza: Gráficas Carpintero, 2003. ÁVILA, Ana. *Imágenes y símbolos en la arquitectura pintada española (1470-1560)*. Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 1993. RAMOS GÓMEZ, Francisco Javier. *Juan de Soreda y la pintura del Renacimiento en Sigüenza*. Guadalajara: Diputación, 2004. DÍAZ TENA, María Eugenia. La vida de Santa Librada y su fuente medieval. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos. *Culturas Populares. Revista Electrónica*, n.8, 2009, available at: www.culturaspopulares.org/textos8/articulos/diaz.pdf.

² In relation to Lucca's *Volto Santo* and changes in the religious sensitivity of Latin Christianity to images, cf. SCHMITT, Jean-Claude. *Le corps des images: Essais sur la culture visuelle au moyen âge*. Paris: Gallimard, 2002. FRIESEN, Ilse E. *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001.

³ PALMA, Ricardo. *La fundación de Santa Liberata*. In: *Tradiciones peruanas*. Barcelona: Montaner y Simón, p.291-295, 1893. NAVARRO, José Gabriel. *Contribuciones a la Historia del Arte en el Ecuador*, v.IV. Quito: La Prensa Católica, 1952, p.200. VALLÍN MAGAÑA, Rodolfo & VARGAS MURCIA, Laura. *Iglesia de San Juan de Dios*. Bogotá: Arquidiócesis de Bogotá, 2004, p.79.

⁴ POSADA, Eduardo. *Fastos de Santafé*. Bogotá: Academia de Historia. *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades*, v.XIV, n.58, p.123-128, 1922.

⁵ HIGUERUELA DEL PINO, Leandro. La Iglesia y las Cortes de Cádiz. Madrid: Universidad Complutense. *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea* v.24, n.68, p.61-80, 2002. GONZÁLEZ CHANTOS Y ULLAURI, Diego Eugenio. *Santa Librada. Virgen y mártir, patrona de la santa iglesia, ciudad y obispado de Sigüenza: vindicada*. Madrid: Imprenta de la Administración del Real Arbitrio, 1806. CROISSET, Jean: *Año Cristiano, ó ejercicios devotos para todos los días del año [julio]*. Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1854, p.384. PÉREZ GALDOZ, Benito. *Juan Martín: el empecinado*. Madrid: Susesores de Hernando, 1916.

⁶ *La Constitución Feliz. Periódico político y económico de la Capital del Nuevo Reyno de Granada*. Bogotá, 17 August 1810, p.2.

⁷ CABALLERO, José María. *Diario de la Patria Boba*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1902, p.99-91. It appears that the sermon of Friar José Antonio Chavarría was not printed.

⁸ REY, Juan Ricardo. *Los indígenas europeos: la "India de la libertad"*. Bogotá: Museo Nacional, 2007.

⁹ *Sermón que en la fiesta de Santa Librada hecha en obsequio del Exmo. Señor Presidente Don Antonio Nariño por el ilustre cabildo de la villa de Bogotá, pronunció el Padre Francisco Florido de la Orden de San Francisco, el día 3 de enero de 1812*. Santa Fe de Bogotá: Imprenta de D. Bruno Espinosa, 1812. (This ecclesiastic patriot is known for his *Velada de las 13 tesis* in honor of Simón Bolívar in 1819).

¹⁰ CABALLERO, op. cit., p.90-91 and 137-140. About the importance of the *damnatio*

memoriae in this context, cf. LOMNÉ, Georges. Las ciudades de la Nueva Granada: teatro y objeto de los conflictos de la memoria política (1810-1830). Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, n.21, p.115-135, 1993. See in CABALLERO the ritual of desacralization and destruction of a Spanish flag (p.144, 31 ago. 1813).

¹¹ CABALLERO, op. cit., p.139-140. This would be the second sermon of the Franciscan friar Francisco Florido dedicated to the saint (see note 9).

¹² ESCALANTE, Miguel Antonio *Novena a la Gloriosa Virgen y Mártir Santa Librada, Patrona, Protectora y Libertadora de los Ciudadanos de la Nueva Granada, redactada por Fray Miguel Antonio Escalante, presbítero de la orden hospitalaria del Patriarca San Juan de Dios*. Bogotá: Imprenta del C. B. Espinosa, 1815. Cf. ROMERO, Mario G. *Novenas políticas en la Independencia*. Bogotá: Academia de Historia. *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades*, v.XLVII, n.549-551, p.477-487, 1960.

¹³ CABALLERO, op. cit., p.181-183.

¹⁴ *Sermón que en la solemne festividad del 20 de julio, aniversario de la libertad de la Nueva Granada predicó en la Santa Iglesia Metropolitana el Ciudadano Dr. Juan Fernández de Sotomayor, Representante al Congreso de las Provincias Unidas por la de Cartagena y en este Obispado Cura Rector y Vicario Juez Eclesiástico de la Ciudad Valerosa de Mompox*. Bogotá: Imprenta del C. B. Espinosa, 1815. Cf. OCAMPO FLÓREZ, Javier. *Catecismos políticos en la independencia de Hispanoamérica*. Tunja: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1988.

¹⁵ LOMNÉ, op. cit., shows how the meaning of the commemorations of 20 July in 1821 and 1822 moved to the celebration of the victories of Carabobo and Pichincha; there was no longer any place for the memory of the civic virtues of the *Patria Boba*, and there were no funerary honors for the corpse of Antonio Nariño in 1824.

¹⁶ *Decreto sobre conmemoración de la Conspiración Septembrina*. Virtual exhibition: Impresiones de la Independencia: Proclamas, bandos y hojas volantes. Bogotá: Biblioteca Nacional, 2010, available at:

huellas.bibliotecanacional.gov.co/index.php?idcategoria=38869.

¹⁷ TAMAYO, Joaquín. *Don Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera*. Bogotá: Cromos, 1944. MOSQUERA, Tomás Cipriano de. *Memoria sobre la vida del general Simón Bolívar Libertador de Colombia, Perú y Bolivia*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1954.

¹⁸ GONZÁLEZ PÉREZ, Marcos. La fiesta republicana del siglo XIX. In: *Fiesta y nación en Colombia*. Bogotá: Cooperativa Editorial Magisterio, 1998, p.49-71. Cf. Bogotá: *El Neogranadino*, 1849, p.321-322.

¹⁹ Bogotá: *El Neogranadino*, 1849, p.65; Bogotá: *La Crónica Mensual*, 1849, p.69.

²⁰ Bogotá: *Gaceta Oficial*, 1850, p.425-426.

²¹ *Panejórico de Santa Librada Predicado en la Iglesia Catedral el 20 de julio de 1855 por el*

Dr. Paulino A. Olivos Cura Interino de la Catedral. Bogotá: Imprenta de Francisco Torres Amaya, 1855.

²² SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María. Construcción de un imaginario nacionalista mediante la estatuaría pública en la Venezuela de Antonio Guzmán Blanco (1870-1888). In: *Teoría e historia de los nacionalismos*. Universidad de Oviedo: Asociación de Jóvenes Historiadores, 2006, p.546-557. Available at: eprints.ucm.es/7063/1/OVIEDO_Jov_Histor_PONENCIA_NACIONALISMOS.pdf.

²³ Cf. GONZÁLEZ RUIZ, Sergio. *Veintiséis leyendas panameñas*. Panamá: Autoridad del Canal. Colección Biblioteca de la Nacionalidad, 1999.

²⁴ Bogotá: *El Gráfico* 22 jul. 1922, p.101-103.

²⁵ GHOTME GHOTME, Rafat Ahmed. Santanderismo, antisantanderismo y la Academia Colombiana de Historia: la operación histórica en el proceso de construcción de la nación en Colombia, 1910-1970. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* n.34, 2007, p.121-164.

²⁶ Bogotá: Academia de Historia. *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades* v.XXXVIII, n.441-443, 1951, p.510.

²⁷ CORDOVEZ MOURE, José María. *Reminiscencias de Santafé y Bogotá*. Bogotá: Imprenta del Telegrama, 1895, p.444. MARQUES VILLAMIL, Martha Isabel. *Monseñor Bernardo Herrera Restrepo en la vida política colombiana*. Bogotá: Universidad de la Sabana. Facultad de Comunicación Social y Periodismo, 1986, p.78.

²⁸ Bogotá: *El Siglo*, 19 jul. 1959, p.1.

²⁹ The exhibition folder is available at: www.quintadeBolívar.gov.co/museoindependencia/otrasExposiciones/plegablesantalibrada.pdf.