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Las Bexareñas and their Wills: Women's Material Culture and Cataloguing Practices in Spanish San Fernando de Béxar

Abstract:

The women of San Fernando de Béxar (modern-day San Antonio, Texas) on the northern edge of New Spain faced the many challenges of frontier life. The belongings of these women were limited compared to that of women in other parts of New Spain, yet the Béxar women accumulated, largely through inheritance, religious paintings, statues, and crucifixes as well as clothing, jewelry and kitchen wares. Some women had luxuries and furniture from other parts of New Spain or the world. Through their wills, women catalogued their most prized possessions. Not all women left behind wills, but those who did catalogued their precious belongings with care. This study uses wills from San Fernando de Béxar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to examine what possessions women included in their wills and explains how they catalogued this property.

In 1738 on the far northern frontier of New Spain in the relatively new villa of San Fernando de Béxar, María Melián recorded her last will and testament. According to extant documents, this was the first will from a woman in this community. The will was brief and noted ownership of unnamed property and six cows.¹ While Melián engaged in a practice customary throughout the Spanish world, it was not so usual at the time in Béxar. As the villa grew, recording of wills became more common and more detailed. Though the will writing

¹ “Protocol of notary of the Cabildo, Francisco José de Arocha, consisting of twenty-three powers of attorney, sixteen contracts of sale, four wills, one contract of gift and one resignation,” March 22, 1738 (Austin: Bexar Archives Online, 1717-1805, Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin), https://www.cah.utexas.edu/projects/bexar/gallery_doc.php?doc=e_bx_000045&t=140&s=20 (accessed September 4, 2021).

focused on preparing the soul for approaching death, it also organized property dispersal and debt collection and/or payment. In this endeavor, the Bexareñas would pay careful attention in cataloguing their belongings. The will writing revealed two major considerations: testatrices either grouped possessions together based upon the function of the objects (kitchen implements, tools, clothing, etc.), or they grouped possessions together based upon which heir would inherit which property. In either organizational pattern, the women noted the items of most value to them. As much work on women's collecting and cataloguing practices has focused on elite women, this study offers a look at women who had high social standing in their communities but were not necessarily wealthy, especially when compared to people of wealth in other parts of the Spanish empire.² Thus, the Bexareñas' concerns in organizing and cataloguing their property in their wills were practical and functional, yet still reveal emotional connections to some objects.

Spain began official settlement of the San Antonio area in the province of Texas in 1718 with the foundation of Mission San Antonio de Valero and the presidio of San Antonio de Béxar.³ The Spanish launched the missionary endeavor in hopes of converting the Payaya and other Coahuiltecan peoples to Christianity. The early settlement consisted of the indigenous people, missionaries, artisans brought to help direct the building of the mission, and presidial soldiers and their families. The Spanish continued their missionary enterprise with four other

² This trend is evident in works such as Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, ed., *Material Women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*. (London: Routledge, 2016) and Arlene Leis and Kacie L. Wills, ed., *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. (London: Routledge, 2021). Of course, this current volume in which this essay is located seeks to examine other women and broaden conceptions of what makes a collection and how women with fewer possessions catalog and organize their belongings.

³ Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1992), 117.

missions in the area.⁴ Spanish officials worried over their capacity to hold and settle the frontier, especially after the French strove to settle nearby in Louisiana.⁵ As a result, Spain recruited families from the Canary Islands, and these people made a long and demanding journey from the Canaries to the San Antonio area. Fifteen families plus a few men arrived. Widows headed two of the families including a family led by the above-mentioned María Melián whose husband died on the voyage. The new settlers officially founded the villa of San Fernando de Béxar.⁶ The information recorded in the women's wills enables researchers to better know and understand women's roles in building new frontiers.

This community remained quite isolated throughout the Spanish era. There were *camino reales*, royal roads, that connected Béxar to other parts of New Spain, but the other settlements were far away and travel was dangerous. Indigenous peoples from the Plains, such as Lipan Apaches and Comanches, controlled great expanses of territory throughout Texas.⁷ In addition to distance and difficulty in travel, the imperial system of Spain made it difficult and expensive to produce and/or import objects into New Spain. For example, laws required that any items imported to New Spain had to enter the port of Veracruz. Then, merchants carried goods along a

⁴ Gilberto M. Hinojosa, "The Religious-Indian Communities: The Goals of the Friars," in *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio*, edited by Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1991), 61-2.

⁵ Gilbert R. Cruz, *Let There Be Towns: Spanish Municipal Origins in the American Southwest, 1610-1810* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 52-54.

⁶ Amy M. Porter, "The Women and Children of Spanish San Antonio: Their Practical and Spiritual Worlds," in *300 Years of San Antonio and Bexar County*, edited by Claudia R. Guerra (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2019), 34.

⁷ Elizabeth A.H. John, "Independent Indians and the San Antonio Community," in *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio*, edited by Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1991), 123-25.

long and challenging path to reach Béxar and other frontier settlements.⁸ The result was that individual belongings in Béxar were rather scant when compared to other core areas of the Spanish empire. Immigrants brought some items with them, local artisans and indigenous people produced some wares, and merchants transported other items.⁹ Though scarce, this property provides an understanding of living conditions, dress, spirituality, and other aspects of Bexareño culture. While Bexareños' belongings might be referenced in court cases, last wills and testaments are the best sources available uncovering what people owned, how they described their property and the items they deemed most important.

Recording a last will and testament allowed Spanish citizens in borderland communities an opportunity to prepare for death as the will was a spiritual document. Most wills began with a prayer and managed the wishes concerning burial early in the document. The will also followed a formula. Though there were few lawyers and trained notaries in the frontier settlements, there were books that had the legal procedure for making a will. To some degree, this formula likely meant that scholars cannot interpret wills as being freely constructed by testators.¹⁰ In addition, literacy rates were low in the borderland communities, especially among women, so a testator had to trust that the notary wrote the will accurately.¹¹ Aside from all of those caveats, the wills

⁸ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 173-77. See also Jesús F. de la Teja, *San Antonio de Béxar: A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 128.

⁹ Jesús F. de la Teja and John Wheat, "Béxar: Profile of a Tejano Community, 1820–1832," in *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio*, ed. by Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Austin: University of Texas Press, Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, 1991), 18.

¹⁰ Martina Will de Chaparro, *Death and Dying in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 31-3; Charles R. Cutter, *The Legal Culture of Northern New Spain, 1700-1810* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 4.

¹¹ Bernardo P. Gallegos, *Literacy, Education, and Society in New Mexico, 1693-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 26-7. Amongst the wills used in this

provide the one document where women could catalog their belongings. Yes, the formula for the will was set, but there was a space for listing property and explaining inheritance wishes. It is likely that women chose how to catalog their property emphasizing that which held special meaning to them. This significance might have been economic, personal, or both in many cases.

It is important to note that the women who recorded wills in B exar were elites within their communities, but they were poor when compared to elites in other parts of the Spanish empire.¹² As a result, the testatrixes catalogued their possessions carefully and described items in terms of their utilitarian value. The descriptions also reveal the importance of the reuse of property that remains valuable in a place where property cannot be replaced easily or that the value of the material remains high because it can be repurposed, such as in the case of metal objects.¹³

Under Spanish law, women could own, inherit, and buy and sell property. Community property laws meant that husbands and wives shared what they gained in a marriage. Property that women brought into a marriage remained their own. Finally, Spanish law encouraged male and female heirs to be treated fairly equally.¹⁴ Despite equitable property and inheritance laws, Spanish society did denote specific gender roles that circumscribed women's work.

essay, only one of the women signed her name to the will. There were witnesses who signed wills which should have helped ensure accuracy.

¹² The Spanish charged various fees for the creation and filing of a will. The will of Mar a Ignacia Urrutia lists these fees, and they might have been prohibitive for some community members. Maria Igancia Urrutia, Spanish Archives of Bexar County (SABC), WE 114, 1/7/1812.

¹³ There are hints in the historical documents that metal was scarce in frontier communities such as San Antonio. For example, around 1817 the governor of Texas, Antonio Mart nez, wrote a letter requesting iron and steel, noting that there was a scarcity. See Marc Simmons and Frank Turley, *Southwestern Colonial Ironwork: The Spanish Blacksmithing Tradition from Texas to California* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 1980), 33.

¹⁴ Jean A. Stuntz, *Hers, His, and Theirs: Community Property Law in Spain and Early Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005), 72, 77, 82.

Women in Béxar fulfilled several roles in their families, and food preparation was an important one. Women's wills reveal this significance as the women tended to list their kitchen implements carefully. In her 1772 will, Esmeregilda Hernández first described her house and then began her list from her kitchen: a *metate* (a flat stone used to grind corn to make *masa* for tortillas), two boiling pots, a griddle, a copper boiler, two kettles, and a small three-legged pot.¹⁵ In an 1809 will, another woman lists very little property to include a stone house, two iron pots, and a copper boiler.¹⁶ One of the most detailed and stocked kitchens comes from the will of María Concepción de Estrada. Estrada listed two *metates*, a large boiler, a small pan, a large pot, two small pots, two roasting pans, a copper pan, a small kettle, and a *molcajete* (a mortar).¹⁷ María Josefa Flores de Abrego detailed her kitchen wares as well as their condition noting "a *metate* of colored stone and its *mano* of the same material, two earthen pots, one of which is a little broken and the other is without any damage, a repaired broiler..."¹⁸ Another woman listed a small, broken iron pot.¹⁹ These details are significant in several ways. One, the broken, slightly broken, and/or mended items still had value in monetary as well as utilitarian terms. Two, they reveal that women needed to repair pots, especially metal ones. This might have been due to replacement cost or more likely due to lack of availability of new pots.

Though rare, other women noted items that would help them to entertain and/or display their wealth. A woman recording her 1808 will in Béxar listed five plates, three of which were high quality and two were earthenware (clearly considered of lesser quality). She also

¹⁵ Last Will and Testament of Esmeregilda Hernández, SABC, WE 59, 3/14/1762.

¹⁶ Last Will and Testament of Josefa Flores, SABC, WE 42, 5/3/1809.

¹⁷ Last Will and Testament of María Concepción de Estrada, SABC, WE 36, 11/2/1815.

¹⁸ Last Will and Testament of María Josefa Flores de Abrego, SABC, WE 2, 4/24/1799. The will says, "...*un metate de piedra colorada, con su mano de lo mismo, dos ollas de tierra la una quebradita y la otra sin leccion ninguna, un caso remendado...*"

¹⁹ Last Will and Testament of Catarina Posos, SABC, WE 86, 3/14/1802.

catalogued five cups and six earthenware mugs for drinking water.²⁰ Teresa Saenz de Zevallos listed a bench, table, and candelabra.²¹ Only a few women noted owning a table and a bench or chairs. One of the most detailed listings of dining items comes from María Concepción de Estrada. She noted the following: a bench, a large table, two small tables, four chairs, worn rugs, a crystal vase, a crystal pitcher, four crystal tumblers, two flint crystal jars, and a flint crystal bowl.²² This will stands out for its many crystal items that would have been difficult to find or buy in Béxar. Another woman who owned luxury items for entertainment was María Antonia Ruíz. She listed the following: two large glass flasks, another flask, three wine flasks, four small flasks of China, six crystal glasses, six China plates, a coffee pot made from Puebla ware, three silver dishes, two tablecloths, and four napkins among other items.²³ The China, an expensive import, is unusual and speaks to her status in the community. The Puebla ware was fairly common as artisans crafted it in Puebla, Mexico. While the colonists in New Spain desired European and Asian ceramics, supplies were limited, and the Spanish taught indigenous people to make glazed ceramics in the European and Asian styles.²⁴ All of these items meant that Ruíz could entertain at a level well above most others in Béxar. Luisa Gertrudis de la Rúa listed twenty-four silver knives and spoons.²⁵ This cutlery set indicates that like Ruíz, she too

²⁰ Last Will and Testament of Maria Josefa Valdes, SABC, WE 115, 4/26/1808.

²¹ Last Will and Testament of Teresa Saenz de Zevallos, SABC, WE 121, 6/11/1802.

²² Concepción de Estrada, WE 36.

²³ Last Will and Testament of María Antonia Ruiz, SABC, WE 96, 10/7/1816.

²⁴ Archaeologists have noted that the Puebla ware ceramics had Andalusian and Italian influences. Once Chinese porcelains began to arrive in the late 1500s, artisans began to create Puebla ware in blue and white in a style that copied the Chinese style. Anne A. Fox and Kristi M. Ulrich, *A Guide to Ceramics from Spanish Colonial Sites in Texas, Special Report #33* (San Antonio, Texas: Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2008), 21-3, <https://car.utsa.edu/CARRResearch/Publications/SR/SR%20No.%2033.pdf>.

²⁵ Last Will and Testament of Luisa Gertrudis de la Rúa, SABC, WE 98, 6/25/1820.

entertained. Though living in Béxar at the time of her will, Gertrudis de la Rúa had emigrated from Pensacola. It is likely that she brought her silver with her from Florida.

Most Bexareños lived in small homes. Some dwellings were *jacales* which were structures made of mud and wood, while other houses were made of stone or adobe.²⁶ In either case, few people had much furniture within their homes. One of the most common pieces of furniture was the chest that could store a variety of items. Esmeregilda Hernández noted little property, but she included “an old, good chest.”²⁷ Ana Santos listed a chest with a lock.²⁸ Most women noted that they owned a chest or a trunk. A few of the women described the chest as being from Michoacán.²⁹ One woman, María Betancour, who had emigrated from the Canary Islands to Béxar, noted a chest that she had brought with her from the Canaries.³⁰ Several women described their chests as used, old, or worn.³¹ One woman described her trunk as covered in bright red chamois providing the only description based upon color.³² Another woman owned two chests, one large and one small.³³ Clearly, chests were important belongings to the women who likely brought the chest into their marriages. Many items that women owned were simply listed, but the chests tended to include greater descriptions of size, origin, condition, and presence of a lock. In some cases, the women divulge that the chests held items of value and emotional significance for the women, such as clothing and jewelry.

²⁶ Amy M. Porter, *Their Lives, Their Wills: Women in the Borderlands, 1750-1846* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, Press, 2015), 27-30.

²⁷ Esmeregilda Hernández, WE 59. Specifically, her will states, “una caja vieja, Buena.”

²⁸ Last Will and Testament of Ana Santos, SABC, WE 102, 4/7/1778.

²⁹ Ruiz, WE 96 and Flores de Abrego, WE 2.

³⁰ Last Will and Testament of María Betancour, SABC, WE 10, 1/5/1799.

³¹ Esmeregilda Hernández, WE 59, Posos, WE 86, and Last Will and Testament of Gertrudis de Armas, SABC, WE 3, 2/8/1802.

³² Urrutia, WE 114.

³³ Saenz de Zevallos, WE 121.

Other furniture catalogued in wills includes beds, mattresses, tables, benches, and chairs, María Josefa Flores counted a writing desk and a bed. The writing desk was an uncommon piece of furniture for this place and time, and interestingly, Flores signed her will which was also very uncommon.³⁴ While most women simply listed the furniture, on occasion, a woman offered more detail. For example, Luisa Gertrudis de la Rúa described a bed and table made of mahogany.³⁵ Yet, overall, the furniture was minimal. The descriptions of furniture in the wills, though very limited, are important because as Lonnn Taylor notes, “In the 18th century Hispanic *carpinteros* undoubtedly made furniture in the Spanish communities in Texas, as they did in New Mexico, but no examples or documentation of their work has survived.”³⁶

As noted earlier, a primary purpose of the will was to prepare for death and express spirituality. In cataloguing their religious pictures and statues, the Bexareñas revealed their collections devoted to Jesus, Mary, and saints to whom they would pray. These objects likely made up altars in their homes that women tended to for the family. One woman noted an image of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception as well as four other images of saints.³⁷ Another owned a reliquary with relics inside.³⁸ María Feliciana Durán recorded an image of Our Lady of Sorrows and another of baby Jesus.³⁹ Another had an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.⁴⁰ María

³⁴ Last Will and Testament of María Josefa Flores, SABC, WE 39, 8/5/1787.

³⁵ De la Rúa, WE 98.

³⁶ Lonnn Taylor, “Furniture, Vernacular, of Texas,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, edited by Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 97. Significantly more scholarly work has been done on furniture made in New Mexico in the colonial period. See Lonnn Taylor and Dessa Bokides, *New Mexican Furniture, 1600-1940: The Origins, Survival, and Revival of Furniture Making in the Hispanic Southwest* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1987).

³⁷ Betancour, WE 10.

³⁸ Saenz de Zevallos, WE 121.

³⁹ Last Will and Testament of María Feliciana Durán, SABC, WE 29, 6/25/1814.

⁴⁰ Urrutia, WE 114.

Concepción de Estrada offered a more detailed list to include an ivory statue of Saint Anthony, paintings of Saint John Nepomuceno, Saint Anthony, Saint Joseph, Saint Lucy, and Our Lady of Sorrows, as well as two crucifixes.⁴¹ Another listed six framed religious images as well as four unframed prints.⁴² In several instances, the women passed on these items to their children, especially daughters, in their wills. According to Timothy Matovina, the first patrons of San Fernando de Béxar included Saint Anthony, Saint Ferdinand, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Our Lady of Candelaria (Candlemas). Fairly quickly, Our Lady of Guadalupe became the most important patroness in Béxar, but the wills reveal that in women's home there were many different religious images.⁴³ Just as spiritual items predominated in wills, clothing would be another category of possession that women catalogued.

Women did not always list clothing in their wills, but the clothing listed reveals the importance of certain garments. Béxar did not have textile mills so some of the clothing would have been imported; however, there were looms in Béxar so some local production likely occurred. María Josefa Flores noted ownership of a petticoat and cloak.⁴⁴ María Josefa Valdes catalogued the clothing inside her trunk: seven skirts (one described as long, four described as new, and two as old), ten nightshirts, three white undershirts, and four pairs of hose (two cotton and two silk).⁴⁵ María Betancour listed a wool skirt.⁴⁶ María Trinidad Castelo listed muslin skirts and a *rebozo* (shawl).⁴⁷ Teresa Saenz de Zevallos recorded a blue cotton shawl and cotton

⁴¹ Concepción de Estrada, WE 36.

⁴² Ruiz, WE 96.

⁴³ Timothy Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 34, 47.

⁴⁴ Flores, WE 39.

⁴⁵ Valdes, WE 115.

⁴⁶ Betancour, WE 10.

⁴⁷ Last Will and Testament of María Trinidad Castelo, SABC, WE 22, 12/29/1804.

hose.⁴⁸ Another woman listed her trunk and the following clothing: four flannel nightgowns, two underskirts, two skirts, and one blue shawl.⁴⁹ Yet another catalogued six shirts, four underskirts and two other skirts, a blue shawl, and three silk stockings.⁵⁰ Finally, Brigida Rodriguez in her 1821 will included a new blue shawl, another blue shawl, and an underskirt of blue chintz.⁵¹ The lists of clothing reveal the scarcity of silk items with most items made of cotton or wool. They also reveal a common interest in blue *rebozos* or shawls. Spanish America produced indigo so the blue dye was available, and blue was a color associated with Mary possibly indicating clues as to why the blue shawls were so common.⁵² Though he painted later than the purview of this study, a painting by Jean Louis Théodore Gentilz exhibits a woman wearing a blue shawl over her head and shoulders.⁵³ The *rebozo* could offer warmth as well as cover the head showing women's modesty.⁵⁴ On special occasions, wealthier women might have added jewelry to their garments.

⁴⁸ Saenz de Zevallos, WE 121.

⁴⁹ Urrutia, WE 114.

⁵⁰ Ruiz, WE 96.

⁵¹ Last Will and Testament of Brigida Rodríguez, SABC, WE 99, 11/13/1821.

⁵² People grew indigo throughout colonial America where the climate was fairly tropical. There was much cultivation in Guatemala, Mexico, Louisiana, and Florida. See Robert S. Smith, "Indigo Production and Trade in Colonial Guatemala," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (1959), 181 and Jack D.L. Holmes, "Indigo and Colonial Louisiana and the Floridas," *Louisiana History* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1967), 329-30.

⁵³ Jean Louis Théodore Gentilz, "*Yendo a la Ciudad*," c. 1888, oil on canvas, DRT Collection, Texas A&M University-San Antonio Archives & Special Collections.

⁵⁴ In Spain in this era, a popular fashion trend was the *mantilla* which was a lace or tulle veil that could be worn over the head and/or the face. It was often held up by a large comb in women's hair. This trend does not appear in women's wills in Béxar. For more on the *mantilla* in Spain, see Tara Zanardi, "*Majas, mantillas, and marcialidad: Fashioning identity in late eighteenth-century Spain*," in *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Jennifer G. Germann and Heidi A. Strobel (London: Routledge, 2016), 67-84.

Jewelry ownership appeared rather uncommon in Béxar, but a few women catalogued their jewelry. One woman noted five strings of pearls and a small gold cross.⁵⁵ Considering the location of Béxar, the pearls and gold would have been imported. The Spanish harvested pearls along the coast of their American colonies, but Béxar was far from the coast.⁵⁶ Likely, the necklace was made elsewhere. Another woman had two pairs of gold earrings.⁵⁷ Yet another woman noted three rings, one gold band, and two gold crosses.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly considering the faith expressed in their wills and lives, religious jewelry appeared in several instances. Another woman listed four gold chains, three pairs of earrings, a gold pin, and a diamond.⁵⁹ Jewelry noted a certain level of wealth and access to imported goods that was not common in Béxar. Yet the women who had jewelry made sure to catalog it in their wills and often described the material whether it be gold, pearls, or diamonds.

Finally, another category of belongings that somewhat frequently appeared in women's wills were tools and ranching equipment. One woman catalogued the equipment for a yoke of oxen, a plowshare, a hoe, and an adze while another noted a hoe and axe.⁶⁰ At least one other woman had a branding iron while several noted they had cattle with their brand indicating they probably had a branding iron.⁶¹ Other tools appearing in wills included crowbars, jacks, saws, and spades. Tools tended to be catalogued more frequently in men's wills, but some women, especially widows, owned ranches, homes, or lands and needed tools.⁶²

⁵⁵ Saenz de Zevallos, WE 121.

⁵⁶ Priscilla Muller, "Spanish and Spanish Colonial Jewelry," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 25, no. 2 (2000): 47.

⁵⁷ Castelo, WE 22.

⁵⁸ Valdes, WE 115.

⁵⁹ De la Rúa, WE 98.

⁶⁰ Santos, WE 102 and Flores, WE 39.

⁶¹ Betancour, WE 10.

⁶² Porter, *Their Lives, Their Wills*, 41.

The cataloguing of possessions could serve several purposes. In most cases, women listed all of their property together in one section in their wills. In several other circumstances, women listed property that would be given to specific heirs. And on a few occasions, the women listed property that would be given to religious causes. For example, Ana Santos listed much of her property, but then noted that she was leaving a mattress and sheet to her son. This property was not included in her more extensive list of property in the will.⁶³ In another example, María Josefa Flores de Abrego listed her property and later noted that she intended a bed, a *metate*, and a pot for a young girl that Flores de Abrego had raised. These items had been previously catalogued with her other property.⁶⁴ Both manners of listing property (either all at once and then noting specific items for specific heirs or listing some property and then listing additional property for specific heirs) was common.

As for religious bequests, one woman left a black shawl to the Image of Our Lady of Sorrows at Mission San Francisco de la Espada.⁶⁵ In other cases, women listed property to cover burial expenses or masses offered for their souls or those of deceased family members. Juana de Ocon y Trillo sold a house, land, and irrigation water to her son. She requested that this money pay for masses for her mother-in-law, her father, her husband, herself and several others.⁶⁶ Several women noted such requests that would ensure payment of religious services.

The wills of the Bexareñas provide rich information about the material culture and daily lives of these women. Beyond this, through their wills, these women shared what property they valued most in their lives. They took great care in cataloguing their clothing, furniture, kitchen

⁶³ Santos, WE 102.

⁶⁴ Flores de Abrego, WE 2.

⁶⁵ Castelo, WE 22.

⁶⁶ Last Will and Testament of Juana de Ocon y Trillo, SABC, WE 82, 7/2/1816.

tools, religious pieces, jewelry, furniture, and other belongings. The women's wills invite consideration of the objects as a unified collection. While the descriptions in the wills are often quite limited, at times detailed explanations catch the attention of the reader, emphasizing the emotional or monetary value of the object. Collecting, was hardly a possibility for most women in this remote frontier setting, but cataloguing what they owned was a practice embraced by those who had access to the notaries and could pay the fees, and as a result, Bexareñas' prized possessions shine through in their wills and offer insights into their world.



Molcajete. Casa Navarro State
Historic Site, San Antonio, Texas.
Photograph by author.