

# MEDIEVAL HISTORY IN SPAIN: A REFLECTION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Knowledge about history is still in demand by many people, but another way of understanding the past is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With regard to the Middle Ages in Spain, Spanish medievalism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is the heir of Franquism. The instrumentation of Medieval History for political ends, earlier falsified by the Franco regime to justify the dictatorship, has been distorted over the last thirty years by some nationalisms, and also greatly by Spanish nationalism, to certify their ideological positions. It is time that historians turned their eyes back to the people, the real protagonists of history, and to who it should be aimed.

## **KEY WORDS**

History, Power, Medievalism, Manipulation, Future.

## **CAPITALIA VERBA**

Res gestae, Imperium, Studia Medii Aevi, Dolus, Tempus futurum.

## 1. History, power and medievalism

Although the executive powers try to deny it, it is evident that more than a few technocrats in politics wish to put the shortest possible sell-by date on the humanities, and especially history, or rather, the study of history. And that is despite the fact that knowledge about history is still in demand among many people. A simple glance in a bookshop window or the shelves of a newsstand is enough to show a profusion of books and magazines on history. This is because in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, history ceased to be the exclusive legacy of the ruling classes to become an accessible and interesting discipline for the popular classes. This has led to the growth of an enormous field around this subject, one with a tendency to controversy, debate and discussion.

History interests people, but does it interest the historians, or the political powers that be? And, especially, are these powers and historians interested in people knowing about and having access to a knowledge of history? And which history?<sup>1</sup>

After looking through many of the texts used in pre-university educational, the scandalous gaps are glaring. It is clear that we need only listen to some public policy managers or certain arrivistes when they try to explain and interpret the past to understand that these are not precisely the best of times for history.

Although it seems nonsense, there are still those who sustain that studying, researching, writing and publishing history is a kind of exotic luxury with no place in a society irremediably dedicated to consumption and immediate profitability.

"History, what for?" many still ask, even some of those with the power to decide about the future of its teaching. Curiously, when history was the property of the ruling class, when unidirectional power monopolised political authority and the use of history, when their sicarios were the only ones who could publish their chronicles and annals, then it was useful and convenient. But since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when those who had never had a voice, those who had been silenced so that their laments were hardly even a whisper from the past, claimed their role and found a place on the pages of some books, thus managing to escape from the oblivion and ostracism they had been consigned to, history has not been viewed in the same light by the powerful. This new situation is what irritated the economic and political elites one and a half centuries ago and still does, used as they are to not allowing any shadow to cast doubt about their role and acts.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Peter Burke in an interview given to María Lúcia García Pallares-Burke: "What are historians for? For me they are there to interpret the past in the present. They are a kind of interpreter, translators, cultural translators, as you yourself argued in your book about reception and circulation of ideas. Like other translators, they face the dilemma of being faithful to the text, the past and, at the same time, intelligible to the reader in the present" (García Pallarés-Burke, María Lúcia. *La nueva historia. Nueve entrevistas*. Valencia-Granada: Universitat de València-Universidad de Granada, 2005: 167-168).

2. For a history that listens to other voices, see for example: Guha, Ranahit. *Las voces de la historia y otros estudios subalternos*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2002. According to Jim Sharpe, it was Edward Thompson who introduced the concept of "history from below" in a 1966 article of the same title (Sharpe, Jim. "Historia desde abajo", *Formas de hacer historia*, Peter Buke, ed. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2003: 39-58).



Perhaps because in other times it was considered that “*All historians are liars*”,<sup>3</sup> and nowadays the word “history” is a still synonym of “lie” in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy.

A showcase, not very aggressive, history, a history of fiction a la carte becomes an instrument of political alignment. From the “*tell the facts as they happened*” to the positivist historiography, an axiom that many certainly still hold to in Spain, to the “*show history just as it was*”, still proclaimed in some museums and exhibitions, there is no great distance. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, anything and everything goes to justify the present, and if historians are found in this present prepared to make the past into fiction, then so much the better. Only this way is it possible to understand how some dare to brazenly declare that the skulls found in the oldest levels of the sites in the Atapuerca mountains belong to “*the first Spaniards*” or define the Laietans as “the Catalans who inhabited the Barcelona area before the arrival of the Romans”, among other many examples of this style.

And after so many centenaries and remote-controlled monarchic celebrations, we can end up considering the scoundrel Fernando VII as a great statesman with an extraordinary vision of the future, or the imbecile crowned Charles IV as an exceptional man of State,<sup>4</sup> or Isabel the Catholic worthy of appearing on the Catholic altars between Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross.

History, understood in the sense of narrating events from the past, has been used as an intellectual weapon to justify a certain established order.<sup>5</sup> Generally, it has been written by the same power, at least until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and consequently, similar arguments have been used to explain events that occurred in the distant past, and on innumerable occasions it has become a formidable theoretical instrument to justify power.<sup>6</sup>

Since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attempts have been made to equip history with a firm philosophical base. A seemingly insuperable dichotomy then arose: either one believed in a metaphysical reality which could be reached through intuition, one that would lead indefectibly to subjectivism and relativism, or the exclusive and meticulous study of the particular and individual was encouraged, renouncing any attempt to generalise or discover common elements in the events of the past, which meant recognising that the historians had nothing to contribute to the scientific study of the human being in general.

The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century historians tended to leave these great epistemological themes aside and concentrate on marking out the specific terrain of history and the reaction against the dominant academic practices. The “*exhaustive collection of the*

3. Locke, John. *Ensayo sobre el entendimiento humano*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2002.

4. We can observe this in the celebrations of II Century of Peninsular war (1808-2008).

5. “In the past, most history was written to glorify the rulers and, perhaps, so that they applied it in practice. In fact, certain kinds of history still fill this purpose” (Hobsbawn, Eric. *Sobre la Historia*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1998: 205 [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997]).

6. Michael Parenti’s observations about the most critical American historians and who question the very manipulated official history of their country are convincing. (Parenti, Michael. *La Historia como misterio*. Hondarribia: Hiru, 2003: 168).



facts" and the "solidity of historical judgement" in the interpretation of documentary evidence were the essential virtues of the historian who necessarily had to lead him or her to fruitful conclusions. Obviously, fruitful conclusions are understood as a definitively valid "register of truths", acquired thanks to knowledge of the past but also projected into the future. These scientific pretensions combined badly both with the logical and methodological analysis and the practical results of these works, frequently lacking an overall vision.

Perhaps it is not just chance that it is a novelist who has presented the clearest ideas about the historian's work "It was then that I discovered how many bold fictioneers reside in Clio's grove.[...] With luck, a golden age of historians may now be at hand, freeing novelist to return to the truly great themes..."<sup>7</sup>

The important, obviously. Because there is an allegedly "scientific history" which usually rejects everything from what has come to be called "The Academy". This rejection has concentrated on maligning everything that is not centred on the choice of an apparently serious historical theme and its analysis with the right methodology; this is what is now called "research excellence". Thus, all activity that falls outside this "officialist" framework is discarded as not serious.

However, another way of understanding the past, and using it in the present, is possible. There is not enough with the "professional history", based on the knowledge of the method, the formal handling of the most recent bibliography and "adequate" and correct analysis of historical phenomena. For some, this type of history gives us the impression of taking part in another mechanical laboratory exercise. Faced with the dispensable and inconsequential historian who seems dazzled by the construction of a "scientific history", but one with nothing behind it, it is necessary to advocate for the historian who asks about the sentiments that beat behind each document, about the interests and intentionality hidden in the chronicles written to the dictates of the powerful, the ambitions and oppression of thousands of human beings which lies behind each book of accounts or balance sheet, those who get excited about the design in the varnish on a bowl, who reflect about the desires behind the characters of the faces of coins, who understand the fears contained in the mortar and the stones of the walls or who capture the hopes forged in the making of a humble iron adze.<sup>8</sup>

This is far from the thesis the "established power", whatever it is, sets out, one which only aims to manipulate the historical events. In dictatorships, this manipulation is crude and obvious, and the facts are twisted, hidden, changed and altered without any care. In formal democracies, facts from the past are reinterpreted with partisan eagerness, conveniently manipulated to condition or justify situations in the present. It is so much so that some historians have expressed desires for reconciliation that often lead to conservative positions, as with P. Burke when he stated,

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7. Vidal, Gore. *The Golden Age. A novel*. New York: Doubleday, 2000: 466-467. Gore Vidal stated in his impressive memoirs that "I was a novelist in an era when the line between fiction and fact pretty much broke down as" (Vidal, Gore. *Palimpsest. A Memoir*. London: Abacus, 1996: 3).

8. Corral Lafuente, José Luis. "Historia y ficción sobre la Edad Media". *Aragón en la Edad Media*, 18 (2004): 7-36.

Creo que utilizar la historia como arma en la lucha política es contraproducente. Uno llega a creerse su propia propaganda, a dramatizar excesivamente el pasado y de ahí a olvidarse de la complejidad real de los problemas de cualquier momento. Uno llega a idealizar a su propio bando y a dividir los seres humanos en dos grupos, “nosotros” y “ellos”<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, quiet reflection is needed about the historiographical moment we are going through. More than a few consider positive the “de-ideologisation” that is happening to some historians, previously committed to social change and who are now far from everything except mere empiricism, which is as harmful as it is false in the social sciences.

### ***1.1 And what about in medievalism?***

To avoid being less than the grand theoreticians of the historiography, in general very close to the study of contemporary history, the world of European medievalism attempted to offer its own response; and is still trying. Historians as “formal” as Jacques Heers<sup>10</sup> have put their minds to criticising the abandoning of old “star subjects”, the stereotype of the chronological models (the inveterate mania of setting historical time as if it were a commercial product) and even the topical and worn image that has been given of the medieval period.

An important dose of self-esteem has spread through European medievalism in recent years, while the medievalists have exported it to their period of study. That is why the historians are putting so much effort into taking apart the traditional and folkloric image of a Middle Ages that appears shadowy and inquisitorial through the eyes of the neophyte. And this is by no means distant from the prevailing wind that comes from the new ideas of political power. I am referring to the efforts by a wide sector to rescue for the present the traditional “values” that made Europe possible, and without any intellectual shame identified with freedom, free thought, the liberal economy, and Christian moral and ethics. It is not chance that the efforts by the Catholic Church and its acolytes in national parliaments, organisms of the European Union and even universities to ensure that the future European Constitution, if it is ever possible, will hold Christianity as a fundamental element in the construction of Europe; and although they may wish to introduce this as a historical factor, this is really a policy choice.

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9. “I believe that using history as a weapon in political struggle is counterproductive. One can end up believing one’s own propaganda, to dramatise the past excessively and from there forget the real complexity of the problems of any moment. One ends up idealising one’s own side and dividing humans into two groups, ‘us’ and ‘them’”. (Burke, Peter. “Historia popular o historia total”, *Historia popular y teoría socialista*, Raphael Samuel, ed. Barcelona: Crítica, 1984: 76-77).

10. About stereotypes in the medieval period, see Heers, Jacques. *La invención de la Edad Media*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1995.



In this time, most medievalists propose a rethinking of the studies into the Medieval period in various directions. The concept of modernity that has been paired with the rise of the Renaissance and the overcoming of the medieval is questioned. The Middle Ages are claimed as an epoch of development in culture and art, and even certain economic practices, always dismissed as “feudal”, are rehabilitated, giving them a certain air of modernity. Nowadays, European historiography proposes a rewriting of the Middle Ages away from the constraints and prejudices that for centuries have converted the medieval period into an excessively dark period of our history.

The so-called “scientific history” did not understand, and I believe is still far from accepting, even rejecting as ahistorical, that the lives of the men and women in the Medieval period were full of feelings, fears and dreams. Entrenched in the rancid idea of interpreting the facts, a repetitive and recurrent hobbyhorse, the traditional historiography of the Middle Ages is still bogged down, at the most, in interpretation, avoiding opening new more enriching, and especially more dynamic, foci. Meanwhile, some presumed “scientists of history” are struggling with all kinds of resources to manipulate the facts, invent explanations suited to their ideas and even justify absolutely condemnable actions. European medieval historiography is full of examples of this.<sup>11</sup>

The ideological rearming of history is absolutely necessary for medievalism; only this way can the meaning of the Middle Ages be understood, what were the social movements that arose from it and the mechanisms that controlled it, and what are the imprints that the Medieval period has left on today’s society, so we can focus to the right degree on the events and avoid falling into such puerile errors as usually happen. The crisis of history is no more than the crisis of conservative historiography, limited, in some respects, almost only to struggling against Marxism until its death certificate can be issued. However, our times, require a new framework within which historians can carry out their work without the spurious conditioning factors that blight traditional historiography. Probably many things need renewing and philosophy, social sciences and even psychology must be reintroduced, but the value given to the subjective will continue to define the direction of a renewed history. What is needed is freedom of thought, greater commitment, greater capacity for analysis, more generosity, and much more scientific and technical training. Above all it is necessary to avoid the disenchantment, conformism and agreement faced with formulas that are old, very old, although presented as the latest thing in modernity.

In recent years, the political situation in Europe has conditioned the treatment of these aspects. The surrogate attachment of some historians to certain forms of state, such as the monarchy, has led them to transfer their current desires to their historical research. This is especially noticeable in some recent texts about the medieval Castilian monarchy, the kings of Aragon or even about the French and

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11. Little, Lester K; Rosenwein, Barbara, eds. *La Edad Media a debate*. Tres Cantos: Akal, 2003; Genet, Jean Philippe, ed. *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe: actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation européenne de la Science du 29 mars au 1er avril 1989*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1991.



English crowns. That is, fiction presented with “scientific” arguments postulated as historical when it is a question of pure presentism.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Medieval history and “Spain”

To affirm that Spanish medievalism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the heir to Franco’s regime may sound too strong, especially if stated aloud in a public tribune, but it is still true. One need only review the historiography of the last half century to observe that there is hardly any break between 1975 and 1985, for example; or the training of a whole generation of medievalists who had no other remedy than to attend patiently to the imposition of the acritical and random hierarchy of the Regime.

The mediatisation which the Franco regime’s ideology submitted the historiography and the political control of access to university teaching posts and research centres have been enormous scourge whose practices still continue in some cases. And the legacy did not consist only of the continuation of some of these corrupt practices, but also in the response of the nationalist historiography from irreconcilable positions, well fed by the regional power.

The instrumentalisation of History for political ends, previously falsified by the Franco regime to justify his dictatorship, has also been twisted by some nationalisms, and a lot by Spanish nationalism, over the last thirty years to certify their ideological positions and interests. Once again, the citizens have been marginalised from their own history. The demand for “veracity” and to know “what really happened” have led many of these citizens with a desire to know and find new frameworks for thought to search for part of the response to their concerns in other narrative experiments.

Under Franco’s dictatorship, the official posture was a consequence of the single party, without historical criticism or valuations beyond the imposed framework. Only a few isolated attempts struggled to break the smothering monopoly of the regime’s historiography, subject to dogmas and absolutely outdated postulates, if not completely distanced from the historical reality of Spain.<sup>13</sup>

In the paranoia of the Regime, the Middle Ages in the Peninsula had been a very harmful epoch for the country (Spain, obviously), owing to the “disunion” of its lands and peoples; the ideals of the “common and indivisible patria of all Spaniards” were eternal values, but not only projected towards eternity in the future, but also towards the past, to history. Spanish medievalism of those times did little, or rather nothing, to dethrone this historical aberration.

12. Corral Lafuente, José Luis. “Historia y ficción sobre la Edad Media”...: 7-36.

13. Pérez Garzón, Juan Sisinio. *La gestión de la memoria, La Historia de España al servicio del poder*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2000.



It was a question of turning Spain into a *continuum*, from Atapuerca to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with some parentheses in which “national unity” had been broken by external forces, such as the Roman Empire or the Moors. A clear example of this aberration is the speech the then ex-president of the Government, José María Aznar, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2004 in the Jesuit university of Georgetown, in Washington. This politician, converted into an improvised historian, undoubtedly assessed by speculators out of nowhere, ended up saying things like, “the problem Spain has with al-Qaeda and Islamic terrorism did not begin with the Iraq crisis. In fact, it has nothing to do with Government decisions. You must go back no less than 1,300 years, to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become just another piece in the Islamic world, and began a long battle to recover it’s a identity. The “Reconquista” process was very long, lasting 800 years. However, it ended successfully”.<sup>14</sup>

Statements like this, often repeated throughout our historiography, are based on the mythology created in the chronicles from Leon and Castile written from the 9<sup>th</sup> century on, in which warlike deeds were invented, or in certain cases magnified, then converted into the founding myths of kingdoms, in which divine intervention was usually present;

*Se construye (“la propaganda negra”) sobre la falsificación de ciertas verdades propias considerándolas elementos introducidos por el enemigo. Si el público no admite tal posibilidad, entonces la explicación recurre al azar, el destino o la voluntad del Todopoderoso*<sup>15</sup>

This was the origin of a whole historiographical current that has contaminated the history of the peninsula with a nationalist sheen that has spread to all fields. I mentioned above that all power uses history for its own benefit, manipulating it when needed, but this manipulation becomes a true paranoia when power is spiced with a nationalist, or national, eternal and ahistorical feeling that is greatly accentuated in the case of the dictatorships.

*En los regímenes con fuerte carga nacionalista, la historia ha sido manipulada haciéndola coincidir con los intereses de aquellas ideologías que se desean inculcar a las poblaciones de un determinado territorio. Esta desvirtuación llega a su culminación en los regímenes dictatoriales: cuando el poder es absoluto, la manipulación tiende a ser absoluta*<sup>16</sup>

14. Aznar, José María. “Siete tesis en el terrorismo de hoy –Extracto–” *Absurda revolución*. 21<sup>th</sup> September 2004. 10<sup>th</sup> June 2007 <[http://absurda\\_revolucion.blogia.com/2004/092702-siete-tesis-sobre-el-terrorismo-actual-extracto-php](http://absurda_revolucion.blogia.com/2004/092702-siete-tesis-sobre-el-terrorismo-actual-extracto-php)>.

15. “That is (“the black propaganda”) was built around the falsification of certain truths considering these as elements introduced by the enemy. If the public did not accept such a possibility, then the explanation resorted to fate, destiny or the Almighty’s will”. (Torres, Margarita. “La propaganda del poder y sus técnicas en las crónicas leonesas y castellanas (siglos IX-XIII)”. *Aragón en la Edad Media*, 18 (2004): 75).

16. “In regimes with a heavy nationalistic load, history has been manipulated to make it coincide with the interests of those ideologies that it is desired to instil into the populations of a specific territory. This distortion reaches its culmination in the dictatorial regimes: when power is absolute, the manipulation tends to be absolute.” (Abós Santabárbara, Ángel Luis. *La historia que nos enseñaron (1937-1975)*. Madrid: Foca, 2003: 7).



The "History of Spain" has undergone a great deal in the name of nationalism, whether this be the so-called "peripheral" or "centralist" nationalism which has led to a series of contradictions as evident as the following.

*Sólo puede hablarse de una historia de España cuando los diversos pueblos que la forman comienzan a ser percibidos desde el exterior como una unidad. Mucho después llegará la asunción de ese mismo sentido de unidad por los propios hispanos (...). La unidad de España, prefigurada ya en la diócesis romana de Hispania, se realizó, aunque fuera en condiciones precarias, en el reino visigodo.*

However, at the same time he also states that

*Al morir Isabel la Católica se produjo una grave crisis institucional, puesto que entre Castilla y Aragón no existía más que una unión personal<sup>17</sup>*

### **2.1 National unity or personal union? What is it to be?**

In recent years, and owing to the "presentism" that continues to condition the historiography, the approaches to the Spanish "national fact" have turned radically. With the democratic period that began three decades ago and the reclamations of the autonomies, the Hispanic Middle Ages have enjoyed an unexpected recognition. Converted into an epoch that generated some of the actual Spanish nationalities, the assessment of the Hispanic Medieval period has change substantially. It is no longer a time of disunity and fights between Spanish territories, but rather the origin of the current nationalities. The new prestige of the Middle Ages goes as far as the recuperation of names of institutions that arose in that period as differential elements for specific national facts.

The examples are overwhelming, but it suffices to cite the events in Catalonia in 1989 to celebrate a supposed "millennium of the Catalan nation", placing its origins in the year 989, in full Middle Ages, or in another case, setting the invented battle of Covadonga as the origin of the modern Spanish nation. And although it would seem that such manipulation would diminish with the passing of democratic time, things have not only not calmed down, but have even become worse in some cases. Some regional governments have backed a "national" historiography that contemplates the late-20<sup>th</sup> century autonomic territory as if it had existed as such since the

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17. "One can only talk about a history of Spain when the various people who make it up begin to be perceived from the exterior as a unit. Much later the assumption of this same sense of unity by the Hispanics themselves would arrive. (...) The unity of Spain, prefigured in the Roman diocese of Hispania, came about, although in precarious conditions, in the Visigoth kingdom". (...) "With the death of Isabel the Catholic there was a serious institutional crisis, given that there was nothing more than a personal union between Castile and Aragon" (Domínguez Ortiz, Antonio. *España, tres milenios de historia*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001: 13, 71, 121).



dawn of civilisation, and from here to expressions like "Catalonia already existed before the arrival of the Romans", "The Basque nation dates from before the Middle Ages", etc. These are the same errors as those who celebrate such expressions as "the Spaniards of Atapuerca", referring to the first inhabitants of the Peninsula, or "the kingdoms of Spain in the medieval age".

While the history of Spain was by definition "the national history" until three or four decades ago, in recent years, and although there are still those who keep the most rancid essences, we are faced with a history fragmented by the "frontiers" and limits that have been established in the present. This situation is inherited from Franco's dictatorship, which imposed a formalist and controlling academicism, and stereotypical and rigid modes that have survived in more than a few residues and cliques in universities and research centres. These ways of working have weighed down Spanish historiography, and will continue to do so for some time.

However, and despite some rigid situations, medieval historiography in Spain has progressed notably in recent years. It is true that we still have to escape from the straightjacket of descriptivism, and no less true that little care is taken with the forms of expression or the how to reach a wider audience than the strictly academic, so small at times, and where loyalty and subservience are still rewarded over novelty and brilliance, but something has been gained, although we still depend greatly on external models, sometimes transplanted without the least criticism or corrections required to adapt them to this area.

The Franco-era education still weighs heavily. These were times when almost nobody acknowledged the maestro one learnt from, but rather the boss who set you up, very few the disciple who was taught to better the task of the teacher, but more the loyal and submissive journeyman. This question is reflected in the historiography in statements like this, "On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1492, Fernando and Isabel took possession of the Alhambra... It was the end of the Reconquest, after seven hundred and eighty years, as Fernando and Isabel recorded in a letter to the city of Seville. The marriage of the Catholic Monarchs now appeared as a culmination to the heroic task that allowed the 'lost' Spain of the 8<sup>th</sup> century to be restored".<sup>18</sup> And there is little need to remind one that a good part of Spanish medievalism comes from this school.

### 3. The previsible future?

Just when it seemed that the situation was going to change for the better, conservative historiography, disguised as modernism, has come back in force. Now they do not do this like before, foully censoring criticism and intellectual dissidence, but conservative historiography is back controlling the resorts of the university and

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18. Suárez Fernández, Luis. *Los trastámaras y los Reyes Católicos*, Ángel Montenegro Duque, coord. Madrid: Gredos, 1985: 276.

curtailing plans of studies adequate for the progress in history and the interest of the student. What is worse, they are again trying to push the people to the margins of history, as if the historian were a medicine man in charge of protecting the most haloed arcana.

In such a rapidly changing world, so conditioned by imposed models, so little given to the critical, and so superficial and vane, history has little room for manoeuvre. There will always be a loophole to breath through, although the trap of super-specialisation, which more than a few fall into, is always ready and waiting so that the unwary youth who approaches the trade of historian becomes rapidly de-ideologised, integrated into an absurd system and condemned not to reflect about the true sense of history: understanding human beings and their manifestations - a real breeding ground for mediocrity.

Obviously, these things are of little importance, because, although it might seem incredible, there are still those who defend that to become a historian, such inane postulates for the teaching of medieval history as the following, are still valid, that were born old,

*La participación activa en la labor de programación de todo el equipo de profesores integrado en el Departamento... Unos claros planteamientos epistemológicos de la disciplina... En relación con lo anterior, una clara expresión de los fines y objetivos específicos perseguidos en el área de conocimientos de que se trate -en nuestro caso la Historia Medieval-, contemplándolos dentro del marco más amplio de los objetivos generales del proceso de enseñanza en que esos conocimientos se integran. Adecuación de los contenidos de la enseñanza al nivel en que se imparta, a las limitaciones temporales del curso académico y las disponibilidades del Departamento en profesorado cualificado y en medios auxiliares de trabajo. Una clara percepción de las vertientes que ofrece la enseñanza universitaria, ya que esta oferta se dirige no exclusivamente a futuros especialistas sino a un alumnado que, en buena medida, enderezará su rumbo profesional por la enseñanza media. Flexibilidad en la concepción y desarrollo de los programas e incorporación de las técnicas de evaluación que en cada caso se presenten como más adecuadas para apreciar el rendimiento de los alumnos a lo largo del proceso académico. Es deseable que la programación se materialice, al comienzo de cada curso académico, en una guía orientadora para el estudiante<sup>19</sup>*

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19. "Active participation in the task of programming by all the teaching staff in the Department... Clear epistemological approaches to the discipline... In relation with the above, a clear expression of the specific aims and objectives pursued in the area of knowledge in question, in our case Medieval History, considering these in the widest framework of the general objectives of the teaching process in which this knowledge is included. Adapting the contents of teaching to the level where they are taught, the limitations of time in the academic year and the availability of qualified teaching staff and auxiliary means of work in the Department. A clear perception of the aspects that university teaching offers, as this offer is not aimed exclusively at future specialists, but rather at students who, to a great extent, straighten up their professional trajectory through the teaching they receive. Flexibility in the conception and development of the programmes and incorporation of evaluation techniques which, in each case are presented as most adequate for measuring the performance of students over the academic process. It is desirable that the programme appears in a guide for the student at the beginning of each academic course". (Ruiz de la Peña, José Ignacio. *Introducción al estudio de la Edad Media*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1984: 148-149).



Anything colder, further from a passionate, living, participative, critical and inspiring conception of history teaching seems difficult.

History must be explained for what it is: life.<sup>20</sup> And as such, it will be accepted by the majority when it is passionate and transmits passion for life.<sup>21</sup>

That is why, if history continues to be taught under the following criteria,

*La lección magistral... debe trazar una síntesis clara del estado del tema en el momento de la exposición, señalar las ideas clave, la bibliografía más adecuada, sin atiborrar a los alumnos con listas de obras innecesarias, y las fuentes esenciales. De cada tema importante debe indicarse el estado del mismo, señalando los conocimientos más seguros, los problemas, las orientaciones que sigue la investigación, en tanto le sea posible. A esta lección, es necesario interrumpirla a veces con el diálogo de los discípulos, conseguir que ellos hagan su propia exposición, mediante comentarios personales o ampliación de aspectos concretos que se les encomienden; su objeto es acostumbrarlos a hablar en público. Pero su labor será matizada, corregida, ampliada por el propio profesor*<sup>22</sup>

This is not the way forward.

There is still a lack of reflection and we still miss the passion for the historian's trade. The approach to history is still too aseptic, although sometimes it can, as in some interpretation centres, approach the ridiculous. History interests people, but if professional historians forget this and go on with "their thing", they will continue to bemoan that the same people shy away from history. And I hope that this is not what is aimed for.

But it is not only the backdrop that matters. The historian has only one resource for transmitting what he wishes to express: the word. In half the world, the historians found forms of expression some time ago to make access to the historical discipline possible for a good part of the population because this is a decisive factor so that the historian's work is of some use. However, this obviousness is still regarded suspiciously in Spanish homes, although decreasingly so.<sup>23</sup>

20. Aróstegui, Julio. *La historia vivida. Sobre la historia del presente*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2004.

21. There are many ways of becoming keen on history. Jacques Le Goff did so by reading "narrative texts, full of strength and dramatic expressivity" in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (Le Goff, Jacques. *En busca de la Edad Media*. Barcelona: Paidós Ibérica, 2003: 17); Eric Hobsbawm read Karl Marx, who made him see that "history is a tool without which we cannot understand anything that happens in the world" (Hobsbawm, Eric. *Entrevista sobre el siglo XXI*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2000: 18).

22. "The lecture ... a clear synthesis must be drawn of the state of the subject at the moment of presentation, mark the key ideas, the most adequate bibliography, without stuffing the students with lists of unnecessary works, and the essential sources. The state of each important theme must be indicated, signalling the safest knowledge, the problems, the orientations that the research follows, whenever possible. In this lesson, it is necessary to interrupt at times with the dialogue of the disciples, make them do their own presentation, through personal commentaries or the extension of specific aspects that they are entrusted with; the target is to get them used to public speaking. But this task will be qualified, corrected and extended by the teacher". (Torres Delgado, Cristóbal. *Introducción al estudio de la Historia Medieval: guía para estudiantes*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1977: 100).

23. "La historia, con la posible excepción de la literatura, es la más verbal de las materias, en oposición a los contenidos cuantitativos que se enseñan en la escuela. Esto permite que los alumnos desarrollen aptitudes de razonamiento tales como la argumentación ("History, with the possible exception of literature, is the



It is necessary, a duty, to take history to the people. And for this, historians must take care of how they reach the public, how they express themselves in writing. Because you do not appreciate something if you do not understand it, and if the majority do not understand it, this means that it has been badly, very badly, explained. And if they understand it but are bored by it, much worse.

It is about time that historians turn their eyes back to the people, the real protagonist of history, and to whom it should be aimed. Some historians have realised the enormous error committed,

*Parte del creciente crecimiento explosivo de la historia, que yo empecé por celebrar, ha sido en el gusto y la demanda popular, a los cuales los historiadores profesionales han contribuido poco y apenas han respondido en absoluto.*<sup>24</sup>

This lack of responsibility and neglect by the historians that Gore Vidal had already criticised, who glimpses a return to the important by historians.<sup>25</sup>

New voices have been added to these claims,<sup>26</sup> even with a very constructive self-criticism,

*La memoria colectiva está directamente imbricada en el presente. Constituye the presupuesto 'natural' que simboliza la cohesión social de los miembros de un grupo, legitima institutions o relations de autoridad e inculca creencias, sistemas de valores o convicciones e conducta... La sociedad reclama del historiador su memoria colectiva*<sup>27</sup>

We will see if the majority follow this example or continue this inanity that pre-sides over us.

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most verbal of subjects, in contrast to the quantitative contents that are taught in school. This allows the student to develop aptitudes of reasoning such as argumentation": Carretero, Mario; Voss, James F. *Aprender y pensar la historia*. Buenos Aires-Madrid: Amorrortu editores, 2004: 14).

24. "Part of the explosive growth in history, which I began by celebrating, has been in the popular taste and demand, to which the professional historians have contributed little and have hardly responded at all". (Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. "Epílogo. ¿Qué es la historia ahora?", *¿Qué es la historia ahora?*, David Cannadine, ed. Granada: Universidad de Granada-Almed, 2005: 280).

25. "there are now furtive signs of a revival among younger academics of the realist historians (...) With luck, a golden age of historians may now be at hand, freeing novelist to return to the truly great themes..." (Vidal, Gore. *The Golden Age. A novel*. New York: Doubleday, 2000: 467).

26. Corral, José Luis. *Escribir historia... e imaginarla*. Barcelona: EDHASA, 2001.

27. "The collective memory is directly involved in the present. It constitutes the 'natural' budget that symbolises the social cohesion of the members of a group, legitimate institutions or relations of authority and inculcates beliefs, systems of values or convictions and conduct... Society reclaims its collective memory from the historian". (Mudrovic, María Inés. *Historia, narración y memoria. Los debates actuales en filosofía de la historia*. Tres Cantos: Akal, 2005: 93).

