

Gemma Avenoz. *Biblias castellanas medievales*. San Millán de la Cogolla: Cilengua, 2011. 447 pp. ISBN: 978-84-938395-6-7.

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The Cilengua series by the Fundación San Millán de la Cogolla has published a rather impressive work related to the primary sources of the Bible in medieval Spain. Based on her well-known expertise on codicology after several years leading the PhiloBiblon project,<sup>1</sup> Gemma Avenoz has done superb research on the matter and the final result is this magnificent volume. Thus, I totally agree with Claudio García Turza when he asserts in the prologue that this monograph is not only “uno de los estudios de codicología española científicamente más sólidos” but also “un trabajo rigurosamente ejemplar” (10).

Avenoz describes in depth and with all codicological details the most paramount medieval Spanish Biblical manuscripts written in Castilian, including those held at the libraries of El Escorial (Manid 1480, 1478, 1479, 1161, 1481, 1162, and 1482),<sup>2</sup> Nacional de Madrid (Manid 2449),<sup>3</sup> Real Academia de la Historia (Manid 2451),<sup>4</sup> and, of course, the *Biblia de Arragel* (Manid 3324).<sup>5</sup> In analyzing each one of these sources, Avenoz divides accurately her descriptions in several sections and sub-sections, making easier the understanding of the sometimes overwhelming bulk of information presented to the reader. Some of these sections do not appear in the analysis of all the manuscripts which is justified by Avenoz because her descriptions are guided towards “un sentido u otro, primando a veces la perspectiva codicológica y otras la histórica” (14). Despite this, which perhaps might mislead those readers with little knowledge of codicology, all the descriptions are sufficiently clear because they are structured conveniently, starting with an introduction, following with a general survey of its contents, and

<sup>1</sup> Free access online at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/PhiloBiblon/phhmb.html>. For ease of reference of all sources mentioned in this review, I will use BETA (*Bibliografía Española de Textos Antiguos*) manid and/or texid to locate them. In addition, I will also cite their current call number in footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> Current call numbers: El Escorial I.i.3, I.i.4, I.i.5, I.i.6, I.i.7, I.i.8, and J.ii.19, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> BNE, MS/10288.

<sup>4</sup> RAH, MS 87.

<sup>5</sup> Duke of Alba Archive, Vitrina.

finishing with a profound description of its features, focusing especially on the page structure elements, such as catchwords, ruling, watermarks, and decorative elements, such as figures or graphics.

Aside from these general sections, Avenozza adds other categories to further explain the specific codicological features of every manuscript. Among others, it is paramount the detailed and thrilling story of the *Biblia de Alba*, from the early decades of the fifteenth century, when Rabbi Moshe Arragel of Guadalajara was commissioned by Luis de Guzmán to design it, until the moment when the manuscript was catalogued at its current location, the Duke of Alba's Archive (199-212). But there are numerous other elements worthy of mention, such as *enmiendas o adiciones del copista y anotaciones de lectura* (Manid 1161), *reclamos* and *pliegos irregulares* (Manid 1162), *marginalia* (Manid 2449), *estructura de la página* (Manid 2451). Throughout the pages of this monograph, Avenozza succeeds in making intelligible a subject which is usually considered dull and obscure, so that her descriptions and analyses might be certainly used to teach codicology to students of all levels, from beginners to advanced. In order to obtain this aim, *Biblias castellanas medievales* provides an abundance of sketches, graphics, drawings, and pictures (see pages 30-31, among others) that facilitate this propaedeutic use. In addition, on the book's back cover the reader can find a CD with a PDF file containing all visual support materials used by Avenozza in her study. This PDF file has also an index through which the different photographs and drawings can be exactly located within the book. Thus, the way in which Avenozza uses these materials to explain her analysis, combined with the Cilengua efforts in providing this CD to the reader, are the greatest achievements of this book.

Aside from the manuscripts mentioned above, Avenozza also pays attention to the two codexes (Manid 1198 and 2937-1)<sup>6</sup> written in Castilian and held at Portuguese libraries (257-77), thus providing a complete catalogue of primary sources for the transmission of the Bible in medieval Castile. Furthermore, three other codexes containing materials from the Holy Scripture are studied in her book (*Libros bíblicos exentos*, 280-311): *El libro del rey Hasueros* (Manid 2533),<sup>7</sup> Saint Gregory's *Moralia in Job* (Manid 4817),<sup>8</sup> and a Castilian version of the *Book of Job* BNE (Manid 1892),<sup>9</sup> together with four other tiny fragments (314-35). On the other hand, works which also contain topics related to the Bible, such as *La fazienda de Ultramar* or King Alphonse X's *General Estoria*, have not been included in this monograph because they were not Bible translations strictly speaking, but amplifications based on common Sacred Scripture topics. Furthermore, Avenozza does not analyze the biblical stints copied in works such as *Las bienandanzas y fortunas* by García de Salazar, nor a few small fragments of Kings 1 and 2 from a Portuguese source (BITAGAP manid 2255),<sup>10</sup> nor the romance version of Psalm 43 by Alonso de Cartagena (Manid 1654).<sup>11</sup>

To put the icing on the cake, the author finishes her book by describing and analyzing two manuscript gems (331-335). The bilingual pre-Alphonsine psalter (Manid 4853)<sup>12</sup> which was discovered inside a parchment binding and is the oldest remnant of the Bible written in

<sup>6</sup> Évora CXXIV/1 and Ajuda 52-XIII-1, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> University of Salamanca, MS 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Duke of Alba Archive, MS 64.

<sup>9</sup> BNE, MSS/10138

<sup>10</sup> University of Coimbra, MS 720

<sup>11</sup> El Escorial, MS a-IV-7

<sup>12</sup> Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, no signature.

Castilian, older than both *La Fazienda de Ultramar* (Manid 1483)<sup>13</sup> and the Escorial Bible from the thirteenth century mentioned above (Manid 1161). The second fragment, also held at the BNE (Manid 5377),<sup>14</sup> was written at the turn of the fourteenth century and is a line for line translation of Genesis from Hebrew to Castilian. Avenozas describes both sources with high precision, highlighting not only their textual importance in material terms, but also paying attention to the historical and social background in which they were composed (in all likelihood to be used as a mnemotechnical devices for the learning of both Latin and Hebrew).

As a colophon to the monograph, Avenozas offers several appendixes: the edited text of two of the fragments mentioned above (appendix 1, 339-354); a precise and precious repertoire of watermarks (appendix 2, 355-374); some tables with a comparison of the typical paleographic fonts used to date the sources, such as the ampersand, ‘ç’, ‘z’, etc. (appendix 3, 375-394); several tables with manuscripts dimensions (appendix 4, 395-420); and a brief chapter, written by José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero (appendix 5, 421-424), focused on the coats of arms and other elements of heraldry present in one of the Bible manuscripts previously analyzed (Manid 1478). The book also contains a detailed bibliography and a general index of chapters. However, there are two small absences that, in my humble opinion, could have immensely enhanced this monograph if they would have been supplied by the editors: first, an index of topics and toponyms (which could have been provided as a file, as part at least of the CD); secondly, the inclusion of all of the appendixes, and not only 2, 3, 4, and 5, in the CD. Offering the whole text (tables and figures included) as part of the CD would have provided an astonishing tool for researchers and made the impact of the book as a whole wider and unique in scope.

Despite these minimum discrepancies, let us finish by clearly indicating that Avenozas’s monograph deserves a place of honor in the study of the medieval Castilian Bibles: together with the online database managed by Andrés Enrique-Arias and Francisco Javier Pueyo Mena,<sup>15</sup> Avenozas’s book is an absolute *must read* for all researchers interested in the topic. At the same time, it provides superb materials that can be used by both teachers and students interested in improving their codicological skills and general knowledge on the matter. Overall, the result is rather remarkable, adding thus another excellent record to the publications of the Cilengua series.

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<sup>13</sup> University of Salamanca, MS 1997. For further information about both manuscript and text, see <<http://www.lafaziendadeultramar.com/>> [2013-08-23], an online project on this source managed by David Arbesú.

<sup>14</sup> BNE, MSS/5456

<sup>15</sup> <<http://www.bibliamedieval.es/>> [2013-08-23]