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Reviews

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BADAWI, Mostafa, 2021

Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture

London: IV Publishing

Review by VALERIE GONZALEZ. SOAS, University of London

Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture is the latest book by the prolific and renowned author and architectural practitioner, Mostafa Badawi. Packed with luxurious illustrations, including numerous full-page colour plates, and embellished with gilded page edges, this sumptuous book firstly constitutes an aesthetic homage to historic Islamic architecture. Secondly, it gathers the author's own views and knowledge regarding this splendid cultural heritage, which today is the object of intense research and countless publications worldwide. However, the book does not follow the typical academic model specialized in one particular production, from one particular geopolitical space, at a specific period within the long history of Islamic civilization. Instead, *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture* proposes an all-embracing meditative reflection on the material, contrasting its past and contemporary productions. As such, it presents the interesting feature of expanding the discussions and arguments beyond archaeology and hermeneutics. By contradistinction with purely scientific research, it also expresses Badawi's affections and idiosyncrasies based on his personal experience as both a faithful Muslim beholder of Islamic architecture and a knowledgeable architect concerned with the pragmatics of his practice in relation to the habits and needs of the Muslim community at large. Readers must therefore approach this book accordingly. While naturally keeping their expectations of scientific rigor at the highest level, they must also be prepared to confront Badawi's decision to communicate freely his opinions and judgments. He stipulates his epistemic position in the following way in the introduction:

In my opinion, as a user and not as an expert, the evidence is overwhelming in favour of the existence of many forms of art unified by the spirit of Islam. My primary aim in this study is not to attempt to prove this, but rather to concentrate on the user's point of view, which is what he is able to perceive, while carrying out his ordinary devotional activities, as spiritual meanings within architectural forms. (p. 11)

A proper understanding of this subjectivity is essential to grasp the contents of this book and to benefit from it whether in a scholarly way or otherwise. Above all, it does not mean that these contents possess a lesser degree of truthfulness in relation to the reality of the things being observed. Subjectivity, in this case, only indicates the empirical nature of some of the readings of these things by an observer from within Islamic culture. The flaws or shortcomings these readings may contain from a strictly scholarly viewpoint do not diminish their hermeneutic and epistemic value in the sense that they provide highly valuable humanistic insights otherwise inaccessible through the sole objective act of collecting factual historical data. If only from this epistemological perspective, it is necessary to listen carefully to what Muslim believers in general, and Badawi in particular, have to say idiosyncratically about their own artistic culture. It nevertheless remains true that this empirical form of knowledge, which we may call 'the Muslim idiosyncratic discourse on Islamic art and architecture', stems from the most complex region of representationalism intertwined with the psyche's biases and shaped by the infinitely varied forces of local life conditions and socio-cultural contexts. In this respect, Badawi's discourse definitely reflects his own background.

In fact, in the name of sacrosanct scientific objectivity, for many historians of Islamic art and architecture educated in the West, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, idiosyncratic discourse has little scholarly value. To them, the validation of any hermeneutic proposition depends on historical facts and affect-free rational reasoning. Adding to that the weight on this mainstream scholarship of the post-Enlightenment Eurocentric tradition of separating the religious from the cultural, it is not far-fetched to say that this book would hardly attract these scholars' interest. In the face of this situation, this review intends to give *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture* the visibility it deserves, as its unapologetic empirical character provides precisely access to those elusive aspects of Islamic architecture whose elucidation proves difficult with the sole use of the fact-based traditional art history method, namely the aesthetic workings, underpinnings and meaning of the buildings' forms.

The introduction presents three fundamental points that Badawi endeavors to demonstrate in thematic essays regrouped in three main parts.

The first point asserts the spiritual nature of Islamic architecture, rooted in Quranic metaphysics. This very idea, one must bear in mind, is far from being unanimously supported, owing to the highly problematic persistence of the Eurocentric view held by the mainstream of scholarship in the West that, in Islam like elsewhere,

human activities are divided between the religious and the secular or the sacred and the profane spheres. As Badawi puts it: ‘Western authors speak of ‘sacred architecture’ in a manner which is entirely absent from classical Muslim literature’ (p. 23).

The second point focuses on the conceptual unity of Islamic architecture beyond the rich diversity of its manifestations informed by the local cultures of the vast geopolitical space of the Muslim world whether historical and/or contemporary. Badawi writes: ‘Underlying the different designs of buildings continent apart there exists a single unity of conceptualization, a single spirit at work’ (p. 10). Again, this is a contentious idea that said scholarship considers to be essentializing, ignoring that Muslim scholars past and present have consistently claimed it. I recently produced a firm critique regarding this stifling attitude in Valerie Gonzalez, ‘The Religious Plot in Museums or the Lack Thereof: The Case of Islamic Art Display’ in *Religions* 13, 2022: 281, and ‘Debunking the Regionalistic Myth in the Discourse on Islamic Ornament’ in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, edited by Sam Bowker, Xenia Gazi and Onur Ozturk, Chapter 3 (London, New York: Routledge, 2022).

The third and last point concerns the notion of ambience that Badawi pertinently considers to be a key feature of Islamic architecture. While we may talk about ambience, or the lack of thereof for that matter, regarding any type of building, he emphasizes that ambience characterises not only Islamic interior design, but that it also brings with it a strong sense of spirituality. However, acknowledging the difficulty of explaining how this Islamic spiritual ambience is actually generated by the architecture and how it operates, he rightly remarks: ‘Our ancestors, the builders of old, were obviously masters at producing ambience, although the precise manner of achieving this remains a secret to this day’ (p. 12).

I do subscribe to these three points as a scholar convinced of the religious nature of Islamic art and architecture, regardless of its context of use and function. Following his cogent exposé of these points, Badawi unfortunately embarks on a lengthy generalisation on art and artists that not only is unnecessary, but also relies irreverently and irreverently on the history of Western art. Taking issue with this art, which he perceives of as too materialistic, he pronounces ill-grounded judgments such as the following misappreciation of an impressionist painting by Renoir, ‘more normal and aesthetically pleasant, but betraying a superficial view of reality.’ (p. 18) Although the author has told us that this book reflects his personal inner thoughts, the last thing we need today is reductive ill-informed apprehension, by whomever from whatever cultural extraction, regarding the culture of ‘Others’, whoever those ‘others’ may be. Such an apprehension is sadly no different from the decried Orientalist misperception of non-Western cultures. Moreover, it clashes with the most welcome recent movement of decolonisation of cultural practices by scholars, critics, curators and artists at large. Readers might just want to skip that part and continue with the, more sensible, rest of the introduction in which Badawi expounds the theological foundations of Islam and the essential principles of Islamic thought that he believes shape Islamic art and

aesthetics.

Finally, one must bear in mind the following key statement containing clues which, I think, are extremely useful for addressing the aforementioned unresolved question regarding the most elusive aspects of Islamic architecture: ‘Our goal as users is quite different from that of the art historian, for as users we are concerned with enriching our moments by opening the gateways to spiritual meditation and remembrance’ (p. 31). ‘While sitting in a mosque, I would be entirely disinterested in the stages of development of a particular decorative element, but solely in how gazing at it can help me concentrate on the higher worlds and draw nearer to God’ (p. 32).

In my view, these introductory pages of the book (minus the misstep regarding Western art) offer fundamental ideas to ponder on and develop in-depth for anyone who wishes to pursue critical research on this material. The chief condition for that, however, is the use of an up-to-date expansive interdisciplinary methodology. The book’s three parts aims to carry out this research through the lens of the Muslim faithful.

Part I pertinently deals with Islamic intellectual heritage, both canonical and Sufi. Badawi deliberately addresses the foundational components of this heritage, which are shared by all Muslims, while excluding a description of the Sunni-Shi’a divide in order to demonstrate his chief idea of a unity beyond diversity in Islamic artistic culture. The point is clearly and convincingly made that there exists a common metaphysical core linking all the global instances of Islamic architecture, both past and present. He thereby legitimates the investigation of art and architecture through this core and, in the process, invalidates the rather overused and abused objection of essentialization. Among the wealth of material and thought provided in this rich part of the text, one superlative element stands out: the concept of analogy that articulates the seen and the unseen in a harmonious whole. A hermeneutics seeking to elucidate the role of this concept in the functioning of Islamic art and architecture will significantly advance our knowledge of these matters.

In contrast, Part II appears surprisingly thin in terms of ideas. It consists of photos of buildings and architectural designs, with just a few text boxes here and there that do not suffice to form a third portion of the book. The content of these boxes could have been inserted in Part II and the plates gathered in the form a nice text-free album placed between it and Part I. The text mainly expresses the author’s frustration with contemporary Islamic architecture, a view that not everyone will share, and which would, in any case, require a more thorough critique to constitute something more than an impressionistic comment.

Finally, Part III analyses one by one the generic elements of Islamic architecture and design, mainly mosques, but also houses and palaces. Badawi explains the functioning of windows, light, domes, minarets, mihrabs, minbars etc., in focusing on unravelling their spiritual meaning as he knows and perceives it. His art historical knowledge is solid, but for this very reason, it also conveys the problems of terminology and methodology that affect this art history such as the misuse of the aesthetic

concepts of symbolisation and abstraction. It is, however, not expected from an architect to address these issues. On the other hand, what this part brings forth very persuasively is the spiritual dimension of these elements.

In sum, even though, like the existing publications which endeavour to uncover and explain this dimension of Islamic architecture, *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture* is not flawless, it nevertheless makes very important points to be heeded in future research. For this reason, it truly is an inspirational book both to read and to look at.

BILLEN, Claire (et al.), 2021

Faire société au Moyen Âge. Histoire urbaine des anciens Pays-Bas (1100-1600)

Paris: Classiques Garnier

Review by PAU VIVES XIOL. University of Barcelona

The Parisian publisher Classiques Garnier is releasing a new French language version of this collective work on the urban history of what was formerly known as the Low Countries, which originally appeared in Flemish in 2016. This work focuses on the genesis and evolution of the urbanised system that developed in the territory of the former Low Countries: the Seventeen Provinces that extended over regions including Flanders, Brabant, Holland, Zeeland, the Artois and Luxembourg, which today belonged to the states of Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and parts of northern France, and which, in the late Middle Ages, were grouped together under the dominion of the Dukes of Burgundy.

This group of cities in the former Low Countries, which includes important centres such as Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Yeper, Brussels, Arras and Amsterdam, is one of the most successful historical examples of economic and urban development in Europe, which began in the late Middle Ages and continued to thrive throughout the early modern period. Historiography has traditionally held it in high regard as a model for the emergence and consolidation of complex, self-organised urban communities, not far from the case of the cities of central and northern Italy. It can be argued that these two examples of urban development constituted, following classical lines of argument put forward by Henri Pirenne and Max Weber, paradigmatic examples of cities dedicated to commerce and pioneers in the achievement of political autonomy. However, this publication goes beyond a specific interest in its geographical area and raises some interesting points for those doing research on the early Middle Ages, a period characterised by change and the appearance of diverse forms that created a radically new reality that foreshadowed what was to follow.

First of all, the collective nature of the proposal should be highlighted. All the articles in the book are written by academics from Flemish universities. The four editors of this volume (Claire Billen, Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene) belong to the universities of Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, as do most of the authors, although professors from other universities, such as Leiden and Leuven, also contribute. Secondly, the work provides a general and, indeed, complex vision of urban issues. A multi-causal and multi-faceted approach to the development of cities and the multidisciplinary nature of their analysis is reflected in the choice of a set of highly diverse but coherently interlinked issues which, to a greater or lesser extent, are found in all the cities of the European landscape in the late Middle Ages. In this way, the work is receptive to uncommon but highly explanatory approaches to urban reality, such as its spatial dimension and the process

of shaping urban identity. The awareness of the universality of urban development, though manifested in different ways and in contrasting political contexts, makes it possible to make constant comparisons between the case they are proposing and other realities that are far removed from the medieval Netherlands.

These two characteristics lead us to situate the work in the same line as the influential *Histoire de la Europe urbaine*, published in 2003 by Seuil and edited in its second edition by Patrick Boucheron, Denis Menjot and Marc Boone himself, a work that constituted a major rethinking of medieval urban historical studies. These collective initiatives, which combine efforts in order to overcome the symptoms of merely local erudition, a frequent malady in urban studies, to find common trends through the shared work of multidisciplinary authors who are capable of looking beyond the limitations of their own vision, are truly stimulating and suggestive. The multi-causal nature of the urban phenomenon is very consciously demonstrated in this book in the choice of subject matter for the different chapters.

In the introduction, Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene review the figures that highlight the high rate of urbanisation of these territories in medieval times, which the authors immediately associate with their social and political dynamism. In this way, the authors position themselves as both a continuation and a challenge to the strong historiographical tradition that had previously characterised the study of the region.

The economic development of the former Netherlands is addressed by Blockmans, Munck and Stabel in the first chapter. Commercial dynamism has always been a central theme in historiography, which has often treated it as a necessary and sufficient condition to explain urban development, especially following the work of Henri Pirenne, whose mark is still very much alive among Belgian academics. In conjunction with general explanatory arguments (such as the strength and diversification of the rural economy and the development of intense long-distance trade), the authors highlight a specific feature of the territory under study: its capricious physical geography, in particular its hydrography, as a differentiating factor. Numerous waterways with interconnected branches favoured exceptional communications and gave rise to busy economic networks between the numerous cities in the area, which have been sustained over time and have created multiple hegemonies, such as that of Bruges in the 14th and 15th centuries, that of Antwerp in the 16th century and that of Amsterdam in the 17th century.

The second chapter focuses on social relations within the city, a highly significant issue for understanding the complexity of the urban phenomenon. Blondé, Hanus, Stabel himself, Buylaert and Dumolyn emphasise the contrast, in the various cities, between a reality characterised by extreme social fragmentation and the efforts to build a united community, which can be traced particularly in political texts. However, the authors nuance this social polarisation in the urban societies of the former Low Countries, showing how the concentration of power and wealth among

the merchants (well established from the 12th century onwards) is countered, from the early 14th century onwards, by the activities of the guilds of artisans, who manage to form a kind of thriving middle class that succeeded in their struggle for political rights and which became a distinctive feature of these territories.

Boone and Haemers go on to show how the permanent political tensions in this emerging urban system of power, opposed to but connivant with those of the Dukes of Burgundy, sought to be addressed with a body of rules which, under the guise of the common good, tended to regulate conflicts and promote social peace, order and the maintenance of economic prosperity, very much in line with what happened in the political formations of cities all over Europe in the late Middle Ages.

In addition to addressing the relationship between the new urban institutions and ecclesiastical power, a subject often neglected by historiography and often open to reductionist interpretations, Van Bruaene and Marnef focus on urban rituals and celebrations, which constituted a veritable civic religion bringing citizens together around the idea of community. The consideration of a relationship of connective or symbiotic features between the new civic and religious powers allows us to characterise the urban community in a satisfying way and to better understand the legitimising aims of the communal institutions, while at the same time allowing us to approach the remarkable irruption of Protestantism in these cities from a new perspective.

For their part, Billen and Deligne present an interesting history of the urban environment (with an approach based firmly on the function of public works) and show how the architecture and town planning initiated by municipal institutions, especially in a territory that has been so intensely developed as this one, especially with hydraulic works, serve the dual purpose of providing public goods to the citizens and, on the other hand, legitimising and giving prestige to institutionalised urban power.

In the penultimate chapter, which takes the form of a history of late medieval everyday life in these cities, Baatsen, Blondé, De Groot and Sturtewagen examine an original topic in the field of urban studies, namely the consumption of material goods. The authors show how diversification in craftsmanship enabled the emergence of a new material culture, embodied in the consumption of luxury goods and in the emulation of these behaviours by the artisanal middle class.

De Munck and De Ridder-Symoens emphasise another pillar of late medieval urban power: the emerging educational institutions that managed to breach ecclesiastical monopoly. The diversity of schools was another of the distinguishing features of the former Low Countries, serving a large part of the population and making it possible to consolidate an ideal of community in a heterogeneous society.

In summary, in the thriving urbanised heartland of the former Low Countries, a sustained social and political history developed from the 12th century onwards, characterised, broadly speaking, by the pre-eminence of wealthy merchants and accompanied by a strong representation of intermediate social groups, who played a decisive role in the shaping of cohesive, self-conscious urban communities. This

complex community, united by various civic institutions of very different hues (political, cultural, educational, religious, etc.) serves, as the editors explain in the epilogue, to explain the political mood of later political formations in these same territories and constitutes, moreover, a paradigmatic example approach to the multitude of European urban communities that developed during the late Middle Ages.



BRUGUÉS, Irene, JORNET-BENITO, Núria, BOADA, Coloma, MUNTANER, Carme, CASALS, Jordi, 2019

Diplomatari de la col·lecció de pergamins del monestir de Santa Clara de Barcelona (1039-1241)

Barcelona: Fundació Noguera

Review by EUDALD BLANCHÉ COLLET. University of Barcelona

This book, published in 2019, is the 78th volume of the *Col·lecció Diplomatari* of the Fundació Noguera. This publication is the result of an initiative of the Archives Service of the Catalan Federation of Benedictine Nuns. The book contains the transcription and edition of the collection of parchments of the monastery of Santa Clara in Barcelona, from the first one known to exist (year 1039) to the year 1241. In total, 322 documents. However, the first hundred or so pages are devoted to the historical and archival context of this collection and of the monastery in which it has been conserved. This book can be freely consulted and downloaded in PDF format from the Fundació Noguera website.

The first part of the book (pp. 9-111) describes the historical and archival context of this collection of diplomatic documents. The second part (pp. 113-540) contains the transcriptions of the parchments; each transcription is accompanied by date, regest, documentary tradition and notes, if applicable. Finally, the third part of the book (pp. 541-594) contains an index of anthroponyms and toponyms, arranged in alphabetical order. Each entry indicates the number of the parchment in which this content can be found.

It is important to note that most of these parchments were not produced by the monastery of Santa Clara, as this monastery was founded between 1233/34 and 1236, but rather are parchments that are or were preserved in this monastery, but do not make reference to it, since the monastery did not exist at that time. The chronological period of the monastery covered by this diplomatic document collection therefore spans only five years, between 1236 (the first parchment referring to the Poor Clares of Barcelona) and 1241, the year of the death of Pope Gregory IX and Bishop Berenguer de Palou of Barcelona.

Of the 322 documents in the collection, only 109 date from after the year of the foundation of Santa Clara of Barcelona, and of these, only nine reference the monastery. Of the 322 transcriptions, 114 are from parchments that are now lost, but which were in existence at the beginning of the 20th century, and thanks to the fact that they were transcribed at that time, they are now known and it has been possible to include them in this document collection.

If the majority of this diplomat's parchments were not produced by the monastery, then who produced them, and how did they end up at Santa Clara? Many of these scrolls came to the monastery through endowments made by nuns, property

purchases, or bequests by the faithful. A very important part of the parchments came from two people in the second half of the 13th century: Berenguer de Ferran (a knight) and Pere de Forn (a merchant and moneylender), who generated a great deal of documentation related to their private activity, which was incorporated into the monastery at the time when the two of them became the community's trustees. It is thanks to these incorporations of private documents that in this collection we can find documents that are so unusual in a monastic collection, such as contracts for maritime transport of goods, or documents dating from a long time before the monastery was founded.

Meanwhile, the extensive contextual analysis that accompanies the edition of the collection introduces us to the founding legend of the monastery of Saint Clare of Barcelona, handed down through oral tradition and recorded in writing in the 17th century, according to which the monastery was founded when two disciples and relatives of Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Peranda and Clare of Janua, arrived in Barcelona in a small boat without oars or sails. The two of them are said to have founded the monastery in 1233-1234, although the earliest document refers to 1236 (in document number 213 of the collection). However, it is said that there was a proto-history of the monastery: prior to its foundation in the 1230s, there was already a first nucleus or informal community of religious women with a profile close to that of the Beguines, who identified with the teachings of Saint Clare and the Damianites, and were named after the chapel of San Damiano de Assis.

The monastery was located in the Ribera district, on the easternmost side of Barcelona's "*quarter de la Mar*". As the city grew, this area became more urbanised and the monastery became more central. The monastery building was one of the largest in Barcelona and was an example of Catalan Gothic architecture, with a cloister and three galleries. The real estate that the monastery accumulated was located mainly in this area of Barcelona, in the vicinity of the monastery. The community of Poor Clare nuns existed as such until the beginning of the 16th century, when it became a Benedictine community sometime between 1513 and 1519. The end of the monastery building came when, after the War of Succession, part of the Ribera neighbourhood was destroyed, and the monastery, which had been badly damaged during the siege and the war, was demolished. The place where the monastery once stood now lies within the modern-day Parc de la Ciutadella.

In 1718, the community of nuns settled in a part of the Royal Palace, which had been ceded by Philip V as a new monastery. This community remained there until 1936, when the nuns went into exile in Italy. After the war, the community of Santa Clara de Barcelona joined the community of Sant Benet de Mataró, which had been established since 1940 in Santa Cecilia de Montserrat, owned by the monastery of Montserrat. That is where the community of nuns of Santa Clara went in 1952, creating the new community of Sant Benet de Montserrat. It is this community, therefore, which is preserved in the historical archive of Santa Clara de Barcelona, as its successor.

At present, 2,958 parchments (dating from 1045 to 1827, spanning 782 years) make up the collection of parchments of the monastery of Santa Clara in Barcelona. The vast majority of the parchments in this collection have not yet been published.

This diplomatic archive, in addition to offering us the edition of the first 322 parchments in the collection, gives us, through its preliminary study, an insight into the history of the monastery, especially its origins: how it was created in the context of the expansion of Franciscanism in the 13th century; how the monastery acquired property and power in the city of Barcelona; how the monastery was organised and functioned, and also, and especially, how the monastery's archive was built up over the decades and centuries, and the archival activities that have been carried out by those in charge of the archive over time, right up to the present day, when the work of those currently in charge of the monastery's archive has resulted in the publication of the present book.

CANYELLES VILAR, Núria, 2020

Un camí que porta a l'origen del Vendrell medieval

Vilafranca del Penedès: Institut d'Estudis Penedesencs

Review by MARÇAL DÍAZ ROS. IRCVM-University of Barcelona

Núria Canyelles' book takes as its starting point the exceptional nature of a specific document: a letter that King Peter III the Ceremonious sent to the *veguer* of Vilafranca del Penedès in 1342 asking the residents of Vendrell to reconstruct the original course of the Royal Road from Barcelona to Tarragona. According to the complaints of the neighbours of Arboç, the inhabitants of El Vendrell had disabled a section of the road and had opened a new branch that made it necessary for travelers to cross the town of El Vendrell. The importance of this letter lies in the fact that it documents a type of historical event of which we often have no record, namely the transformation of the road network. Although it is usually considered an immutable territorial element, this network is also subject to changes and transformations of various kinds. As Núria Canyelles points out, this letter from Peter III is evidence of the existence of a structured and organised society in Vendrell which, in the middle of the 14th century, had the capability and the means necessary to divert the route of one of the most important thoroughfares of the period. The author takes this episode as a starting point for understanding the historical background of El Vendrell or, in other words, the medieval origins of the town.

Canyelles shuns a chronological structuring of contents and opts to use a narrative thread of her own, in which time shifts are commonplace. This aspect, which some may find disconcerting, is complemented by a broad and continuous contextualisation of the events presented, which gives the book a comprehensive character and demonstrates her clear command of the period. This also gives the work an informative character and makes it perfectly accessible to members of the general public interested in medieval Catalonia. The author also demonstrates a sound knowledge of her sources and does not shy away from quoting a number of specialised bibliographical titles, which allows her to contextualise her narrative in a more substantial manner. With regard to documentary sources, the author mainly uses the Cartulary of Sant Cugat del Vallès edited by Josep Rius, which is reasonable, bearing in mind that the monastery was the local authority in the area.

A meticulous analysis of this documentation allows Canyelles to examine the territorial organisation of the Vendrell area during the feudal period, as well as its demographic frameworks. The author studies the role that different churches and fortresses may have played in the configuration of the Vendrell area and considers the reasons that led to their construction. In this sense, Canyelles adopts the thesis put forward by Josep Maria Bosch (2017) and considers that most churches were probably built in spaces that were already inhabited, thus avoiding the transfer

of population groups to new areas. However, the degree, chronology and tempo of population concentration around these sites remains uncertain. With regard to Vendrell, the author considers that one of the first documentary evidences of the consolidation of the population around the church of Santa Anna corresponds to a request made in 1306 for this church to become the parish church, to the detriment of the church of Sant Salvador, which was much further away closer to the coast.

On the other hand, mention should be made of the hypotheses regarding the location of various territorial landmarks, such as the castle of Calders and the castle of Sant Vicenç, which are put forward in the book. This is always a thorny issue, especially in areas as heavily transformed urbanistically as coastal regions. In this respect, the interesting restitution of the possible routes of the disputed Royal Road in 1342 is particularly noteworthy. It would be presumptuous to claim that this is a definitive hypothesis, although it must be acknowledged that it has been firmly established through a combined study of documentary and cartographic sources, as well as by fieldwork. As has been mentioned, this work focuses much of its analysis on the territorial planning of the current area of El Vendrell between the 10th and 12th centuries. However, it is in the last chapter in which the origins of El Vendrell as a population centre, which arose mainly in the 13th century, are discussed. Perhaps at this point a minor criticism can be levelled at the author, as this final, interesting section may be too short. Surely a more in-depth approach to the consolidation of El Vendrell as a town and its first urban layout in the 13th and 14th centuries could have been provided. It is true that, at the beginning of the book, the emergence of its municipal government during the 14th century is contextualised, as well as the increase in population which ensued. However, the final section of the book would have been a good place to resume this thread and link it to the consolidation of El Vendrell as a population centre, in order to understand more fully the reasons behind its emergence. This would be a way to place the beginning and the end of the book at the same point: at the time of the letter that Peter III the Ceremonious sent to limit the actions of the people of Vendrell, who were increasingly showing signs that their village was gaining more and more weight and importance in the territory.

HIREL, Sophie, THIEULIN-PARDO, Hélène (coords.), 2021

La Leche Polifónica. Estudios sobre las nodrizas en la península ibérica (siglos XIII-XVI)

Madrid: La Ergástula Ediciones

Review by HELENA CASAS PERPINYÀ. University of Barcelona

The medieval history of motherhood began to attract interest among European historians and historians in the English-speaking world in the 1970s in the context of the rise of women's history. Since then, motherhood and the female experiences that derive from it have been categorised as merely another aspect of the so-called history of everyday life, especially within medieval studies in the Iberian Peninsula.

This volume, which was coordinated by Sophie Hirel and Hélène Thieulin-Pardo, is at the same time a risky and successful venture, as it succeeds in presenting the history of motherhood between the 13th and 16th centuries in the historiographical context of the peninsula from a critical perspective.

Although the title of the study evokes the story of wet-nurses in particular, all the researchers involved share a transversal gendered gaze, which enables them to present a more complex account of the history of motherhood.

Breastfeeding has been considered a lesser historical experience as a result of the ideological construction of patriarchal discourse. In this sense, the interdisciplinary nature of this study makes it possible to subvert the patriarchal narrative in order to understand the experience of motherhood in all its diversity. A diversity which, as the title of this study suggests, is only possible thanks to a compilation from a wide range of documents ranging from medical, legal and religious literature to notarial documentation, among other sources.

From a feminist perspective, the researchers insist on the male monopoly over the wet-nurse trade and the prominence of men as the fiscal subjects of the contracts. The documentation reveals that in many cases, according to María Jesús Fuente, "hiring wet nurses was a male preserve" and that the desire of mothers to breastfeed and raise their own babies was a patent reality, especially among the nobility.

Similarly, it becomes clear, once again, that the historically male tendency to categorise women's behaviour in well-known medieval manuals and treatises is not in any way transferable to everyday experience. In this sense, the sources show us that the prohibition of interreligious breastfeeding was only a question of status and that, according to Silvia Nora Arroñada, in line with Klapisch-Zuber's study, the morals and ethics of the wet nurse were not a particularly relevant element for the bourgeoisie when it came to choosing who would breastfeed their baby. The theory of the treaties was therefore not fulfilled in practice, as the experience of motherhood exceeded its limits, as Victoria Béguelin-Argimón, Cécile Codet and Sarah Pech-Pelletier argue.

In her turn, Ximena Illanes Zubieta weaves an interweaving of maternal experiences through the breastfeeding networks of the children of the Hospital de la Santa

Creu of Barcelona, a striking example of how motherhood occupied all spheres of life and social structures, even in medieval times.

Finally, literary milk and symbolic milk conclude this volume with an evocation of the medieval imaginary of motherhood through fictional narratives and the bodily senses of female mystical experimentation, following the well-known line of research pursued by Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida.

NEWMAN, Barbara, 2021

The Permeable Self. Five Medieval Relationships

Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press

Review by ADRIÁN ARJONA FERNÁNDEZ. University of Barcelona

Barbara Newman, who had focused on medieval spirituality and the definition of the medieval self in her previous works, here draws on her previous research and takes a further step in her research endeavours. Although, in her previous publications, Newman had attempted to define the medieval self through analysis and intertextual comparisons of courtly literature, hagiography, epistles between lovers and other genres, in this work she examines all of these sources in a new light. In *The Permeable Self*, she conceives of the medieval self as a permeable self, which self-modifies and self-defines in relation to the other. This is why, on this occasion, she does not seek to investigate the self individually, but rather to analyse the relationship of two or more selves, whereby the individuals who configure it modify their identities, exchange them, and even lose their own identity in order to become a complete reflection of the other. The text is divided into five separate chapters, though all of them are derived from a common theme to which Newman devotes her attention in this work: “coinherence”. It is this theme that unites, according to Newman, various generic relations and that enables the comparison of one with the other, in order to elicit information regarding the permeability of the medieval self. Given the difficulty of the concept itself, Barbara Newman offers a much-needed introduction, in which she defines and contextualises the term and the sense in which she will employ it in the rest of the book. It is a theological term, referring to the essence of the Trinity; each of the members of the Trinity shares its essence with the others and, although they are multiple, they are the same person. Strictly speaking, the term can only be applied to this relationship, but the theologian, novelist and poet Charles Williams refocused the use of the term, applying it to human relationships. The concept therefore refers not only to the theological principle of the relationship between the member of the Trinity, but also to the principle of *substituted love*, based on spiritual discipline and the practice of prayer. These are practices in which a reciprocal interpersonal relationship is so reciprocal that there is a real psychological and emotional exchange, whereby the *self* is united with the *other*. This is the sense in which Barbara Newman uses the term, and employs it to analyse the permeability of selves in relationships. After this introduction, the work per se begins; each chapter analyses a generic or archetypal relationship and its development in examples throughout the Middle Ages. The chapters follow each other progressively, according to the intensity of the coinherence that the archetypal relationship presents. Hence, the first chapter is devoted to the teacher-pupil relationship, the second to that of the saint and the sinner, the third to the relationship between lovers,

the fourth to the relationship between mother and child and, finally, the fifth to that which is established between the earthly and the spiritual, between God or demons on the one hand and human beings on the other through total possession.

Newman's exhaustive analyses of specific relationships may sometimes confuse the reader and cause them to lose sight of the main theme of the work, namely coinherence. They may even fail to understand why one relationship has a higher degree of coinherence than another, thereby losing focus on the structural order of the work that the author is proposing. It is therefore important to analyse in each case what their specific coinherence is based on. In the first of the relationships, the coinherence lies in the influence that the teacher exerts on the pupil, and vice versa. It is clear that a teacher, in educating his pupil, moulds their personality, in such a way that the pupil's self is affected by the teaching; the teacher, observing the enthusiasm with which his pupil learns, becomes intoxicated by this enthusiasm and rediscovers in himself what he already knew. In this way, the teacher-pupil relationship transforms the personality of both. Added to this, as Newman rightly points out, is the fact that the most widespread model of education in medieval times was the *charismatic model* of education, in which the teacher becomes the model for the pupil to imitate, through the discipline of *mores et litteras*. The second chapter deals with the relationship between the saint and the sinner and, more specifically, with the saint's mystical ability to read the sinner's thoughts. In this case, coinherence is unidirectional, in that the saint is able to learn the sinner's thoughts, but the sinner remains ignorant of the thoughts of the saint. It is coinherence in so far as the saint employs his ability to transform the sinner's behaviour, and thus the sinner's personality, for a redemptive purpose. In addition, this chapter studies certain relationships of friendship between beguines, who are spiritually united in the Mind of God, which is the intermediary that enables them to share their thoughts. A closer and more intimate relationship than the latter is the relationship between lovers, and this is the subject of the third chapter. The mutual influence that the lovers exert on each other's personalities is evident; however, the chapter focuses on the literary motif of the exchange of hearts. Accordingly, this section uses sources from a wide range of literary genres: lovers' letters, which Barbara Newman had already explored in an earlier work, poetry and the courtly novel and, finally, hagiography and the *vitae*, in which virgins exchange their hearts with Jesus Christ. The sanctification of a previously secular motive is therefore involved here. Coinherence arises from the fact that the exchange of hearts also involves an exchange of identities, whereby the personality of one influences the personality of the other so much that it ends up becoming identified with the other. The fourth chapter focuses on the relationship between a mother and her child, which is the most intimate relationship that can occur. In other relationships, coinherence implies a transformation of spirit and personality, but in this one there is an absolute transformation, as the infant is gestated within the mother and is moulded by this bond, both spiritually and

physically. In this chapter, in addition to the relationship between mother and child, the vision of God as the eternally pregnant mother of the world is also explored, implying not only coinherence between two individuals, who clearly influence each other, but also a union between God and his creation. Finally, the relationship examined in the fifth chapter involves such an extreme influence on the personality of others that it can hardly be regarded as a relationship of coinherence. This is the relationship between God or demons and human beings. More precisely, the topic of obsessions and demonic possessions is studied. It is not possible to speak of coinherence in this case, as the influence exerted on the personality of the other does not lead to a mutual transformation of the personalities, but to the complete loss of personality. Examples of this are for Barbara Newman the *annihilation*, as understood by Margarita Porete, and the *diabolophanias*, all of which are studied in this chapter. Through the study of these five archetypal relationships, Barbara Newman succeeds in showing that the medieval self is permeable and is modified through its interaction with the *other*. *The Permeable Self* is therefore the culmination of Newman's research into the medieval self and spirituality.

PUJOL, Josep (edition, introduction and notes), 2021

Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanc*

Barcelona: Barcino (Imprescindibles, Biblioteca de Clàssics Catalans 1)

Review by ENRIC CASAS REIG. IRCVM-University of Barcelona

Editorial Barcino is launching a new collection named *Imprescindibles*, bringing us in its first volume one of the best European novels of the 15th century and a true classic of Catalan literature, *Tirant lo Blanc* by Joanot Martorell (c. 1460-1464), in a new edition edited by Josep Pujol, professor of medieval Catalan literature at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. This new edition is presented to us in the shape of a carefully produced, high quality volume, bound in hardback with cloth covers, and with fabric stitching that facilitates the handling of a large-format book of 1,400 pages.

The volume opens with a number of preliminary sections aimed at contextualising Joanot Martorell's *Tirant lo Blanc* within its time while setting the genesis and subsequent reception of this novel in the midst of both Catalan and world literature. The preface (pp. 7-12) analyses the literary tradition of the novel from its first publications (Valencia 1490, Barcelona 1497) to the present day, paying special attention to the assessment that the Catalan cleric Antoni de Bastero made of Joanot Martorell's novel in his first volume of *La Crusca provenzale* (1724), deeming it to be "the *Decameron* of the Catalans".

Following the decline of cultured literature in Catalan at the beginning of the 16th century, *Tirant lo Blanc* was forgotten until the 19th century, with only a few scholarly Italian and Spanish translations breaking the silence. The starting point for the modern acceptance of *Tirant lo Blanc* in Catalonia can be traced back to a five-volume edition by J. M. Capdevila starting with the second volume of the collection "*Nuestros Clásicos*" (Our Classics) published by Barcino (Capdevila, Josep. Joanot Martorell, Martí Joan de Galba, *Tirant*, 5 vols., Barcelona: Barcino), but the definitive impulse would be given by Martí de Riquer through successive editions that would reach a public in need of the construction of a national Catalan literary canon (Riquer, Martí de, 1979. Joanot Martorell, Martí Joan de Galba, *Tirant lo Blanc i altres escrits de Joanot Martorell*, Barcelona: Ariel, reprinted in 1990; also noteworthy are his following works: 1990. *Aproximació al «Tirant lo Blanc»*, Barcelona: Quaderns Crema; 1992. *«Tirant lo Blanc», novela de historia y de ficción*, Barcelona: Sirmio). From this point onwards, new translations into other modern languages consolidated Joanot Martorell's novel as a recovered classic that was recognised on the international scene, and research and studies of *Tirant lo Blanc* were encouraged in specialised conferences and scientific publications that particularly emphasised its realism, positioning *Tirant* as a paradigm of the "chivalric novel" of the 15th century, differentiated from the fabled "knightly novels" based on the Matter of Britain

and Arthurian motifs which had predominated in the 12th and 13th centuries. In this context we should also mention the first and only critical edition to be published, by Albert Hauf (Hauf, Albert, 1990. Joanot Martorell (and Martí Joan de Galba), *Tirant lo Blanch*, 2 vols., Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, republished in 2004 by the *Tirant lo Blanch* publishing house), since the only other critical edition in existence, a dissertation by Joan Perera (1995), is currently unpublished. Of note is a recent edition by Màrius Serra, who adapted Martorell's novel in its entirety into modern Catalan (Serra, Màrius. 2020. Joanot Martorell, *Tirant lo Blanc*, Badalona: Proa).

In this way we have arrived at this recent Barcino edition by Josep Pujol, who has sought to take a middle route: offering an edition that combines the philological rigour required by specialist scholars with what is required for popularisation among a wider, more general readership. With this aim in mind, Josep Pujol has prefaced the text with a rigorous introduction (pp. 13-61) in which he places *Tirant lo Blanc* in its time and in the context of the chivalric novel in the 15th-century Crown of Aragon; he analyses its plot structure, marked by a tension at the narrative level based on the duality between scenes of war and chivalry and the courtly or love episodes, which are charged with sentimentality and comedy; it establishes the mimic quality of *Tirant lo Blanc* with respect to the contemporary reality of Joanot Martorell, which lends an historiographical aspect to a book that is still a work of fiction; it highlights the messianic features of the hero of the novel; it works on its rhetoric and the most notable literary models that the bibliography has been able to establish; and it closes with a summarised commentary on the first print editions of *Tirant* and its subsequent translations.

The introductory section is followed by a chronology with biographical snippets of Joanot Martorell's life taken from conserved archive documents (pp. 63-73), and a selective bibliographical list of editions and specialised works (pp. 75-85), which serves as a guide for the reader who wishes to delve deeper into the subject.

The edition of the text (p. 87-1348) then follows. Josep Pujol has relied on the version by Martí de Riquer (1979), who himself used the copy of the Hispanic Society of America of New York, corresponding to the first edition printed in Valencia in 1490. The edition by Riquer, who corrected errors in the manuscript and modernised its spelling, was informative, so this new edition by Pujol is still uncritical, although he revises Riquer's edition using the editions and critical apparatus provided by Hauf (1990-2004) and Perera (1995) and has consulted the facsimiles of the preserved copies of the two older editions of 1490 and 1497. An appendix containing variants and corrections has not been included, nor are they justified in the footnotes, which serve as a more informative point of reference for the non-specialist reader, together with the table at the end of the volume (p. 1371-1394) containing all the chapters and titles of this extensive novel. The editor presents a punctuated, orthographically corrected text according to the criteria defined by the current normative system. Graphical and phonetic features are rendered unhesitatingly with a

preference for the most modern graphic forms, without affecting the idiosyncrasy of the text, because the nominal and verbal morphology and the syntax of the text transmitted by the incunabula have been preserved.

At the end of the volume, there are a number of resources to help clarify concepts for the general public: a glossary (pp. 1351-1366), and a brief commentary on the plate armour used by 15th century knights, together with a number of illustrations (pp. 1367-1369).

In conclusion, this is an informative edition aimed at a reader who is less versed in reading medieval prose and who is not a specialist in medieval literature. This is why the text, despite maintaining its original linguistic forms, offers a graphic and phonetic regularisation that facilitates its reading. However, while awaiting a veritable critical edition that updates Hauf's edition, this edition by Josep Pujol published by Barcino, albeit not definitive, may well become the standard edition used in the coming years both by the general public and by a more specialised reader or scholar of the subject who does not have strictly philological concerns.

SABATER, Tina (coord.), 2021

***La casa medieval en Mallorca y el Mediterráneo. Elementos constructivos y decorativos*
Gijón: Trea.**

Review by ESTHER DORADO LADERA. University of Barcelona

The book I propose to review here, *La casa medieval en Mallorca y el Mediterráneo. Elementos constructivos y decorativos*, is a collective volume edited by Tina Sabater based on the papers presented at a scientific seminar held in October 2020, which concluded the research project *La casa medieval. Materiales para su estudio en Mallorca* (HAR2016-77032-P). The sixteen chapters include the presentation of some of the final conclusions of the project and the contributions of the guest speakers. The contributions of the different authors are grouped around three main blocs concerning residential Gothic architecture: the study of material remains; a typological, functional and urbanistic analysis; and monographs of three buildings.

Joan Domenge begins the first section with an introduction to the tradition of the round doorway, that is, a round arched doorway, in the civil architecture of all the economic spheres of the Catalan-speaking countries until the end of the modern age. It includes a study of its typological consolidation and its use from the 14th to the 16th century, based on preserved material remains. The author highlights the lack of historiographical interest in this subject and calls for a systematic search for these elements, despite the difficulties posed by the lack of documentary traces of private architecture.

Next, Elvira González takes a look at graffiti on walls from the late medieval period that have been documented in Mallorca. These are epigraphic and figurative examples preserved mostly in important buildings such as the cathedral and the *llotja*, but also in other religious and residential constructions. These elements are very difficult to date, particularly when they are figurative, and are a traditionally controversial subject, but the author argues for their validity as a historical source.

Following this contribution, Antònia Juan Vicens examines the arches and decorated portals of Mallorcan Gothic houses. It provides a comprehensive list of preserved examples, either in their original location or relocated, and proposes a typological classification. Special attention is paid to the so-called “*portals d’estudi*” (study portals), both for their presence in numerous inventories of goods and for the uniqueness of their ornamental compositions, the interest of their iconography and the significant number of preserved specimens.

Tina Sabater concludes the first section with an analysis of non-figurative wall paintings in medieval Mallorcan houses based on preserved examples and representations in the miniatures of the period, with proposed chronologies ranging from the 13th to the 14th century. A formal classification is proposed in eight typologies that are placed within the European, Hispanic and Catalan-Aragonese contexts.

Among the characteristics of these typologies, the persistence of the Hispano-Muslim tradition, the adaptation of motifs from other building techniques, and religious architecture as a model for civil construction all stand out.

The second section begins with an essay by Magdalena Cerdà Garriga on Gothic devotional sculpture in Mallorcan houses in the 15th and 16th centuries, with notarial inventories as her main source. She examines the iconography, in which Christological and Marian sculptures are particularly noteworthy; the materials, with the most popular and cheapest being plaster pieces made from moulds; and the location, which was mainly in the living room, dining room, bedroom or chapel. It can be concluded that this was a widespread practice among all social groups and that production was mainly local, notwithstanding the existence of imported pieces.

This bloc continues with a study by Teresa Izquierdo Aranda of the provision of furniture in the palace of the Generalitat de Valencia in the 15th century. In addition to an introduction to the origins of the furniture industry in Valencia and its evolution, there is a review of the styles, materials and techniques used in the building of the Generalitat, as well as an identification of the master carpenters. The article is a first approximation to the subject, but it demonstrates the importance of the study of furniture for understanding everyday life in late medieval interiors and the functioning of the carpenter's workshops of the time.

In the following chapter, Maria Barceló Crespi describes the ground floors of the houses in the City of Mallorca based on a selection of post mortem inventories carried out between 1412 and 1516. This is an extension of her previous work, to which she contributes new data on nomenclature, typology and function. Attention is also paid to the circumstances that led to important differences in the uses of these spaces, such as the social group to which the owners belonged, the presence of shops and workshops, and the presence of servants and slaves.

In the following article, Aymat Catafau presents a synthesis of his work on the houses built between the 13th and 15th centuries in the Perpignan districts of Sant Mateu and Sant Jaume. Based on archaeological surveys and documentation preserved in the archives, he proposes reconstructions of housing typologies in terms of construction techniques, the distribution and use of space, and the relationship between the different dwellings. The subsequent evolution of the houses is also explained, in particular the common subdivisions from the 14th century onwards and the improvement works carried out in the following centuries.

Subsequently, Marta Fernández Siria analyses the representative spaces belonging to the Mallorcan monarchy, dispersed throughout the territory due to the itinerant nature of the court, with special emphasis on the grand halls of the castles of Perpignan and Mallorca. She focuses on the layout and diversity of functions of these spaces, as well as the resources used to emphasise their importance. These include mural painting, the installation of large windows, the furnishings, and above all the use of diaphragm arches and wooden roofs with pictorial decorations.

Juan Vicente García Marsilla then goes on to compare the lifestyle of nobles and merchants in the city of Valencia in the 14th and 15th centuries on the basis of fifty property inventories. His comparison is based on the characteristics of the dwellings and he utilises parameters such as their location in the city, the prices and dimensions of each type of property, the layouts and uses of the different rooms, the presence of domestic servants, and the movable goods that were to be found in them.

After this, Federico Iborra Bernad offers an overview of Valencian residential architecture in the 14th century, a field of study conditioned by the continuous reforms carried out in later periods and by the difficulty in dating common constructions. The origin and typological evolution of single- and double-bay dwellings and of square fortified houses is presented here. This chapter ends with a brief study of the now vanished Royal Palace of Valencia and the Ducal Palace of Gandia.

Meanwhile, Marcello Schirru analyses the civil architecture of Alghero in the 15th and 16th centuries within the context of the late Mediterranean Gothic period, with a particular focus on the residences of the urban nobility. Based on the surviving elements, he provides an architectural and iconographic description of the mansions of Ferrera, Carcassona, Guillot and Machin, explaining the architectural model behind the mansions being built in this region at this time.

Jacobo Vidal Franquet concludes this second section with an overview of the Gothic houses of Tortosa, covering the dimensions and distribution of the dwellings of the different social strata, as well as the construction techniques and decorative elements employed. His study is constrained by a lack of housing contracts and the scarcity of material remains, and is therefore based on historical photographs, ruins uncovered by recent building work, literary sources, comparative analyses with other civil works of the period and, above all, property inventories.

The last three chapters of the book are monographs on three residential buildings. In the first, Marco Rosario Nobile examines the circumstances surrounding the construction of Palazzo Bonet in Palermo at the end of the 15th century, which serves to illustrate the social ascent of its promoter, Gaspare Bonet, a merchant from Barcelona. It also offers a description of the original appearance of the palace, which has been profoundly altered by later modifications.

In second monograph, Tina Sabater Rebassa, Magdalena Cerdà Garriga and Antònia Juan Vicens analyse the origins and characteristics of Can Balaguer, a residential building in Palma, and the urban area in which it is located. The study is based on the preserved medieval rooms, archival documents, urban planning changes and graphic sources from the 17th century, and serves as a starting point for the study of the evolution of this type of building in early modern times.

To conclude, Francesca Tugores and Miquel Àngel Capellà reconstruct the medieval configuration of the 15th century Ca n'Oleo from the grouping of pre-existing buildings and their subsequent evolution, using it as a paradigmatic example of the process of the monumentalisation of the houses in the city during the 15th century.

They pay special attention to the monumental staircase in the courtyard, one of the icons of medieval civil architecture in the city of Palma. The main sources of the study are the archaeological and archive work carried out between 1997 and 2011 by Dr. José Morata, among others.

In conclusion, this collection constitutes a choral approach to late medieval domestic architecture in terms of its technical aspects, functionality and use, in the context of the Kingdom of Mallorca and its area of cultural relations. It is worth highlighting the challenge posed by this line of research due to the marked scarcity of material remains and documentary evidence, which make the reconstruction and dating of these buildings very difficult.

However, this limitation opens up the use of sources that have traditionally been neglected by historians, but which provide valuable information and, beyond confirming or completing theories derived from traditional sources, can lead to conclusive propositions.

Moreover, the quality of the results of this set of articles, together with their variety, confirms both the fruitfulness and the great interest of the residential spaces of different social groups as a subject of study, and the need to explore this type of work more deeply in order to achieve the closest possible picture of medieval society.

TARRADELLAS, Cristina, 2020

Sant Miquel d'Engolasters. L'arcàngel de les muntanyes

Barcelona: Ars Picta - Universitat de Barcelona (Pirineus romànics. Monografies 2)

Ressenya de MARTA FERNÁNDEZ LAHOSA. Universitat de Barcelona

Sant Miquel d'Engolasters. L'arcàngel de les muntanyes by Cristina Tarradellas is the second volume in the collection *Pirineu romànic monografies*, which is a channel for the diffusion of the work being carried out by the Ars Picta research group at the University of Barcelona. The contents of this brief study are derived from the author's doctoral thesis titled *L'art romànic del Principat d'Andorra. La pintura mural en el seu context*.

The volume unfolds in just over 100 pages, a succinct space in which a comprehensive, contextualised overview of the church of Engolasters is presented in a didactic, grounded fashion. In each of the chapters, Tarradellas presents a summarised state of the issue that helps the reader to discern between older historiographical approaches and the new contributions and revisions that the author presents here in a clear and comprehensible way. In this sense, the footnotes are particularly useful, since they allow novice readers to orientate themselves in the subject, while at the same time providing critical material for a more in-depth reading of the concepts presented in the text.

Following a very brief prologue (by Jaume Serra i Serra) and a short introduction, Tarradellas begins with four chapters that present information in the form of an itinerary that progresses from more general to more specific hypotheses. This approach helps the reader to contextualise the architectural ensemble and paintings in both space and time and provides a better understanding of the interpretative details.

The first chapter, titled *El paratge d'Engolasters i l'església de Sant Miquel al llarg de la història*, analyses the setting of Engolasters as a geographical location, the resources of the territory and its transport routes, taking into account both those of the present day and, above all, those of the Middle Ages. The historical context of the region and the enclave in which the building is located is also briefly provided. At this point, it should be noted that there is no archaeological or documentary evidence to clearly place a town or settlement with the name of Engolasters to which the church being studied could be linked. The building, therefore, was erected in a solitary location, but the researcher insists on the importance of the region as a crossing point of various roads that connected the two sides of the Pyrenees, especially the road that led to La Seu d'Urgell, roads that carried both people and influences. A concept that should be taken into account, since beyond the prejudices, whether founded or unfounded among certain historiographical trends that tend to see the isolation of certain mediaeval territories as being disconnected areas, these new perspectives stress that inhospitable does not necessarily mean isolated.

After a brief outline of the history of the ensemble, which helps to understand how it has come down to the present day, this chapter concludes with a methodical account of the discovery, removal and subsequent conservation of the paintings, focusing in particular on the problem of the multiple removals that led to the loss of some of the fragments of these pieces at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The second chapter presents a thoughtful description of the architectural features of the building, the bell tower (one of the tallest in the country) and its sculptural decoration. The author describes the problems associated with the quality of the workmanship and the dating of the various parts of the ensemble. She also states that the construction of the building and the tower were the work of an unskilled team that, nevertheless, followed the basic tenets of Lombard architecture. The peculiar height of the bell tower is also highlighted; despite its size, it does not compromise the harmony of the proportions of the overall ensemble. In order to carry out an architectural analysis, both in terms of techniques and style, Tarradellas presents a comparison with other constructions of the period, both in the Principality itself and in other Pyrenean regions. In fact, this comparative approach is a constant practice that extends throughout the book and helps readers to contextualise the phenomena analysed and allows them to verify for themselves, through observation, the hypotheses put forward.

In the third chapter, which is the core of the study, the author describes and interprets the pictorial remains preserved in the church of Engolasters, which are mainly concentrated in the apsidal basin, in the apsidal vault, and in the soffits and the presbyteral arch. These are now on display among the Romanesque painting collections of the MNAC in Barcelona. The decoration of the triumphal arch was preserved until 1937, when it was lost in the context of the transfer of several pieces from the MNAC to Paris.

In her analysis of the iconography of the preserved remains, Tarradellas points to several anomalies in the decoration of the apsidal basin, which has the image of Christ in majesty at its centre. Both affect the representation of the living creatures: on the one hand, there is an exchange of positions between the symbols of the Evangelists Luke and Mark. On the other hand, there is a representation of the figure of the Archangel Michael replacing the symbol of the man associated with Matthew. The author observes that the first anomaly is perceptible in other churches within the bishopric of Urgell and suggests that it is the result of an application not following the usual pattern, but applying older models, since, as the chapter points out, the order of the living creatures became widespread in the West from the 11th century onwards and this characteristic would become a common feature of the region.

In order to explain the iconographic anomaly of the replacement of Matthew by the Archangel Michael, which is the most notable, the author sets aside an entire subsection in this third chapter. She begins with a brief, but concise, historiographical overview of the interpretation of this figure in the Engolasters ensemble. The

author eschews readings that identify this substitution as an error or as a partial vision of the advocate angels and suggests that it was a conscious decision made by the creator of the iconographic programme with the aim of highlighting the figure of the church's patron saint. For reasons of space, the man of the living creatures would have been assimilated with the archangel, a logical substitution, since both figures have very similar profiles and can be interpreted in an ambivalent way. The presence of Michael inside the apse allows for a more complex reading, one that is more integrated with the overall iconography of the ensemble. Accordingly, Tarradellas, in relation to the text of John (Rev 12:7-10), proposes that in the apse Michael is shown as the leader of the angelic army defeating the beast, an action that would permit the appearance of the figure of Christ the Judge (represented in the *Maiestas Domini*) and the redemption of mankind from original sin. Saint Michael thus becomes the protector of mankind, but also of the building and, by extension, of the community that inhabits it.

This reading is completed with the following two subsections of the same chapter dedicated to the decoration of the apse chamber and the presbyteral area. In the chamber the author sees an apostolate represented by six figures headed by Peter and Paul, representing the universal Church and the new covenant. In the soffit of the triumphal arch, the four half-length figures (two bearded and two beardless) should be interpreted as saints, since identifying them as the missing apostles is ruled. These figures would therefore be intermediaries, unnamed saints, who would embody a general vision of the community, of the believers, of the chosen ones who follow Michael's leadership. All the different strata would be integrated into this eschatological vision that proposes a hope of salvation that was meant to serve as an inspiration for clergy and parishioners. Furthermore, as the author points out, these figures are architecturally located in a transitional space between the apse and the body of the nave, adding Eucharistic significance to the images.

Tarradellas concludes the third chapter with an interesting summary of the state of the issue regarding the existence of the figure of the Master of Santa Coloma, his production and influences (traditionally related to the circle of Pedret and Taüll). In the body of work of this figure or workshop, the historiographical tradition includes several Andorran churches, including the group that is the subject of this study. In these lines, the author attempts to dismantle the clichés that have been reiterated in the different approaches to the subject. Warning of the problem of creating the figure of a "master", she proposes instead a common style for the group of Andorran paintings, but not one created by the same hand, and argues that this production should no longer be seen as a marginal and isolated phenomenon, stressing, once again, its connection with the diocese of Seu d'Urgell

The book concludes with a brief final chapter providing a general overview of the cult of the Archangel Michael by examining its associated issues, locations and main centres, highlighting the protective function of this figure and the relation-

ship of his sanctuaries with mountains and elevated areas. This final note helps the author to establish the link between the meaning and readings of the iconography and the Engolasters ensemble and the site in which it is located. It is in these lines that the reasons for the evocative subtitle of the volume, the archangel of the mountains, become clear.

With this book, Cristina Tarradellas fills a vacuum that needed to be addressed by providing a scientific approach to Andorra's Romanesque heritage, a task she had already begun in her thesis, which is presented in this monograph in an informative and entertaining format, a clear and condensed formula that is accessible to all types of reader.