

**Ángel del Olmo García: Iconografía sexual del Románico;** Salamanca: If ediciones, Colección ACE 1999; 278 S., 27 meist farbige Abb., 4 Landkarten; ISBN 84-95327-79-1.

Ten years after the appearing of the book, *El románico erótico en Cantabria*, written by the author in collaboration with BASILIO VARAS VERANO, Ángel del Olmo publishes alone his *Iconografía sexual del Románico*. It is necessary to admit that the first book marked a milestone in the interest towards this kind of marginal iconography, which is so rich and characteristic of great part of Spanish Romanesque art except for Catalonia. That work's excessive emphasis on justifying these images as the result of that time's sexual habits freedom, in which the monastic atmosphere was included, led to consider these representations as a kind of artistic outlet of the popular as opposed to the strict official sexual morality, hypothesis that immediately caused hard criticism by the scholars. Part of the bibliography produced since then about this problem is incorporated now by A. del Olmo into a work whose objective is to offer a new vision of the question in an attempt of setting apart from the theses defended in 1988.

In a "functionalist"-like interpretation, the author defends that these images are a call to reproduction in the peculiar context of Spanish repopulation. For this reason, he vindicates the didactic value of the image in the Romanesque and the old biblical recommendation of the sexual act as a means of procreation ("Go forth and multiply", Gen 1, 27-28), which would begin to make current sense in a moment of urgent necessity of demographic increase caused by the Reconquest and Repopulation process between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. To this end, the author points out several legal provisions of the Castilian-Leonese Fueros favouring marriages, as well as a varied series of textual sources and folk traditions showing a positive vision of the sex, that goes from the apotropaic function of showing off the sexual organs to the use of sexual enjoyment as a joyful expression of the Resurrection within the *Risus Paschalis* celebration. However, the author is aware of the themes' complexity and diversity that are subjected to multiple interpretations and implications of anthropological and cultural nature. This is well shown by the representation of nudity and sex in many Romanesque cycles that could correspond – as S. Moralejo has remarked – to Teofrasto's old *topos* about concupiscence and shamelessness of the rural, or just be, as most scholars point out, a cruel denunciation of the deadly sin of lust.

In my opinion, the question cannot or must not be raised as a general extrapolable issue but from its own configuration as a discourse in each specific case. In this sense, L. G. FREEMAN and J. GONZÁLEZ ECHEGARAY's work<sup>1</sup> is commendable applying prior assumptions from the structuralism to the symbolic organization of Cantabria Romanesque churches decoration or NURITH KENAAN-KEDAR's work<sup>2</sup> about language

- 1 L. G. FREEMAN and J. GONZÁLEZ ECHEGARAY: Organización simbólica en la escultura románica: I. Ensayo sobre las iglesias de Cantabria, in: *Bulletí de la Reial Acadèmia de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi* 4-5, 1990-1991, p. 105-145.
- 2 NURITH KENAAN-KEDAR: Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France. Towards the deciphering of an enigmatic pictorial language; Cambridge University Press 1995.

peculiarities of marginal decoration in French medieval art. Both of them come to the conclusion that a “narrative” discourse exists in the disposition of corbel themes. This inductive analysis is missing in A. del Olmo’s work, in which besides obviating a detailed description of the series, an articulation paradigm or pattern of this themes is not even offered, something absolutely necessary in order to understand the character of its possible discourse.

It would be essential to make an effort in order to bring to the field of these artistic images MICHEL FOUCAULT’s questions in his “Histoire de la sexualité” – Who is speaking? What is their power status? In which institutional context they express themselves? What tactics and strategies are followed in their discourse?. To this end, it would be fundamental to establish in each case the church’s hierarchy in which these decorations appear, their location and disposition in the temple, as well as the target audience. That is, an analysis of each work’s production and reception process is required in order to understand the real function of these themes. A figuration in a cathedral, in a monastery or rural church does not imply the same whether it is located in the inside or in the outside, on the façade or on the margins, or whether its audience is urban or rural.

As A. WEIR and J. JERMAN show in relation to corbels marginal decoration<sup>3</sup>, they develop the moral teachings of the façades’ carvings through an accumulative process, contributing to the sense and general atmosphere of the church. Thus, they are integrated into a sacred discourse in which references to profanity work in a clear eschatological code of admonition and condemnation. H. BREDEKAMP pointed out these images’ emerging in the heart of Saint James’ Way as a Church’s response to a freedom-marked space in which the pilgrim was constantly exposed to the temptation of sin<sup>4</sup>. However, by ‘devilizing’ everyday’s life through corbels decoration, the artist was able to experiment freedom of artistic space in volume as well as in corporeal nature. However, Bredekamp’s suggestive idea was developed from a monument’s marginal decoration – the monastic church of San Martín de Frómista – which had been visibly changed in a restoration, made between 1900 and 1904 by the architect Manuel Aníbal Álvarez, in which great part of its corbels were made ex novo.

At any rate, there is no doubt about the didactic character of these images in Romanesque churches, their inclusion in a general discourse of their decoration and their negative reading about the sexuality. Themes such as “femme aux serpents”, bestiality or sodomy, being present, for instance, in the outside of San Pedro de Cervatos monastic church, Cantabria, would not fit in A. de Olmo’s “reproductive” theory. In fact, according to F. J. PÉREZ CARRASCO<sup>5</sup>, in the above-mentioned Cantabria church, repugnance towards cardinal sins is visibly exposed – despising the charac-

3 A. WEIR and J. JERMAN: *Images of Lust. Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches*; London – New York 1993 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1986).

4 HORST BREDEKAMP: *Wallfahrt als Versuchung. San Martín de Frómista*, in: *Kunstgeschichte – aber wie?*; Berlin 1989, p. 221-258.

5 F. J. PÉREZ CARRASCO: *La Iglesia contra la carne. El programa contra la lujuria esculpido en la iglesia de Cervatos*, in: *Historia* 16, n. 196, 1992, p. 56-64.

ters by making faces, grimaces and negative acts -, and the vice of lust is related to the one of gluttony associating both of them with the festive atmosphere of minstrel music and with several animals from the Bestiary. A similar discourse is found in the eaves at the ex-cathedral of San Martiño de Mondoñedo, Lugo, or at the rural church of Santo Tomás de Serantes, Ourense, in which also the inside of the sacred place was chosen in order to make explicit the condemnation of the flesh through punishments applied to the body<sup>6</sup>. Figurative language's apparent freedom in marginal decoration is not the result of the "artist's" licence but product of clergy's diglossia phenomenon. The clergy, who made the sacred liturgy in Latin, did not hesitate in their speeches about everyday's life to use vulgar language, even use registers belonging to the lowest layers of society in order to ridicule and make the loss of customs more obvious. Also, the figurative discourse in Romanesque churches goes from the tympanum's sacred and dogmatic image to profane carnivalization on the margins, where an absurd 'upside down world' is presented, whose objective is to provoke a sour laugh of condemnation<sup>7</sup>. We must not forget, just as F.J. PÉREZ CARRASCO remembers<sup>8</sup> that in the case of the monastic centres of San Quirce de Burgos and San Pedro de Tejada, Burgos, that discourse is enriched with the allusion to the Genesis: basis of a theology that understood sex and procreation as a product of the Original Sin and understood marriage as a less perfect state due to its subjection to the senses, from which the monk escapes. This is shown by the coarse and rough tone of the images intercalating the biblical tale of men's fall on the frieze of corbels and metopes at San Quirce de Burgos' western portal. They refer to human gender's inversion resorting to what M. BATJIN called the lower body, conveniently glossed with comments in vulgar language – "Mala caco", "Io caco"- that associate once more the human physiological needs to dirt.

Taking things seriously, a detailed catalogation and classification work of the series would have to be vindicated according to the above-mentioned criteria. It would be also necessary to delimit the origin of these cycles and their ways of dissemination in the Peninsula. In my opinion, this work would offer very positive conclusions for Spanish Romanesque's originality, just as A. Weir, J. Jerman or the very H. Bredekamp pointed out. This task, maybe feasible with many scholars' effort, would even show the variety of these images' discourses and the possible processes of surviving old believes or re-meaning their contents. In this sense, in several cases we could talk about apotropaic-like explanations in the representation of showing sexual organs, as the ones defended by A. GARCÍA AVILÉS<sup>9</sup>, P. CASTELLI<sup>10</sup> or E. P. KELLY<sup>11</sup>. A. del Olmo's work certainly con-

6 M. A. CASTIÑEIRAS GONZÁLEZ: Arte románico y reforma eclesiástica, in: Las religiones en la historia de Galicia, Hrsg. M. V. García Quintela (*Semata*, 7-8); Santiago 1996, p. 307-332.

7 G. BOTO VARELA: El disfraz del ciervo y otros testimonios del carnaval medieval en el alero de San Miguel de Fuentidueña, in: *Locus Amoenus* 1, 1995, p. 81-93.

8 F.J. PÉREZ CARRASCO: Ascetismo e ideología monástica en la escultura de San Pedro de Tejada (Burgos), in: *Cuadernos de arte e iconografía* 6, n. 11, 1993, p. 203-213.

9 A. GARCÍA AVILÉS: Religiosidad popular y pensamiento mágico en algunos ritos del Sureste español. Notas sobre el mal de ojo en la Edad Media, in: *Verdolay* 3, 1991, p. 125-139.

10 P. CASTELLI: Il doppio significato. L'ostensione della vulva nel Medioevo, in: *Il Gesto. Quaderni di Garzosa* (Hrsg. C. Bertelli, M. Centanni); Firenze 1995.

11 E. P. KELLY: *Sheel-na-Gigs. Origins and Functions*; Dublin 1996.

tributes, courageously, to a better knowledge of Spanish Romanesque's sexual images and of the open discussion about it. His research helps to break several topics about the Middle Ages, thus showing us other faces of a period that now requires the interest of the most innovative methodologies.

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**Marion Opitz: Monumentale Höllendarstellungen im Trecento in der Toskana**  
(*Europäische Hochschulschriften, R. 28, Kunstgeschichte, Bd. 320*); Frankfurt am Main  
u. a.: Peter Lang 1998; 243 Seiten, 29 SW-Abb.; ISBN 3-631-32997-0; DM 89,-

Mit der Wahl des Titels wird der Untersuchungsgegenstand der vorliegenden, 1994 in Dortmund abgeschlossenen Dissertation in dreifacher Weise aus dem reich überlieferten Material spätmittelalterlicher italienischer Weltgerichts- und Endzeitdarstellungen eingeschränkt. Zur Diskussion stehen Höllendarstellungen ausschließlich des 14. Jahrhunderts, die in der Toskana entstanden und monumental aufgefaßt wurden; letzteres bezeichnet in dieser Arbeit großformatige Darstellungen, die als abgetrennte, quasi-selbständige Szenen des Weltgerichtsbildes auch einzeln lesbar sind. Auf diese Weise werden nur vier Fresken zur Bearbeitung zusammengestellt: die Höllen der Scrovegni-Kapelle in Padua, des Camposanto in Pisa, der Strozzi-Kapelle in S. Maria Novella in Florenz und der Stiftskirche S. Maria Assunta in San Gimignano. Da mit Ausnahme von San Gimignano alle Beispiele häufig und ausführlich bearbeitet worden sind, erwartet man zu Recht eine Begründung dieser Auswahl bzw. einen neuen Zugriff auf das bekannte Bildmaterial.

Zunächst legt die Autorin aber einen erneuten Versuch vor, eine Entwicklungsgeschichte der bildlichen Darstellung des Jüngsten Gerichts vom Frühchristentum bis zum Trecento zu schreiben. Es erstaunt, daß sie dabei auf den widersprüchlichen, teilweise wissenschaftlich unzureichenden älteren Versuchen ganz selbstverständlich aufbaut. In darstellender Absicht werden hier Entwicklungslinien aus dieser Literatur kompiliert und mit flüchtigen, z.T. auch unrichtigen Beschreibungen einzelner Weltgerichtsdarstellungen kommentiert. Einigen eigenen Beobachtungen, die als Thesen zum Hauptteil der Arbeit überleiten, kann aber zugestimmt werden. So weist Marion Opitz nicht nur generell auf den fehlenden kanonischen Text zur Verbildlichung des Themas Weltgericht hin, sondern sie benennt auch die auffälligen Veränderungen der bildlichen Darstellung im frühen Trecento, die die Hölle zu einer emotionalen Aspekte einbeziehenden, anschaulich schildernden Höllenlandschaft machen. Sie betont richtig, daß diese Darstellungen großen Wert auf die Erkennbarkeit der Strafen und damit auch der begangenen Sünden legen. Generalisierend und mit Blick auf die in den folgenden vier Kapiteln behandelten Einzelbeispiele wird dann allerdings eine Herauslösung und Verselbständigung der Höllenszene aus dem Gesamtbild des Jüngsten Gerichts postuliert, die sich bei der Analyse eines größeren Bestandes an Weltgerichtsbildern so nicht halten lassen würde. Problematisch ist auch der Versuch, die formale Systematisierung