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"Nunca mayor sobervia comidió Luçifer": límites del conocimiento y cultura claustral en el Libro de Alexandre by Fernando Riva (review)

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the instructor can easily supplement the book with material related to his/her special interests. This comprehensive textbook will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the next generation of Spanish language specialists.

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The *Libro de Alexandre* has often been considered the most significant literary work to emerge from the *mester de clerecía* poetic movement during the long thirteenth century. While the poem has attracted extensive critical attention over the years, most book-length studies have been limited to traditional, philological approaches to the anonymous poet's use of language and style, and his Latin sources. Fernando Riva, in his splendid new monograph, delves deeply into the intellectual context of the poem, showing how it reflects the learned Latin culture of the early twelfth-century cloister.

In the introduction Riva explains how the work was most likely penned by a canon working during the 1220s, who, having received the kind of training available at cathedral schools and the fledgling University of Palencia, cultivated

scholarly, ecclesiastical interests as well as a knowledge of secular, political matters related to the court. Riva goes on to show how the poem expresses preoccupations characteristic of such writers, who belonged to a religious order, but circulated outside the cloister: namely, a concern over worldly learning influenced by heterodox Aristotelianism, natural sciences, and magic arts, leading the curious and prideful astray from the orthodoxy of patristic wisdom. During this period a new, earthly *scientia* was challenging the spiritual *sapientia* of Church authorities. Alexander the Great's excessive pursuit of secular knowledge, as Riva demonstrates, would have been expected to bring about a Luciferic downfall.

In Chapter 1, "El saber de Alejandro y sus límites," Riva explores the danger of *curiositas*, warned against by St. Augustine and other Church Fathers, as well as medieval theologians. This vain desire to know for the sake of knowing was linked exegetically to the fall in the Garden of Eden, and opposed to true wisdom acquired by seeking God through Christian faith. According to Riva, Alexander's proud adherence to the former at the expense of the latter, his unbridled *vitium curiositatis*, leads him on a quest to conquer and perceive everything in the world, causes his failure to interpret signs correctly, and blinds him to prophecies revealing his fate. This chapter demonstrates how Alexander is linked—as a legendary student of Aristotle who constructs machines to see above and below the earth—not just to science and philosophy, but also esoteric knowledge being translated on the Iberian Peninsula from Arabic (and Hebrew) into Latin.

Chapter 2, "*Scientia, sapientia y profecía de Daniel*," examines the typological use of the biblical prophecies of Daniel and how this relates to Alexander's hermeneutical blindness. A *rex curiosus*, as Riva shows, cannot understand scriptural wisdom in spite of his efforts to rationalize nature. Alexander, in this sense, serves as a negative exemplar who illustrates the problem of vainglorious *scientia* as decried by influential figures like the canon regular Hugh of St Victor. Unlike Solomon, the Macedonian ruler fails to come to terms fully with his intellectual pride, his inordinate desire to know all that can be known. Ascending to look down on the world from above, Alexander fails to see that a fall is inevitable—being, like the Pagan philosophers of old, unable to discern the divine truth in spite of all his learning. As Riva explains, his role in sacred history and exegetical relationship to the apocalyptic coming of the Antichrist, preceded by Antioch IV, is closed to him. In this way, the book shows how the *Alexandre* reacts against new kinds of knowledge being absorbed on the Peninsula during the thirteenth century, and instead promotes the *sapientia* of the Church.



Chapter 3, “El clero y el claustro: el *contemptus mundi* y el fin de los tiempos,” explores how the *Alexandre* develops the topic of *contemptus mundi* or disdain for the transitory nature of the physical world, popular among cloistered writers and reformers of the period, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as the future Pope Innocent III who authored *De miseria condicionis humane*. As Riva observes, the topic also impacted Peninsular Latin writers from the period, as can be seen in Diego García’s *Planeta*, where Alexander’s pride is similarly portrayed in a negative light. In this section, as elsewhere in the book, Riva’s close reading makes revealing comparisons with relevant Latin works (including sources). As Riva convincingly demonstrates, the *contemptus mundi* theme takes on apocalyptic associations in the poem, as Alexander prefigures biblical rulers opposed to the divine will.

Chapter 4, “La reacción frente al aristotelismo hispánico,” considers how the *Alexandre* relates to conservative reforms undertaken as part of the 1215 Lateran Council and efforts to remedy the notoriously deficient education of the Iberian clergy. Riva also considers the kind of learning being undertaken at *studia generalia*, cathedral schools, and especially the University of Palencia—where the Latin *Alexandreis* legend was apparently read, professors were brought in from outside the Peninsula, and worked together with Iberian scholars (including those with exposure to Jewish and Arabic learning). Exploring how Aristotelian heterodoxies potentially made their way into scholarly instruction, Riva finds that subjects like metaphysics, astronomy, medicine and even necromancy were being promoted, citing evidence of Andalusian influence such as the writings of Petrus Alfonsi. In Riva’s view, this can be related to Aristotle’s tutelage of the Macedonian—in the *Alexandre* and wisdom literature like the *Secreta Secretorum*—prior to his insatiable conquests and hubristic downfall. At the same time, Riva points to evidence of heresy making its way into Palencia and Burgos during the period. He describes how Lucas de Tuy saw the prideful *scientia* of ancient philosophers, at the expense of *sapientia* authorized by the Church (and favored by the *Alexandre* poet), as preparing the way for heresy to spread, insofar as it predisposed rationalizing *naturales* and Iberian Averroists to misread the Bible.

In Chapter 5, “Los viajes del rey y el linaje de Babilonia,” Riva uncovers ambivalent interpretations of Alexander in medieval tradition, as a prideful Pagan and triumphant king, a heroic, yet deeply flawed model. Riva analyzes in depth how the Macedonian’s characterization follows the Luciferic model of

ascent and descent, wherein Alexander seeks to elevate himself politically and intellectually, but falls as a result of his *codicia*, *soberbia* and epistemological failings. Accordingly, Alexander is linked in the poem to both Troy and Babylon, with its mythic tower raised by Nimrod, a figure condemned for challenging God, echoing the story of Edenic expulsion. Riva investigates how the prophet Daniel was not only understood as referring to Alexander and Antioch IV, but prefiguring the Antichrist, expected to precede, imitate, and oppose Christ at the End of Days, and also connected with the Last World Emperor. While learned Christian readers could unpack the typological significance of sacred language and meanings in the *mester de clerecía* poem, such as the Tetragrammaton, Riva concludes that Alexander himself cannot read apocalyptic signs due to his overweening reliance on *scientia*. Not unlike the flying sorcerer Simon Magus, the *rex curiosus* will be brought down for this sin. In this sense, both St. Peter's demonic rival and the Macedonian can be understood as ironic imitators of Christ, who descended into hell and ascended into heaven. Such associations, as Riva makes clear, contribute to the poem's *contemptus mundi* motif, as well as its reform-minded promotion of ecclesiastical *sapientia*, in keeping with the early thirteenth-century religious culture of the cloister.

In a brief conclusion to the book, Riva reflects on the legacy of the *Alexandre*, distilling and commenting on the most significant insights and findings that emerge in this erudite and convincing first monograph: the likely background of the author; biblical exegesis and patristic wisdom as an antidote to the hero's flawed pursuit of knowledge; the poem's apocalyptic meanings; allusions to the threat of heterodoxy and esoteric learning inspired by Aristotle; the Luciferic, Babylonian motif of ascent and descent as an intellectual failing. The pages that follow are a useful, up-to-date bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and an onomastic index. This monograph sheds new light on important historical and cultural contexts, and productively employs interdisciplinary research. Riva has produced a compelling full-length study of the *Libro de Alexandre*, bringing together invaluable insights for scholars and students of the classic poem. His book will not only appeal to specialists in Hispanomedievalism, but anyone who is interested in the legend of Alexander in premodern Europe.

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