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Arqueología española

de José Ramón Mélida, edición de Margarita Díaz-Andreu, Uργοiti Editores, Pamplona, 2004, CXCIX + 319 páginas

The Spanish publishing house Uργοiti publishes a series on the history of different human sciences in Spain. Each volume is dedicated to a leading founding father who established the basis for scholarly research in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The original books are published as they were, including the possible printing misspellings, so that the readers have access to the exact original work, as it was when it was a major referente. A modern expert in the field writes the introduction, paying attention to several issues, such as the life, academic achievements, scholarly production and fortune of the eminent scientist focused in the volume. The series is thus a major attempt to address the growing interest in the history of science, using a classic major work as a way of discussing the contribution of a given scientist to the field. The introductions are aimed at understanding the author and the political, social and academic contexts, so that the whole emphasis is an externalist one, as proposed by most recent literature on the history of science. Unlike internalist accounts of the fields, the series aims at situating that history in the changing social, cultural and political-economic circumstances of the Spanish society as a whole. It considers the historical conditions that have permitted the existence of difference disciplines as well as the circumstances in which scholarly knowledge has been produced. The series is thus a most important one for our understanding of academic endeavour in Spain in the humanities.

In this context, the publication of Mélida's classic *Spanish Archaeology* is a to be praised. Mélida published this volume originally in 1929 and his other classic *Classical Archaeology*, issued in 1933, influenced generations not only of Spaniards but of the whole Spanish-reading world. Mélida's books are common currency in several Latin American countries, including Portuguese-speaking (but also Spanish-reading) Brazil. Mélida's books were so influential for several reasons, not least the clear language, very good figures and a comprehensive approach to the subject. The goal of describing everything, *alles wissen und alles tun*, in the best positivist tradition entices the reader, who is led (or misled) to believe he or she knows everything is possible to know about the subject, Not a mean feat.

It is difficult to imagine a better author to study Mélida, for Margarita Díaz-Andreu is a leading student of the history of archaeology, always keen to look for the contradictions in the knowledge produced by archaeologists refracting divisions in the wider society. Furthermore, Díaz-Andreu has a deep knowledge of archaeology in her native Spain, but is also well aware of the wider European and world contexts. Lecturer at Durham, U.K., she has an uncommon command of all the theoretical and empirical issues involved in such a daunting task. In almost two hundred pages, she is able to produce a comprehensive picture of both Mélida's achievements and Spanish archaeology features in such an important formative period.

It is impossible, in a short review, to try and recreate the rich analysis proposed by Díaz-Andreu, which should be read in full in the book. I will simply try and focus on some of the more general features, which may be of particular interest not only for those of us interested in Spanish archaeology, but also for all those prone to a critical understanding of our discipline. In her first pages, Díaz-Andreu refers to the importante of patronage in Spanish academia, what she calls *sistema clientelar*, and of aristocratic ethos and ambiance prevailing in Spain in the studied period (Mélida was born in 1856 and died in 1933). During Mélida's lifetime Spain witnessed revolutions (1868-74), restoration and empire demise (1874-1898), disintegration (1899-1923), dictatorship (1923-1931), the Republican fragmentation (1931-6). The deep features of Spanish society in the period were clienteles and caciquismo, what

several historians would call a new feudalism based on obliging friends, ranged in hierarchy¹. Mérida's family background was a distinguished one, his father a jurist who gained medals and who had been Member of Parliament. Mérida studied at the Diplomatic School (*Escuela Superior de Diplomática*, 1873-1875) and was sponsored, in his patronage system, by professor Rada. Mérida aimed at being a prose writer, composing novels and poems with archaeological subjects on Egypt and Pompeii.

Mérida's scholarly career was not easy though. Mérida tried to gain a professorship but official candidate, Catalina gained the position and his association to liberal institutions in the 1880s further hindered Mérida. Later on, Mérida decided not to oppose another official candidate, in 1899, missing another opportunity to get a professorship. Mérida was active as a lecturer, gaining a professorship in 1899 at the *Escuela de Estudios Superiores del Ateneo de Madrid*. Mérida was also a museum scholar at the National Museum of Archaeology (MAN), being in touch with the Spanish colonial world at the Overseas Office, particularly active in the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America in 1892. Mérida had an uncommon international experience in Portugal, France, Greece and Turkey and was active in the aristocratic *Sociedad Española de Excursiones*, from 1893. He was active in the Royal Academies too, from 1899, being director of the MAN from 1916 to 1930. Mérida was also instrumental for the enactment of a Royal Decree (9th August 1926) protecting Spanish heritage, in a context of illegal export of cultural property from Spain to other countries. However, Mérida was linked to the export activities and Díaz-Andreu concludes it is difficult to say a definitive word about the issue. Catalina's death opened the way for Mérida's professorship at the University in Madrid in 1912. He noticed the lack of introductory textbooks and in the end of his life published the two handbooks mentioned earlier. Mérida had two followers, Taracena and García y Bellido, the latter being a most important classical archaeologist in the next generation.

Díaz-Andreu also studies theory and praxis in Mérida's work, stressing his positivist approach and the aim of cataloguing heritage, which culminated in the 1920s with his project of including Spain in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* endeavour. Díaz-Andreu then turns to study the handbook itself, starting with Mérida's evolutionist approach, emphasising the trajectory from 'rustic' natives to the Romans, who 'brought civilisation to Spain'. The imperialist ethos was usual in this period and Mérida was no exception. When the book was reprinted in 1942, under Franco, the referents to Bosch Gimpera, the then exiled archaeologist, were suppressed, but the overall text was maintained.

Reading Mérida's book in the beginning of the 21st century is an interesting experience, for several features relate to our own epoch. His evolutionist approach was straightforward. Now and again he opposes simplicity to complexity, the primitives to the civilised. Despite the criticism of the whole evolutionist approach and its notion of complexity², the literature using those dichotomies is still huge³. Another interpretive framework used by Mérida is the acculturation model, activated to understand the contact between colonisers and colonised. Natives are interpreted as inferior culture bearers aiming at mimicking the colonisers, leaving their traditional material culture to adopt superior Phoenician, Greek and later Roman ways and artefacts. This acculturation model, under the labels of Hellenisation and Romanisation, are still very much in use, despite the criticism from social theory studies on the fluidity and mixed features of all culture⁴. Acculturation was very much a key concept in Mérida's time, as it is still today as we live in the mid of a crusade to acculturate the East in Iraq and beyond⁵. Mérida considered society as homogeneous, male-oriented and it is still not unusual to read books on homogenous identities and gender-free

1. Cf. Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2nd. Ed., 1993, p. 367 et passim.

2. Cf. McGuire, R. H. Why complexity is too simple. In Dawson, P.C. and Hanna, D.T. (eds), *Debating Complexity*, Calgary, University Press (1996), 1-7.

3. E.g. *Unknown Amazon. Culture in nature in ancient Brazil*, edited by Colin McEwan, Cristiana Barreto and Eduardo Neves. London, The British Museum Press, 2001, ISBN 071412558X, 304pp.

4. Cf. Martiniello, M. *L'ethnicité dans les sciences sociales*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995. Iones, S. *The archaeology of ethnicity*. London, Routledge, 1997.

5. Patterson, T.C. *Inventing Western Civilization*. New York, Monthly Review (1997).

analysis. This approach is more astonishing, considering all the documents by international institutions, like the Unesco, on social diversity⁶. On academia, it is important to note what Díaz-Andreu mentions at p. XXV: "As is still the case in the 21st. century, in several instances, as the academic system is self-reproducing through the generations, in that epoch all young candidates needed someone to protect and promote him or her, if aspiring a professional career". From Max Weber⁷ to Pierre Bourdieu⁸, the academic meanders have been exposed as prone to patronage and aristocratic, rather than merit criteria. In some quarters, patronage is more important than in others, but this is another reminder that Mérida's work and life, apparently so distant from us, is not only relevant but very useful for examining our own times and, as we know, only an examined life is worth living.

6. Cf. *Unesco and the issue of cultural diversity, Review and Strategy*, 1946-2003. In October 2005, Unesco adopted a Convention on Cultural Diversity, to be ratified by member states.

7. Weber, M. *Wissenschaft as Beruf*. Berlin, Dunker und Humblot, 1967.

8. Cf. Weber, M. *La noblesse d'Etat. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*. Paris, Minuit, 1989; Pierre Bourdieu, entrevista a Juremir Machado da Silva, *Folha de Sao Paulo*, 7th. February, 1999, 5, p. 4; *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*. Paris, Seuil, 2001