

REVIEWS

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2018. *La muerte en la Casa Real de Aragón: Cartas de condolencia y anunciadoras de fallecimientos (siglos XIII al XVI)*, col. Fuentes Históricas Aragonesas, 82, Zaragoza, Institución «Fernando el Católico».

It is common knowledge that death has held, and still holds, a prominent place in all civilisations of all ages and geographical areas. Nevertheless, it has been interpreted and approached in different ways depending on the culture and the prevailing religious and philosophical currents of each historical moment.

The director of the Arxiu General de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), Mr. Carlos López Rodríguez, writes an exquisite introduction to this magnificent and necessary work, continuation of the *Colección de documentos inéditos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón* (CODOIN) in which the ACA archivists have compiled a total of 347 epistles –most of them coming from the old Arxiu Reial– which were written or received by members of the Aragonese aristocracy and that have death as a common denominator. The value of these letters goes beyond their historical significance. From a linguistic, philological and even anthropological point of view, they also constitute a documentary corpus of unquestionable interest; this is evident both in their common subject matter and in the content, form and languages in which they were written. As indicated in the foreword, it is estimated that the temporal frame of the collection of letters ranges from 1300 to 1516, ending with an epistle attributed to Germana de Foix. The documents collected in this work are preceded by a regest (in Castilian and in direct style). Finally, an appendix with a detailed index of toponyms and anthroponyms, followed by a selection of images with references and explanations in their captions, brings the work to a close.

I would like to thank the author of the foreword for emphasising, right from the start, the importance of the letters written by women, such as those from Violant de Bar or the queens Margarida de Prades and Maria of Castile. In the words of Peter Dronke, women in Middle Ages write to satisfy “an inner need” (1995: 11) and here we find “attempts to address human problems in their uniqueness [...] by seeking appropriate and existentially valid solutions” (1995: 11). To exemplify the above quotation, we can consider document 143, in which Violant of Bar expresses her condolences to King John I of Castile. She reflects on death and encourages its acceptance as an inherent part of life, since from an anthropological point of view “death is the universal and irrevocable event par excellence” (MITRE 1994: 16) but at the same time she offers the King her unconditional support and help. These authors, therefore, faithfully expressed their thoughts and sought a certain degree of commiseration with the recipient of the letter.

As for the linguistic palette that is so characteristic of Aragon and Catalonia, both on the part of the members of the royal household and of the civil servants themselves –the people in charge of writing the letters were the secretaries and scribes– I find it fair that the emphasis is already made in the foreword, as each document is a testimony to this. Further on, I stress the importance of these scribes. Although it is true that this is not the goal of this work, it would nevertheless be interesting, from a philological perspective, to undertake a study of the linguistic particularities of each language used in it –including Latin– because the linguistic and literary richness of the epistolary is of great interest. Regarding its literary importance, we should mention document 291, in which Maria of Castile demands a copy of the hagiographic work of Angela of Foligno, a fact that unveils what kind of works reached the hands of the members of the royal family and what their cultural interests were. We also know that books made up a large part of the inventory of objects belonging to this queen and, as M. Rosa Terés and Teresa Vicens point out, “a large part of the texts are works of a moral and religious nature” (2015: 32).

Just as testaments can serve “as an instrument of reconciliation between the dying and their loved ones, as a way of repairing wrongs” (MITRE 1994: 25) these epistles –also linked to the theme of death, albeit in a different way and with different goals– serve as a means of expressing grief and affliction, while having, and I quote from the foreword to the present work, “a political content, due to the position occupied by the monarch, his wives and children” (2018: 14). Furthermore, although the secretaries and scribes wrote under the guidance of the intellectual authors of the epistles, we must not forget their linguistic and literary training. Martí de Riquer pointed out that this and other correspondence that circulated around the Crown of Aragon in different languages was a clear indicator that the scribes and secretaries were “skilled in the use of the three languages [...] that is, Latin, Catalan and Aragonese [and] good latinists” (1984: 10). On the other hand, with regard to the ability to write epistles in Latin, it should be mentioned that “it presupposes not only a good grammatical knowledge of the language, but also a certain rhetorical and stylistic talent that they learnt in the study of the *Ars dictandi*” (DE RIQUER 1984: 22).

This is, without a doubt, a great project that we must keep well in mind, as it already does a great service to researchers of the different disciplines in the humanistic fields, but it will also do so to the new generations of university students and to all those who, for various interests, wish to access the vast documentary universe of the ACA.

MARC PUERTA GARCIA

MUÑOZ I SEBASTIÀ, Joan Hilari, 2018. *L'arquitectura del Renaixement a Tortosa (1500-1630). Fonts documentals. Tortosa, l'autor i L'escultura i la pintura del Renaixement a Tortosa (1500-1630). Fonts documentals. Tortosa, l'autor.*

The two volumes we are analysing are devoted to transcribing documentary sources on late-medieval and modern architecture, sculpture and painting in the city of Tortosa. Joan Hilari Muñoz i Sebastià has written a long series of books –and many more articles– on the same subject in the last four years. In case we were in doubt, he says that he will publish some volumes of the same kind in the not-too-distant future: one on the cathedral's choir stalls, another on the 'applied arts', and a third on the territory in the Ebro delta. It is essential to have this information at one's disposal in order to begin to develop a well-founded discourse on the history of Renaissance art in Tortosa and to complete the panorama of the ancient Crown of Aragon. But these volumes, so conceived, are of little use. They add to the confusion that since the 1990s has done nothing but hinder the work of scholars.

The first problem is that these two books include sources that are apparently unpublished, but they can actually be traced back to other works. This is a common denominator in the work of Joan Hilari Muñoz –and unfortunately it is a characteristic that is repeated in many other publications on the old bishopric of Tortosa.

I will give just a few examples. In the volume on sculpture and painting, the first document published has already been published and commented on in the book *Art i cultura a la Tortosa del Renaixement*, Arxiu Històric Comarcal de les Terres de l'Ebre, Tortosa, 2005, p. 243-244, without this being acknowledged; the second document appears in the same publication, p. 207; the eighth one, on page 214... The references to the sculpture of the frieze of the kings in the Col·legi de Sant Jaume i Sant Maties (doc. 22-23) were first published in issue 4 of the journal *Recerca* in 2000: we have known for many years that it is the work of the sculptor Francisco de Montehermoso from Burgos! The same is true of the curbstone of the well of the Casa de la Ciutat (doc. 14), now conserved in the cathedral. It is true that the corresponding entry in the clàvia had not been fully transcribed, but its content and what follows from it were public knowledge: the work had already been attributed to the well-known Occitan master Miquel Anglès in an article published in 2004, and in two studies on the public works of the Tortosa Council (2005, 2008). Another example is the content of document 13, which was used to identify the artist Vicent Desi in an article that also appeared in the journal *Recerca* in 2004. The same is true of the contract for the altarpiece of the high altar of the cathedral (doc. 43), published in issue 14 of the magazine *Art*, in 1988 (although the reference may be old, it is not difficult to find, as it is available in pdf format in the repository raco.cat). The documents on the rebuilding of the *Casa de la Ciutat* (doc. 46...) were made known by Federico Pastor i Lluís at the beginning of the 20th century, in the journal *La Zuda*. In this regard, I would like to point out that in the first note of an

article in the BSCC (2016), Muñoz implies that it is he who first realised that the painting known as the *Verge dels Procuradors* is not related to the documentation gathered by Pastor, and this is not true.

The volume on Architecture shows the same problems. The document according to which Joan Munter, stonemason of Selva del Camp, was in charge of the reconstruction of the walls of Perelló in 1585 (doc. 14) was published in issue 11 of *Recerca* (2007), and the accounts of the foundations of the Hospital of Tortosa and the chapel of Coll de l'Alba were featured in an article in issue 6 of the *Quaderns del Museu Episcopal de Vic* (2013). And so on and so forth. I won't go on any further. This lack of honesty is striking, and detracts from the value of Muñoz's work.

It is very difficult to generate a coherent historiographical discourse when the market is full of uncritical contributions. It is exhausting! I presume that in his new book on the cathedral's choir Muñoz will not mention that the tendering process that took place before the work on the stalls, sponsored by Jaume Cassador, was published many years ago. And I guess that in the books on "applied arts" and on Terres de l'Ebre we will again see a large number of documentary novelties that are not actually such. Historical accounts are fundamental to produce a factual art history, but not all approaches are adequate.

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MAZZI, Maria Serena, 2018. *Los viajeros medievales*. Madrid: Antonio Machado Libros.

The traditional historiographical view, or stereotype, of static Middle Ages, confined solely and exclusively within its geographical limits, has recently been the subject of a profound critical revision. The historical reality was much more complex. In fact, throughout her excellent work, and by means of a meticulous and exhaustive analysis of numerous sources, Maria Serena Mazzi fills in the mediaeval roads of a wide and vigorous flow of a multitude of different people. The text generates a continuous movement of anonymous people who converge on the roads for different reasons and with specific objectives (economic, social, religious, political, cultural). Among all these travellers we could highlight the pilgrims, those "tireless inhabitants of the roads" (p. 80). Traditionally associated with the phenomenon of travel narratives, pilgrims are only a small part of the intense, almost daily flow of people in permanent circulation that Mazzi describes.

The geographical and cultural barriers, the adverse conditions, the limits and technical incapacities to overcome, the unspeakable perils of the roads, do not seem to weaken the sense of purpose of the medieval people—especially from the 12th century onwards—and their desire to undertake their

own particular journey. There is an unequivocal eagerness to know, to touch, to feel, to discover and to see beyond one's horizon. The author goes past the historical phenomenon, and focuses her attention on the men and women who learn about and experience the world on the move. And, as they enter into completely different realities, they recount their impressions, opinions, emotions, their fears and mistrust... For the medieval traveller, as for the modern traveller, the journey is above all surprise, admiration, experience, strangeness, and often also refusal and intolerance.

Travelling is, without a doubt –as the author of the book rightly says– exposing oneself to the unexpected, to “a repeated denial of custom” (p. 225), of everything understood within the mental canons of normality. Throughout this book we have access to the multitude of interesting descriptions by contemporary travellers, and their personal portraits of the otherness, that that is different, out of the ordinary. Chapter 8, entitled *El Encuentro con los Otros*, is a magnificent reflection on the traveller's encounter with the other, with a different world, and an absolutely strange one. Above all, we witness the medieval model of a ‘normal’ and nearby Centre, as opposed to a distant and isolated Periphery, ‘strange’ in its *modus vivendi*, in its structure.

The almost absolute lack of knowledge of vast territories, and the profound ignorance of other worlds give free rein to the imagination of a medieval man. The material world, the more earthly reality of travelling, is easily swept away by the symbolic world so characteristic of the Middle Ages. Mazzi, following the work of Jacques Le Goff, speaks of ‘mental landscapes’ (p. 11), which are imprecise and indefinite, and have no clear cultural boundaries. Reality, literature and commonplaces are often intertwined in the stories of these travellers. Reason and fantasy merge, and recreate unknown far-off worlds in unimaginable forms, altered by impressive stories and legends of fabulous and terrifying scenes. Monsters, ghouls, deformed men, dangerous animals, and strange superhuman beings inhabit these strange lands.

The author examines this ability to imagine alternative worlds, wonderful and fantastic landscapes where all dreams –unlike in the modern world– are a real possibility. The reality of the traveller and the symbolic and cultural journey are two distinct but indissoluble parts both in the work of Maria Serena Mazzi and in the medieval adventurer himself.

JORDI SAURA I NADAL

SALES CARBONELL, Jordina i BUENACASA PÉREZ, Carles, 2018. *In unum estis congregati. Arqueologia del primer monacat cristià (segles IV-VII dC)*. Barcelona: Societat Catalana d'Arqueologia

Some might think that this publication is an outreach book –published by the SCA– with a simple edition and just over 100 pages. But it is no more than a miratge that vanishes when one takes a look at the three pages referencing primary sources and the ten pages devoted to specialised bibliography.

The book deals with a complex topic that has aroused the interest of many researchers who see, in the first Christian monasticism, a common thread that links Antiquity with the Middle Ages, overcoming the obstacles that this transition involved.

The problem lies in how we can identify these first monastic communities from the archaeological point of view, given that we know very little about the characteristics of the spaces they created and their material elements. Jordina Sales and Carles Buenacasa undertake a careful exercise of synthesis that draws on their deep and solid knowledge of the topic, and provide very interesting data on the development of the early Christian monasticism.

At the beginning, the authors set out a theoretical framework and describe the way in which they will use certain concepts that often lead to confusion. Then they devote a chapter to non-Christian monastic forms, examining the ideology that led to the expansion of these forms of spirituality in the West. Thus, they break with the notion that monasticism and Christianity go hand-in-hand and imposes a much broader vision that is common to different societies and cultures around the world.

The next two chapters of the book are devoted to the first monasteries in the Near-East and Western Europe. Here, the authors examine textual and material sources, and include citations and references to the primary sources. They also include a very interesting graphic apparatus with photographs, plans and reconstructions of a large number of the monasteries.

The last two chapters focus on the Iberian Peninsula and Catalonia, beginning with a reflection on the difficulties the peninsular monastic archaeology has gone through. I highlight this section because it is absolutely essential in order to carry out research on this subject. It is essential to be aware of the difficulties in order to find ways to overcome them and thus be able improve our knowledge of early monasticism. The authors examine and interrogate current evidence of the existence of monasteries in the *Tarraconensis* and *Baleares*, *Gallaecia*, *Lusitania*, *Carthaginiensis* and *Baetica*. Finally, in the third chapter, the authors explore the Catalan territory, differentiating between urban and rural monasteries, in order to delve into two exceptional cases such as Bovalar and Els Altimiris.

As a medievalist, I feel a little uncomfortable considering the 6th and 7th centuries as part of the Late Antique period. Personally, I understand they are part of the Early Middle Ages. However, this is not a very important debate if we understand history as a unravelling continuum that we historians split up again and again for our own convenience.

Perhaps I find the conclusions a bit short (half page). It would have been interesting to include proposals for future archaeological research in this area, and have pointed out the key issues related to the identification of the remains of these early monasteries.

Finally, I would like to highlight the dialogue between documentary and archaeological sources that the authors carry out throughout this volume. Also noteworthy is the capacity for synthesis, the clarity of the exposition and the critical contributions that, without any doubt, will be of great use to those of us who work to identify and characterise these early Christian monastic communities in Catalonia.

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