

Martin Biersack. *Mediterraner Kulturtransfer am Beginn der Neuzeit. Die Rezeption der italienischen Renaissance in Kastilien zur Zeit der Katholischen Könige.*

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Until recently German historical research has tended to neglect Spanish humanism and Renaissance culture in Spain. This has changed with the publication of two books in 2010 centering on the Iberian Peninsula. One is Martin Biersack's study of *Mediterranean Cultural Transfer at the Beginning of the Modern Age*, reviewed here. The other — with a similar theme but a different focus — is my own *Chronisten, Räte, Professoren. Zum Einfluß des italienischen Humanismus in Kastilien am Vorabend der spanischen Hegemonie (ca. 1450 bis 1527)* (*Chroniclers, Counselors, Professors: The Influence of Italian Humanism in Castile on the Eve of Spanish Hegemony*).

Biersack's aim is to investigate the increased reception of Italian Renaissance culture during the reign of the Spanish monarchs at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, as well as the effect of humanist learning in Castile. For this purpose he focuses on "exposed cultural disseminators" (31) as the central figures of transmission from Italy into Spain, and on their students to measure the subsequent success of humanist influence in Castilian learning. As the protagonists of his investigation, he takes distinguished humanist scholars from two areas, the royal court and newly conquered Granada. The methodological

background is provided by the Franco-German concept of *Kulturtransfer* (cultural transfer) and influenced by Peter Burke's ideas on reception.

Thus the book analyzes in detail the life, work, and impact of Italian-born Peter Martyr d'Anghiera (part 3), Granada's first archbishop Hernando de Talavera (part 4), Granada-based convert Juan Rodríguez de Pisa (part 6), and the important Castilian classicist Hernán Núñez de Toledo, during his tenure at the school of the Alhambra Palace (part 7). These chapters, centering on individual scholars and their social environment, are supplemented by a comprehensive description of the Spanish context of reception (part 2), a shorter chapter on the local Granadan grammar school (part 5), an appendix of selected documents, and an exhaustive bibliography. Unfortunately, the volume does not contain any indices.

Based on his reading of a wide variety of humanist literary works and particularly on his extensive research in Granada's archives, the author provides detailed information on dozens of persons involved in the process of the diffusion of humanism and Renaissance culture in Castile (although one can safely assume that not all of them are to be counted as key figures in the spread of humanism). The number of students portrayed is especially abundant in the cases of Peter Martyr and Hernando de Talavera, while Rodríguez de Pisa does not seem to have had any direct students. His influence on the diffusion of Renaissance culture thus seems to be of a different character than in the case of the other "disseminators." At any rate, these case studies improve our insight into the functioning of education and learning in Castile considerably and therefore constitute an important contribution to current scholarship.

Unfortunately, a certain conceptual imprecision has to be noted, for example, when humanism and Renaissance culture are repeatedly conflated. A more important shortcoming, though, is that the text is too optimistic in its assumption of humanism's success and impact in Castile. For while admitting that the reception of humanism was heterogeneous, Biersack still states that during the reign of the Catholic monarchs the *studia humanitatis* became the "acknowledged program of education from the grammar school to the university" (677). Undoubtedly, certain elements of the new schooling did make their way into the curricula of Castilian education. Nevertheless, this integration of individual elements of humanism does not imply its acceptance *in toto*, reflected, e.g., in the role of learning for the general formation of the human being or the recognition of classical antiquity as a universally valid model. Resistance to humanism in Spain persisted, strongly, in the sixteenth century.

Despite these criticisms, there is no doubt that Biersack has made a valuable contribution to the field of Spanish humanism. His work deserves, and will find, a wide reception.

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