

Anatomy and the construction of the body in 16th century Spain

Maria Portmann
L'image du corps dans l'art espagnol aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles. Autour du "Libro Segundo" de Juan de Arfe y Villafañe (1585).
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Miranda, Bartolomé E. Murillo and Jerónimo Jacinto Espinosa, and refers only to one sculpture, the *Recumbent Christ* by Becerra for the Convent of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid, limiting her study not only at the "art espagnol aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles" as the title of the book reads, but mainly at the art of painting.

"DE VARIA COMMENSURACION" AND THE TRADITION

The final part focuses on the "Libro Segundo" of the treatise *De varia commensuración para la escultura y arquitectura* by the goldsmith and sculptor Juan de Arfe y Villafañe (1535–1603), because Portmann considers it as "le plus important" of artistic treatises of the time in which intellectual exchanges between Italy and Spain and, presumably, among anatomists, surgeons and coeval Hispanic artists crystallized. Significantly, this is the first time that part of the treatise is translated into French. However, considering the dependence of the "Libro Segundo" on the whole treatise and particularly on the first and the fourth books – as Portmann herself acknowledges (10) –, it would have been a good occasion to translate the full treatise.

De varia commensuración contains four books dedicated, respectively, to geometry, anatomy, zoology and architecture. The first and the second books were published in 1585, and the third and the fourth were added in a new edition published in 1587. In any case, the issue that matters to Portmann is the "image du corps" and, therefore, anatomy, the discipline that structures her book from the first chapter – entitled "L'image anatomique du corps" – to the anastatic reproduction of the 1585 edition and the translation of the "Libro Segundo". Arfe devoted this "Libro Segundo" to anatomy, and divided it in four "títulos" dedicated to proportion, osteology, myology and the representation of the foreshortened human figure.

In recent years, the interdisciplinary combination of History of Science and History of Art has resulted in the publication of numerous studies that have contributed to the renovation of a more global field of knowledge to which we could still refer as Cultural History. In this context the book by Maria Portmann can be included. It was her PhD thesis, supervised by Victor I. Stoichita at the Université de Fribourg, and it was awarded the "Prix Sournia" of the *Société Française d'Histoire de la Médecine* in 2012.

As Portmann states in her introduction, "à partir de la Renaissance, une nouvelle image de l'homme naît grâce à l'accès des artistes aux dissections et à la diffusion du savoir par le biais d'ouvrages illustrés" (9). This issue is quite wide, so the author focuses her attention on artists such as Pedro Berruguete or Gaspar Becerra in order to demonstrate their interest in the study of anatomy; on the wounds of the martyrs and Christ for "découvrir l'intérieur du corps" and, ultimately, the soul; and on some ideas circulating between Italy and Spain. In order to expose her argumentation, Portmann refers to paintings by Andrea Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini, the Maestro de Becerril, José de Ribera, Alonso Cano, Juan Bautista Maíno, Juan Carreño de

Portmann argues that “les différences qui sont visibles dans la représentation du corps sont le reflet des divers types de réception de l’anatomie par les artistes” (155). Certainly, in his *Vite* (1550 and 1568) Giorgio Vasari highlights the dedication to anatomical studies by Mantegna, Donatello, Antonio Pollaiuolo, Baccio Bandinelli, Raphael and Michelangelo, to which the cases of Leonardo and, together with him, Leone and Pompeo Leoni – not by chance, the latter owned some of the manuscripts by Leonardo –, Alessandro Allori and Vincenzo Danti must be added. Leonardo is a paradigmatic case study, but also quite a unique one, so this is no occasion to refer to him. Under the shelter of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence, Allori and Danti tried to publish their treatises on artistic anatomy. However, the manuscript by the first (*Dialogo sopra l’arte del disegnare le figure*, c. 1565), which would have been profusely illustrated, never saw the light. Danti only managed to publish one of the fifteen books of his ambitious treatise – eight books of which would have been devoted to anatomy –, and without illustrations (*Il primo libro del trattato delle perfette proporzioni di tutte le cose che imitare e ritrarre si possono con l’arte del disegno*, 1567). Therefore, the first printed and illustrated treatise on artistic anatomy was the one written and published by Arfe, and not just in the Hispanic context as Portmann claims (125), but also in the European context.

SAVOIR ANATOMIQUE, SAVOIR ARTISTIQUE

The collaboration between anatomists and artists is documented for example in the case of the publication of *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) by Andreas Vesalius, the consequences of which have been compared – as Portmann herself does (155) – with those brought by *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* by Nikolaus Copernicus, published in the same year. The engravings of Vesalius’ book have been linked with Titian and, since Vasari, with the Flemish artist Jan Steven van Calcar. A combination of text and images characterizes the treatise by Vesalius and was imitated in two Hispanic treatises: *Libro de la anothomía del hombre*

(1551) by Bernardino Montaña and *Historia de la composición del cuerpo humano* (1556) by Juan Valverde de Amusco. Both authors used the images published by Vesalius to illustrate their treatises, but other images were added by Valverde de Amusco, engraved by Nicolas Beatrizet and inspired by designs that have been attributed to Gaspar Becerra or Pedro Rubiales; doubts about the authorship of these designs still remain among scholars. In Spain could be subjoined, for example, the testimonies about the vivisection performed by the physician Francisco Hernández with the architect and sculptor Nicolás de Vergara; the anatomical studies that, concerted with Jusepe Martínez (c. 1673), were carried out by the painter Juan de Juanes; or the collaboration between the sculptor Mateo de Vangorla and an unknown anatomist in order to make an articulated mannequin for the anatomical lectures by Andrés Alcázar, first ‘Catedrático’ of Surgery between 1567 and 1584 at the University of Salamanca, where the mannequin is still preserved.

However, one wonders whether this “savoir anatomique” (11) of the anatomists and surgeons in the mid-sixteenth century coincided or differed from that of the contemporary artists, and vice versa. In this regard, it is significant what we can read in two literary sources published in the period in which Portmann is interested, although she does not mention the first. In *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (1611), Sebastián de Covarrubias defines “anatomy” as “la descarnadura y abertura que se hace de un cuerpo humano para considerar sus partes interiores y su compostura; cosa necesarísima a los médicos y cirujanos; y así en las universidades hay cátedras de esta facultad, y se ejecuta algunas veces en los cuerpos de los ajusticiados y otras en los que mueren en los hospitales y en algunas otras personas particulares. Y en su lugar se suele hacer de una mona, y de un puerco para lo que es lo interior del corazón, asadura y tripas” (fol. 68v). Covarrubias does not refer to artists, but only to physicians and surgeons and the institution of the university, the only place where anatomical dissections could be legally carried out. He also refers implicitly to surgical Galen practices on

monkeys or pigs, a traditional and settled practice significantly criticized by Vesalius and his followers.

The second literary source is the treatise by Juan de Arfe itself. On several occasions, Arfe states the substantial difference that existed between the anatomical knowledge of early modern Spanish physicians and surgeons and the anatomical knowledge artists could attain. Arfe argues that the study of bones and “morzillos” (i.e. the muscles) is necessary, “pues no entendiéndolos, [el artista] no sabrá hacerse [una figura] sino con mil errores” (Prólogo), but also notes that “sin tratar de las venas y telas del cuerpo, porque para este propósito [artístico] sería inútil curiosidad imitallas” (Libro II, título III, fol. 25v). Neither he analyzes the muscles of the face, “porque aquella manera es para sólo médicos y cirujanos, y no para la escultura y pintura” (Libro II, título III, cap. I, fol. 26), a subject matter which significantly was a real problem for contemporary anatomists according to Valverde de Amusco (Libro II, cap. V, fol. 32), who is among the authorities used by Arfe, although not explicitly referred to. Arfe applies analogous characteristics to other “agujeros, salidas y tolondrones”; as it is not possible to see them, he is not interested in them, neither so are the artists: “Quien quisiere verlos, los cimiterios están llenos y podrá” (Libro II, título II, cap. I, fol. 15).

These assertions are even more relevant when one considers that, as Arfe himself recounts, he attended some of the anatomical demonstrations taught by Cosme de Medina, first ‘Catedrático’ of anatomy at the University of Salamanca between 1552 and 1561. However, his description of dissection is not only superficial, but determinant in regard to its practice: “Vimos desollar por las partes del cuerpo algunos hombres y mujeres, justiciados y pobres, y demás de ser *cosa horrenda y cruel*, vimos *no ser muy decente para el fin que pretendíamos*, porque los músculos del rostro y barriga nunca se siguen en la escultura sino por unos bultos redondos que diremos adelante, y los de los brazos y piernas en el natural se ven en los vivos casi determinada y distintamente, y así los mostraremos

con los términos altos y bajos que el natural muestra sobre el pellejo” (Libro II, título III, fol. 25v; the italics are mine).

VARIOUS TREATISES

In his book *Anatomy and Anatomists in Early Modern Spain* (2015), Bjørn Okholm Skaarup states that, given this disdain for the practice of anatomical dissection, it is possible to assume that Arfe studied independent and separate bones rather than the complete structure of the human body, an essential tool for the anatomists who followed the new proposals by Vesalius. This might be the reason why Arfe counted 182 bones rather than the 206 that the human skeleton actually contains (Libro II, título II, cap. V, fol. 24). But also we have to highlight some of his calculations: among 22 bones that really form the skull, Arfe identifies 20 (Libro II, título II, cap. I, fol. 14v). Meaningfully he reduces those 20 bones to only two in the last rhyme of that “título” before moving on to the description of the muscles (Libro II, título II, cap. V, fol. 24). His priority was thus artistic, not anatomical.

This also happens in later Hispanic artistic treatises, whose authors refer to Arfe as authority in the matter together with Vesalius or Valverde de Amusco. In his *Diálogos de la pintura* (1634), Vicente Carducho says it is necessary to know the works of these authors “para saber por ellos el sitio, forma, tamaño, y efecto de los huesos, y músculos, que son las partes que debe ver el pintor; dejando la calidad dellos, su virtud, oficio, y de sus acciones a los médicos, y cirujanos” (Diálogo I, fols. 2–2v). Analogously, in his *Arte de la pintura* (1649) Francisco Pacheco shows interest only for the muscular structure (Libro II, cap. VIII). It is significant that both Carducho and Pacheco prefer Arfe for not being as discursive or prolix as Vesalius or Valverde de Amusco are. In any case, Antonio Palomino is the author whose judgement of the knowledge of anatomy by artists is more decisive, considering also that his treatise *Museo pictórico y escala óptica* (1715–24) is the culmination of the artistic theoretical reflection of the still so-called Golden Spanish Age.

For example, in *Práctica de la pintura* he points out: “Los doctos anatomistas consideran esta parte

[la anatomía] más exactamente que los pintores [...]. Pero los pintores, omitiendo unos [músculos] por ocultos y otros por ser divisiones imperceptibles de algunos, sólo consideramos los músculos del cuerpo humano no descarnado, sino unido en aquella organización externa, y manifiesta a nuestra vista, que se puede considerar, quitada la piel” (Libro IV, cap. VI, § 1). And later, he emphasizes: “La anatomía sólo ha de procurar el pintor saberla, para olvidarla [...]. Y finalmente, que se ha de usar la anatomía como de la sal en las viandas, que la que basta, sazona; la demasiada, ofende; la que falta, disgusta” (Libro IV, cap. VI, § 2). For that reason “basta lo dicho, corroborado con el estudio del natural, y de los modelos, y estatuas antiguas, donde se halla corregido” (Libro IV, cap. VI, § 3).

THE BLOOM OF ANATOMY

It seems fairly uncertain to say that “les connaissances requises pour les artistes proviennent d’un exercice de l’anatomie ou du moins d’un savoir extrêmement pointu” (Portmann, 156). Indeed, how could artists be interested in the lavish accumulation of viscera reproduced in the treatises of anatomy, such as those by Vesalius or Valverde de Amusco, if the main characteristic of those viscera is their lack of order, that is to say, their lack of form? In *Della pittura* (c. 1435), the founding book of modern painting, Leon Battista Alberti states: “Conviensi tenere certa ragione circa alla grandezza de’ membri, in quale *commensurazione* gioverà prima allogare ciascuno *osso* dell’animale, poi apresso agiungere i suoi *muscoli*, di poi tutto vestirlo di sue *carne*” (Libro II, 12; the italics are mine).

He refers here to bones, muscles and flesh, or what is the same, structure, mass and surface. Probably Arfe shared this idea, given the title of his own treatise, which seems to derive directly from the concept coined by Alberti. In that sense, it is just enough to compare Alberti’s advice or the statements by Arfe with some marvelous images included in the Libro III of the treatise by Valverde de Amusco: in one of them, a man holds his “peritoneum” with his teeth in order to show “el redaño, el estómago y una parte del hígado” (fig. III); in another engraving, a cadaveric man has “las

tripas derrocadas hacia abajo” and holds his small intestine with his left hand (fig. XI); but this is nothing compared to the non-artistic spectacle of an engraving with the internal anatomy of a woman, “en la cual está quitado todo el entresijo y estómago, y las tripas, y se ve la madre, la vejiga y los instrumentos que pertenecen a la generación, y la teta desollada” (fig. XXVI).

Considering the density of the subject matter of the book by Portmann, one might wonder whether, as stated in the “Conclusion finale”, the body image in the Spanish art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries depended on “des divers types de réception de l’anatomie par les artistes” (155) and not, rather, on a very complex combination of factors that will require further studies. First, it would be necessary to consider the revision carried out by Vesalius and other “modern” scholars of the proposals by Galen and the “ancient” ones, with the gradual replacement of the principle of authority by that of experience and empirical observation. From this point of view, for instance, it is highly relevant how Covarrubias defines the concept of “*empiria*” explicitly referring to physicians and surgeons.

Moreover, the way in which this new direct experience of the body was combined with texts and images included in anatomy treatises should be analysed, and also what the characteristics of these new images of the human body were. If further studies were to focus on the Early Modern Hispanic context, as is the case of the book by Portmann, it should be considered that Spanish universities were, after the Italian ones, the first to offer specific studies in anatomy. In fact, between 1552 and 1583, anatomy experienced an extraordinary bloom as a university discipline with the creation of new chairs. It was also during those years that some Spanish anatomy treatises were published, already showing awareness of the new proposals by Vesalius before he joined the service of King Philip II in 1559 until 1564. This is the case of those by Montaña and Valverde de Amusco, to which must be added at least *Dialogus de re medica* (1549) by Pedro Jimeno, *Liber de ossibus* (1555) by Luis Collado and *In pluribus ex iis quibus Galenus Impugnatur ab Andrea Vesalio Bruxelensi in*

constructione et usu partium corporis humanis, defensio (1559) by Alonso Rodríguez de Guevara; later on and in the New World, *Summa y recopilación de cirugía* (1578) by Alonso López de Hinojosos and *Tratado breve de anothomía y cirugía* (1579) by Agustín Farfán.

Finally, it would be necessary to discuss other issues affecting the context or contexts of production of this “image du corps”, such as the important theological or eschatological debates on the Incarnation of Christ or the resurrection of the flesh; or the “style” of individual artists, a concept neglected by art historians themselves despite it may be the only one that characterizes the History of Art in demarcation to other humanistic disciplines. In that sense, the book by Portmann poses a dilemma that will need to be studied in the

near future: whether it is possible to speak of the conception of diverse “images du corps” during the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, rather than of a single “image du corps”. Perhaps this argument may shed new light on what anatomists and artists of the time shared and also what differentiated them, following the controversial and still discussed “Vesalian revolution”, and maybe we will be able to know much more about the role of the artist in the construction of a new, modern conception of the body.

DR. JOSÉ RIELLO

Pratiques paysagères, logiques discursives et stratégies de domination dans les jardins romains

Denis Ribouillault
Rome en ses jardins. Paysage et pouvoir au XVI^e siècle. Paris, CTHS/INHA 2013. 377 p., ill. ISBN 978-2-7355-0794-8. € 38,00

Ce beau livre traite de l'image de Rome, de la perception des lieux et de la construction culturelle du paysage à la Renaissance. Partant d'une thèse de doctorat dont le texte semble avoir été entièrement refondu pour la publication, Denis Ribouillault nous offre la synthèse de plusieurs années de réflexion sur les relations entre paysage et pouvoir dans la culture des élites romaines au XVI^e siècle. L'en-

semble de l'ouvrage repose sur une analyse approfondie des nombreux décors topographiques qui constituent, dans le cas romain, l'un des éléments distinctifs de la décoration des demeures aristocratiques à cette époque. Les vues de bâtiments, de localités, de villes ou de territoires entiers ne sont pas seulement étudiées pour elles-mêmes, soit en leur qualité de paysages habilement insérés dans la décoration d'un vestibule, d'une salle de réception, d'un *studiolo* ou d'une loggia.

Ces grands cycles topographiques, dont les vues peintes dialoguent souvent avec l'environnement immédiat du palais ou de la villa, sont surtout appréciés pour leurs qualités discursives qui mettent généralement en jeu, à travers la description picturale, le statut social du commanditaire, ses intérêts économiques, les aspects variés d'une pensée politique ou religieuse qui se trouve ainsi rapportée et pour ainsi dire *ancrée* dans l'histoire lo-