REVIEWS

doi: 10.1344/Svmma2015.6.14

Di Carpegna Falconieri, Tommaso, 2015. *El presente medieval. Bárbaros y cruzados en la política actual*, Barcelona: Icaria editorial.

This book was translated into Spanish and French in 2015, which is indicative of its relevance. A thorough review of the bibliography was conducted during the edition of the Spanish version, which also features a new set of examples of the political manipulation of the medieval legacy and its interpretation. The titles of both the Spanish and the French version do not convey the exact meaning of the original Italian title—*medioevo militante*—and it has been changed to *el presente medieval* and *médiéval et militant* respectively. The book retains its interest, but there is, however, no justification for that change. The key to its success lies in the masterly exposition of how the postmedieval reconstruction of the Middle Ages, understood both chronologically and philosophically—namely the denial of modernity and the affirmation of the futility of the notion of progress—is rooted in a process of nineteenth-century, bourgeois, and Romantic origins. This reconstruction is capitalized on in order to build legitimizing political discourses, whose influence and convening power are felt from the radical Left to neo-Nazism—just to mention the two most stridently radical cases—and are applied not only to the process of European unification but also to the war against terrorism.

Unravelling the intricacies of this process requires deep immersion into the recesses of a very complex present—which is as globalized as fragmentary and dramatically militant. Such reality is presented with crystal clarity and also attending to its internal contradictions, which the author discusses with objectivity, dispassion, and vast erudition. However, fortunately enough for both medieval studies and those who approach this work, Di Carpegna conveys his views with unusual elegance and balance, for instance, when he says that the policy of the Bush administration against terrorism, despite being dressed up as a Crusade, responded to the patterns of Nazi and fascist repression against partisans in World War II (p. 55); when he refers, in a breathtaking style (for its restraint) that attests to the literary quality of the work, to the crimes of the self-called Templar Breivik, an offensive example of how far the militancy that justifies itself or looks itself in the mirror of the Middle Ages—real or metaphorical—is able to go (p. 68); and, to close this brief enumeration, when he stresses the flagrant contradiction that lies in the canonization of Nuno de Santa Maria Alvares Pereira (1360-1431), the victor of Aljubarrota (1385) by Pope Benedict XVI (pp. 227-230). *Medioevo militante* and multifaceted: this work not only uses the analysis of legitimizing discourses, but also takes into account the ambivalence of medievalism and medieval culture to create images and discourses that can be conceived as complementary, but also as sharply contrasting with each other.

In this regard it should be noted that both the secessionist, reactionary, and postmodern *Lega Nord*, and the unifying, Romantic, and bourgeois *Risorgimento*, involved the same stereotyped nineteenth-century medieval heritage (p. 254); at the same time, J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction is an example of how a literary work set in a medieval atmosphere can sustain radically opposing views regarding its interpretation (pp. 99-100), and the same work can be both a required reading and a constant reference for audiences that embrace irreconcilable ideologies. This is precisely why references to Tolkien's work abound in this book and evidence the meticulousness, skill, and thoroughness of Di Carpegna. One consequence of this topical political activism with medieval roots is the deep and seemingly unbridgeable rift between medieval studies, defined as the scientific study of medieval times—which, of necessity, must be constantly renewed and is subject to criticism and change as a sine qua non of its existence and consistency—and medievalism, understood as a set of ideas, beliefs, images, concepts, and opinions that the non-scholarly public has about the medieval period.

This medievalism, born of the Romantic and bourgeois reading of the Middle Ages, in turn based on the scientific approach of medievalists and scholars of the nineteenth century, has ended up nurturing the collective imagination and ideas that the "binomial" Middle Ages evokes in the general public. And that is so both in the case that such ideas rely on a professional and academic development of the current medieval studies—which they do not—and in the event that they originate in the vision of poets, writers, artists, philosophers, semiologists, and essayists, the result of an interpretation which, even if it is framed within a medieval context, does not match the views of medieval studies. Namely, and paradoxical as it may seem, the knowledge of the Middle Ages in general terms is constructed by this medievalism, to the point that one can understand the aphorism that "in short, while the Middle Ages are over, medievalism triumphs" (p. 61), and also that, at the same time, the Middle Ages end up becoming a mythical and timeless framework that nurtures the dialectic paradigm of the political arena, the discourses of identity construction, and the imagination of Western societies. The edition of this book, which has an analytical index that helps consult specific authors, would be more accessible if the critical apparatus at the end of each chapter was replaced with footnotes, which would facilitate the consultation of the range of resources invested in drafting *Medioevo militante*; finally, I would also recommend the integration of internet references in the context of printed references. I can not think of only one specific reason for recommending this book, in fact, it is a work whose reading should be mandatory and would be highly profitable from any of the numerous perspectives addressed by Dr. Di Carpegna Falconieri.

Xavier Ballestín

Terés, M. Rosa, Vicens Teresa, 2015. ***Violant de Bar i Maria de Castella: promoció espiritual i mecenatge/ Violant de Bar and Maria de Castella: Spiritual Promotion and Artistic Patronage,*** **Lliçons/Lesons 6, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona.**

This little book—the sixth volume of the *Lliçons / Lessons* collection—is, as its name suggests, a masterclass. It includes the closing lecture of the 7th Seminar in Medieval Cultures delivered by Rosa Terés and Teresa Vicens under the title "La Ciutat de les dones. El món monàstic femení i el seu impacte en la construcció de la Barcelona Medieval." This seminar, held in spring 2012, brought together specialists in Medieval History and Art History in order to discuss the role of women and female spirituality in the transformation of the urban world, and especially of the city of Barcelona. In this context, both authors presented their latest research on the subject.

Experts both in Catalan Gothic art and in royal patronage, in this "lesson" the authors conduct their analysis following the leading trends in recent medieval historiography: queenship, the role of female promotion and spiritual patronage, and the study of objects in their own context, that is, in this case, works of art in relation to their circulation circuits, location, and the use for which they were intended.

The book focuses on the figures of two great queens of the Crown of Aragon who reigned between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Violant de Bar and Maria of Castile. Both queens stand out precisely because of their important political role and their strong presence in the reign of their husbands—Joan I, and Alfons V, called the Magnanimous, respectively—as both Violant and Maria acted as lieutenants to their kings, the latter doing so for a longer period and in a more significant way. However, as this study shows, such political importance is not the only thing that likens the personalities of both queens, so different in so many other aspects. The authors undertake, first separately and later on together, the analysis of the reigns of these queens, in order to reveal the relationship that both maintained with the culture, art, and architecture of their time. Thus, the scope and meaning of the roles both queens played in the culture of their age and the impact of their activity on the city of Barcelona, and, more generally, on the territories of the Crown of Aragon, is outlined through the examination of the works of art that they commissioned, possessed, favoured, and promoted (manuscripts, sculptures, reliquaries, altars, palaces, and especially monasteries).

First, the authors outline the figure of Violant de Bar. Educated as a child in the refined and cultured court of France, the love for culture of Queen Violant is clearly reflected in her interests and artistic inclinations. The authors highlight the rich variety of her literary tastes: from a first stage in which the profane works were predominant to her significant shift towards religious and devotional works. Violant's activity as a promoter of the chapel of the Palau Reial stands particularly out; she enriched it with relics and devotional images. Also important was her

connection with the cathedral of Barcelona and her contribution to the implementation and ornamentation of the monstrance. Both spiritual and devotional aspects, and the elements of reginal prestige related to patronage are analysed in detail through these artworks.

Next, the authors turn to the figure of Maria of Castile and her activity and involvement in the cultural universe of the period. The approach to the personality of this queen is conducted first through the study of her extant portraits, which present her in a dual political and spiritual dimension. Both aspects come together, enhancing her role as a sovereign, given that the intense religiosity that characterized Maria, and marked her artistic inclinations, was not exempt from the connotations of reginal prestige. Especially important in this case is the analysis of the library of the Queen, known in considerable detail through inventories and records, in particular the post-mortem inventory of her possessions. The volumes she gathered, commissioned, had copied and translated throughout her reign show us a cultured queen, especially inclined towards spiritual, theological, and devotional works. Also in the case of Maria, the evidence of her active patronage of art objects must be emphasized, although the preeminence of devotional works is quite remarkable: reliquaries, liturgical objects, and altarpieces, whose description, location, and uses are in many cases known once again thanks to the inventory. As queen and lieutenant, her name is also associated with major construction works among which the hospitals of Lleida and Sant Antoni in Barcelona.

Finally, closing this short book, the authors bring together both queens around the promotion of a particular monastery. Despite their different personalities, the exercise of reginal power and spiritual patronage led them both to the sponsorship of the building of an important monastic community of medieval Barcelona: the Hieronymite monastery of Sant Jeroni de la Vall d'Hebron. The book concludes with an account of the stages of development and construction of the monastery and the analysis of the role played by both queens: Sant Jeroni, according to the authors, was the main work of architectural promotion of Violant de Bar and the most personal intervention of Maria of Castile.

We are therefore faced with a true masterclass that expertly recovers the performance, artistic interests, literary tastes, and religious sentiment of two very significant queens of the Crown of Aragon, showing the decisive role of their involvement in the monumental religious complex of the monastery of Sant Jeroni de Barcelona.

Blanca Garí

Fumagalli, Vito, 2015. *Uomini contro la storia*, Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino.

This is one of the last books of Vito Fumagalli, as Massimo Montanari, the author of the *Prefazione*, explains; *Uomini contro la storia* has become a classic, which is now being re-printed twenty years after its first edition. Fumagalli shows predilection for documents that are not easily labelled; singular, fringe documents—as Montanari defines them—in which the author also seeks unconventional men that escape typifications. His characters are not simple and safe, but rather men who do not conform to social norms, such as counts that try to look like monks, or peasants who denounce the oppression of their masters, men who are against history, and for this reason are often defeated. Fumagalli tries to rescue them in this book: his choice, claims Montanari, is to give voice through historiographical research to those who have gone against the tide and have been defeated, granting them a posthumous retribution. Fumagalli himself, in the *Premessa* dated in Bologna in 1995, declares a preference for those who placed limitations on the dominant institutions by opposing them, and wonders whether civilization will prove them right over time.

The first example of a *man against history* is taken from the *Vita Geraldi*, written by Odo of Cluny in the late tenth century. Count Gerald is a warrior who resorts to violence to defend the defenseless, but who knows the Holy Scriptures "better than many clerics." His figure is that of a "secular saint" who reluctantly takes care of the administrative obligations arising from his social position. But the bishops, priests, abbots, and monks described by Pope Gregory I in his *Dialogues* are also *men against history*, men who humbly seek to face circumstances that seem to overwhelm them, as in the case of Probus, bishop of Rieti, who reaped the wheat in the fields himself, or Paulinus, bishop of Nola, who, held hostage by the Vandals, got in the good graces of the king because he knew how to grow vegetables. Even the tenth-century anonymous work *Miracula Sancti Columbani* shows men fighting against history, such as the religious men who tried to save the possessions of their monastery from the greed of the powerful by carrying the bones of the founding abbot in procession from Bobbio to Pavia, hoping to instill in them the fear of the saint.

According to Fumagalli, the lives of the saints also open another interesting line of research, that of the presence in history of the helpless they defended. For example, in the aforementioned *Vita Geraldi*, the count appears as a benefactor of the poor that went far and beyond custom; not only was their sorrow great at his death, but the crowds came from distant countries to mourn him. The Count of Aurillac also distinguished himself for freeing slaves: only a few remained in his service, while most chose freedom. Gerald proved not to be afraid to overcome the conventions of the time that wanted lords and serfs in their own places, thus becoming, through this discreet act of liberation, a man against history in his own right.

Fumagalli tries to trace back the roots of the feudal system that was based on the control of a few over many, and, as far as the Po valley goes, finds them in the need for defense and protection generated by the second wave of barbarian invasions: the population's lack of preparation to defend themselves created lords whose power was proportional to their ability to fight. Peasants sought their protection and became debtors of new corvées and "angaria," that is, tasks that had to be undertaken at the discretion of the lord. The chronicles relate the murder of those opposed to excessive taxation; they also give news of the rebellions of countrymen who hoped to be able to improve their living conditions and who were an easy prey for the preachings of heretical movements on the return to poverty. Fumagalli claims that said preachings must have had an "aristocratic" origin, as it was unlikely that such a condition was desirable to those who already suffered from a painful situation. The meeting between the mentality of the clergy and that of countrymen finally happened in a renewed social setting, with the explosion of thirteenth-century peace movements promoted through the preachings of the Friars Minor, whose joyous expressions were, however, strongly opposed by the religious who wanted a religion based on sorrow.

In his reconstruction of the origins of feudal society, Fumagalli's volume, always in search of men against history, does not forget the role played by the Carolingian kings who were against smallholders turning into tenants. These kings issued laws trying to prevent the powerful from overburdening peasants with obligations that made it difficult for them to participate in civic activities, and from punishing peasants so severely as to make them unable to work. Charlemagne made use of imperial envoys to supervise the performance of the administration and work of one of them, Theodulf, Bishop of Orléans, which allows us to learn about the bad customs the envoys witnessed—counts that arrived drunk to trials, who accepted gifts, or devoted little time to their duties—in addition to recounting the difficult journeys faced by the crowds in order to attend the trial over which counts presided. Kings, men against history themselves, imposed rules on their vassals so that they worthily exercised justice and abided by the laws that could prevent the exploitation of peasants; little wonder, then, that the crowds ended up seeing kings as the embodiment of justice, attributing them healing powers.

In the thirteenth century, the castles and their lords gave way to an environment characterized by villas, a symbol of the rise of the bourgeoisie, and their gardens. There, Fumagalli sees the rise of a new impoverishment condition for countryfolk, who witnessed the transformation of farming land into large gardens surrounding bourgeois villas. Alongside the large expenditures to embellish these gardens, there was a parallel lack of concern on the part of the merchant bourgeoisie for the defence and the planting of crops, and vast cultivated areas were therefore abandoned. This did not occur in those areas where the traditional agricultural economy carried on. The countryside there was not impoverished but, on the contrary, many agricultural practices were improved and the yield of the fields increased. The Po Valley is a good example of how these

practices were maintained and improved; not surprisingly, the best thirteenth-century treatise author on the cultivation of fields was the Bolognese Piero de'Crescenzi. However, Fumagalli, as already mentioned above, is interested above all in the fate of the vanquished, in this case, those who had to abandon the land that was no longer cultivated; the peasants who left the smallholdings became shepherds or arrived in the cities, where they encountered a fate that was not always benevolent.

Cities provide the background for the last chapters of Fumagalli's volume, which focuses on popular uprisings, particularly on the Revolt of the Ciompi in Florence. The author also mentions the tumult of the Senzabrache—labourers who did not wear underpants to work unencumbered—which saved the *podestà*, in danger of death for having protected the labouring classes. This tumult shows the discomfort of lower-class craftsmen, who lived in the same difficult economic and working conditions that were also the cause of the riots in Florence about a century later.

The Ciompi, so called by the upper classes as a sign of contempt, were those lower artisans who combed and prepared the wool for spinning and, by extension, all wage earners; in the summer of 1378, seeing their claims denied, they rebelled, laid waste and burned down Florence, managing to get hold of the city government. Then they created new *Arti* (guilds), including that of the Ciompi, called "Arte del popolo di Dio" (Guild of the People of God), but an agreement between the other guilds decreed its violent elimination, also followed by the dissolution of the new government. The *Arti Minori* (literally, the lesser trades), far more numerous than the *Maggiori* (greater trades), finally lost control of the city's economic activities.

In the Epilogue, Fumagalli noted that whereas in the early Middle Ages the opposition to the institutions was mostly voiced by individuals or small groups, in the late Middle Ages, these movements were characterized by the involvement of "true crowds of people." The revolt of the Ciompi was in particular an act of rebellion dictated by economic and social hardships, but born of the denial of simple requests to improve such conditions; it was suppressed, but the failure to solve the problems that created it was shortly after at the origin of other attempts to revolt, which in turn paved the way for the affirmation of the Medici rule that guaranteed civil order.

And it is precisely on this point that Vito Fumagalli's volume *Uomini contro la storia* can make us reflect on the need to listen to the claims of the most humble and the voices opposed to them, in order to rescue them, grant them a justice that was often denied, and to prevent that the violence that this can generate leads to a restriction of the achieved liberties. This is a book on the Middle Ages, whose stories, after all, can only be experienced by modern readers with an extraordinary sense of immediacy.

Maria Cristina Pascerini

Sancho i Planas, Marta, 2015. *Des de l'arqueologia, reviure l'edat mitjana. Reconstructing the Middle Ages through Archaeology*, Lliçons/Lessons, 7, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona.

Since 2009, the IRCVM regularly holds its Seminar on Medieval Cultures, often centered on a lecture given by a medievalist. These lectures aim to provide an overview of a particular aspect of our medieval past and address a non-specialist audience. The *Lliçons / Lessons* collection (published in a bilingual edition, in the language of the author and in English) is based on these lectures. It is in this context, that the book suggestively and purposefully entitled *Des de l'arqueologia, reviure l'edat mitjana. Reconstructing the Middle Ages through Archaeology* acquires its full meaning. The author, Marta Sancho, has a long career as a university professor and archaeologist, an experience that is evidenced by her ability to condense in a few pages what medieval archeology is.

The text is divided into two main sections: the first one presents a brief overview of the history of European and peninsular medieval archaeology, and the second part discusses the specific archaeological method for the study of the medieval period. The first section traces the history of this discipline since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with the first examples of an archaeological discipline that was more related to restoration, collecting, and antiques than to the method we know and apply today. The author also reviews the most important European researchers and archaeological sites, and then focuses on Spain and Catalonia, paying special attention to schools such as that of Manuel Riu, of which the author was a disciple herself.

The second part of the book begins with the heading "How to understand medieval archaeology and its contributions." After commenting an excerpt from an article by Lucien Febvre, which, despite being written over sixty years ago remains fully present, the reader is introduced into the stratigraphic method, proposed by Harris in the 1970s. Here, the author states a claim that should be taken into account by all archaeologists but is often ignored: the method is important but should not be the ultimate goal of research, which should go further in order to build historical knowledge. This is certainly one of the theses that articulate the book.

Next, the author broadens the scope to the research work of the archaeologist. From a seemingly insignificant object like a piece of pottery, she shows all the possibilities of interpretation that this provides and the questions that must be posed about it: how was it made, who did it, with what resources, etc. These are the "who," "what," "how," "when," "why," and "how much" that are both essential to build knowledge in archaeology, in history, and in many other fields.

Going through the archaeological evidence from lowest to highest (artifacts, biotic indicators, structures, sites, environment), Marta Sancho also approaches elements that are less known to

the general public such as macroscopic and microscopic remains. These have been analysed for years, but they are still not taken into account in many archaeological sites, partly because of the high cost and partly because of the expertise their study requires. For this reason, Sancho insists on the need to surround oneself with a team of specialists that ultimately allows obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the site.

To conclude, the last two sections focus on the complementary sources of data from archaeological sites (ethnoarchaeology applied to the medieval world, iconography, and written texts) and highlight the need to disseminate research results, another topic often forgotten by many researchers.

Throughout the book, the author makes her intention clear: demonstrating that archaeology is a fundamental tool to investigate our medieval past. As Sancho claims, her thesis goes against a general opinion that until relatively recently left archaeology aside as a resource for the interpretation of this period. To convince readers, she speaks from experience; an experience that she has developed both teaching in the classroom and through her fieldwork in many archaeological sites and areas of Catalonia, first as a student, later as a director and teacher.
Unfortunately, the format of the collection, small in size—although with a careful edition that is not always common in scientific publications—leaves little room for explanations. For this reason, a lot of information is concentrated in a few pages, especially in the first section, which perhaps more than one reader will find lacking in information about pioneering researchers and archaeological sites of medieval archeology. However, we must note the author's capacity for synthesis and her use of simple, albeit rigorous, language, aimed not only at specialist readers but also at the general public.

Finally, the fondness and pleasure the author finds in the research she conducts seeps through the text. Marta Sancho feels comfortable with what she explains, especially in the second part of the lesson, in which she shows a close relationship with what she does: as she claims, archaeology is, more than any other discipline, a way of life. And it is that passion and deep knowledge of the subject which enable her to demonstrate that archaeology is more than a valid tool, an indispensable instrument to write and reconstruct the Middle Ages.

Carme Muntaner i Alsina