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October 9, 2013

Vicente Lleó Cañal

### *Nueva Roma: Mitología y humanismo en el Renacimiento sevillano*

Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2012.  
334 pp.; 126 ills. Paper €28.00 (9788415245247 )



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Originally published in 1979, Vicente Lleó Cañal's *Nueva Roma: Mitología y humanismo en el Renacimiento sevillano* represented a breakthrough in the history of Spanish art. Along with Jonathan Brown's *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), *Nueva Roma* was among the first sustained discussions of the social and intellectual bonds forged among Sevillian men of letters, artists, and patrons. Lleó also charted new territory by exploring how humanistic learning informed local architecture, painting, sculpture, and broader aspects of visual culture. In the decades since the book was originally published, scholars have made great strides in reconstructing the interchange between art and letters in early modern Seville, as exemplified by critical editions of writings by the painter and theorist Francisco Pacheco and inquiries into members of Pacheco's erudite circle. Although the revised text of *Nueva Roma* does not give full measure to these developments, historians of Sevillian art will value the new edition for its color illustrations, updated bibliography, and fresh insight into specific monuments and artworks.

In his introduction, Lleó outlines his principal aim: to explore the role of "Renaissance culture" (la cultura del Renacimiento) in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Seville, a city at the very "center of the world" (el centro del Mundo) because of its status as the principal Iberian port to Spain's vast overseas empire (11; all translations from Lleó's book are mine). Seville was not the only Spanish city to proclaim itself a "new Rome," but it is an especially fascinating example because of the ways in which Sevillians contended with their city's complicated history. Throughout the book, Lleó uses the term *Renacimiento* not as a synonym for early modern, but rather in reference to the revival of antiquity and the emphasis upon Italian culture among Seville's elite. He also sheds light on the local practice of embracing classical culture in part as a means of eliding the Muslim past. The text would have been enriched, however, by perspectives that have come to the fore since it was first published, among them studies of marginalized groups in Seville, discourse on the dynamic nature of cross-cultural exchange, and considerations of Seville's pivotal role in the Atlantic world.

The first section of the book, "El marco de la vida" (The Framework of Life), explores the role of Italianate urban palaces and suburban villas in transforming the landscape and cultural practices of sixteenth-century Seville. Among various examples, Lleó focuses on the Casa de Pilatos, which was owned by Seville's most powerful noble family, the Enríquez de Ribera. The Casa de Pilatos was renovated under Fadrique Enríquez de Ribera, the first Marquis of Tarifa, who traveled to Italy and adorned the palace with works of ancient and modern Italian art. Lleó highlights the synthesis of classical and Islamic architectural and decorative elements in the Casa de Pilatos: its facade is dominated by a triumphal arch, the main staircase is crowned in a gilded *Mudéjar* vault, and the entrance to its chapel includes Arabic inscriptions. Lleó discusses these elements mainly in terms of stylistic development, but scholars have shown that they held larger religious and cultural significance. Amanda Wunder has explored the marquis's "transformation" of the Casa de Pilatos into a "pilgrimage site," and Barbara Fuchs has examined the palace in light of an "unwitting Moorishness"—the unmistakable, if often unintentional, "cultural indebtedness to al-Andalus" so prevalent in early modern Spain (Amanda Wunder, "Classical, Christian, and Muslim Remains in the Construction of Imperial Seville (1520–1635)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 2 (2003): 199; Barbara Fuchs, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, 5).

In "El marco de la vida," Lleó also analyzes the pictorial decoration of several Sevillian palaces, including the famous ceiling painting in the Casa de Pilatos, the *Apotheosis of Hercules* (1604), which was executed by Francisco Pacheco for the young Fernando Enríquez Afán de Ribera, the third Duke

of Alcalá. Lleó relates the *Apotheosis's* imagery to intellectual exchanges conducted among the duke and associates such as Pacheco and the Latinist Francisco de Medina (whom Pacheco credits with devising the painting's imagery), and he argues that the mythological figures refer to Alcalá and the Herculean "hard road to glory" mentioned in the main inscription (as translated in Brown, 79). He furthermore provides a cogent analysis of a Sevillian source for Pacheco's composition: the *Assembly of the Gods* (1601, here plausibly attributed to Alonso Vázquez), a ceiling painting in the urban palace of the poet Juan de Arguijo. Lleó's interpretation of both paintings, however, would have benefitted from a discussion of the similar readings given in Brown's *Images and Ideas*—a text surely published too late to have been incorporated into the first edition of *Nueva Roma*, but one whose arguments could have broadened the historiographical scope of this new version.

The second section of Lleó's book, "El marco de la muerte" (The Framework of Death), explores the transformation of Sevillian funerary monuments during the sixteenth century. Lleó argues that this period saw "in very general terms" a shift from the medieval "triumph of death" to the "humanistic idea of the 'triumph over death'" through the cult of fame (En términos muy generales . . . frente al concepto dominante durante la Edad Media de 'triumfo de la muerte' . . . la idea . . . humanista de 'triumfo sobre la muerte' [133; emphasis in original]). This triumphalist view of humanism remains very much open to debate; it would seem to be challenged, for instance, by the contemporaneous rise in Sevillian penitential confraternities dedicated to the physical suffering of Christ (see Susan Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 3–13). Nevertheless, Lleó provides insight into the local appropriation of Italian art through his analysis of funerary sculpture. Here again, he focuses largely on the Enríquez de Ribera family, and specifically on the tombs of Pedro Enríquez and Catalina de Ribera, parents of the first Marquis of Tarifa. Commissioned by the marquis from a prominent Genoese workshop, the tombs consist of triumphal arches featuring effigies of the deceased together with Christian and pagan decorative elements. Lleó rightly argues that Pedro Enríquez's tomb alludes to his role in the Christian reconquest of Granada, especially through the depiction of Santiago and other saints invoked in the crusade against Islam. Expanding upon this point, it would also be worth asking whether the Enríquez de Ribera used classical style and iconography in order to fashion themselves in contradistinction to their former Muslim adversaries.

The third and final section of the book, "La ciudad" (The City), turns explicitly to the relationship between Seville's Islamic heritage and humanistic visual culture. In what I found to be Lleó's most compelling argument, he examines Seville's "fantastic genealogy" (fantástica genealogía) (211) as constructed by sixteenth-century chroniclers, who emphasized the city's origins in Roman myth and history rather than its centuries of Muslim domination. Contemporary artists allegorized Seville as a woman accompanied by attributes such as a cornucopia and a crown of laurels, and humanists composed inscriptions crediting Hercules with the city's foundation. Building upon records of Sevillian ceremonial culture, Lleó argues that the classical imagery used in ephemeral art and architecture served to conceal the old Muslim cityscape, which was hidden behind triumphal arches bearing the letters SPQH (Senatus Populusque Hispalensis) and images of Hercules and the river god Betis.

"La Ciudad" furthermore underscores the strategic deployment of classicizing architecture in Seville's "center of power" (centro del poder) (255) near the Alcázar, where new structures such as the archbishop's palace, the customs house, and the mercantile exchange transformed the fabric of the city. The most striking example of the displacement of Islamic architecture in favor of classical forms is the Giralda, the twelfth-century minaret that became the cathedral's bell tower. In the late sixteenth century, Hernán Ruiz brought the Giralda to soaring new heights by adding tiers based on classical orders and crowning them with a round marble cupola, itself topped with a statue of Faith, whose iconography was derived from "ancient pagan [sculptures] of victory" (las antiguas victorias paganas) (254). For Lleó, the Giralda thus expressed both the triumph of Christianity over Islam and the victory of humanism "over the medieval, Muslim quarter at its feet" (sobre el caserío medieval, musulmán, que se extendía a sus pies) (254).

In the epilogue, Lleó argues that Sevillian humanist culture all but disappeared in the early seventeenth century, when the city began its long economic decline. For Lleó, it was the intensely religious climate of the Catholic Reformation that dealt the most critical blow to Sevillian humanism. He calls attention to the Inquisition's brutal persecution of Sevillian scholars such as Juan de Mal Lara (Francisco de Medina's teacher), who was imprisoned for three months in 1561, perhaps because of ties to a local theologian suspected of Lutheranism. Lleó also suggests that Mal Lara, Medina, Canon Pacheco, and other figures discussed in *Nueva Roma* left many of their writings unpublished because they feared Inquisitorial condemnation. In a similar vein, he argues that artists stopped depicting nudes and mythologies in the wake of newly austere moral codes. These suggestions are important, if tentative, because the Inquisition's impact on intellectual life in Spain remains largely to be understood.

Yet Seville's learned culture did not vanish with the turn of the seventeenth century. In many ways, the Catholic Reformation helped to reinforce the study of antiquity—even as the lessons of the ancient world were now interpreted within a distinctly religious context. Consistent with the Council of Trent's emphasis on the ancient Church, the painter Pacheco (who held the title of overseer of paintings for the Inquisition), along with the Duke of Alcalá and others, carefully investigated the historical circumstances of Christ's crucifixion and the philological correctness of inscriptions used in paintings of the cross (see Brown, 60–61, 70–71). The Jesuits, whom Lleó impugns for bending ancient culture toward their own "pedagogical ends" (fines pedagógicos) (195), established schools that educated some

of early modern Spain's most innovative interpreters of classical myth, among them Félix Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo, and possibly Luis de Góngora. Finally, it is significant that the great Diego Velázquez trained in Pacheco's studio, where he learned to synthesize humanistic learning with his own dazzling pictorial practice—a marriage of invention and skill that would culminate in mythological paintings ranging from the sensuous *Rokeby Venus* (ca. 1647–51) to the enigmatic *Fable of Arachne* (ca. 1657) (see Brown, 81–82). Through paintings such as these, key aspects of Sevillian humanistic culture became hallmarks of Spain's Golden Age.

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