

The Production of Knowledge of Normativity in the Age of the Printing Press

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The Production of Knowledge of Normativity in the Age of the Printing Press

*Martín de Azpilcueta's Manual de Confessores from a
Global Perspective*

Edited by

Manuela Bragagnolo



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Preface: Coordinates of an Experiment

This book is the outcome of an experiment. The experiment originated from two premises: the awareness of a strong (although not exclusive) connection, in history, between law and the written page; and the idea that knowledge is, today, much like it was in the past, also the product of different material and social processes of production. In particular, I started the experiment with the aim of reaching a better understanding about how knowledge of normativity was produced in the early modern period, which was the time of the first globalisation and the media revolution that accompanied the emergence of the printing press. For a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it was not sufficient to look at legal texts as intellectual outputs of the so-called “author”. It was also necessary to look at books as material objects: objects in which knowledge was embedded, stored, and mobilised on a global scale; objects, the production, circulation, and consumption of which—according to Robert Darnton’s “communication circuit”—contributed to the production of knowledge itself.

To explore this, we therefore required interaction and dialogue between at least two disciplines: book history and legal history. With this purpose in mind, I put together a team of experts from the two fields, who shared the task of analysing—using different perspectives, methods, tools, sources, and research questions—the object on our lab table, which was an early modern normative global bestseller: Martín de Azpilcueta’s *Manual de Confessores*. Looking at Azpilcueta’s *Manual* as a material object meant considering all three pillars of Darnton’s “communication circuit” on the early modern global scale. Thus, the members of the team were chosen according to their expertise on different geographic areas, enabling us to cover as much as possible of the four parts of the early modern world.

Thanks to the results of the experiment, found in the chapters of this volume, we can follow different actors, places, and factors that contributed toward shaping the early modern knowledge of normativity. First, in addition to discussing author’s agency in the publishing industry (Bragagnolo; Manrique Figueroa), this book shows different communities of actors with different relationships to the printed page. These communities were made up of the first readers of the *Manual*, who were asked by Azpilcueta to provide questions and who participated in the transformation process of the book (Bragagnolo); missionaries who consulted Azpilcueta from the mission and whose letters were used as a means to produce and disseminate knowledge of normativity (Barbosa; Ribeiro); and missionaries who possessed copies of the *Manual*

or of the *Compendia* and put these into practice in the missionary territories both in the Western (Barbosa; Ribeiro) and Eastern parts of the Early Modern Empires (McManus; Orii; Coutinho Silva), sometimes adapting Azpilcueta's erudite knowledge to the local needs of their missions in the printed and hand-written texts and confessional manuals that they authored (McManus; Orii; Rex Galindo). Authors of the several *Compendia* of the *Manual*, who transformed and adapted the text for different readerships, are also present in the following pages. Moreover, the contributions in this volume shed new light on all those actors involved in the production and circulation of the book as a material object: institutional and political powers granting licences and printing privileges (Bragagnolo; Manrique Figueroa), as well as printers, publishers, booksellers, agents, and shippers (Manrique Figueroa; Maillard Álvarez; Rueda Ramírez; Orii). Last but not least, owners and readers of Azpilcueta appear in this volume: missionaries (Jesuits in particular), clerics, legal professionals, governors, and physicians (Rueda Ramírez), as well as confessors and priests—who had to acquire the knowledge they needed to perform confession according to the norms of the Council of Trent (Guibovich Pérez)—and friars who read the books that belonged to the collections of institutional libraries—such as the Franciscan monasteries in New Spain (García Aguilar)—and who sometimes left traces on the printed page (*manicules*, for instance) of their reading practice (Hamann).

Furthermore, the authors of this volume show that the distribution, circulation, and presence of the *Manual* on a global scale is also a fundamental component of the production of knowledge of normativity. Some of the chapters portray the actual presence of the book in a certain geographic area, shedding light on the time span in which the book was requested, shipped, sold, present on the bookshelves of private and institutional libraries, and possessed by readers. Commercial and religious channels brought different editions of Azpilcueta's *Manual* and *Compendia* to the Americas and Asia: we find copies of it in the book market, on the ships that brought books and other goods from Seville to New Spain and Tierra Firme, between the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century (Rueda Ramírez); in conventual and private libraries in New Spain (García Aguilar; Rex Galindo), Brazil (Ribeiro) (clearly losing its importance, and being replaced by other titles by the 18th century), and Asia (Orii).

Finally, together with the never-ending revision and transformation processes performed by an “authority” like Azpilcueta (and, later, by both Franciscans and Jesuits), which made the book suit different contexts and readers (Bragagnolo; Orii), the need to spread the norms of the Council of Trent was among several factors that explain the extraordinary diffusion and pres-

ence of Azpilcueta's *Manual* on a global scale (Guibovich Pérez; Rex Galindo). These factors, which contributed to explicating the demand for the book in the Atlantic book trade (Rueda Ramírez), were intertwined with other factors, such as the economic interest of the actors involved in the book production and trade—printers, publishers, booksellers—who saw in the *Manual* an exceptional business opportunity (Maillard Álvarez).

The Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory is the context in which the idea of this collective volume was conceived and this experiment put into practice. It is thanks to the stimulating teamwork at the Institute, the seminars and workshops, and, most of all, the always inspiring discussion with Thomas Dube and colleagues in Frankfurt, that the idea to make Azpilcueta's *Manual* the object of cross-observation by legal historians and book historians, and to look at it from a global perspective, came to fruition.

But this book is first and foremost the outcome of a dialogue among the authors, who formed a very productive working group. Everyone agreed to look at Azpilcueta's *Manual* as a material object, with their own categories, methodologies and sources. I made available to the authors a database containing the metadata and digital reproduction of all the editions of the *Manual* and derivative products that I had compiled over the last few years, as well as my passion for this incredible story. All the members of the group accepted the challenge. We all met together three times, always virtually, to share methods, questions, and bibliographies, and exchange provisional versions of our chapters, which gave consistency to the volume. With part of the team, we also presented the first results of our research at the fifth CHAM International conference, that took place in Lisbon in July 2021. And a final virtual conference, involving all the members of the working group, took place in January 2022.

I have the impression that we were able to provide quite an interesting overall picture. For me, it has been a very enriching journey. I am very grateful to each and every author who accepted the challenge to start new research, at a very complicated moment in time (during the COVID-19 pandemic). In that context, working with an international team of scholars based all over the world forced us into long online meetings, which were unavoidably too early for the members of the team based in the West, and too late for those living in the East. I am also grateful to Rômulo da Silva Ehalt, Laura Beck Varela, Matthew J.K. Hill, Fupeng Li, Alexandra Woods, Otto Danwerth, and Andrea Ottone who animatedly participated in the discussion and enriched the debate. It has been a heroic enterprise! Thank you, all!

Manuela Bragagnolo

April 2023

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