Arqueología medieval en Guadalajara. Agua, paisaje y cultura material, edited by Guillermo García-Contreras Ruiz and Lauro Olmo Enciso. Editorial Alhulia, 2018. 492pp., 133 figures, Hb. €24.04. ISBN-13: 9788494958885.

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In 1977, Spanish pioneer in medieval archaeology Manuel Riu wrote about the state of the discipline in Spain:

This irresponsibility and the little appreciation that exists in Spain for medieval archaeology -in the absence of a collective conscience which allows to understanding the scientific interest of sites, apart from the intrinsic value of the findings- appears between the biggest problems that current medieval archaeology in our country poses (Riu Riu 1977: 403; translation by the author).

This statement was not an exaggeration. At that time medieval archaeology in Spain was still a marginal discipline within academia, even in southern Iberia, where Islamic archaeology was way more advanced. Only in the late 80s, medieval archaeology in Spain thrived, becoming a discipline in itself both in the academic and the research fields. Its development since then has been just enormous, thanks to the consequences of the Heritage Law (1985), the expansion of rescue archaeology and the emergence of several specific research projects dealing with the materiality of the Spanish Middle Ages. A development which some authors have qualified as a “silent revolution” of a discipline that finally “lost its innocence” -using D. Clarke’s words- in a quite limited period of time. The book edited by Guillermo García-Contreras Ruiz and Lauro Olmo Enciso is a direct product of those processes.

This book gathers the proceedings of the First Congress on medieval archaeology in the province of Guadalajara (central-north east Spain), held at the town of Sigüenza in 2014. Its main aim, as the authors state in the introduction, was to bring together the largest number of researchers working on the Early Middle Ages in the province and its surroundings, “considering some of the topics which are the focus of researchers’ concerns, such as settlement patterns or landscapes” (p. 15). Landscape is, without a doubt, the topic that unites the different contributions. As A. Malpica states in chapter 2: “[...] the landscape sums up and brings to life the elements that stay as evidence of human labour, a fact that needs to be made visible at a scientific level” (p. 33; translation by the author). Up to 21 articles plus the introduction, written by 29 different authors are the result of that first congress which, unfortunately, had no subsequent continuation (unless we consider the 2019 6th Congress of Spanish Medieval Archaeology held in Alicante, an event that had not been celebrated since 1999, and that took up the mantle of medieval archaeology after the Sigüenza conference).

If landscapes and their archaeology is one of the key elements that justify this book, territory may be considered the second. Guadalajara and its surroundings frame the geography of the book. Guadalajara is relevant for the Iberian Middle Ages for multiple of reasons. In post-Roman times, it was one of the main centres of power of the Visigothic kingdom through the

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impact that the foundation of the city of Recópolis had in the territory, sharing with Toledo and Mérida the triangle of power during the 6th to 8th centuries AD. After the invasion of 711, this territory became one of the spearheads of Al-Andalus, the so-called “Marca Media”. Some of the most important Islamic settlements and fortifications were established here (such as Gormaz or Brihuega), as a way to control both the frontier territories of Al-Andalus and the local peasant communities. As the Christian kingdoms and the extent of their feudal relations of production grew in the 13th century, Guadalajara became, once again, a frontier territory between two different state powers. In summary, the area may be considered one of the best laboratories to apply the different methodologies regarding the analyses of the archaeological remains of the Middle Ages.

And this is one of the foundations of the book: its interdisciplinary nature. Even though all of the 21 papers deal with the material record, many of them introduce different dialogues with other disciplines or methodologies: the analysis of written sources for the study of Guadalajara (chapter 3 by A. Donderis), archaeobotany applied to the well-known context of Recópolis (chapter 5 by M. B. Ruiz, M. J. Gil and L. Olmo), GIS applied to territorial studies (chapter 9 by G. García-Contreras), building archaeology (chapter 17 by E. Valiente) and art history (chapters 18 by A. Herrera and 22 by H. González). As it is stated by the editors, the book is a “good example of what is being done in the province of Guadalajara in the field of medieval archaeology, ranging from studies close to art history to palaeo-environmental analysis, yet all of them related to material culture coming from stratigraphic excavations” (p.17; translation by the author). However, what is a stimulating proposal is ultimately limited due to the lack of a dialogue between the different chapters or studies or a comprehensive conclusive chapter. Nonetheless, this does not constitute a problem for the whole understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of the volume.

It is quite difficult to sum up every chapter of the book in a limited review. However, in a nutshell, we can detect four main themes in the book. The first is the theoretical approach to landscapes, mainly exposed in chapter 2 by A. Malpica regarding the concept of landscape, but also present in chapter 12 (I. Rubio and M. Ruiz) in relation to the feudal and the Andalusi social models, or the analysis of the state made in chapter 15 (J. Checa). A second topic, which occupies most of the volume, is the presentation of new data coming from recent excavations and projects. Important sites for the comprehension of Guadalajara’s Middle Ages such as the castle of Jadraque (chapter 13 by M. Retuerce and G. Prieto), the castle of Trillo (chapter 14 by A. Batanero), the monastery of Santa María de Bonaval (chapter 17 by E. Valiente) or Guadalajara itself (chapter 8 by M.Á. Cuadrado and M. L. Crespo), altogether with particular material culture analysis such as the glass production of Recópolis (chapter 4 by A. Gómez de la Torre) or the windmills of El Sotillo (chapter 21 by A. Batanero and I. Jacobo) are well explained with abundant data and figures to understand the sites. This will be without a doubt a reference for future explorations and studies not only for the province, but for Medieval and Islamic Archaeology in the Iberian Peninsula.

A third strand of interest of the volume are the territorial studies. Many chapters of the book focus on the historical development of specific territories within the province of Guadalajara through the analysis of settlement patterns. This is the case of the western area under the control of the Banu Salim family, founders of Guadalajara (chapter 6 by S. Berrica), the Riva Valley (chapter 6 by G. García-Contreras), the south of the Alcarria (chapter 11 by Á. Piña) or

the region of Molina de Aragón (chapter 16 by J. M. Ortega and J. A. Arenas). Even though each of them presents a particular historical development, all highlight some inter-territorial patterns such as the importance of the rural settlement before the 8th century, when the formation of the Andalusi state caused a great impact, but also the continuities as shown in the study of the Banu Salim's territory (chapter 6) or Guadalajara (chapter 8)—or the big transformation that the feudal/Christian conquest implied. Finally, a last topic of the book is its methodological proposal for the study of the archaeology of Guadalajara's Middle Ages. Although this is present in most of the chapters, it becomes a central element of the reflection for topics such as analysis of written sources (chapter 3 by A. Donderis), fieldwork and pottery (chapter 7 by S. Ramírez and C. Martínez), religious and symbolic exploration (chapter 20 by M. Nieto and D. Pérez) or art history (chapter 22 by H. González).

The book constitutes an ambitious volume focusing on a specific territory at a moment when the discipline needs this type of territorial analysis and presentation of unpublished data. One of the biggest setbacks of current Spanish medieval archaeology is the lack of well-published contexts with which specialists may build good historical narratives. This volume partly covers that gap and will constitute a reference for future research and studies, both for the territory of Guadalajara and the Iberian peninsula itself. However, a more complete introduction which had not only presented the different chapters and topics of the book but also the historical particularities of the territory and the main conclusions of the congress would have helped to solidify the narrative of the book. Some of the chapters deserved some more figures in order to offer a core complete understanding the nature of the topic they were studying (mainly for some chapters dealing with specific material culture of presentation of stratigraphy), although the general editing and presentation of the volume has a high quality.

Retaking the quote by M. Riu and the idea of the loss of innocence, this volume can be considered a necessary step toward the maturity of the discipline in a moment when territorial and specific studies need to be published in a comprehensive way, in order to offer elements for renewed and coherent historical narratives of the Iberian Middle Ages. As the editors state at the beginning of the book: "the organization of this congress is, partly, a sign of the maturity of this field within the archaeological discipline in the province" (p.13; translation by the author). I cannot agree more.

Reference

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