Compostela
A Cultural Center from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century

Adeline Rucquoi

À D. Manuel Díaz y Díaz (1924–2008)

Whether one speaks of the seventh century or the twelfth, of medieval Spain or of the rest of western Christendom, the widely accepted notion is that of an illiterate world in which written culture was guarded in but a few great monasteries. Only the clergy could read and write, one reads here and there, and the ignorance of the great mass of the population even led them to cling to pagan rites.¹ For medieval Iberia, some recent works on education make it seem as if learning did not blossom until the twelfth century. The traces of culture that are discernible at earlier dates in the monasteries of the Rioja or elsewhere in Christian Spain are often attributed to foreign ‘influences’, from Carolingian or post-Carolingian Europe, or the southern part of the peninsula—al-Andalus.² As a result, the matter of teaching is hardly raised for the period from the eighth to the eleventh century, except for those southern lands ruled by the Muslims, and, there, basically in the Muslim and Jewish schools.³

Schools, Masters, and Books in Early Medieval Spain and Galicia

In fact, the canons of the Second Council of Toledo in 527 enjoined future clerics to study letters. A century later, in his Synonyma, Isidore of Seville declared that “ignorance is the mother of errors.”⁴ In the sixth and seventh centuries, several cathedrals earned renown for the quality of the education they offered: Urgel with Justus of Urgel and Justinian of Valencia; Seville with Leander and Isidore; Zaragoza with John, Braulio, and Taio; Palencia with Conantius; and Toledo with Eugenius and his successors. Students studied the seven liberal

---

¹ Gil (1995), 175.
arts, and the elements of medicine, law, and philosophy.\footnote{Díaz y Díaz (1976), 23–35; Riché (1962a), (1971); Velázquez Soriano (1989).} Future clerics had to know the Psalms and must have devoted themselves mostly to the reading of Scripture and the liturgical offices, while the laity, following the Institutionum disciplinae, received a philosophical education in a Stoic tradition.\footnote{Isid., Sententiae 3.9, pp. 430–432; Riché (1971), 178–179; Díaz y Díaz (1981).}

The Muslim invasion at the beginning of the eighth century and the flight or exile of many of the learned undoubtedly disrupted the educational system. The aceifas or raids of the ninth and tenth centuries also contributed to the disappearance of many libraries: the testimonies concerning Barcelona after the taking of the town by Almanzor in 985 make clear that the conquerors had a policy of seizing precious works and systematically destroying all other writings.\footnote{Els diplomes carolingis, pp. 72–73; Zimmermann (2003), 1153–1154.} The Vikings did their part and, around 995, the bishop of Iria-Compostela had to restore the monastery of Santa Eulalia de Curtis after it had been devastated and its books burned by the marauders.\footnote{Venerunt gentes lotimanorum in ipsam terram et vastaverunt sic ipsam ecclesiam, sicut et alias convicinas eiusdem, sicut et sacerdotes sui captivitate ducti et gladio trucidati sunt, ipsasque scripturas ipsius ecclesie de ignibus concremaverunt usquequo non remansit ibidem nisi petre ignibus ustulate. (Tumbos...Sobrado, vol. 1, doc. 137, pp. 177–178).} It is not surprising, then, that the evidence for written culture in Christian Spain has often vanished, but one must not conclude, as historians have done too easily, that the inhabitants had little education and that the principalities of northern Iberia were marked by “the mediocrity of their cultural life” and their isolation or backwardness.\footnote{Defourneaux (1949), 13, asserted that “the difficult conditions of life in Christian Spain and its isolation from the other lands of the west explain the mediocrity of its cultural life during this period, and the contrasts in this realm between the kingdoms of the north and the area under Muslim rule.” See also J.L. Moralejo (1984), esp. 12–13.}

The Hispana collectio, which remained in effect and was copied and consulted, expected there to be primary education in the parishes and higher education in the cathedrals.\footnote{Il Toledo 1–2, in Colección canónica Hispana IV, 347–350; Concilia Hispaniae, in PL, vol. 84, cols. 335, 374.} Moreover, seventh-century Spain had passed on the tradition of a palace school where children of the nobility were groomed as future civil and ecclesiastical leaders of the realm.\footnote{Orlandis (1992); Delgado (1992), 127–148.} Considerable evidence suggests that such a place of instruction still existed in the tenth and eleventh centuries. An attentive reading of the documents also reveals that the education offered in ecclesiastical centers was not aimed only at a small elite.