

Zitierhinweis

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Rose Walker: *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages. Routes and Myths*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2016 (Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia 1). 408 S., 150 Abb. € 189.00. ISBN: 978-90-8964-860-0.

Rose Walker's book is the first volume in Amsterdam University Press's new series, *Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia*, edited by Jamie Wood, which aims to present new, synthetic literature on the Iberian Peninsula in the period ranging from the Roman period to the tenth century. The series itself first and foremost deserves praise as it aims at making accessible research on late antique Iberian material in the English language, which over the past decade has attracted increasing attention by the broader medievalist community.

The book itself is printed in full colour, it has a neat layout and is very carefully edited. It is organised into eight chapters with an introduction and an epilogue, all of which cover various aspects of the art of the Iberian Peninsula from the Early Imperial period to the end of the eleventh century. In presenting the 'art' in this region, the author relies heavily on architecture to produce a discourse in which the Roman past (and in particular, the early Roman past, although this is not specifically stated) serves as a model that has been followed and copied in the centuries after the fall of the Empire. In this way, the re-use of Roman elements (generically referred to as '*spolia*' throughout the book) constitutes one of the most characteristic elements of architecture in late antique/early medieval times. From a theoretical perspective, this also underlines the shortcomings and technical deficits that characterise the post-Roman West, which turned this re-use and imitation not only into a political advantage but also into a constructive necessity. In this aspect, Rose Walker's book deserves even more recognition, as it positions itself away (rightly in my opinion) from traditional Art History manuals on the medieval material by following the most recent and ground-breaking interpretations of Spanish scholars, especially when dealing with church chronologies (see below).

The chapters are organised chronologically, following the main historical events and keeping a global view over the whole of the Peninsula, rather than breaking up the periods and phases into regional linear narratives – this is done not just with the North-South (Christian v. Islamic) divide, but also with the East-West (Asturias and León v. Aragón and Catalonia). Chapter 1

(pp. 31–64) addresses the imperial Roman period, leaving largely aside the monuments of pre-Augustan settlements. The chapter looks mostly at temples and *fora* (especially those with large Augustan and Flavian phases), then moves on to mosaics, sarcophagi and, lastly, late Roman urban walls, while also highlighting the road network. It largely ignores domestic architecture, *spectacula*, baths, statues, sewers and aqueducts, as well as pottery decorations, while some other questions (perhaps pertaining to more general historical or archaeological aspects) are not addressed, such as phasing, modifications, and agencies behind these constructions. However, these omissions should be considered in the overall perspective of the book, since this first chapter seems to serve more as an introduction to the Roman material culture which would be available for re-use in later periods than as an in-depth analysis of Roman provincial art in Spain. Chapter 2 (pp. 65–102) is devoted to Late Antiquity, a period of changes. In the fourth century these changes are primarily of a constructive nature, especially in cities (where there was a wave of urban renewal) and at the large ‘palatial’ villas (usually decorated with lavish mosaics). Christianity appears at this stage as a main agent in artistic production, making its art historical entrance first in the decoration of sarcophagi in the fourth century, but then also in churches from the fifth century onwards. At the same time, the fifth century is the time of arrival of the barbarians (the Visigoths in particular), which prompt the end of the Roman state apparatus in the Peninsula. In this way, the fifth century sees a very limited continuity of art production, especially linked to Christian sites, while old Roman monuments fall into disrepair.

The Visigothic period is discussed in Chapter 3 (pp. 104–37) which, much in line with Luis Caballero’s arguments,¹ is seen as a period of continuity of late Roman traditions, without any significant innovations in any field (including the loss of vaulting techniques and the end of newly-quarried ashlar

1 L. Caballero Zoreda: La arquitectura denominada de época visigoda, ¿es realmente tardorromana o prerrománica? In: L. Caballero Zoreda/P. Mateos Cruz (eds.): Visigodos y Omeyas. Un debate entre la Antigüedad tardía y la alta Edad Media, Madrid 2000 (AAEspA 23), 207–248, L. Caballero Zoreda/I. Sastre de Diego: Espacios de la liturgia hispana de los siglos V–X. Según la arqueología. In: I. Fernández de la Cuesta/R. Álvarez Martínez/A. Llorens Martín (eds.): El canto mozárabe y su entorno. Estudios sobre la música de la liturgia viejo hispánica, Madrid 2014, 259–291, as well as L. Caballero Zoreda/M. Á. Utrero Agudo: Una aproximación a las técnicas constructivas de la alta edad media peninsular. Entre visigodos y omeyas. In: Arqueología de la Arquitectura 4, 2008, 169–192.

masonry). This means that main examples of what traditional Art History considered to be ‘Visigothic Art’, such as the hanging crowns of Guarrazar or the churches of San Pedro de la Nave and San Juan de Baños, should not be considered as such (the former a Byzantine gift, the latter examples of Mozarabic architecture). Otherwise, all elements of jewellery and architecture which can be archaeologically dated to the Visigothic period imitate, reuse, or add on to previously existing elements. In this line, the late-sixth century urban renewal linked to the period of state formation is minimised (perhaps, one could argue, excessively). The ‘Dark Ages’ of Medieval Iberian historiography (the eighth and ninth centuries) are discussed in Chapter 4 (pp. 138–78). The main focus of this chapter is, necessarily, the two main foci of political power, which are the places where art production continued after the end of the Visigothic period: Oviedo (the Naranco complex) and Córdoba (the Great Mosque). Besides these examples of state architecture, the chapter also briefly addresses other secondary elements, such as the new churches of the Asturian Kingdom and Santiago de Compostela as well as the fortified urban and rural enclaves of the Umayyads. This chapter is chronologically problematic (as is acknowledged by the author, p. 178), since culturally – if not politically – most of the ninth century should be included into the discussions concerning the tenth century, while at the same time those contexts from the eighth century are closer to the seventh.

Chapter 5 (pp. 180–232) describes in length the ‘great’ tenth century, where Córdoba, as the seat of the Western Caliphate, functioned as the motor that prompted new construction techniques, new motifs and new designs which were then taken to the north (something which, as seen in the previous chapter, already began in the ninth century with the re-introduction of new ashlar masonry and of vaulting). The role of the Mozarabs in this exchange is underlined, despite the problems linked to the use of this term. The splendour of the tenth century then is exemplified by the constructions of Córdoba and Madinat al-Zahra in al-Andalus, and in the new vaulted ‘Mozarabic’ churches both north and south of the Duero, together with the new tradition of manuscript illumination. Chapters 6 (pp. 235–73) and 7 (pp. 275–304) deal with the eleventh century, the moment during which the equilibrium of power shifted from Córdoba to the Christian north, resulting in a period of experimental art where the Christian north began to innovate art and architecture, although it still heavily depended on Andalusian skills and techniques. This results in more detailed or more characteristic wall paintings,

liturgical furniture, ivory carvings, and other minor arts. The final chapter is Chapter 8 (pp. 305–46), which presents the introduction of foreign influences into the Iberian Peninsula (Romanesque and Almoravid) which dramatically transformed the patterns of Hispanic Art, as they were no longer the results of local initiatives and traditions, but integrated again into broader, extra-Hispanic traditions – something that is further summarised in the epilogue. The book concludes with chronological tables, an extensive bibliography running over fifty pages, and a thematic index which is almost too detailed to be useful (there are, for example, five lines of index references just concerning capitals).

In summary, the book is immensely useful, not least because of the wide range of material covered and the many examples which illustrate the arguments. Moreover, it should be a point of reference in any discussion of early medieval Iberian Art. There are, some interpretative issues which should be approached with caution, although they do not undermine the validity of the proposals and the conclusions. One could list here the high importance given to geography and the ‘lay of the land’ (i.e. the availability of building stone as the main reason behind the choice of location for new urban foundations as argued by the author) or the importance attributed to the Roman road network to understand artistic exchanges in post-Roman centuries. It is refreshing to see new approaches to material culture through Art History compiled in such a useful volume; and the author is to be congratulated for such a valuable contribution which will most certainly be a great resource for teaching, research and as general reference.

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